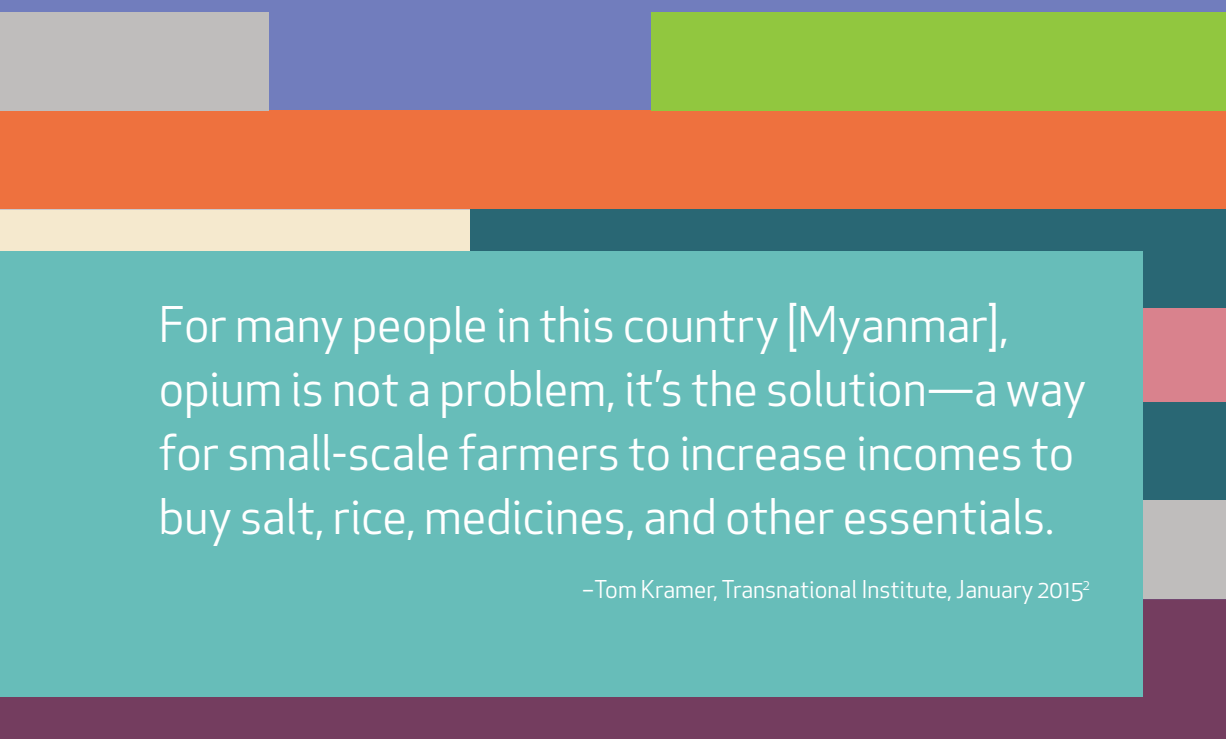


# DRUG CROP PRODUCTION, POVERTY, AND DEVELOPMENT



Julia Buxton<sup>1</sup>



For many people in this country [Myanmar],  
opium is not a problem, it's the solution—a way  
for small-scale farmers to increase incomes to  
buy salt, rice, medicines, and other essentials.

—Tom Kramer, Transnational Institute, January 2015<sup>2</sup>

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*As member states of the United Nations take stock of the drug control system, a number of debates have emerged among governments about how to balance international drug laws with human rights, public health, alternatives to incarceration, and experimentation with regulation.*

*This series intends to provide a primer on why governments must not turn a blind eye to pressing human rights and public health impacts of current drug policies.*



# DRUG CROP PRODUCTION, POVERTY, AND DEVELOPMENT

Millions of people, mostly in the Global South, participate in the cultivation of plant crops—coca, opium poppy, and cannabis—that are used in the manufacture of psychotropic drugs.

<sup>1</sup> This paper relies heavily on an earlier paper — J Buxton, Associate Dean and Professor of Comparative Politics, School of Public Policy, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Drugs and development: the great disconnect. Swansea: Global Drug Policy Observatory, 2015. <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/The%20Great%20Disconnect.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Cited in T Fuller, "Myanmar returns to what sells: heroin," New York Times, 4 January 2015.

## INTRODUCTION

Millions of people, mostly in the Global South, participate in the cultivation of plant crops—coca, opium poppy, and cannabis—that are used in the manufacture of psychotropic drugs. The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the first and most influential of the three United Nations drug conventions, mandates ratifying state parties to uproot and destroy all cultivation of coca, opium poppies, and cannabis not related to medical and scientific needs. It enjoins countries within their respective legal frameworks to make the cultivation of crops declared illicit (hereafter ‘drug crop’) an offense punishable “by imprisonment or other penalties of deprivation of liberty” (Article 36).

In spite of this strong prohibition, which is reflected in many countries’ national laws, achieving “zero cultivation” has been an intractable challenge. The 2014 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *World Drug Report* cites the total global area of land under opium poppy cultivation in 2013 as 296,720 hectares, which is “the largest area since 1998, when estimates became available.”<sup>3</sup> Afghan opium cultivation increased 36 percent between 2012 and 2013 to 209,000 hectares. The area under coca cultivation in Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia has gone up and down over the years, but still covered 133,700 hectares in 2012.<sup>4</sup>



3 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2014*. Vienna, 2014. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2014\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2014/World_Drug_Report_2014_web.pdf)

4 UNODC reported the figure for illicit coca cultivation was down 14% from 2011 estimates.

“...there is no international consensus on how (if at all) to compensate producer states of the Global South for losses associated with eradicating crops that have been the bedrock of some rural economies for centuries.”

