

# Mainstreaming Alternative Development in Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar: A Process of Learning



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Mainstreaming Alternative Development in  
Thailand, Lao PDR and Myanmar:  
A Process of Learning

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## FOREWORD

**A**lternative development efforts to reduce the illicit cultivation of opium poppy and to improve the livelihood of small farmers over the last years have been based on different approaches resulting from the need to address different realities. Alternative development, or development-oriented drug control, has played a very important role in providing development assistance to areas that would not have benefited from traditional forms of rural and agricultural development. The extent to which alternative development has directly contributed to an overall decline in illicit opium poppy cultivation in the region is debatable, but what is almost certain is that had it not been for this specialized type of assistance, many communities and villages would never have received assistance and would be worse off. Equally important is the recognition that some countries in the region have been more successful than others. Factors other than varying levels of economic, social and political development have led to this disparity. Identifying these factors as well as the challenges, obstacles and successful practices is all the more important given the shrinking resources available for alternative development programmes. In this connection, it is important to recognize and accept that not all efforts have proven successful, either in terms of reducing illicit crop cultivation or of improving the social and economic situation of small farmers.

It is clear that this is a special moment for securing any gains made over the many years dedicated to reducing illicit crop cultivation. Current trends and assessments point to a situation where farmers are replanting illicit opium poppy. For example, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic there has been a 7% increase in the area under such cultivation, from 1,500 ha to 1,600 ha over the last two years. In Myanmar, the increase has been of 3%, from 27,700 ha to 28,500 ha over the same period. In addition, there is information suggesting a small but nevertheless worrisome trend in replanting in Thailand. Added to this is the fact that alternative development programmes reach only a small portion of the entire population that desperately requires development assistance. UNODC and the international community must not forget the principle of shared responsibility and the ultimate responsibility we have been entrusted with to ensure a decent living for the many small farmers who look to us for support and assistance.

This publication is but one effort to compile and disseminate a series of experiences and approaches undertaken by Thailand, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar. It is one element of the effort made by UNODC to create linkages among States in the region and between States in different regions.

I would like to thank the many Government staff members with whom I have worked and my colleagues at the UNODC offices in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar for their tireless efforts. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. Sanong Chinnanon, who has dedicated so much of his professional life to bringing many development projects to fruition.

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Opium Cultivation Area in 2007 - Source : UNODC Opium Survey 2007

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## ACRONYMS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

ACCORD	ASEAN + China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs
AD	Alternative Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ALTID	Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASOD	ASEAN Senior Officials on Drugs
BAHT	Thai currency: approximately 33 baht equals 1 USD
CBDAC	Community-Based Drug Abuse Control
CCDAC	Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (Myanmar)
CICP	Centre for International Crime Prevention
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CRCDP	Crop Replacement and Community Development Project
CTA	Chief Technical Officer
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency (USA)
DCDC	District Commission for Drug Control and Supervision
DDR	Drug Demand Reduction
DTEC	Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (Thailand)
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GMSARN	Greater Mekong Subregion Academic Research Network
GTZ	GTZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (the German Technical Cooperation Agency)
HAMP	Thai/UN Highland Agricultural Marketing and Production Project
IDSWG	Illicit Drug Sector Working Group
IDU	Injecting Drug Use
IMPECT	Inter-Mountain Peoples for Education and Culture Association
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board (the independent and quasi-judicial monitoring body for the implementation of the UN international drug control conventions, established in 1968 in accordance with the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961)

IOM	International Organization for Migration
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KIP	Lao currency: approximately 8,500 kip equals 1 USD
KYAT	Myanmar currency: approximately 960 kyat equals 1 USD
LCDC	Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Paris, comprising 30 countries)
PFU	UNODC Programme Facilitation Unit, Vientiane
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RFD	Royal Forest Department (Thailand)
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SLORC	State Law and Order Council (Myanmar)
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council (Myanmar)
TPR	Tripartite Review
UNDCP	United Nations International Drug Control Programme (established in 1991, following restructuring of UNFDAC)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Security Services
UNFDAC	United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (established in 1970)
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session (The short name used for the Political Declaration and Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development, adopted by UNGASS 1998).
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, established in 2002, following the reorganization of UNODCCP
UNODCCP	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, established in 1997, following the merger of UNDCP & CICP
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWSP	United Wa State Party





# INTRODUCTION

## *What is Alternative Development?*

**U**NODC defines “Alternative Development” (AD) on its website as “giving farmers an economically viable, legal alternative to growing coca or opium.”<sup>1</sup> Projects of this sort were first implemented by UNODC’s predecessor organization, UNFDAC, in 1971 with the Crop Replacement and Community Development Project that began in Thailand. Since then, many more projects have been implemented in Thailand as well as country-level interventions in the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Projects also began in several countries at the same time through regional programmes managed from Bangkok.

Rather than inventing the term “AD”, UNODC appropriated it in the 1980s from others in the development field who had been using this term to refer to a range of measures promoting locally-based, rural development aimed at rural and indigenous peoples who had been largely left out of the “neo-classical” international economic system set up at Bretton Woods in 1944. These measures, which held that economic growth resulted from the accumulation of capital and the expansion of the labor force, together with the exogenous factor of technological progress (all of which tended to favor the richer creditor nations), were pursued through the 1960s and the first United Nations Development Decade.

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<sup>1</sup> [http:// www.unodc.org/unodc/en/alternative-development/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/alternative-development/index.html)

AD gained popularity after the results of the Development Decade proved disappointing. Although UN Secretary-General U Thant noted that in some cases poorer countries had made economic gains, he also recognized the decade had witnessed increased imbalances between rich and poor countries.

A major catalyst for a new way of thinking about development came in a 1975 report by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation entitled *What Now? Another Development!*. This report contended that development should aim to provide for the basic needs of the people. Development, it said, should be in harmony with the environment and that people at the local level should be able to manage it themselves after the interventions were completed. As this way of conceptualizing development grew popular, the word “alternative” came to be used more often than “another.” In an influential paper by sociologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse, which attempted to define AD, he observed that it covered a range of processes that operated as “a roving critique of mainstream development.” Instead of output and technology, Pieterse noted that AD emphasized agency work along with “people’s capacity to effect social change.”<sup>2</sup>

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation report drew on several intellectual trends and much practical experience. Factors were the growth in thinking Green, the crystallization of the concept of sustainable development, and the increased role of NGOs. Proponents of alternative forms of development began discussing “participatory” or “people-centered” development, “grassroots movements”, “empowerment”, and “conscientization.”

Among the antecedents were the writings of a Christian Socialist from Brazil named Paulo Freire, in particular his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>3</sup>. Freire called for freeing colonized and oppressed people

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<sup>1</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. 1975. *What Now? Another Development*. Uppsala: Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. 1998. “My Paradigm or Yours? Alternative Development, Post-Development, Reflexive Development.” *Development and Change*.

<sup>3</sup> Freire, Paulo. 1993. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum. First published in 1968 in Portuguese as *Pedagogia do Oprimido*.

through cooperation, unity, critical and independent thinking, as well as their becoming more organized. Freire wrote that the oppressed are taught to be followers through the “banking” type of education, whereby students take facts and deposit them in their minds without thinking critically about them. Instead of such a system, which, Freire says, tends to program them into being followers, he called on them to liberate themselves from this “pedagogy” and to begin thinking independently and making their own decisions. Freire suggested that the relationship between “teacher” (developer) and “student” (the poor) should be used productively to create knowledge. Persons prominent in the development of participatory rural development, such as Robert Chambers, have since said that they gained much from the thinking of Paulo Freire. Among many honors, Freire was given the UNESCO Award of Education of Peace in 1986.

Similar in approach was Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*<sup>1</sup>. Schumacher was a prominent economist who had worked with John Maynard Keynes but who had been considering alternatives to the mainstream course of development for some time. After being invited by Prime Minister U Nu to serve as an economic consultant in Myanmar in 1955, where he also practiced vipassana meditation, he began to appreciate a type of economics that aimed to reduce desire rather than increasing it. Through his Society for Intermediate Technology, which he founded in 1965, he began calling for “Buddhist Economics.”

Schumacher wrote that modern economics were accustomed to measuring the standard of living by how much people consumed, with the idea being that someone who consumed more would somehow be better off than someone who consumed less. Contending that this did not make sense, Schumacher said that the goal of economics should be to obtain the most well-being with the least consumption. His suggestions gained considerable popularity after *Small is Beautiful* was published and which was, according to the *London Times*, one of the 100 most influential books published after the end of World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Schumacher, E.F. 1973. *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Bland & Briggs. A collection of his essays, including “Buddhist Economics,” originally written in 1966.

Adapting such conceptions, in particular Freire's contention that the poor are able to analyze their own situation and propose alternatives, Robert Chambers, a Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, began using the term, "Rapid Rural Appraisal" (RRA) in 1983 to bring about a "reversal of learning". Chambers argued that "developers" should not think of themselves as the sole source of information and wisdom for development interventions, instead, they should be looking to the poor in the community where they are living and working for insights into what to do.

RRA grew popular and within two years, the first international conference on RRA was being held at Khon Kaen University in Thailand. From RRA, which was primarily a methodology of learning for developers and community organizers, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) took shape as a means to design development interventions with the community directly involved.

The PRA package comprised participatory action research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research, and RRA. In 1995, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was implementing



UNODC project staff during PRA with villager in Northern Laos

the Sub-Regional Highland Peoples' Project in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam which used PRA in highland communities and worked with PRA teams throughout the region, such as the Hanoi Medical College and the Social Research Institute at Chiang Mai University. Many related initiatives took shape, including those by NGOs and supported also by the increasing number of indigenous organizations in Thailand and elsewhere.

As for whether PRA is AD, Pieterse concludes that AD is a misnomer because it offers no alternatives and that AD still supports the development process. He suggests terms such as "human development" or "participatory development" but cites disadvantages to all of them. Still, he is clear that whatever this type of development is called, there will always be a place for non-mainstream development that promotes micro-approaches with local people fully involved.

What would be a real alternative is the sustainable development that aims at the goals described by Schumacher and promoted by King Bhumibol. Using a Buddhist outlook, the King promotes activities that provide for "enough to live, enough to eat" rather than a high return on investment<sup>1</sup>. In the next section, where UNODC's AD activities are discussed, it will be seen that the goal of all of them is alternative and sustainable livelihoods for the villagers. While income generating activities were encouraged, as was food production, the projects placed no stress on growth. The purpose was that the people who formerly grew opium poppy could find sustainable alternatives.

Although it was a struggle to find environmentally-friendly alternatives, this was still the goal. It should be noted that the way in which opium poppy was being cultivated caused deforestation and soil degradation. The alternatives also furthered environmental damage but as time passed and the interventions grew more sophisticated, damage declined considerably.

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Project Development Board. 1997. Concepts and Theories of His Majesty the King on Development. Bangkok: Royal Project Development Board, DTEC, & UNDP.

## *UNODC's Alternative Development*

Throughout discussions of AD (under this or related terminology), UNODC and its predecessor organizations are hardly mentioned. This is despite UNFDAC, UNDCP, and UNODC having been the first international development agency to have worked with highlanders in Thailand, and then in similar ways that grew increasingly participatory (through PRA and related approaches), in Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

The antecedents of AD had roots in this region. Many persons involved in AD with UNFDAC, UNDCP, and UNODC also worked for other organizations, including those larger, more substantially funded, and also with better public relations operations. Information sharing and trials of techniques involved consultants and others working for UNODC projects and with other organizations.

