

2.4. CONCLUSION

The world has failed to come to terms with cannabis as a drug. In some countries, cannabis use and trafficking are taken very seriously, while in others, they are virtually ignored. This incongruity undermines the credibility of the international system, and the time for resolving global ambivalence on the issue is long overdue. Either the gap between the letter and spirit of the Single Convention, so manifest with cannabis, needs to be bridged, or parties to the Convention need to discuss re-defining the status of cannabis.

The ability to make evidence-based decisions is undermined by our lack of knowledge about the nature of cannabis markets. Despite an academic bibliography that could run into several volumes, there remain large gaps in our understanding of where and how the plant is cultivated and consumed. This ignorance is particularly dangerous because many assume that cannabis is understood quite well, and base their decisions on shaky foundations.

At the same time, the drug itself is changing. High-potency sinsemilla produced in indoor cannabis factories represents genuine innovation in a substance that has been around for centuries. Its emergence highlights the fact that global illicit drugs markets are a moving target, and policies must be dynamic in order to address continual shifts and unexpected turns. There must be constant feedback between research and intervention if our approach to drugs issues is to be sound.

In several respects, cannabis is unique among illicit drugs. It is not dependent on transnational trafficking or organized crime to move from cultivator to user. Often, they are the same person, or at least socially related. There exist international advocacy groups promoting legal reform concerning the drug, a phenomenon not seen for cocaine or heroin. Medical use of the active ingredients, if not the plant itself, is championed by respected professionals. It is not surprising that national opinions on this issue have begun to diverge. It is essential, however, that consensus be regained, and that what is truly a global issue is again approached with consistency on a global level. After all, it is for precisely this that the multilateral drug control system was designed.