The persistence of drug crop production, in spite of possible criminal sanctions for producers, can be explained by many factors. Most importantly, producers rationally assess their livelihood alternatives, and drug crop production may offer the greatest economic security in spite of the risks (see examples in part III below). In addition, it is challenging to eradicate crops that are easily relocated across borders. The enforcement system assumes clearly demarcated nation-states with territorial integrity, state presence and state capacity to prevent cultivation displacement. This has not been the case in practice and particularly in remote border areas with itinerant populations.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there is no international consensus on how (if at all) to compensate

producer states of the Global South for losses associated with eradicating crops that have been the bedrock of some rural economies for centuries. As discussed below, efforts to replace drug crop cultivation with other livelihood activities have generally not succeeded. The militarization of drug crop eradication, moreover—for example, the United States-led eradication of coca in the Andes—illustrates the extremely high cost of methods that lead only to displacement and fragmentation of cultivation.

This briefing paper highlights some relevant issues for debate in the UNGASS on drugs, focusing on strategies for addressing drug crop production as a development issue.

5 See H Donnan, T Wilson. *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1999; J Sturgeon. Border practices, boundaries, and the control of resource access: A case from China, Thailand and Burma. *Development and Change* 35(3):463-484, 2004; J Goodhand. Frontiers and wars: the opium economy in Afghanistan. *Journal of Agrarian Change*. 5(2):191-216, 2005, p 200; International Crisis Group. *Corridor of Violence: The Guatemala Honduras Border*. Guatemala City/Bogotá/Brussels, 2014. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/latin-america/Guatemala/052-corridor-of-violence-the-guatemala-honduras-border.pdf>;

## UN AND OTHER MULTILATERAL STATEMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Since the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen and the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, the United Nations has framed discussion on development around a vocabulary of rights-based and participatory approaches that emphasize local ownership and stakeholder engagement. “Alternative development” (AD) strategies—that is, identifying and implementing suitable sustainable livelihoods to replace cultivation of drug crops—are central to UN approaches to drug crop production and at least in rhetoric reflect the language of participatory sustainable development. The landmark “Action plan of international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development” of UNODC in 1998, for example, defines “recognizing the particular socio-cultural characteristics of the target communities” as a key element of AD.

AD with respect to drug crop production is the subject of numerous UN resolutions and guidelines. Making specific reference to the Millennium Development Goals, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 2005 called on member states to increase support for AD programs that “empower local communities and authorities in [AD] project areas and to increase their ownership of development measures undertaken...”<sup>6</sup> The same resolution endorsed integration of AD into such development efforts as environmental conservation and reforestation, micro-credit, and regulation of land ownership (paragraph 4).

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2003 urged member states to prioritize AD in their development assistance, including encouraging markets for products that may result from AD projects.<sup>7</sup> In 2006, ECOSOC emphasized the importance of “prevent-

6 UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 48/9, “Strengthening alternative development as an important drug control strategy and establishing alternative development as a cross-cutting issue,” March 2005. At: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug\\_Resolutions/2000-2009/2005/CND\\_Res-2005-48-9.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2000-2009/2005/CND_Res-2005-48-9.pdf)

7 UN Economic and Social Council. “Strengthening alternative development through trade and socio-environmental preservation,” res. 2003/37.

“The goal of the consultation was to finalize the draft guidelines for General Assembly approval, although along the way, some of the key elements agreed on in Thailand were lost.”

ive alternative development”—that is, supporting alternative livelihoods in communities that may be susceptible to growing drug crops—and called for more financial support from member states for AD efforts.<sup>8</sup> A 2008 ECOSOC resolution called on the General Assembly to develop guidelines for AD programs.<sup>9</sup>

The development of those guidelines illustrates something of the political and conceptual struggles around AD. The first formal consultation for formulating UN guidelines on AD was in Thailand in November 2011 and included experts from both government and civil society. The draft guidelines from this consultation emphasized, among other principles, (1) the importance of proper sequencing of actions—that is, viable alternative livelihood activities must be in place before drug

crop reduction or eradication can be expected; (2) economic assistance for AD must not be conditioned on prior reductions in drug crops; and (3) AD should not be a complement to law enforcement measures but rather a central and well integrated element of holistic “people-centered” national development strategies.<sup>10</sup>

The draft guidelines were then considered by diplomatic missions to the United Nations in Vienna—those usually representing member states at the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)—in preparation for a second consultation of governments held in Lima in 2012. The goal of the consultation was to finalize the draft guidelines for General Assembly approval, although along the way, some of the key elements agreed on in Thailand were lost. The guidelines that emerged from Lima preserved recognition of the importance of good sequencing (though not at the level of detail in the Thailand draft) but rejected the other two principles and framed AD as a complement to policing.<sup>11</sup> Civil society experts also noted that the Guiding Principles place the responsibility for AD with UNODC, CND, and the International Narcotics Control Board without reference to

8 UN Economic and Social Council. “Strengthening international cooperation for alternative development, including preventive alternative development, with due regard for environmental protection,” res. 2006/33.