One reason that UNODC's work in AD has not been widely recognized is that the institutional culture of UNODC stresses drug control and law enforcement. For example, when RRA was being introduced into UNDCP work, the Report of the International Narcotics Control Board<sup>1</sup> (INCB) for 1991, noted only briefly that development projects in the Lao PDR "combined with the Government's campaign against illicit poppy cultivation...appears to be having some success in reducing opium production."<sup>2</sup>

While space constraints may have been a factor in the INCB report, other UNDCP reports barely let the world know (if at all), for example, that the "Palaveck approach<sup>3</sup>" worked out commitments of Hmong communities in the Palaveck area of Xaysomboun Special Region of the Lao PDR to voluntarily reduce poppy cultivation. Such accomplishments were relegated to internal documents, consultant reports and project evaluations with very limited circulation.

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1 The INCB Secretariat is an administrative entity of UNODC reporting solely to the Board.

2 International Narcotics Control Board. 1992. Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 1991. Vienna: INCB.

3 Referring to the UNDCP Highland Integrated Rural Development Pilot Project, 1989-1996 (UNDCP LAO/89/550).

Although engaging in people-centered development, the institutional imperatives of UNDCP to eliminate illicit crops overshadowed its AD accomplishments. In its project documents, evaluation reports, and other literature, UNDCP measured success primarily in terms of decreased poppy cultivation. AD was seen primarily as a means to an end. Achievements in building better links with local people, growers, and ex-growers were not seen as successes in their own right but just tactics to be used in meeting drug control objectives. With this orientation, UNDCP manifested a greater interest in drug control and supply reduction than in AD. In 1990, UNDCP adopted a balanced approach to drug control, comprising supply reduction, demand reduction, and law enforcement. However, because donors had become accustomed to UNDCP implementing law enforcement projects, more support was provided for this sector than the others. This continued when UNDCP became UNODC. Priorities shifted to criminal justice, crime prevention and law enforcement in order to expand the portfolio for combating criminal activity.

The confused image of the UNODC had resulted in an unintended consequence of negative press over the supposed harm eliminating opium caused. One journalist (who later retracted the statement) reported that villagers “were dying like flies” because of such efforts. The Economist quoted a Vientiane-based ambassador as saying a “disaster” could result if Laos banned opium by 2005<sup>1</sup>. However, when UNODC reported that opium growers in Laos earned less cash income than non-growers<sup>2</sup>, it was barely noticed by the development community, such were the negative connotations surrounding UNODC’s AD work.

However, while there is a lack of information concerning the advances UNDCP had made in AD, the more widely available UNDP Human Development Reports published as early as 1993 states that people must participate in the “events and processes which shape their lives”, a concept similar to the USAID’s New Partnership Initiative, introduced by Al Gore at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. By that year the World Bank had produced a Participation Sourcebook as a guide for involving

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1 Epprecht, Michael. 2004. “Unintended Consequences”. The Economist (29 April).

2 UNODC. 2005. Laos Opium Survey 2005. Vientiane: LCDC & UNODC.

people in their own development. UNDCP reports by comparison dwelt on such topics as national legislation, treaty adherence, and seizures.

This situation within UNDCP (and later UNODC) is ironic since it was in 1998 that a United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) mandated alternative development in Resolution S-20/4E as well as did the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs<sup>1</sup>. Resolution S-20/4 E defined AD as:

*“a process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national economic growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognizing the particular sociocultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs.”*

Nevertheless, the emphasis with UNDCP has remained on control. In the UNODCCP’s major annual publication, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2002*, the focus is on statistics in three categories: production, trafficking, and consumption<sup>2</sup>. Although there is an analysis section, it is entirely devoted to conditions in Afghanistan where AD initiatives were not carried out. The publication neglected the mention the achievements of AD.

UNODC’s AD work was comprehensively evaluated in 2005 by the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU). The findings verified the effectiveness of UNODC’s AD work. The report found that despite there being little information on the impact of UNODC interventions, (as opposed to crop reduction data); they led to improved livelihoods<sup>3</sup>. This evaluation

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1 CND 45/14.

2 UNODCCP. 2002. *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2002*. Vienna: UNODCCP.

3 UNODC. 2005. *Thematic Evaluation of UNODC Alternative Development Initiatives*. UNODC Independent Evaluation Unit.

aimed to undo the mixed messages UNODC had been sending to donors and other stakeholders (arising from negative publicity) which resulted in donors not funding UNODC AD initiatives in the amount needed to address the serious issues arising out of the cultivation of illicit crops in the region.

However, the report's incomplete definition of AD went beyond the terse definition made by UNGASS and noted the importance of demand reduction and law enforcement. In addition, and according to UNODC's 2005 report "public education" was required to "warn people of the physical, legal and economic consequences of growing, trafficking and using drugs." Furthermore, to bring about permanent changes in farmer behavior, it is necessary to reduce "the coercive power of the drug industry" and to improve economies "to assure the adequate and stable income from licit activities."

Nonetheless, UNODC made a renewed effort to promote AD. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution 48/9, agreed on in 2005, called on UNODC to "strengthen its capacity in alternative development, including preventive alternative development." The General Assembly in December 2005 passed a resolution reaffirming the use of AD in drug control. The UNODC Executive Director's third biennial report on the world drug problem submitted to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs responded by saying the organization would "identify and promote strategies for international cooperation in the development and dissemination of best practices and relevant research, including the monitoring of drug trends." Finally, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations passed resolution 2006/33 in July 2006 which recognizes the need to mainstream alternative development and implement "preventive alternative development."

As a part of the follow-up to these resolutions was the formulation of the Global Partnership on Alternative Development, GLO/I44, a UNODC project in partnership with the Government of Germany. This project aims to strengthen the capacities of participating countries, and the relevant people and agencies within them "to mainstream counter narcotics objectives and analysis into broader national and regional development plans and programmes."

Besides reaffirming the role AD could play and the responsibility UNODC has in this regard, these resolutions add a new dimension to AD. The introduction of the term “preventive alternative development” emphasizes the usefulness of AD in impeding the introduction of illicit crops into drug-free areas and in preventing their recurrence in places where they have been eliminated. AD, in this sense, specifically responds to the needs of people who grow illicit crops or who recently stopped. The latter invariably need continued support over many years to acquire the skills and find opportunities to begin drug-free livelihoods and then to be able to carry them out sustainably.

For this report, the terminology “Alternative Development (AD)” will be used according to the UNGASS definition together with parts of the IEU report, and with the new dimension of preventiveness.

The International Conference on the Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation, Feldafing/Munich 2002 which brought together practitioners and theoreticians to review all aspects of AD, used the UNGASS definition and so it shall be in this report.

AD is a part of the overall drug control strategy carried out in a participatory manner with the local people that will also include demand reduction, law enforcement, and public education (civic awareness) to provide the local population with the security needed to adopt and maintain drug-free livelihoods.

### ***AD in South East Asia***

AD work (in all senses and by all definitions) within the United Nations System, particularly in the Greater Mekong Region was pioneered by UNODC and its predecessor organizations, UNFDAC and UNDCP. From 1971 when work focused on crop replacement and did not comprise the entire AD package, the process has evolved until it has become a comprehensive response to the cultivation of illicit crops. As this has occurred, another component of AD has been brought to play. As mentioned in the resolution of the Economic and Social Commission, this is the mainstreaming of UNODC’s AD efforts with other international

development agencies and also national agencies, including NGOs, indigenous peoples groups, and local communities.

The pace and scope of AD work in the three countries of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar has varied, with Thailand having reduced poppy cultivation significantly since 1984 with Laos only doing the same in 2006. In Myanmar, although cultivation is much reduced from a decade ago, the amount of opium produced has actually increased in the last two years and the country remains the second largest producer in the world (although far behind Afghanistan)

Although reviews of the AD process have been written, particularly in Thailand, the work there has never been analyzed comparatively with efforts in the neighboring countries. Similarly, there have never been



Photo: Xavier Bouan

Lancing the opium poppy capsule, Wa Region, Myanmar

analytical studies on what role mainstreaming played in reducing poppy cultivation in the Lao PDR and in Myanmar.

This is a critical gap, given the fact that poppy cultivation is far from ended in Myanmar (even increasing in the last two years) and that there is a continued need to sustain the elimination of opium in Laos. At the same time, because of these significant reductions, donors are mistakenly assuming that the job is all but over and funding for AD is harder to obtain than in the past (attitudes compounded by bad publicity.)

Mainstreaming of AD has taken place in all three countries according to the differing situations in each. In Thailand, after 30 years, government agencies and Royal Family-supported projects have fully adopted AD while also making their own contributions to the AD concept. In the Lao PDR, AD is now being integrated into the National Growth and Poverty Reduction Plan as well as the work of several governmental agencies. In Myanmar, despite budgetary shortages and other difficulties, government agencies such as Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs (commonly referred to as NaTaLa -the Myanmar Language acronym) have adopted the AD approach as a part of the national border progress and development plan and implemented activities in this manner. In all three countries, UN agencies have cooperated in different ways in doing AD which itself represents mainstreaming within the international development community.

This reports aims to provide an analytical study identifying lessons learned (both negative and positive) regarding AD mainstreaming in Thailand, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar so that good practices can be highlighted to serve as guidelines for future work within the broader development framework. The study will review lessons learned regarding partnership development and working collaboratively for a common goal.

This has contributed to the formulation of the AD component of the new National Masterplan in the Lao PDR as well as the expansion of the Myanmar AD programme to areas where poppy cultivation is increasing. This will also contribute to the role regional projects can play and help

identify value added benefits they can provide and give ideas to drug control work in the rest of Asia as well as in Latin America.

One of the main reasons for this report is the usefulness that shedding light on UNODC's AD work will bring. For too long and to the detriment of the overall development process in these three countries, AD by UNODC has been viewed as stealth operation, in isolation of traditional development.

Compared to other UN agencies and international development units, UNODC (along with UNFDAC and UNDCP) is something of a newcomer to the UN family. The work UNODC has done in AD has often been obscured by UNODC's overall focus on drug control and by the publicity and larger funding enjoyed by the larger development agencies both in the UN and outside of it. This situation calls for a reversal of learning so that UNODC's accomplishments can more fully benefit development work in the region.

The author has seen AD firsthand since he tagged along as an observer on the baseline survey of the Mae Chaem Integrated Watershed Development Project in 1980. He has participated in AD work with the UN since 1985 when he worked with the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Project in the north of Thailand. Since then he has participated in various ways, such as a project manager, evaluator, project designer, and through consultancies in projects in all three countries covered by this report and elsewhere. He has written about the history of illicit drug use in Myanmar and the process of opium elimination in Thailand. He has seen many good practices and innovative solutions to highland problems involving growers or ex-growers of illicit crops in UNODC projects.

Many lessons have been learned; too many have been forgotten. The time has come to record how this work started, evolved and matured, and how it can help in the work that remains to be done. Not only will this benefit the implementation of AD work in the future but it will help to mainstream UNODC's contribution to AD and broaden its role both in South East Asia and on a global scale.



# Learning Organizations, AD and Reducing Poppy Cultivation

## *Mainstreaming*

In recent years, “mainstreaming” has become a trendy word in the international development community. Unlike AD, however, no one has successfully defined it in the context of development. It became a part of the discourse within the United Nations development community in the decade after the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1991, it became a part of European Union parlance through the Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities. Since then its application has spread to such sectors as gender mainstreaming when, in 1995, it was part of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Through the UNODC Global Partnership in Alternative Development, it has become an active concept in the agency’s AD work.

A succinct definition was provided in the summary report of a conference entitled *Drugs Environment: Beyond Alternative Development?* that was held in June 2006 in Berlin. It stated that “mainstreaming is simply embedding the objective of illicit drug crop elimination in national and regional development programmes.”

In a similar way, an evaluation of gender mainstreaming in 2006 carried out by the UNDP Evaluation Office under the leadership of Dr. Nafis Sadik stated that gender mainstreaming was a process of:

*“assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels... [so that] in all political, economic and societal spheres... women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.”*

Mainstreaming should also include people who are referred to as the “target population” or the “beneficiaries”. If mainstreaming is to be successful, however, these people in the project areas must be considered as stakeholders and involved in the planning from as early a stage in the process as possible. If this definition is adopted and the project is implemented in this way, it will provide the greatest chance of sustaining inputs and improving the way of life of the local people.