9 UN Economic and Social Council. “Promoting sustainability and integrality in alternative development as an important part of drug control strategy in States where illicit crops are grown to produce drugs,” res. 2008/26.

10 C Youngers. UN International Guiding Principles on Alternatives Development: An opportunity lost? (parts I and II). Washington Office on Latin America, 2012, at [http://www.wola.org/commentary/un\\_international\\_guiding\\_principles\\_on\\_alternative\\_development](http://www.wola.org/commentary/un_international_guiding_principles_on_alternative_development); M van Dun, HC Cubas, P Metaal. Between reality and abstraction: Guiding Principles and developing alternatives for illicit crop producing regions in Peru (Briefing paper 39). Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2013, at [http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/brief39\\_0.pdf](http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/brief39_0.pdf)

11 Ibid.

the role of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other development agencies.<sup>12</sup> A group representing the interests of drug crop farmers also noted the absence of recognition of traditional uses of coca leaf in the Guiding Principles<sup>13</sup> (Bolivia withdrew from and later re-acceded to the 1961 Single Convention in 2012, claiming that a wide range of traditional uses of coca leaf justified some level of legal cultivation of coca. See Section III below).

The “UN Guiding Principles of Alternative Development,” in line with the Lima proposals, were approved by the UN General Assembly in 2013.<sup>14</sup> The Guiding Principles frame AD as an “integral element” of drug control that should take into account “the vulnerability and specific needs of the communities and groups affected by illicit cultivation of crops...” (paragraphs 2, 4). States are enjoined to understand AD as requiring a “long-term commitment” that should “complement economic efforts in the fight against poverty” (paragraphs 13, 16).

Multilateral bodies such as the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) have taken strong positions in favor of AD. The EU’s 2006 position paper recognizes that illicit drug crop cultivation “is concentrated in areas where conflict, insecurity, and vulnerability prevail,” and that “poor health, illiteracy, and limited social and physical infrastructure reflect the low level of human development experienced by the population in these areas.”<sup>15</sup> This statement embraces AD as a “long-term strategy, based on a comprehensive approach to rural development that seeks to place the foundations for sustainable development and independence from illicit drug cultivation in the long term,” with respect for human rights, empowerment, accountability, participation, and non-discrimination of vulnerable groups seen to be integral to AD approaches.<sup>16</sup> The OAS Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs 2011-2015 commits member states to adopting “comprehensive measures, such as integral sustainable alternative development and law enforcement measures” to reduce the supply of plant-based drugs.<sup>17</sup>

12 Youngers, *ibid.*

13 Observatory of Crops Declared Illicit. Valencia Declaration on Alternative Development. Valencia, Spain, Nov. 2012, at: [http://www.druglawreform.info/images/stories/documents/Valencia\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.druglawreform.info/images/stories/documents/Valencia_Declaration.pdf)

14 UN General Assembly. United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development. Resolution of 18 Dec 2013, UN doc. no. A/RES/68/196, 11 Feb 2014, at [https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug\\_Resolutions/2010-2019/2013/A\\_RES\\_68\\_197.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2010-2019/2013/A_RES_68_197.pdf)

15 Council of the European Union, Horizontal Working Party on Drugs. CORDROGUE 44, 18 May 2006, at: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%209597%202006%20INIT>

16 *Ibid.*

17 Organization of American States. *Hemispheric drug strategy and plan of action 2011-2015*. Washington, DC, 2010, para 29. At: [http://www.cicad.oas.org/Main/Template.asp?File=/main/aboutcicad/basicdocuments/plan-action\\_eng.asp](http://www.cicad.oas.org/Main/Template.asp?File=/main/aboutcicad/basicdocuments/plan-action_eng.asp)



## THE EXPERIENCE OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Despite proliferation of guidelines and considerable experience in many countries, AD programs have struggled to succeed. Some possible reasons for this lack of success are discussed below.

**Failure to understand the economic motivation for drug crop cultivation:** The farming of opium poppy, coca leaf, and cannabis—low-input, high-yield crops—by an estimated four million people in the Global South is a rational livelihood option for those exposed to multidimensional poverty<sup>18</sup> experienced as citizenship deficits in access to state services, land, infrastructure, markets, and credit. Drug crop cultivation occurs in societies characterized by structural inequality, violence, and conflict. These crops provide livelihood security and sometimes informal physical security for exposed and vulnerable communities, especially in the conflicts that affect the world’s leading opium poppy and coca producers (Afghanistan, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Burma and Bolivia).

Opium poppy, coca, and cannabis are well suited to the adverse conditions faced by displaced, itinerant, and physically isolated populations. These crops thrive on marginal terrain, in poor soil, at high altitude, without sophisticated (or any) irrigation or inputs such as pesticides, or the needs for storage, credit, transportation, and market facilities required by more perishable crops. Even low levels of cultivation of these high-value-to-weight products provide an economic safety net for the land-, food-, and cash-poor, with guaranteed markets, relatively stable prices, cash payment and ease of access to seeds. These crops provide access to on-farm and non-farm income, informal credit mechanisms, and access to land through sharecropping or tenancy agreements. In the case of Afghanistan: “[O]pium can define the ‘creditworthiness’ of the land poor. Without

<sup>18</sup> On multidimensional poverty, see, for example: A Cohen. *The Multidimensional Poverty Assessment Tool*. Rome: IFAD, 2009. <http://www.ifad.org/mpat/resources/book.pdf>

it, access to basic food items, agricultural inputs, and funds for health care becomes severely constrained.”<sup>19</sup> Coca can be harvested four to six times a year after an 18-month growing period, contrasting with the three years normally required for a coffee bean harvest, for example.

Drug crop farming and related refining and distribution processes (coca paste, morphine) have been major generators of employment in conditions of economic and physical vulnerability. For example:

- **There were 96,000 families, equivalent to 804,000 people or 6.5 percent of Moroccan agricultural households (2.5 percent of the total population), engaged in cannabis cultivation during economic adjustment in the mid-2000s;**<sup>20</sup>
- **In Bolivia, the number of people employed in coca during the searing market liberalization process of the 1980s and early 1990s was estimated at 74,000-500,000 (a tenth of the 1.8 million “economically active population”);**<sup>21</sup>
- **There were 240,000 households in Burma’s Shan State engaged in poppy farming in the mid-2000s;**<sup>22</sup>
- **In Afghanistan, where the opium economy forms “a well-linked market in terms of credit, purchase, transport, and processing,” an estimated average of 5.6 jobs are generated in the rural non-farm economy for each hectare of opium poppy cultivated.**<sup>23</sup>

In some of these cases, legacies of inadequate recovery from conflict combined with market liberalization, few mainstream employment opportunities, low levels of remuneration, weak opportunities for social mobility, and opaque governance—all making the estimated \$322 billion per annum international drug trade a rational if not perfect livelihood alternative. AD programs have rarely taken these factors into account, failing to offer opportunities that represent viable and scalable alternatives to people who make survival decisions in difficult circumstances.

19 D Mansfield and A Pain. *Alternative livelihoods: substance or slogan?* Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) Briefing Paper, Oct. 2005, p 3. At: <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/524E-Substance%20or%20Slogan%20BP.pdf>

20 P-A Chouvy. Morocco said to produce nearly half of the world’s hashish supply. *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 17(11):32-35, Nov. 2005.

21 C Allen. *An industrial geography of cocaine*. London: Routledge, 2009.

22 UNODC. *World Drug Report 2005*. UNODC: Vienna, p. 192.

23 Mansfield and Pain, op.cit., p 3.

24 *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington DC: Office of the President, 2002. At: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>

25 Oxfam. *Whose aid is it anyway? Politicising aid in conflicts and crises*. Oxfam Briefing Paper 145, 2011, at: <http://www.oxfam.org/en/research/whose-aid-it-anyway>; for details of this debate see Overseas Development Institute. “Is the UK securitising its development aid?” (web posting) 2 March 2011, at: <http://www.odi.org/opinion/5654-uk-securitising-its-development-aid>; J Harrigan. The political economy of aid flows to North Africa. UN University-WIDER Working Paper, 2011.

26 For definitions see Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). “Principles for good international engagement in fragile states,” Development Assistance Committee (DAC), Paris, 2006—see <http://www.oecd.org/dac/fragilestates/47278529.pdf>; F Stepputat, L Engberg-Pedersen. “Fragile states: Definitions, measurements and processes” in *Fragile Situations Background Papers*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2008, pp 21-31.

27 See for example M Duffield. Social reconstruction and the radicalization of development: Aid as a relation of global liberal governance. *Development and Change* 33(3): 1049-1071, 2002; J Howell, J Lind. *Changing donor policy and practice on civil society in the post-9/11 aid context*. London School of Economics, Non-Governmental Public Action Programme, Working Paper 25, 2008, at: [www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/NGPA/publications/WP25\\_Donors\\_HowellLind\\_Web.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/NGPA/publications/WP25_Donors_HowellLind_Web.pdf)

- 28 M Duffield. *Global governance and the new wars: The merging of development and security*. London: Zed Books, 2001; M Duffield. *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008; M Duffield. 'The Development-Security Nexus in Historical Perspective,' in J Stilhoff Sorensen (ed.) *Challenging the Aid Paradigm: Western Currents and Asian Alternatives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; J. Stilhoff Sorensen. The failure of state-building—Changing biopolitics and the splintering of societies. *Development Dialogue* 58:49-65, 2012.
- 29 Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN Burma). *A failing grade: Burma's drug eradication efforts, 2004*. At: [www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Special%20Reports/Failing%20Grade.pdf](http://www.altsean.org/Docs/PDF%20Format/Special%20Reports/Failing%20Grade.pdf)
- 30 T Andersson, D Talin, J Stage et al. *Impact assessment of crop eradication in Afghanistan and lessons learned from Latin America and South East Asia*. London: Akha Foundation/Senlis Council, 2006.
- 31 L Farthing, B Kohl. *Conflicting agendas: the politics of development aid in drug-producing areas*. *Development Policy Review* 23:2, 2005; Akha Foundation/Senlis Council, *ibid*.
- 32 For resources see Akha Foundation/Senlis Council, *ibid*, and Cultural Survival project page—Laos: Poppy eradication policy displaces thousands (undated): [www.culturalsurvival.org/news/laos-poppy-eradication-policy-displaces-thousands](http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/laos-poppy-eradication-policy-displaces-thousands)
- 33 A. Isacson. *Time to abandon coca fumigation in Colombia* (web post). Washington, DC: Washington Office on Latin America, 7 October 2013, at: [www.wola.org/commentary/time\\_to\\_abandon\\_coca\\_fumigation\\_in\\_colombia](http://www.wola.org/commentary/time_to_abandon_coca_fumigation_in_colombia); Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense. (2006). *Alternative development strategies in Colombia: The need to move beyond illicit crop spraying*. [Executive Summary]. Oakland, CA, 2006, at: [http://www.aida-americas.org/sites/default/files/AIDA-EX\\_SUMM\\_ALT\\_DEVT\\_06-08\\_0.pdf](http://www.aida-americas.org/sites/default/files/AIDA-EX_SUMM_ALT_DEVT_06-08_0.pdf)

**Contradictory and incoherent approaches:** Conceptualization of development and thus of approaches to AD and other development programs differs greatly by region and among influential global powers, leading to a profusion of contradictory programs.