This report covers mainstreaming of AD by the governments of Thailand, the Lao PDR and Myanmar. How have they made AD a part of their strategies to both reduce and eliminate opium poppy cultivation and to provide support to farmers after it has been eliminated?

### ***Poppy Cultivation in the Hills of the Greater Mekong Region***

Opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*) is an annual herb belonging to the poppy family that originated as a species in semi-arid areas of southeastern Europe. From here and over several hundred years, the poppy spread across Asia to the Mekong River kingdoms and China by the 6th century. For the next millennium, it was cultivated for its medicinal values provided by the alkaloids it produces, such as morphine, codeine, noscapine, papaverine, and thebaine. Opium was used popularly over this time as an analgesic, a cough suppressant, to control diarrhea, to suppress the symptoms of malaria as well as for other purposes.

Besides being a valuable medicine, opium is highly addictive. For this reason, rulers of many kingdoms in the Mekong Region (including emperors of the Qing Dynasty) issued edicts prohibiting the use of opium. These and various indigenous controls kept opium use largely under control so that it did not escalate into a social problem.

Very little cash-cropping of poppy took place until the British East India Company began pushing for permission from China to import opium to coastal cities in China such as Guangdong (Canton) and Xiamen (Amoy), mainly as a way to reverse Britain's negative trade balance with China. The British were able to force their will on the Chinese during the Opium War and continued pressure until in 1858 the Chinese legalized opium<sup>1</sup>.

This ironically upset the British plan of offsetting the trade deficit by shipping opium produced in Bengal to China. Although British exports of raw opium to China reached 6,500 tons in 1880, exports declined thereafter as Chinese production increased. At the first ever international conference to control opium and other drugs held in Shanghai in 1909, a Chinese delegate admitted that local opium production totaled eight times more than what was imported from India<sup>2</sup>. After opium's legalization in China, local entrepreneurs increased poppy production to over 35,000 tons in the early 1900s which by some estimates supported 40 million users, or almost 10 per cent of the 500 million people then living in China, which at the time was accountable for consuming approximately 85% to 95 % of the world's opium supply<sup>3</sup>.

It is not at all certain what the yield of the opium poppy was at that time. But if a figure of 10 kilograms per hectare is used as an indicator<sup>4</sup>, this means opium poppy was grown on about 350 square kilometers, a very large area for any country, even China. This amount of cultivation would also have involved a very large number of growers. Using the same ratio of users to yield as in the 2005 UNODC opium survey in Myanmar when 193,100 households were involved in producing 312 metric tons

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1 Even in the 1890s, when commercial cultivation was already popular in China (and some places in Laos), French officials in Luang Namtha recorded that the Hmong, Lanten, and the Yao there, although smoked opium, cultivated poppy only enough for their own use.

2 Hosie, Alexander. *On the Trail of the Opium Poppy, A Narrative of Travel in the Chief Opium-Producing Provinces of China*. London: George Philip & Son 1914, 2 vols.

3 UNODC. 2008. *World Drug Report*. Vienna: UNODC.

4 The 9.5 kg/ha poppy yield in Myanmar in 2005 was obtained in conditions similar to those in China at that time in areas with similar soil and climatic conditions.

on 32,800 hectares, this means there would have been about 20 million growers in China a century ago<sup>1</sup>. The implications of this many growers and the trade networks it engendered are enormous and have lasted until now.

The province with the greatest production was Sichuan, followed by two other southern provinces, Yunnan, and Guizhou. Adjacent areas in Vietnam, Laos, and British Burma, as well as Thailand, also produced significant amounts, particularly in later years as cultivation spread southwards<sup>2</sup>.

Almost all the growers were members of ethnic minority groups such as the Miao/Hmong<sup>3</sup>, Yao/Mien, Lahu, and Akha who lived in the hills of China and countries to the south. Even in the absence of accurate demographic data on these groups, it can still be concluded that immense numbers of them were growing poppy, probably over half the entire ethnic minority population in these southern provinces. However, because of considerable unrest in China during the 1930s especially after the Marco Polo (Lugou) Bridge Incident of 1937 when the war with Japan spread deep into China, there are no accurate data on poppy production in the country.

Unrest in Yunnan and other southern provinces had in fact existed for well over a century before this time. Southward migration of Han Chinese and sometimes forced assimilation led many members of minority groups to move elsewhere or rebel, such as the Miao in Sichuan and Yunnan did unsuccessfully, in 1735-1738, 1795-1806, and 1854-1873. After the second

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1 UNODC. 2006. *Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Golden Triangle Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand*. Vienna: UNODC.

2 Owen, David Edward. 1934. *British Opium Policy in China and India*. New Haven: Yale.  
McCoy, Alfred W. 1991. *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill.

3 Miao is a Chinese term referring (rather negatively) to a group of peoples in southern China. Hmong is one group of Miao, sometimes referred to as "Green Hmong". Many Hmong, especially outside of China, object to the use of the term Miao due to its negative connotations. Many Miao in China do not find the term objectionable.

war, some Hmong seem to have moved south, with one village in Nonghet (near the border with Vietnam in Xiang Khouang Province) dating back to 1810. Other groups also began moving southward at the same time. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, migrants would also have been commercial cultivators of opium poppy.

Some of this movement was brought about by efforts in the late Qing Dynasty to suppress opium. This followed the international conference at Shanghai at which the International Opium Commission adopted a law enforcement approach by calling for the control of the production and trade of opium. Since there was insufficient medical expertise at the meeting, the member countries (one of which was Thailand) deferred discussion of addiction.

Efforts were taken to prevent cultivation in China. A former British consul of Chongqing, Alexander Hosie, went to see how effective these preventative measures were. He commented that they were conducted through the use of military force: in one case, 100 Miao had been killed. He is also quoted as saying that the opium prohibition campaign, waged under Governor-General Zhao Erxun from 1908-1911 was a “complete success.”<sup>1</sup>

However, this “success” did not last long as by the end of the second decade of the 20th century, poppy growing had returned to its previous level. One major reason was that the measures used to achieve this “success” were grounded in law enforcement. There are no reports of any incentives or inputs being provided to the farmers. Nor was there any serious discussion of treating addicts who apparently were left to their own devices to bring their habit to an end. Consequently, when legal pressure was relaxed, the growers reverted to poppy cultivation.

The shortcomings of such a narrow approach are obvious. Not only was the “success” short-lived, but during the time when poppy cultivation was suppressed, smuggling derivatives of opium such as morphine and

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1 Wyman, Judith. “Opium and the State in Late-Qing Sichuan. In Brooks, Timothy, et al. 2000. *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839-1952*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

heroin grew. Promoted by Shanghai-based secret societies such as the Green Gang, this temporary halt in opium cultivation strengthened a criminal culture in southern China that would last for decades and put the lie on any claims of “success.”

However, more comprehensive efforts to ban opium cultivation and use might have failed at that time due to growing turbulence in the south of China. Hosie realized this and in the last page of his book, he observes that with the “outbreak of the revolution in October 1911, the government lost control and could not “prevent a recrudescence of poppy cultivation.” From then on much of southern China came under the control of warlord groups who could operate almost freely due to their remoteness as well as their access to income from opium sales. These unsettled conditions continued for decades until Mao Zedong and his forces overthrew the Chiang Kai-shek government in 1949.

By 1951, the new rulers of China turned their attention to opium poppy cultivation and addiction by implementing drug control measures throughout the country. In the south they carried out various supply reduction measures so rigorously that virtually all opium poppy cultivation was eliminated from Yunnan and neighboring provinces by 1953. So too, was addiction to opiates which was all but eradicated.

Unlike efforts in the Qing Dynasty a half-century earlier, the new government of China could maintain near-complete control of the political situation even in remote areas of Yunnan. Furthermore, the law enforcement measures were carried out to some extent, with economic incentives built into the overall development initiatives being introduced. The government also had the ability to mobilize huge numbers of people in mass campaigns. So successful were these efforts that poppy cultivation has not resumed to any appreciable degree. With the supply cut off, the users had to stop although this began to change when opiate supplies began reaching China again in the late 1980s.

The cultivation of opium poppy and the trade in opiates continued, although to a lesser degree in countries to the south of China. One impact of the opium suppression in the 1950s was that thousands of former growers moved out of China to places in Myanmar, such as the

Wa Region and Kokang, where they could continue poppy cultivation unhindered, as well as the north of Laos, Vietnam, and Thailand. Little is known about the dynamics or extent of this migration, but there are Akha and others in the UNODC Wa Project Area who date their crossing the border from China to the early 1950s when poppy growing was banned in China. From there, some growers moved into Thailand, occasionally with defeated elements of the Nationalist Army, some of whom took over the marketing of the drugs, often in cooperation with Overseas Chinese already living in these countries. The implications of this movement will be taken up in the sections below.

### *Commercial Cultivation in the Mekong Region, South of China*

Commercial cultivation developed in French Indochina, British Burma, and Thailand over a century ago, long before China banned opium in the early-1950s. This cultivation was an extension of the poppy growing in southern China and was carried out by the same ethnic groups. Initially, it had little to do with the opium use in the big cities of these countries or the agencies set up there to manage the opium trade and use.

The French set up a state-run opium monopoly to control distribution known as Régie Générale de l'Opium in Saigon in 1881. This was extended to Laos in 1894, a year after the French took control of the area. They managed, over the years, to establish links with growers, some of whom, in Vientiane Province, were close to the Lao capital. So lucrative was this monopoly for the whole of Indochina that it subsidized half the cost of administering the colony.

In Laos in 1911, the government estimated production (officially sanctioned) at 3,800 kilograms on 1,250 hectares, involving 35,500 farmers. However, there was also an ample amount of non-sanctioned cultivation so the total was well in excess of this<sup>1</sup>. This can be seen when compared with figures from a report submitted to the Resident Superior in 1935, with yields averaging 5-8 kg/ha and a total production of 14,572 kg. In fact the yields for 1911 were very low, far less than the 8 kg/ha found by the

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<sup>1</sup> Rapin, Ami-Jacques. 2007. *Opium et société dans le Laos précolonial et colonial*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

UNODC Laos Opium Survey in 2005<sup>1</sup>. Most likely, the farmers in 1911 were selling opium on the sly to buyers other than the government.

In British Burma, the distribution of opium poppy was also a state monopoly that had started when the British East India Company administered parts of the country (Tenasserim and the Arakan) taken in the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The Company aggressively introduced opium use where it had been all but unknown, having been banned with heavy punishments by King Bodawpaya (reign 1782-1819). However, within fifteen years, addiction in these areas was the highest of any province in India. Petty theft and other crimes grew to the point where East India Company Governor, A.D. Maingy tried to restrict opium usage<sup>2</sup>. Although Maingy failed, eventually the British administrators responded by later restricting opium use in areas where ethnic Burmans lived. In the Shan States, however, where the cultivation was the most intense, restrictions were far fewer and the British never banned cultivation east of the Salween River. No serious attempt to measure cultivation there was ever carried out before Independence.

In Thailand, the situation echoed that of British Burma. As with the King Bodawpaya, Thai kings had also banned opium use, even many centuries ago<sup>3</sup>. Such edicts, however, fell before British promotion of free trade (such as in British Burma). When King Mongkut signed the Bowring Treaty in 1855, opium was allowed to be sold in the kingdom with no import duties. This rankled Thai leaders who wished to place controls on its import and use. As with its neighbors, Thailand established an opium monopoly to control the use of the substance and generate income for the government.

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1 UNODC. 2005. Laos Opium Survey 2005. Vientiane: LCDC & UNODC.