Moreover, the 2000s has seen a significant shift in development practice.<sup>24</sup> Development interventions have been reoriented away from the poorest countries,<sup>25</sup> and instead often work cooperatively with military forces in “weak, fragile, and failing” states,<sup>26</sup> through interagency missions to prevent “transnational threats” to the Global North, including from drugs.<sup>27</sup> With this “securitization of development,”<sup>28</sup> alternative development with respect to drug crops is often relegated to a military stabilization and consolidation strategy, while drawing the development community into a “threat” perspective that frames drugs as a cause rather than symptom of poverty and exclusion.

Thus, for example, coercive eradication—through aerial spraying or manual eradication—may seem justifiable from a security perspective, but from a development perspective it has proven disastrous. An estimated 260,000 households (1.2 million people) faced starvation and death from treatable disease during opium cultivation bans and eradication exercises in Burma in the mid-2000s.<sup>29</sup> Similarly in Laos, external pressure to achieve zero cultivation by 2005 led to a 45 percent decrease in cultivation in 2003-2004 at the cost of widespread hunger.<sup>30</sup> In Bolivia, forced eradication programs in the early 2000s pushed 50,000 families into severe economic difficulties, resulting in malnutrition and recourse to illegal income-generating activities such as prostitution and migrant labor—similar effects can be observed across countries.<sup>31</sup> Coercive eradication can also lead to displacement, such as in the cases of Colombia, with an estimated five million displaced people (15 percent of the population), and Laos with 65,000 displaced hill people.<sup>32</sup> Chemical spraying of narcotic plants and the forced relocation of populations has caused environmental and ecological damage, affecting alternative agricultures, husbandry, and human health.<sup>33</sup> In addition, when the livelihood of cultivators is threatened abruptly, communities may forge alliances with insurgent, rebel, or

“Lacking access to capital, collateral, credit, or forms of identification, landless and itinerant rural communities have little potential to capitalize on market and trade liberalization processes.”

criminal groups for their own protection.<sup>34</sup> Forced eradication and cultivation bans are also associated with the “balloon effect” within and between states as cultivators relocate or supply shocks drive up prices, encouraging new market entrants or diversification into other types of drugs.<sup>35</sup>

Approaches based on macro-economic measures such as trade and tariff agreements intended to stimulate growth and development have generally been ineffective and often regressive with respect to the poor. The U.S. International Trade Commission found the 1991 Andean Trade Preferences Act impact on coca produc-

tion in Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador to have been “small and mostly indirect.”<sup>36</sup> Although presented as an element of drug control, trade and tariff agreements have been more effective in locking source countries into market reforms than reducing dependence on drug crop cultivation. Lacking access to capital, collateral, credit, or forms of identification, landless and itinerant rural communities have little potential to capitalize on market and trade liberalization processes.

**Poor targeting:** AD program interventions have consistently benefitted farmers that are: a) easy to reach; b) not dependent on coca or opium poppy for livelihoods; and c) favorably positioned to transition to alternative income streams due to resource advantages such as land ownership. While favoring such farmers enables short-term reductions in cultivation levels and “quick impact” results, these reductions are not sustainable. They

34 M Lifsher, “U.S. Drug War Ally Bolivia Loses Ground to Coca Farmers,” *Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2003. [www.wsj.com/articles/SB105277602959745000](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB105277602959745000); K Ledebur, L Farthing, *To the beat of a different drum: Bolivia's Community Coca Control*. Cochabamba: Andean Information Network, 2014, at: [ain-bolivia.org/2014/07/to-the-beat-of-a-different-drum-bolivias-community-coca-control/](http://ain-bolivia.org/2014/07/to-the-beat-of-a-different-drum-bolivias-community-coca-control/); United Nations International Drug Control Programme. *Alternative Development in the Andean area: the UNDCP experience*. Vienna: United Nations, 2001 p 19, at: [www.unodc.org/pdf/publications/alt-development\\_andean.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/publications/alt-development_andean.pdf)

35 On South East Asia cultivation increases see Transnational Institute. *Alternative development or business as usual? China's opium substitution policy in Burma and Laos*. Drug Policy Briefing Paper 33, Nov 2010, at: [www.tni.org/files/download/brief33.pdf](http://www.tni.org/files/download/brief33.pdf); L Astorga. *Drug trafficking in Mexico: A first general assessment*. Management of Social Transformations Working Paper 36. UNESCO, at: [www.unesco.org/most/astorga.htm](http://www.unesco.org/most/astorga.htm); Witness for Peace. *An exercise in futility: Nine years of fumigation in Colombia*. Washington, DC, 2009, at: [witnessforpeace.org/downloads/An\\_Exercise\\_in\\_Futility.pdf](http://witnessforpeace.org/downloads/An_Exercise_in_Futility.pdf); M Dion, C Russler. *Eradication efforts, the state, displacement and poverty: Explaining coca cultivation in Colombia during Plan Colombia*. *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 40:399-421, 2008; D Mansfield, A Pain. *Evidence from the field: Understanding changing levels of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan*. In J. Buxton (ed.) *The Politics of Narcotic Drugs: A Survey*. Oxford: Routledge, 2011. On Peru, see L Whittington. *The balloon effect, in effect: Humala, Peru and the drug dilemma*. Washington, DC: Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2013, at: [www.coha.org/the-balloon-effect-and-displacement-part-2-of-2/](http://www.coha.org/the-balloon-effect-and-displacement-part-2-of-2/); B Bagley. *Drug trafficking and organized crime in the Americas*. Woodrow Wilson Centre Update, 2012, at: [www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/BB%20Final.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/BB%20Final.pdf); C Youngers, E Rosin, (eds.) *Drugs and democracy in Latin America: The impact of US policy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005, p 45.

36 M Villarreal. *ATPA renewal: background and issues*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011.

further marginalize the most insecure and vulnerable such as itinerant labourers and the landless, while the provision of mechanical, chemical, and infrastructure support to more privileged farmers inflates the value of land and household income. This bias generates or reinforces rural inequality and exclusion, in turn increasing the likelihood that those at the very bottom of the cultivation chain will seek out new areas and restart planting in order to sustain livelihoods.<sup>37</sup> In Afghanistan, for example, AD did not directly target the land- and resource-poor most dependent on poppy cultivation but rather focused on accessible regions that had agricultural potential or areas where the conflict had intensified. The focus on quality land with commercial farming potential compounded the marginalization of the rural poor, increased vulnerability of cultivators, and raised political discontent in those areas where alternative livelihood opportunities were scarce.<sup>38</sup>

In some cases, targeting has been determined more by military than by development considerations, undermining development outcomes. In Colombia, for example, AD activities by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the government of Colombia focused on areas of paramilitary demobilization (Catatumbo, the middle and lower Atrato, and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta) and not regions subject to spraying of illicit crops (Amazonia and Orinoco).<sup>39</sup> The flexibility in resources and strategy associated with combined interventions is unfavorable to coherence in AD projects. In Afghanistan, according to the United Kingdom's Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI): "Aid has often been used as a direct part of military operations, particularly interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy growing and in the delivery of quick-impact projects aimed at winning the 'hearts and minds' of the local population." The security-led approach meant development funding was directed to areas where conflict, not poverty, was prevalent, causing "considerable resentment in the more peaceful provinces."<sup>40</sup>

37 M van Dun, H Cabieses Cubas and P Metaal. *Between Reality and Abstraction Guiding Principles and developing alternatives for illicit crop producing regions in Peru*. TNI Drug Policy Briefing Paper 39. Amsterdam: TNI, 2013, at: [www.undrugcontrol.info/images/stories/documents/brief39.pdf](http://www.undrugcontrol.info/images/stories/documents/brief39.pdf); Mansfield and Pain, op.cit.

38 Derived from D Mansfield, *Pariah or Poverty?: The Opium Ban in the Province of Nangarhar in the 2004–05 Growing Season and Its Impact on Rural Livelihood Strategies*, GTZ Project for Alternative Livelihoods in Eastern Afghanistan: Internal Document No. 11.

39 R Vargas Meza. *USAID's Alternative Development Policy in Colombia*. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2011, at: <http://www.tni.org/briefing/usaid-alternative-development-policy-colombia>

40 UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact. (2014). *DFID's Bilateral Support to Growth and Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. Report 31. <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-Report-DFID-Bilateral-Support-to-Growth-and-Livelihoods-in-Afghanistan.pdf>

**Metrics of AD success neglect human development:**

The usual indicator of “success” in AD programs is reductions in drug crop cultivation based on the UNODC’s institutional imperative to uphold the UN drug conventions. Targets and appraisals are driven by short-term thinking configured around periodic reporting to the UNODC and often the United States. Reporting creates pressure on countries to achieve demonstrable declines, forcing *ad hoc* responses to rising cultivation levels, even when reliable estimates are difficult to obtain.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, UNODC metrics do not incorporate human development indicators or measures of socioeconomic progress, and they do not shed light on how households make cultivation decisions.<sup>42</sup> Inadequate assessment and analysis of development impacts in the design, implementation, and evaluation of AD programs means their potential to do harm is overlooked. Rather than alleviating the poverty, marginalization, and insecurity that are factors of drug crop cultivation, AD programs may create new forms of exclusion and inequality.

In Afghanistan, for example, there was negligible assessment of how opium poppy cultivators might be affected by AD interventions or what their responses might be to internationally funded “development” programs (relocation, replanting, etc.). As a result, there was “no clear understanding of what influences households in their decision to move from illicit to licit livelihoods and how this differs by socioeconomic and gender group, as well as location”.<sup>43</sup> ICAI found that the United Kingdom’s £190 million annual aid budget in Afghanistan was unfortunately based on poorly designed monitoring and inappropriate indicators. “Lack of direct consultation with intended beneficiaries and unproven theories of change” hampered the activities, ICAI noted.<sup>44</sup>

“Rather than alleviating the poverty, marginalization, and insecurity that are factors of drug crop cultivation, [alternative development] programs may create new forms of exclusion and inequality.”