2 Furnivall. John S. 1991. *The Fashioning of Leviathan: The Beginning of British Rule in Burma* Canberra: Australian National University Research School of Pacific Studies Occasional Paper.

3 Much earlier, King Ramathibodi I banned selling or consuming opium in 1360. Violators were paraded around the city on land for three days and by boat for three days. They were held until their craving ceased and then given to relatives who were to prevent relapse (Kotmai Tra Sam Duang (Law of the Three Seals). 1963. Bangkok: Kurusapha, 3 vols.)

The experience of one director-general of the Opium Department (from 1917-1920) shows how difficult it was at the time to counter international efforts to promote the trade. Prince (Mom Chao) Sithiporn Kridakara, made a serious effort to restrict the number of dens. He wanted to reduce supply and was the first Bangkok official known to have considered supply reduction, and had visited villages in Nan Province (the birthplace of his wife) where the poppy was grown. He proposed that a special police force be trained and deployed in poppy growing areas in Nan Province (Sithiphon memorandum 1917) and suggested that the police force destroy the opium crop just before it would be harvested in January and February of each year. He also proposed that agreements be made with Hmong and Yao growers in other provinces, such as Mae Hong Son, and Chiang Mai, by which they would, as a community, agree to stop cultivation. If the growers failed to agree, Prince Sithiphon suggested that they be deported to their countries of origin<sup>1</sup>.

However, Prince Sithiporn abandoned his efforts when he realized that the British were not willing to address poppy cultivation in the Shan States. Some British officials believed that benefits of the money gained from poppy cultivation outweighed any dangers its use posed<sup>2</sup>. However, other officials were convinced that they would not be able to eliminate poppy cultivation and prevent smuggling across the country's porous borders. When the prince realized that a constant supply of opium would remain in the country despite his efforts, he resigned. He moved to Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in southern Thailand where he set up a model farm –farming field corn, watermelon, peanuts and other cash crops– that became internationally famous and led eventually to his winning the Magsaysay Award.

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1 Many Thai leaders, in the increasingly popular spirit of nationalism at the time, considered such newly arrived immigrants as aliens with no right to reside in the country.

2 In this regard noted James George Scott, the preeminent British official working in the Shan States at the start of the twentieth century, "there are no victims of opium in these... districts...It is only...where opium is prohibitive in price that there are victims to opi-um. There to buy his opium, the poor man must starve himself...and opium is blamed. Where opium is cheap the people are healthy and stalwart. East of the Salween the universal opinion of opium is that of the Turk, who stamps on his opium lozenges Mash Allah the gift of God. [Scott, James George, and J.P. Hardiman. 1900 Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States. Rangoon: Superintendent, Government Printing and Stationery.]

For the next few decades, until after World War II, opium cultivation and use persisted. The poppy was cultivated in the hills and was sold, officially under government license, to legally sanctioned dens which were mainly in the big cities. However, the government required that the dens sell opium at an inflated price partly to reduce demand and also to raise funds to run administration. There was, therefore, a considerable incentive for growers and den operators to make unofficial deals. Although opium poppy could be legally grown and opium could be legally used, a criminal culture arose wherein smugglers from opium fields in Thailand and elsewhere sought to evade the law so as to sell directly to den operators at a mutually profitable price. This received a strong boost during World War II when Japan awarded its ally, Thailand, the province of Kengtung in 1943 which it held until 1946<sup>1</sup>. During this time, connections were established between opium traders there and buyers in Thailand that continued well after the province reverted back to British Burma's control.

Poppy cultivation was to increase after the change of government in China in 1949. Since the market in China was terminated, the opium produced in these other countries was consumed mainly by users in the countries where it was cultivated. Use by people in urban areas (except in British Burma) continued as it did among the growers, among whom it probably increased.

As for the amount of poppy cultivated, the number of people involved, and other relevant data, there are no accurate estimates in Thailand, the Lao PDR and Myanmar until the 1970s and 1980s when UN and national surveys were initiated. These, which combined aerial photography and field checks enabled the first accurate production figures for these countries. But it is certain that in all these countries, the poppy was cultivated both legally and illegally at higher levels than before World War II. This gave rise to smuggling and, as the connections forged between Kengtung and Thailand show, trans-national criminal groups were taking advantage of these opportunities. Within each country as well, as the experience in British Burma from the 1830s shows, addiction grew more common. Within a century a vibrant and commercial industry

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<sup>1</sup> It was returned at that time as a part of the negotiations by which Thailand was admitted to the United Nations.

was established that supported the cultivation of the opium poppy, its use throughout Thailand, the Lao PDR and Myanmar and far beyond, while at the same time giving rise to criminal activities at different levels ranging from petty theft to money laundering and smuggling.

### *International Drug Control Efforts*

Efforts to control drugs began to take shape in the early-twentieth century, but with a law enforcement approach. Such efforts were led by the United States, in particular Harry J. Anslinger, first Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, an agency in the Department of the Treasury created in 1930. In his career as Commissioner until 1962, he consistently called for a complete ban on cultivation on opium produced for non-medical purposes. However, officials in British Burma, Thailand, and French Indochina did not agree that this was viable due to the difficulties in enforcing cultivation bans in remote areas. As a result, poppy cultivation in the region continued, while international efforts to control opiates and other drugs grew in strength.

Three years after the Shanghai Conference, a second such meeting to discuss drug control was held in The Hague. Unlike the Shanghai Conference, which was purely consultative, delegates here were authorized to conduct official negotiations. This led to the signing of the International Opium Convention which reiterated the law enforcement approach, but was superseded by the treaty signed in 1925 in Geneva that revised the International Opium Convention, which, while expanding the scope of the Convention, continued to emphasize law enforcement through a Permanent Central Opium Board under the League of Nations.

Thailand played an active role in international drug control efforts, with international representation in Shanghai and at The Hague. Thailand also hosted a League of Nations conference on opium smoking in Bangkok in 1931. The results of both this meeting and one in Berlin in 1936 followed the same drug control strategy through law enforcement but with attention now being paid to supply reduction. At the meeting, for example, the Thai Government reported that some poppy field

eradication had been carried out in the north<sup>1</sup>. However, nothing arising out of these conferences made any impact on growers in Thailand or in neighboring countries. Although there had been some discussion and perhaps limited testing by British officials of cash crop alternatives to the opium poppy, nothing significant in terms of assistance to the poppy growers was attempted until long after World War II. No AD interventions were considered and the mainstream continued to be dominated by law enforcement.

In 1946, the United Nations (UN) took over the drug control work of the League of Nations. The tasks of the League's Advisory Committee were given to the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs that was set up as a functional Commission of the Economic and Social Council. Two other UN agencies established early on were the Division on Narcotic Drugs and the Secretariat of the International Narcotics Control Board. Their tasks were to monitor the status of drugs and drug control in the Member States as well as to work on treaty issues such as the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs which was adopted in 1961<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter called the Single Convention of 1961). This Convention consolidated nine multilateral drug control treaties that had been adopted at different international conferences between 1912 and 1953.

Although neither AD or crop substitution were a part of the Convention, for the first time there were internationally agreed upon restrictions on the production and cultivation of illicit poppy and other drug crops. The Convention called for each country to monitor production of the poppy to ensure that it did not exceed the medical needs of that country. Article 22 of the Single Convention of 1961<sup>2</sup> notes that a country prohibiting cultivation of a drug crop such as opium poppy, "shall take appropriate measures to seize any plants illicitly cultivated and to destroy them, except for small quantities required...for scientific or research purposes."

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1 League of Nations. 1930. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Control of Opium-Smoking in the Far East. Paris: Commission of Enquiry.

2 The United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961

### *Inadequacies of Approaches to Control Poppy Cultivation Based Solely on Law Enforcement*

From the earliest times, when Thai and Burmese kings banned opium, the approach to opium has been based on law enforcement among the users. There was no demand reduction and no supply reduction. Responsibility for behavioral change rested solely with the users who were liable to punishments, which could be as harsh as molten metal being poured down the throat or other forms of execution. For centuries, no consideration was given to the growers while users were essentially forced to undergo detoxification.

This approach would have been appropriate for a time when opium was used mainly for its medicinal properties. The poppy was primarily a household garden crop, but rulers feared its negative effects when it began to be used recreationally. However, this punitive approach proved insufficient when the poppy became an internationally-traded cash crop and trans-national groups were involved in its marketing.

Furthermore, because the governments of British Burma, Thailand, and French Indochina had been involved in the trade and profiting from the sale of opium for several decades, enforcement efforts were compromised from the start. Because a drug-related criminal culture had been established in all these countries, government efforts to prosecute selectively some growers or users, taking substances away from the sanctioned dens was all the more difficult because of the vested interest some governments had regarding income from opium. In such a situation, international efforts to control drug use could not possibly have succeeded.

It would be more than a decade after World War II when all the region's governments would make commitments to ban drug use, enabling these efforts to succeed. However, by this time the criminal elements had become quite strong. Carrying out law enforcement in situations where influential people had a vested interest in maintaining the drug trade was to be all the more difficult. In particular, efforts to institute supply reduction, which had hardly been attempted in the past (and when it had, such as at the end of the Qing Dynasty, had failed),

would require learning much more about the people who grow the crops, what their stake in commercial cultivation was, and what impact ending their cultivation of poppy would have on them.

### *Learning Approaches to Highland Issues in the Pre-AD World*

In the 1950s and 1960s when the governments began considering ways to end poppy cultivation, little was known about the hill peoples, particularly those such as the Wa and the Hmong who grew the most poppy. The areas were remote and in some, especially in the Shan States, there was civil unrest.

These factors made carrying out law enforcement efforts all but impossible, just as the thought of implementing them had frustrated British officials and Prince Sithiporn in the 1920s. A half century ago, not only was the concept of AD not yet formulated, but the entire idea of rural development had barely been started and there was nothing to mainstream.

Rural development initiatives that existed in the 1950s emphasized efforts to increase food and fuel production, and to build infrastructure that were promoted by the American-led Marshall Plan (officially the European Recovery Program) and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (that helped restore Europe after World War II). This approach was carried forward in the UN Development Decade of the 1960s in which developed countries were asked to help developing countries sell more of their products in order to finance economic development.

When initial results proved disappointing, alternatives were sought and the concept of integrated rural development emerged. One of the first projects was sponsored by the Ford Foundation to address famine in India in 1966. A team of specialists suggested that a package approach should be created, comprising adequate supplies, credit, education, planning, strengthening village institutions, guaranteed prices for farm produce, reliable market structures, rural public works, a process of evaluation, as

well as coordinating all of these into a single process<sup>1</sup>. Although these large projects could not be implemented easily and there were notable failures, this pioneered the idea that economic development required a multi-faceted approach, something that has not been abandoned.

A similar approach was adopted by Thailand and, to a lesser degree, by Laos and Myanmar. Beginning with Thailand's first five-year National Economic Development Plan (1961-1965) when the country's per capita gross national product was less than several Sub-Saharan countries, the country's agricultural and livestock sector grew at an average annual rate of over 4 per cent through 1980. The country became one of the few food-exporting countries in the world which contributed to development in other sectors, such as services and industry, which grew at average rates of 7.28 and 8.82 per cent over the same period<sup>2</sup>. Growth in both Laos and Myanmar occurred, but at lower rates because of difficulties associated with gaining independence (Myanmar in 1947, Laos in 1954) and, particularly in Myanmar, because of rebellions, first by the Karen in 1948 and then by other ethnic groups in the early 1960s.

In all three countries the poppy growing zones were remote, removed from the infrastructure and social development that had taken place elsewhere. In Laos, the poorest of the three, there was very little infrastructure outside of Vientiane, no institutes of higher education (except a small teachers college in Vientiane), and hardly any government services to provide for the people.