41 D Mansfield. Alternative development: The modern thrust of supply side policy. *Bulletin on Narcotics* LI(1-2), 1999, at: [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin\\_1999-01-01\\_1\\_page004.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1999-01-01_1_page004.html); also K Ledebur and C Youngers (2012) *Bolivian Drug Control Efforts: Genuine Progress, Daunting Challenges*. Andean Information Network.

42 Mansfield, *Alternative development*, *ibid*.

43 Mansfield and Pain, *op.cit.* (note 20).

44 UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *op.cit.*

**Failure to incorporate development best practice:** Although international consensus on best practice in development emphasizes stakeholder engagement, ownership, and design of development initiatives, the criminalization of cultivators under the 1961 Single Convention remains an impediment to meaningfully participatory processes. AD programs often exclude local knowledge in the development of alternative options, undermine municipal institutions, and erode cultivator confidence in national authorities and donor agencies.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, little progress has been made in mainstreaming AD into national development plans and donor support.<sup>46</sup> In Afghanistan, for example, alternative livelihood interventions for opium poppy cultivators were not integrated with the national counter-narcotics strategy or the “National Priority Programs,” which included anti-poverty measures. Thus, interventions responded to short-term security goals rather than to long-term integrated development goals.<sup>47</sup>

Technical guidelines for best practice in AD, including by UNODC and the European Union, stress the negative impacts of conditionality in assistance, particularly in a context where cultivation levels cannot be accurately determined and farmers are subject to external pressures that they cannot control. Nevertheless, conditionality has remained a cornerstone of the AD programs of some donors, notably the United States, a practice that “sees development assistance as compensation rather than a means by which to promote equitable growth and empower the poor.”<sup>48</sup> The persistence of conditionality demonstrates lack of consensus within the drug control regime, lack of agreement on best practice, and core differences in the priority of donors. Retaining conditions on AD perpetuates cultivator mistrust and patterns of conflict and localized violence.

45 L. Farthing, *Rethinking alternative development in Bolivia*. Andean Information Network, 2004.

46 GTZ, FAO. (2006). *Lessons learned from alternative development in Asia*.

47 Mansfield and Pain, *op.cit.*

48 *Ibid.*

**Rejection of Bolivia's innovative approach:** Bolivia has undertaken a demonstrably successful experience of reduction of illicit coca cultivation that merits global attention but has been treated with hostility by some global actors. Under President Evo Morales, a former coca grower, Bolivia's "Coca Yes, Cocaine No" policy recognizes the need for a legal market in coca leaf to support traditional, legal uses of coca in drinks, soaps, and other products as well as the chewing of coca leaf as a mild stimulant. In key coca-growing areas, some farmers are offered the chance to grow a defined amount of coca for the legal market.<sup>49</sup> In these schemes, the government provides support for developing agricultural and other livelihood opportunities to replace the illicit coca cultivation given up by participating farmers. As coca cultivation for the illicit market has declined significantly in the areas covered by this program, farmers are no longer beholden to criminal networks for their livelihoods and violence in the affected communities has declined dramatically<sup>50</sup> (See also Briefing Paper No.06 Harm Reduction). Despite this success, the United States reacted to the policy by suspending Bolivia's trade preferences under the Andean Trade Preference Act, affecting an estimated 25,000-50,000 jobs in the country's textile industry.<sup>51</sup>

49 K Ledebur and CA Youngers. From conflict to collaboration: an innovative approach to reducing coca cultivation in Bolivia. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2(1):9, 2013. DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.aw>

50 Ibid.

51 A Poe. (2008). *Are thousands of Bolivian jobs at stake?* Security Assistance Monitor. <http://www.securityassistance.org/blog/are-thousands-bolivian-jobs-stake>



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultivation of drug crops is a development issue, not a crime or security issue. Addressing drug crop cultivation in the Global South must be incorporated into and reflect the goals of sustainable, rights-based, empowering development. There is an urgent need to reflect critically on the limitations of existing approaches to AD, and on the feasibility of development objectives that derive from a prohibition-oriented drug control framework. Advocacy for existing AD approaches seems to assume benefits to drug control—and development—that are simply not proven, and AD initiatives sit uncomfortably with wider post-2015 aspirations of “sustainable development for all.”