Furthermore, in all three countries there was considerable ethnic diversity among the poppy growers. Being mainly recent immigrants, they shared few cultural traits with the rulers of the country and the lowland kingdoms of the past. Only rarely did the growers, be they Hmong, or Wa, Yao, Lisu, or Lahu, speak the national language. They pursued subsistence

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1 Cohen, John M. 1987. *Integrated Rural Development: The Ethiopian Experience and the Debate*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

2 Nipon Poapongsakorn. 2006. "The decline and recovery of Thai agriculture: causes, responses, prospects and challenges." *FAO. Rapid Growth of Selected Asian Economies: Lessons and Implications for Agriculture and Food Security Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam*. Bangkok: FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific", part 2

economies with opium being their only cash crop. Their trade dealings with others tended to be for necessities such as salt and also some small luxuries. At the same time the poppy cultivation tied them into international trafficking groups who provided both negative and positive incentives for them to continue providing opium to them.

Many growers became addicted and were using 2-3 kilograms of opium annually. Since the users were mostly male and often heads of household and the strongest laborers, if they grew disinterested in or unable to carry out heavy labor (a common result of heavy opium use), they compromised the livelihood of the entire household. Non-growing families by contrast tended to have more diverse economies and, as was shown in surveys by UNODC in 2005, a higher cash income.

The governments of three countries in the 1950s and 1960s were not strong. They lacked financial resources, had few trained officials, and were poor in infrastructure. The challenges for governments aiming to end poppy growing among such these groups, living apart from the mainstream of national life, sometimes in rebellion against the country's government, tied to criminal activities, with high addiction rates, and living an impoverished lifestyle were enormous. But this was the task confronting the national governments in the 1960s, and later when it was decided to adopt a policy of opium elimination.

Mainstreaming AD requires both AD techniques and a “main stream” of functioning government institutions, political will, and trained individuals into which AD can be channeled and integrated. This report covers the experiences that Thailand, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar have had in progressing towards mainstreaming. In addition to showing the role UNODC and its predecessor agencies (UNFDAC and UNDCP) have played in facilitating this process, the report also draws lessons from these experiences as well as makes suggestions on how to support mainstreaming in positive ways.





# Thailand: Pioneering the AD Concept and Mainstreaming AD in Highland Development

## *UNFDAC/UNDCP/UNODC Develop the AD Concept*

**A**t the start of work to address poppy growing in the Thai hills, there were no experts in the country on the upland peoples or their agriculture. More than that, the differences between the lowlanders and the hill peoples went beyond a simple lack of understanding between the two. There was also considerable antagonism between hill people and government officials.

The Royal Forest Department (RFD) was established in 1896 to end conflicts between British Burma, independent timber companies, and Thailand, over teak logging, which it did satisfactorily. The RFD has grown since until the present. In 1913, a royal order placed all logging under the control of the Department. In 1921, the RFD gained control over the collection of forest products; and, in 1938, the Forest Conservation Law gave the RFD authority over forest land (in addition to the trees). In the 1941 Forest Act, a forest was defined as a place where no one could legally reside. Thus, in less than half a century, the domain of the RFD had grown

from controlling the exploitation and marketing of one tree species to a monopoly over all forested areas in the country<sup>1</sup>.

More changes came with the beginning of World War II. In 1941, Thailand nationalized foreign lumber companies and set up the Thai Forestry Company the next year which furthered the commercial orientation of forest use in Thailand. In 1960, a new Royal Forest Act extended total protection to tree species other than teak<sup>2</sup>. In 1961, a National Park Act was promulgated. Further controls over use have been made since then.

The Royal Forest Department was promoting profit-based logging, which represented a significant shift in forest use since the nineteenth century. As indicated by the 1941 Forest Act, the type of forestry carried out by the RFD excluded the people from the forests. Forests, a term cognate with “foreign”, as well as “parks”, were in England and other countries in Europe, reserved for the use of royalty for pursuits including hunting (as opposed to woodlands which were a part of the public commons.)

While the RFD recognizes many benefits that forests provide the people and the country, the foremost was their being a source of income, namely for the logging concerns that extracted timber and other natural resources. Lesser benefits (for the RFD) included their being a source of jobs, water for agriculture, and as a retreat and site for hunting. The RFD had now come to identify itself as the protector of all things about the forests, the benefits of which it would make available on its terms. This marks a radical change from a century previous when the people had free access to the forest and its produce<sup>3</sup>.

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1 Chaloe Siriwan 1956. *Prawat Lae Phonngan Khong Krom Pamai*. P.S. 2437-2500 (History and Achievements of the Royal Forest Department 1894-1956). Bangkok: Royal Forest Department; Monthian Sirisawat ca. 1967. *Prawat Khong Krom Pamai*. (History of the Royal Forest Department). Bangkok: mimeo. RFD library (Bang Khen, Bangkok) item no. 681.

2 Tiem Komkris 1971. *Naiyobai Kanpamai (Forestry Policy)*. Bangkok: Faculty of Forestry, Kasetsart University.

3 With a few exceptions in certain places such as where teak is grown, the access and use of was sometimes considered a royal prerogative.

The RFD inherited the dislike of shifting cultivation from the British Burma foresters who helped establish the RFD in 1896. The RFD saw it as a waste of salable resources and also believed that agriculture could best be practiced (as it was in England) in the lowlands. What they did not know or made no effort to find out, was that this shifting cultivation had been used by hill people throughout the Mekong Region (and many other places in the world) to make a living for centuries, especially in areas where the soil is poor and the nutrients are in the biomass of trees and shrubs.

In this system, farmers cut down the trees in a given area (but often leave the largest ones growing to hasten regrowth). They burn the cut material which provides the nutrients for rice and other crops that they cultivate. After a year or two, when increasing weed growth and declining yields make further cultivation untenable, the farmers abandon the field and cultivate a new field. This is carried out in a cycle of up to ten years or more after which time they return to the former site. By then, the forest there has regrown sufficiently so that it could be cut and burned again. There are places, such as at villages belonging to the Lua minority in Chiang Mai, where this was carried out for centuries. According to a forestry expert, if there were enough time for the land to lie fallow, little or no soil degradation occurred, thus enabling it to be practiced almost indefinitely<sup>1</sup>.

There are reports that biodiversity in traditional shifting cultivation systems is greater than if the area were reforested<sup>2</sup> and that certain animal species, such as the jungle fowl, thrive in this environment. Also, the farmers who practice this kind of agriculture cultivate a wide variety of crops, including different rice species, vegetables, and other plants such as used in pharmaceutical preparations.

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1 Zinke, Paul, et al. 1978. "Soil Fertility Aspects of Lua' Forest Fallow System of Shifting Cultivation," in Peter Kunstadter, et al. eds., *Farmers in the Forest*. Honolulu: East-West Center.

2 Prasit Wangpakapattanawong et al. 2007. "Applying Traditional Knowledge on Forest Management to Tropical Forest Restoration." Paper presented at the GMSARN International Conference on Sustainable Development: Challenges and Opportunities for GMS 12-14 December, Pattaya, Thailand.

However, for the RFD, which legally controls forested land, including where the hill people were living, they were illegal settlers. As a result, the farmers were blocked from obtaining documents such as household registration which is a prerequisite for obtaining government services from education to health care. They were also thus unable to obtain Thai citizenship papers even if they were born in Thailand to which they were qualified according to the Thai Citizenship Act of 1911. But since the RFD lacked the resources by which they could comprehensively enforce the relevant laws, they largely left the hill people alone.

The same was also true for opium poppy cultivation. As noted above, even though it was still legally permissible to grow opium this was only true for the cultivators sanctioned by government authorities. Many others grew poppy surreptitiously and preferred to stay out of the way of lowland officials. However, the same policy of benign neglect was applied for poppy growers, even after opium was made illegal in Thailand in 1958. Although dens were shut down in Bangkok and the other big cities and the trade in opiates suppressed, the government lacked the resources to deal with the poppy growers in the hills and cultivation carried on.

This was notwithstanding the fact that opium poppy was mainly cultivated by pioneer swiddening (as opposed to the “established” or “rotational swiddening” discussed above). Instead of rotating from field to field annually or nearly annually, pioneer swidders cultivate a field for several years in a row, sometimes until the long-term fertility of the soil is compromised and forest regrowth takes place slowly, sometimes initially dominated by *Imperata cylindrica*, an invasive grass that lays down a mat of rhizomes beneath the surface and is also resistant to fire so that it can become dominant for years<sup>1</sup>. Pioneer swiddening was practiced mainly by groups immigrating to Thailand who had been cash-cropping poppy already. Their farming systems appalled some of the established swidders who recognized it as a threat to wildlife diversity and other features of the highlands by which they had been making a sustainable living for centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> It was once nominated as one of the world's ten worst weeds (Holm, L. and Herberger, J. 1969. “The world's worst weeds.” Proceedings of the 2nd Asian-Pacific Weed Control Interchange. Wisconsin: Asian-Pacific Weed Science Society.

This benign neglect by which the hill people had been able to make a living in the forests and out of sight of the people in the valleys came to an end in the mid-1950s and more so after opium was banned in 1958. By then, fighting had broken out between ethnic groups, some of whom grew poppy, and central governments in the newly-independent countries of the former French Indochina as well as in Myanmar. This worried Thai leaders who until then had not thought much about conditions in the northern hills except that some people there were not loyal to the Thai state.

Another problem compounding tensions and creating conflicts arose when government officials came into contact with hill people. From the Thai point of view, these people were illegal immigrants, destroying the forest, growing an illegal crop, speaking only languages the officials did not understand, and who showed no interest in participating in the mainstream of Thai life. Many thought, as Prince Sithiporn and others had in the 1920s, that the government should force them out of the country.

Unlike the other countries of the region which recognized their government as comprising different ethnic groups (i.e. the Union of Myanmar), in Thailand the emphasis was placed on being Thai since the reign of King Vajiravudh (reign 1910-1924), who had spent ten years in England and was struck by the vitality of English nationalism. Thai education in the early-1900s stressed assimilating the different ethnic groups into central Thai culture so that they would appear as a modern Thai State that would be independent and resist colonial threats. In this it was successful. Students of diverse ethnic groups entering Thai schools almost always leave having gained many Thai values and attitudes. However, as time passed and certain groups and individuals remained isolated in remote areas, they became estranged from the Thai State. Thus, it was not only recent immigrants to Thailand who lacked Thai citizenship but also many whose families had been in the country for centuries if not longer and who should have been Thai citizens.

As for the hill people, they saw officials, namely soldiers or police, as interfering with their way of life and livelihoods. Despite largely avoiding punishment for breaking laws (about which they were mostly unaware) for settling in forests or growing poppy, hill people were arrested and

fined for other offenses such as brewing liquor without a license or carrying unregistered firearms. Hill people interpreted such fines as unjust harassment that was sometimes racially based. They were vulnerable to various abuses from a legal system they did not understand and could not read even if they were so inclined.

### ***Bridging the Gap between Thai Government Officials and the People of the Hills***

Much of this abuse arose because of the gap between the lowland Thai<sup>1</sup> and the poppy growers. Only a few Thai living close to the hills could speak any highland languages and not many poppy growers could speak Thai, to say nothing of being able to read the language. With the exception of a few strategic thoroughfares, no roads entered the hills. There were no tribal treks, tourists did not visit hill villages, and tribal handicrafts were all but unknown to lowlanders. For decades, diseases to which highlanders had developed a higher level of resistance than the people living in the valleys, as well as the fear of evil forest spirits, had mostly kept lowlanders out of the forests. There was also little interaction between the two, except for trade of goods including salt and forest produce, largely carried out through people at the fringes of the forest.