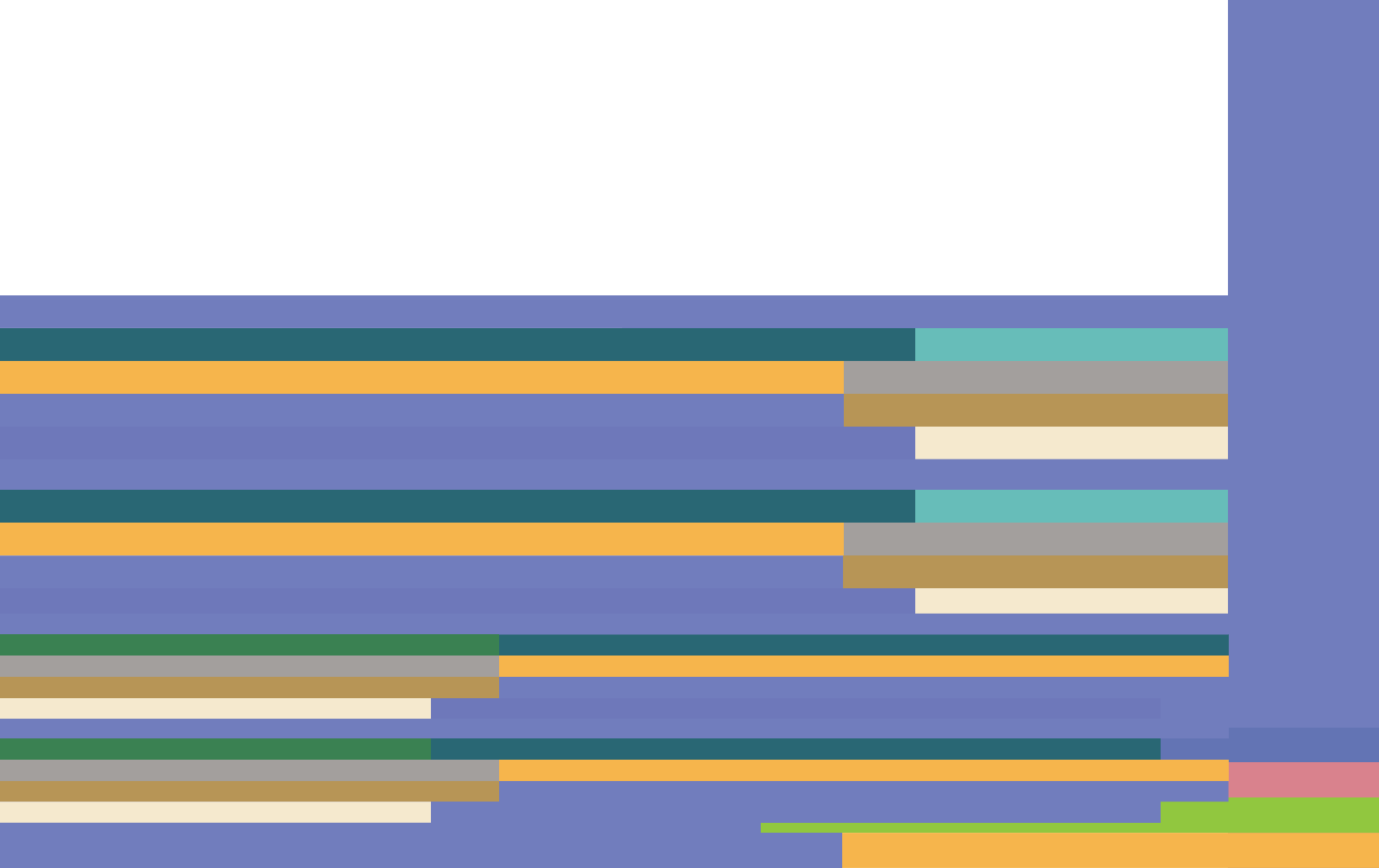
**Existing AD programs are inchoate, fragmented, and may do more harm than good. AD is an old approach to drug supply, which has been implemented for over 30 years without evidence of tangible success or uptake of lessons learned.**

Fundamental to the concept of development is citizen agency and the redistribution of political and economic power. These principles cannot be realized in a macro-policy context of criminalization, the metrics of drug crop reduction at all costs, or the constraints of the UN drug conventions. National ownership and stakeholder engagement are recognized as crucial to the achievement of development goals. By contrast, drug control rests on adhesion to external targets often policed by military force and threat of economic sanction. The experience of Bolivia demonstrates the limited room for innovation and ownership of the “drugs and development” issue and the inability of the control system (including the 1961 Single Convention) to recognize the complexity and tensions of change processes. Continued donor support to the existing patchwork of AD initiatives is a chronic misuse of resources, most particularly at a time when countries of the Global North are mired in economic austerity, and international poverty reduction goals are largely unmet.



## In the 2016 UNGASS and beyond, the following issues should figure in the AD debate:

- **There is a profound need to bring the debate on harm reduction, rights-based approaches, and decriminalization to drug supply issues. It is essential to address the vacuum of empirical research and discussion on AD and supply-side reform options, including through largescale, international field research to find measurably effective, evidence-based policies and practices in this area.**
- **Discussion of alternative supply-side approaches has been a difficult and sensitive topic for the international drug control regime for over a century. The 1961 Convention delimits national ownership of the drugs issue by supply countries and frames rigid inflexibility in supply-side responses. These constraints on modern, development-oriented, and rights-based policies must be addressed and mitigated. As other treaty flexibilities are being discussed, it would be a step forward for the UNGASS to reach a consensus that 21st century development ideas for drug crop-producing communities should not be impeded by the drug conventions.**
- **UNODC is not well placed to be the global leader on “drugs and development” issues. It should cede responsibility in this area to the UNDP and other development organizations, or at a minimum, be more proactive in pursuit of UN sector wide approaches. If it continues to be active in AD, UNODC’s development capacity must be dramatically scaled up, including formulating and using program indicators that focus on long-term development objectives rather than law enforcement.**
- **Alternative development interventions, by whichever organization they are led, should be subject to evaluation by outside experts with demonstrated independence from the organization leading the project. Independent evaluations should not endanger or be disrespectful to affected populations but should be planned and implemented with their meaningful participation.**
- **Development and drug control actors, institutions, and agencies must engage in robust, evidence-based, and “out of the box” thinking on complex supply questions, including how these relate to structural inequalities, peace-building, and poverty reduction, and in a manner that supports a meaningful shift from declaratory statements on “best practice” to actual implementation. Both the 2016 UNGASS on drugs and the elaboration of the post-2015 development goals provide an opportunity to address the limitations of current approaches and to bring new thinking to strategies for the fulfillment of the needs and rights of the millions of people affected by this challenge.**



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