Although Thai kingdoms, (Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Chiang Mai and elsewhere), had links with forest groups for trade and for use as spies in battle, these were longtime residents of the region, such as Lua and Karen (who practiced rotational swiddening). These people mostly lived at elevations too low for the successful cultivation of the opium poppy—since the poppy does not tolerate lowland tropical conditions, preferring instead the climates higher in the hills that may hearken to the poppy's homeland in the eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>1</sup>Thai and related groups such as Lao and Shan live in valleys. There are no speakers of these linguistically-related people who conventionally lived in the hills. This is because the word Thai (and a more inclusive earlier term, Tai) referred primarily not to a particular ethnic group but to people of a certain social status that was equivalent to the old European term, freeman. These people (*tai*) were seen to have possessed certain "civilized" traits such as being literate, paddy rice cultivation, and Buddhism, which could best be practiced in valleys.

However, it was into such areas in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, and Tak provinces that the newer migrants, including Hmong, Mien, Lahu and Lisu moved because of the available land. Coincidentally, this land was also suitable for poppy growing, and put them far from the lowland Thai, contributing to their mutual ignorance.

The gap between lowland Thai and new migrants widened when opium was banned through a proclamation of the Revolutionary Party on 9 December 1958, even though no mention was made of the growers in the Harmful Habit-Forming Drugs Act. This act forbade everyone from using opium as of 1 January 1959 (a practice that was considered “anachronistic”, uncivilized, and damaging to the country’s image by the Prime Minister Sarit Tanarat) and called for the shutting down of all opium dens or other places where opium was sold by the end of June 1959. The Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of the Interior were also ordered to set up clinics and therapy centers where the former users could be treated.

Few people then knew that treating opium use was not just about detoxification. It was thought the task was simple and could be accomplished quickly. However, many users could not stop their consumption, and within the year, heroin use had re-started, with Sarit publicly executing the first person arrested for this offense. It would be years, however, before treatment received proper attention and grew effective, with some of the most profound advances occurring in the AD projects in the hills.

Before long the government turned its attention to the growers. One of the first approaches suggested was to resettle the hill people in the lowlands. From a governmental point of view, this would stop the “encroachment” of the forests while also moving the people to areas where they could be controlled (far from insurgents across the border) and where the poppy would not grow well. In addition, the government wanted to encourage them to assimilate into Thai life.

The Public Welfare Department was given charge of the Self-Help Land Settlement Project for the Hill Tribes in Tak, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai,

and Loei Provinces. After these sites were established, and when the government tried to persuade the hill people to move rather than to resettle them in these nikhom by force, the highlanders objected. Not that many moved in the first place and those that did quickly learned that the agencies managing these sites lacked the technical skills and resources to provide for those who were moving there. As a result, most of those who resettled moved back to the hills, although often not to their original village. This negative experience was the first lesson in working with the hill people of Thailand (and was not necessarily learned by all Thai officials).

In 1962, the government set up a central agency to address drug abuse. Composed of the police and medical agencies, this committee was to carry out law enforcement measures and to treat addicts, including providing some vocational training. At this time, AD, the concept of which barely existed since efforts aimed more at resettlement, was still not a function of this Committee. This would evolve into the Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB).

Thai leaders recognized that they lacked information on the hill people, especially poppy growers. There was only one trained anthropologist in Thailand and he was busy teaching at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok<sup>1</sup>. The government thereupon conducted a survey in 1965-1966 of the poppy growing areas through a cooperative effort of the Department of Public Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Royal Forest Department and the Border Patrol Police. Financial and technical cooperation was provided by the Asia Foundation, the United Nations, and Chulalongkorn University<sup>2</sup>.

The surveying team visited poppy growing areas in Tak, Chiang Rai, and other provinces to interview growers and inspect fields, mainly belonging to Hmong and Lisu. Based on this survey, the Tribal Research Center was set up by the Public Welfare Department on the campus of

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1 Although he did write a book on the hilltribes for SEATO in 1963.

2 Thailand. 1964. Department of Public Welfare. 1962. Report on the Socio-Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand. Bangkok: Ministry of Interior.

the newly-opened Chiang Mai University. This was part of a five-year plan (1964-1969) to deal with “hilltribe problems.” The Plan called for the Public Welfare Department, the Border Patrol Police, and the Central National Security Command, to try a new approach by introducing replacement cash crops for the poppy and to carry out other development initiatives. In fact this was prior to the start of the Royal Project, showing that the idea of replacing poppy was not only thought of by the King. However, due to a lack of budget and trained staff, cash crop replacement work did not start under this Plan. Instead, the tone of working with the poppy growers was set at the dedication of the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai in 1964 by the Director-General of the Public Welfare Department, which focused on:

- 1) preventing forest and watershed destruction,
- 2) ending opium cultivation,
- 3) arranging for socio-economic development of the hill tribes, and
- 4) instilling a feeling of loyalty to Thailand among the hill tribes.

A second survey was organized through the United Nations Consultative Group on Opium Problems which was part of the UN technical assistance programme on narcotic drugs. The World Health Organization and the Permanent Central Narcotics Board, as well as the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO/INTERPOL) were also represented, as were growing nations such as Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Also participating was William Geddes, an Australian anthropologist who had in 1958 begun a study of a Hmong community in Chiang Mai and was one of the most knowledgeable authorities on hill people in Thailand.

This study estimated that the area under opium cultivation was about 18,500 hectares with a yield of 145 tons (about 8 kg/ha) in the 1965-1966 season. To deal with this much production, the survey team advised that a large-scale effort would be required to provide for the social-economic development of the hill people<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Survey Team. 1967. Report of the United Nations Survey Team on the Economic and Social Needs of the Opium-Producing Areas in Thailand. Bangkok: United Nations Survey Team.

This estimate<sup>1</sup> startled if not shocked Thai leaders who, unfamiliar as they were about hill conditions, must have thought that since opium had been banned (or at least nearly so) there ought not to be a problem in the hills. Leaders also realized that they lacked the financial and technical resources to carry out the large task of enforcing the ban on cultivation over such a wide area. With few roads into the hills, a lack of experts on hill peoples, few highland government outposts except for a few schools, clinics, and malaria abatement offices, the challenges were immense. Unsure of what to do, the government bided its time.

In the late 1960s, with poppy production at possibly the highest level in Thai history, AD was only a vague idea. The only part of drug control that was mainstreamed at this time was law enforcement. However, the government lacked the means to carry it out.

### ***The Royal Project and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation***

#### *The Royal Project*

It was into this chasm between the poppy growers and the lowland officials in the middle of a muddled situation that His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej moved. The Royal Family had been working with highlanders since at least 1955 when the Border Patrol Police was set up as a unit of the Royal Thai Police Department. The Border Patrol's purpose was to provide "control and public safety in the remote hills and frontier regions<sup>2</sup>". In cooperation with the Princess Mother, the government had Border Patrol Police serve as teachers for hilltribe children in remote villages. The first such school was established in 1956 in Don Mahawan Village, Chiang Khong District, Chiang Rai Province. Even though many were not citizens, and thus not eligible for official Thai education, Thai leaders together with the royal family felt that helping them learn Thai and about Thailand would be useful both for them and for the country.

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<sup>1</sup> And it may have been too high in fact, since it was about three times as high as that estimated by ONCB's first survey in 1980/1981.

<sup>2</sup> Manndorff, Hans. 1969. The Hill Tribe Program of the Public Welfare Department, Ministry of Interior, Thailand Research and Socio-economic Development. Bangkok: Department of Public Welfare Division of Hill Tribe Welfare.

Education would lead to work such as the Princess Mother's Volunteer Doctors, established in 1969, by the royal family with poppy growers and ex-growers; a project that has continued until today.

The Royal Family expanded its work with rural people in the 1960s. On a trip with the Nuai Phraratchathan (Royal Assistance Unit) in December 1969, the King went to the north where he had already met Hmong people at Doi Pui village, a few kilometers from Bhubing Palace. He was aware that opium growers made use of several income generating activities. When he learned that Hmong people often earned more money from selling peaches that were used for pickling than from opium he had the idea that grafting an improved variety onto the local rootstock would yield better fruit. The King later explained:

*"I asked...how much a family earned in average from the annual selling of opium. The answer was 3,000 to 5,000 Baht. When asked how much the annual selling of [peach] would bring, the reply was...4,000 to 12,000 Baht! It was then that we thought we had the answer... We could also choose other fruits which are high-priced and in great demand, such as apples, pears and chestnuts...These present no marketing problem. And the hill-tribe will not have to compete with the lowland as the crops cannot be grown successfully there."*

To carry this out, His Majesty instituted the Royal Project in 1969. The first training program was run in 1970 to prepare representatives of 15 tribal villages in agricultural extension<sup>1</sup>. The King set up the Doi Ang Khang Highland Development Station in the north of Chiang Mai Province as well as others. His Majesty also contributed to highland development work in other ways. Among the most influential projects, the opium poppies were not to be destroyed until viable alternatives existed. The King realized that the radical removal of the hill people's source of income would cause many negative results.

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<sup>1</sup> Aram Suwanbubpa. 1976. Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Programmes in Northern Thailand. Singapore: Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development.

The King also learned that marketing was not quite as easy as first thought. When so many growers began cultivating peaches, the farmgate price fell to about 2 baht per kilogram, an amount less than the cost of transportation<sup>1</sup>. This taught everyone that there were cash crop alternatives to opium but that finding a comprehensive solution would be difficult.

Although this part of the story of the Royal Project is well known, what is less known is the enthusiasm he brought with him to bridge the gap between growers and the Thai bureaucracy. A glimpse can be gained from the description written by his cousin, Mom Chao Viphawadee Rangsit, of a visit to Doi Pui Village in 1970. It is clear from this that the King and his staff were learning as they went along rather than following a rigid path set in a project document with fixed activities and inputs. This can be seen in a visit the King paid to an orchard to see if the villagers had followed his example by grafting the overseas peach cutting on the native species.

*"His Majesty observed that the fruit on the tree was as large as peaches from overseas and was also sweet and juicy. His Majesty also observed other temperate fruit trees including more peach, persimmon, pear, and apple and recognized this would go far to solving hilltribe problems. In this regard, His Majesty made a loan of 240,000 baht to Kasetsart University to conduct experiments and to defray the cost of temperate fruit trees. [The university] was making experiments on propagating fruit trees on this orchard and planned to expand the work into a Center for the Highland Agriculture Project. His Majesty suggested that the university experiment with propagating makhi nu, a native species of apple, because it could be grafted onto the apple varieties from overseas." (translated by the author of this report)*

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Gar Yia. 1981. The Effects of Development Measures on the Socio-Economy of the White Hmong. Sydney: University of Sydney Doctoral Dissertation.

The King also understood the need to raise funds to support what would have to be a large operation. He took representatives from various embassies along with him on some of the early trips to encourage their supporting crop replacement projects. Although he did earn some contributions in this way, the funding he and Thai government officials were seeking was not to come until 1971 when the United States began its war on drugs.

Royal Project work has expanded and diversified since then. After being awarded the Magsaysay Award in 1988, it reorganized its structure as a Foundation in 1992. This has given it more flexibility within the Thai system to raise funds and to enter into agreements with government agencies. The Royal Project works through six research stations, including one supervised by Kasetsart University and another by the Department of Agriculture. Grading and post-harvest care have been given increased attention. Marketing of products is facilitated through an active section of the Foundation with the brand name of Doi Kham (Golden Mountains) that has sold coffee to Thai International and a reliable supply of temperate fruits and vegetables to the country's leading hotels and restaurants. New



King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Prince Bhisatej Rajani view peach trees in a Hmong village in Northern Thailand at the start of the Royal Project

directions include trout fisheries, kiwi fruit, artichokes, wine, and various processed foods. Through these initiatives, young staff are trained, villagers learn how to respond to market changes, government officials are encouraged to take a positive approach to the hill people, and chances of poppy cultivation reestablishing itself are stalled.

### *The Mae Fah Luang Foundation*

When the Princess Mother Mae Fah Luang was over 80 years of age, she and her staff began to look for a place in Thailand where she could reside rather than returning to Switzerland (where she had raised her family for almost two decades) each year. Eventually they settled on Doi Tung, a mountain in Chiang Rai Province bordering Myanmar. When she visited Doi Tung she was dismayed by the deforestation she saw there (resulting from intensive poppy growing and other types of pioneer swiddening) that had occurred since her first trip there in 1966. She felt the need to rehabilitate the area and help the people, most of whom were Akha and Lahu<sup>1</sup>.

The Doi Tung Development Project was approved by the Thai Cabinet in 1988. The project has five sectors: infrastructure, forestry, agriculture, improving the quality of life, and administration. Much of the produce is grown under plantation-like conditions: coffee and macadamia nuts are grown in central plots where the local villagers are employed as the working staff and, increasingly, in higher positions.

From here, the Foundation expanded into a wide range of products and services - from houseware and rugs to handmade paper, and other products<sup>2</sup>, Mae Fah Luang has opened coffee shops in Bangkok and in the north, started marketing orchids and other expensive plants, and started gift shops in airports and shopping centers. Not the least of its undertakings has been the world-class Hall of Opium in Chiang Saen District of Chiang Rai Province, very close to the Mekong River and also

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<sup>1</sup> Khanitha Lekhakun, ed. Doi Tung. 1998. Bangkok: Tourist Authority of Thailand. In Thai.

<sup>2</sup>The project has, in the last decade, extended its AD work to other countries, including Myanmar, Indonesia, and Afghanistan.

the borders of Laos and Myanmar<sup>1</sup>. Here the history of opium and other dangerous drugs is presented in an appealing way that the Foundation refers to as “edutainment” with its main target audience the young people of Thailand.

### *International Initiatives*

Illegal Drugs in the U.S. were spreading rapidly, and heroin use had captured the attention of President Richard Nixon as a priority issue. As a part of a range of responses, the White House decided to stop heroin at its source. At that time, due to unrest in Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam, the only place where supply reduction could be attempted was Thailand. Nixon sent a young lawyer, Egil (Bud) Krogh, White House Deputy for Domestic Affairs to Thailand’s Royal Project in Chiang Mai, with funds to support a supply reduction project.

The Thais proposed an expansion of the Royal Project’s crop replacement as a first step. Krogh agreed and a draft project document was drawn up in less than 24 hours and received quick approval from the United States and UNFDAC<sup>2</sup>. UNFDAC itself was a new organization, having only been established in 1969 and the Crop Replacement and Community Development Project (CRCDP) was the first project of its kind in the world. The agreement was signed on 7 December 1971 with its Thai counterpart agency, the Bureau of Narcotics Drugs, a branch of the Royal Thai Police.

From the beginning, drug control work with the growers took the form of AD. Despite the American and also Thai history of using

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<sup>1</sup> The place became known in about 1980 as “The Golden Triangle” after a guest house of that name was established there.

<sup>2</sup> After presenting a description of these events at an AD meeting in Taunggyi in 2001, I was taken to task by a UNDCP official for making it seem like it was donor driven. And while the project was driven by the immediate availability of funding, the approach that was taken had already been devised by the Royal Project which up until then had been trying to secure funds without sufficient success.

law enforcement and the fact that Anslinger<sup>1</sup> had stepped down from his job less than a decade before, the project agreed-on did not focus on law enforcement, but on AD and King Bhumibol's influence and the work he had already started with the Royal Project that persuaded all stakeholders to comply. In this first instance, AD was mainstreamed in the Thai system through the agency of the King. Although many techniques for working with farmers, identifying income generating alternatives, and rehabilitating drug users remained to be worked out, the principle was established. Even though some government agencies were reluctant to agree, the country's leaders accepted the concept that AD would be the approach taken to replacing opium poppy cultivation.

Not only did the project receive quick UN approval (despite some inter-agency jealousy by UNDP) it received good support in Thailand because Prince Bhisadej Rajani, Director of the Royal Project, was also the Project Manager for CRCDP. For the course of this project, cooperation with it and the Royal Project was so smooth, they almost operated as one<sup>2</sup>.

The government was sure that they did not want to antagonize the poppy growers. General Chavalit Yodmani, long-time Secretary General of ONCB and closely involved with the first two decades of AD work in the hills, remembered that in 1971, one big goal was to overcome the distain the hill people had for the police, stating that they only wanted the hill people "not to hate" them<sup>3</sup>.

Chavalit's deputy, Narong Suwanapiam, whose two decades of highland development work started in 1977, said that at first they wanted to have a chance to operate in the hills and work with the growers, "Don't talk about crop eradication at all" he said. "If someone sells opium, let

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1 Anslinger was a well known figure in the drug control field since the 30's and was the US representative to the United Nations Narcotics Commission before his retirement in 1964.

2 Richard Mann. Worked for the CRCDP, HAMP, and several other UNFDAC and UNDCP projects from 1971-1989. Interviewed several times in Chiang Mai in 2000 & 2001.

3 Chavalit Yodmanee. Former Secretary-General, Thailand. 2003, Bangkok.

them be. Users should not be approached or forbidden from smoking. We only would tell them that if someone wanted to stop, they could go to Chiang Mai for treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone recognized the need to learn and the approach CRCDP took stressed research. The project established the Chang Khian Field Crop Development Station in a field where Hmong had been cultivating poppy. Also established was the Doi Pui Temperate Fruit and Nut Experimental Station near Bhubing Palace. Experimental work was also carried out five key villages, representing the Hmong, Lisu, and Yunnanese Chinese. Dozens of cash crops were tested and other efforts were reviewed. One was to verify the suggestion by anthropologist Geddes that livestock could be grazed in ex-poppy fields. The answer to this was negative. Still, the project decided that integrated community development was the best approach, involving health care, drug use rehabilitation as well as measures to detect possible heroin addiction<sup>2</sup>.

At a time before the participatory approach had been devised, the staff members, including several young idealistic Thais belonging to the generation that toppled the Thai government in 1973, energized the work. Sometimes they were too eager to implement what they thought were solutions prior to discussing them with villagers. Sometimes they were unaware of local customs and unintentionally offended villagers. Sometimes funds were spent inappropriately. Sometimes the international staff worked in top-down ways.

However, when the author interviewed several early staff members in 2003 and 2004 as a part of an oral history project for the Mae Fah Luang Foundation's Opium Museum in Chiang Saen, they were proud of their work in the early-1970s. This is surprising, since, coming from an academic background and having done field work in the northern Thai hills in the mid-1970s, it had been de rigueur to point out flaws in the approach taken by UNODC (as top-down and culturally insensitive).

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1 Interview with Narong Suwanapiam. Former Deputy Secretary-General, ONCB, Thailand, 2 July 2003, Bangkok.

2 Williams, I.M.G. 1979. "UN/Thai programme for drug abuse control in Thailand-A Report on phase I: February 1972-June 1979". Bulletin on Narcotics XXXI:2 (April-June).

The CRCDP itself was a pioneering initiative. Unlike the big development plans Thailand had carried out in the 1960s such as dam constructions, this project focused on a few small communities with minority people who, to many Thai officials, should have been run out of the country. Instead, those in CRCDP tried to help improve the standard of living of these communities instead of trying to enforce restrictions. This was unprecedented, and the fact that it is not better known is partly due to the secretive approach of the agency under whose name the work was done<sup>1</sup>. In this non-punitive approach opium efforts were indirect. Richard Mann once said, "I will never forget the remarks of the Australian Ambassador during a helicopter trip to Doi Sam Mun, Chiang Mai Province, when he asked: 'Why has opium poppy been planted in that coffee field?' I answered: 'opium poppy was not planted in that coffee field; coffee was planted in that poppy field.'"

There were no other development projects working with the hill people at this time. NGOs had yet to become active in Thailand. There were no indigenous groups. The only non-governmental agencies active in the hills were church run and often had evangelistic agendas. Many staff members and villagers who worked with CRCDP and other UNFDAC projects later worked with other agencies now better associated with participatory, bottom-up development. At the time and given the absence of knowledge about hill people among lowlanders, CRCDP was trend-setting. It was the first to try and build trust with the people. For the hill people, too, whose previous experiences with lowlanders had been negative, this was a learning experience. They learned about dealing with Thai officials and other lowlanders, as important a skill in many ways as about the crops being tested in their fields. They learned that some Thai officials were interested in their welfare and helping improve their way of life. Ironically, because of their willingness to help the poppy growers, UNFDAC officials were sometimes accused of being overly sympathetic to the hill people and not showing proper concern for the situation of the Thai state.

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<sup>1</sup> At the end of the project, officials in Thailand were told by an official in Vienna to destroy their records, including such innocuous materials as annual reports and crop test results (Richard Mann interview 2000). Fortunately he disregarded this advice.

CRCDP officials also learned of basic problems that had to be addressed, including land rights (which as a UN consultant noted in 1967 could turn the “hill people... [into] outlaws at any moment” and citizenship. During the life of the project, the Thai government changed the law on citizenship with the issuance of Revolutionary Party Order no. 337 in 1972 so that citizenship rights for persons whose paternal grandfather was not a Thai were severely restricted.

In 1979, the Thai/UN Highland Agricultural Marketing and Production Project (HAMP) succeeded CRCDP to work in 18 former project villages. During its five year life, HAMP worked in three opium producing areas: Omkoi and Chom Thong Districts of Chiang Mai Province and Wang Nua District in Lampang Province. HAMP’s major innovation was in marketing. HAMP continued testing potential replacement crops, but also worked to market the produce. William’s call for integrated development led to HAMP carrying out small-scale infrastructure development such as roads, domestic water systems, and health centers. However, despite their recognition of legal issues, HAMP devoted little attention to land tenure or citizenship which, planners must have felt, would be solved through existing channels. Although HAMP’s final report noted that “in selected highland areas and on a limited scale, land certificates entitling families to farm small holdings are being issued<sup>1</sup>”, the issue was ignored. Nor was much attention given to drug treatment or prevention. Developing cash crop replacements to opium remained the focus.

HAMP had also made the replacement of poppy cultivation one of its objectives, a task that HAMP’s final report stated was “particularly difficult”. In 1981-1982, 3.85 metric tons of opium were grown in HAMP villages. Although in the last season of HAMP’s life (1983-1984), production declined to 2.73 tons, poor weather was the major factor. The area cultivated declined only from 39,200 hectares in 1980 to 36,800 hectares in 1984. This, along with the fact that it was difficult to market highland produce, even those like red kidney beans, coffee, and wheat which grew well in project villages, were major lessons learned.

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<sup>1</sup> HAMP. 1984. Terminal Report. Chiang Mai (by Richard Mann.)

Project planners learned that replacing the opium poppy as a cash crop was indeed difficult because the poppy has many advantages for growers. It can be profitably cultivated on the poor soils of the region, especially if these soils have been recently burned from advanced secondary forest regrowth. At the start of the growing season (which barely overlapped with the time for growing rice) “agricultural extension agents” come to the village with seeds, cash, and other inputs. At the end, they reappear with cash and take the opium away. The payload is small. Opium requires no special handling such as refrigeration. For its size and weight, it commands a higher cash return than anything else they could grow at the time (even peaches), with prices tending to increase every year because of steady demand.

At the same time as this realization, the issue of involving the hill people in the decision-making process was being raised. Although the UN staff was enthusiastic and wanted to help the villagers, there were many among them who took a top-down approach. Paul Lewis, an American missionary fluent in Akha and Lahu and who had worked with these groups in Myanmar and Thailand since the late-1940s, offered a different opinion. As he wrote:

*“The program was brought to them, with the general attitude, ‘Aren’t you lucky! Look at the wonderful goodies we are bringing to you.’ If they found that any villagers did not like what they proposed they sometimes talked them into accepting it one way or another.”*

*“How much better it would be to discuss every aspect of the problem with tribal leaders from the VERY START [emphasis in the original]. . . . For those who are upset by this suggestion, it might be well to ponder: ‘Has the method of excluding the tribal people worked?’<sup>1</sup>”*

From then on, as new projects started, bilateral and UN, the crop-replacement approach was expanded to integrated rural development,

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1 Lewis, Paul. 1985. “Effects of Opium on Tribal People in Thailand.” Mimeo.

with the new projects working in several sectors. Issues identified by UNFDAC were later recognized by bilateral and other agencies. New projects included the USAID-funded Mae Chaem Integrated Watershed Development Project (in Chiang Mai), the GTZ-funded Thai-German Highland Development Programme (in Chiang Rai and later Mae Hong Son), and Australian-funded projects in several areas in the north. The UN together with Norwegian Church Aid funded the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Highland Development Project (Chiang Mai, Lampang, and Phayao).

Besides ONCB, other governmental agencies became implementing partners. This included the Department of Local Administration (a key agency in naturalizing aliens) and the Royal Forest Department. This involvement sometimes led to positive developments. Several projects facilitated hill people attaining Thai citizenship although not as much as they desired. In the Sam Mun Highland Development Project, where the concept of community forestry was pioneered, those RFD officials in the project became the head of the Community Forestry section in the Royal Forest Department that helped create community-managed forests throughout Thailand (although they were unable to get the Community Forestry bill passed by parliament). UNFDAC also ran a project with the Thai Third Army in the Doi Yao and Doi Pha Mon area of Chiang Rai Province on the Lao border where an insurgency was active, indicating the ability of UNFDAC to operate in high risk areas.

### ***Mainstreaming Drug Control Objectives and Programmes in Highland Development Planning and Rural Poverty Alleviation***

After a decade of highland development, the approach pioneered by CRCDP and improved later on was being accepted by Thai government planners. This resulted both from the outputs of the projects themselves, but also in the widening scope these projects developed that made aspects of them useful for other development initiatives in other parts of the country.

The newer projects, incorporating lessons learned from the crop replacement projects, were all integrated development projects. The

principal objective of the later UN projects (Doi Sam Mun, in Chiang Mai, Pae Por in Chiang Mai and Tak, and Wiang Pha (Chiang Mai) was to improve “the qualities of life among the hilltribes through the implementation of an integrated rural development project.”<sup>1</sup> Supporting government policy to eliminate poppy cultivation and (for the first time) opium addiction were secondary objectives.

They also made use of lessons from royal initiatives. In 1982, King Bhumibol suggested that Huai Hong Khrai, in the Doi Saket District hills east of Chiang Mai be used as an interagency development study center to find ways to develop degraded watershed source forests. In this and other such centers, representatives from different government agencies were located at the same place to facilitate coordinated action. The King also began promoting a “middle (i.e. Buddhist) path to development, namely a sufficiency economy in the same way as E.F. Schumacher and also Robert Chambers<sup>2</sup>, whose writings were becoming widely known then. This approach influenced not just the Royal Project but other activities by international agencies as well as the Thai Government.

The Fifth National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) plan (1981-1985) promoted rural development planning to overcome poverty. Later, and perhaps taking a cue from the planning underway for the Development Study Centers agencies, responsibility for development was linked through working committees at different administrative levels. Concern for social issues would grow in the Sixth Plan (1986-1991) when developing “human quality” was promoted and people’s participation was encouraged.

As a part of the Fifth Plan, NESDB drew up a Master Plan for the Development of the Opium Poppy Cultivation Regions of Thailand in 1983<sup>3</sup>. Besides proposing projects for new areas, National and Provincial

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1 Thai/UN Doi Sam Mun HDP. 1987. Project Document. Bangkok: UNFDAC ; Thai/UN Wiang Pha HDP. 1987. Project Document. Bangkok: UNFDAC.

2 Robert Chambers, of the University of Sussex, pioneered the popular PRA approach that has been introduced in development projects throughout the world.

3 ONCB. 1983. A Masterplan for Development of Opium Poppy Cultivating Regions of Thailand. Bangkok: ONCB, 2 vols.

Hilltribe Committees were established, comprising representatives of the four “basic” ministries. Through this plan, Provincial Hilltribe Welfare and Development Centers were set up under the Department of Public Welfare<sup>1</sup>.

Again, although lacking direct inputs from hill people and implemented in a top-down way, it still represented a more comprehensive approach to issues in the hills. Most of the data on which they based this planning came from the UNFDAC projects, their partner agencies, most often ONCB and the Public Welfare Department, and certainly not the least, the Royal Project. In this indirect way, the voices of the hill people were beginning to be heard and steps towards comprehensive mainstreaming were being taken.

Another impetus for participatory work in Thailand came from the Hill Areas Education Program of the Non-Formal Education Department. In a USAID-funded project starting in 1980, the goal was to promote the Thai concept of *khit pen* (being able to think) for hill people. The purpose was

*“to develop and test...a community-based and replicable non-formal basic education model more appropriate to the needs and conditions existing in remote hill areas...[and] make extensive use of village level resources and participation in all phases of model development<sup>2</sup>”*

These models (Ashrams, i.e. “retreat for educating holy people”) hired teachers qualified according to “devotion to duty” and “sense of responsibility”. Emphasis was on practical goals such as obtaining citizenship, drug demand reduction, and eradicating crop pests. They included a non-graded formal education system by which a student, studying according to ability and initiative, could complete the six-year primary curriculum in as many years as he or she could do so. Although

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1 Francis, Paul et al. 1991. Report of the Terminal In-Depth Evaluation Mission of Pae Por Highland Development Project. N.p.: UNDCP.

2 USAID. 1980. Project Paper: Thailand-Hill Areas Education 493-0297. Bangkok: USAID Thailand.

the program, in the end, was institutionalized by requiring that the teachers held academic degrees, during its life it trained teachers, officials in the Nonformal Education Department, hill people, and others who went on to work in the UN and parliament. They started projects, NGOs, foundations, and new initiatives within the government that made highland development more participatory.

It was at this time that the government began enforcing the poppy cultivation ban. ONCB, which was established in 1977, began surveying poppy fields in 1979. In 1984, when it was decided that in some areas suitable options existed for growers to earn a living without poppy, eradication was implemented by ONCB and the Border Patrol Police. Some incentives were offered, including announcing that citizenship could be offered to those abandoning poppy cultivation.

According to Government statistics and UN reports, poppy was cultivated in the 1984/1985 growing season on 8,290 hectares with a yield of 33 tons (approx. 4.0 kg/ha). Following enforcement in 1985/1986, cultivation declined to 2,428 hectares with a yield of 16.5 tons. This reduced the amount of opium produced to below what addicts in the country consumed, thus making Thailand a net importer of the substance<sup>1</sup>.

With the threat of eradication or legal punishment, farmers were much more willing to stop growing the poppy. After thirteen years of an increasing amount of development initiatives in the hills, no appreciable decline in opium had been observed. The government realized that AD by itself would not be able to reduce cultivation effectively. Given the opium poppy's many advantages as a cash crop, creating economic alternatives that poppy growers will accept voluntarily is a challenging task. It is possible but it takes decades. Only now, almost forty years after CRCDP started are there beginning to be crops, such as coffee, that earn more income for farmers on a sustainable basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Opium production fluctuated for the next fifteen years, as the gradually increasing price and continued demand by users encouraged growers to risk cultivating the poppy. Nevertheless, the trend was downward. By 2000, cultivation was being carried out on only 300 hectares and has remained at about that level ever since. In 2006/2007 the amount cultivated was 205 hectares (UNODC. 2007. *Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Golden Triangle* Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand. Vienna: UNODC.)

This bears out what King Bhumibol knew at the beginning. Giuseppe di Gennaro, UNFDAC Executive Director described how he began to understand this in a meeting he had with the King in 1982:

*"The Kingsaidthat-accordingtohispointofview-atleast thirty years would be required to complete the task. I... [pointed] out that thirty years was... unacceptable... No serious planning could be so long term. Within such a time span, so many independent variables could hinder the productivity of any investment. I tried to let His Majesty understand that if I proposed such a long time frame to my donors, they would disappear. The King listened in silence. I was sure I had changed His Majesty's mind. But when, after the audience, I mentioned this feeling to those accompanying me, they explained that it is a Thai custom not to react in such circumstances. Silence did not mean acceptance."*

Nevertheless, in this case the Thai Government took action and did not accept the king's advice. In some cases the transition to live without opium production occurred smoothly. Farmers in the village of Pa Kluai in Chom Thong District, for example, made agreements with the Thai-NCA Project in 1985 to stop growing by the end of the project in 1989<sup>2</sup>. There were other instances where farmers, especially those growing poppy in small amounts or with low yields had received enough new information from different projects to stop growing poppy without serious problems.

However, the learning process was not yet complete. Many problems remained, from citizenship and land use to a lack of cash crop alternatives, and poor marketing connections. Many hill people remained estranged from the mainstream of Thai national life and lacked the means

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1 Di Gennaro, Giuseppe. 1991. La guerra della droga. Rome: Mondadori.

2 This village also became embroiled in a long-running dispute with lowland Thai and a prominent Buddhist monk over the damage their cultivation of cabbage and the pesticides used in the fields did to water quality. Although the project never promoted cabbage, the Hmong used technical inputs from the project to adapt cabbage cultivation to the highlands and were making more money from cabbage than from opium.

to receive a Thai education or gain other benefits from the state. As in other countries in the Mekong Region, political will preceded the ability of AD to provide adequate alternatives to all the growers. Nevertheless, practitioners of AD would continue to learn and adapt, and local communities would gain capacity so that AD became effective.

### *Expansion of AD to Include NGO and Indigenous Groups*

Among the major development in the 1990s was the growth in importance of NGOs, indigenous groups, and the increased acceptance of participatory development. In northern Thailand alone there were dozens of groups run by indigenous peoples for various purposes. Among the first was the Inter-Mountain Peoples for Education and Culture Association (IMPECT), based in Chiang Mai. Set up in 1986 with support from a Dutch NGO, NOVIB<sup>1</sup>, IMPECT evolved into an organization managed and mostly staffed by hill people. This worked together with an earlier organization for Akha started in 1981.

These organizations furthered participatory development. They took a greater interest in the issues confronting hill people such as how to resolve conflicts with officials. Being smaller, they were flexible and could start work faster than larger organizations such as UN agencies. They also sometimes became politically active, such as protesting changes in land use regulations that affected their way of life and raised the threat of their resettlement or eviction. This might occur when new national parks or national forests were established in areas long after hill people had settled there. When the RFD or other government agencies tried to have them moved, NGOs and indigenous groups were usually prominent in the negotiations over this and in helping find alternative arrangements (which was not always easy.)

Although conflicts and misunderstandings still exist between hill peoples and Thai officials, the situation has improved since the start of AD-related work in 1971. There are now hill people in the government service, hill people have graduated from all the major universities in Thailand

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<sup>1</sup> "Nederlandse Organisatie Voor Internationale Bijstand" (Dutch Organization for International Aid.)

and have taken up responsible positions in many sectors including development agencies and universities. Officials have also learned from their own participation in AD projects and from interactions with NGOs.

UNODC's AD work contributed to this for over 25 years, until in the mid-1990s when direct implementation ceased. At this time the work was largely taken over by the Thai Government agencies. While the lack of budgetary support often required the cessation of certain activities, this has been largely (if not more so) compensated by efforts from NGOs and community-based groups.

There is now an increasing number of sophisticated and carefully-prepared interventions to participatory highland development. Among them is the Uplands Program which aims to find ways to introduce sustainable land use and rural development, mainly in Thailand and Vietnam. Through a rigorous effort to link hill people with government agencies, and pioneering new concepts such as "Payment for Environmental Services," upland farmers are rewarded by those in valleys for making use of environmentally-friendly practices<sup>1</sup>.

Given the wide gap separating Thai officials and the growers in northern Thailand in 1971, it is difficult to see how the situation would have been better resolved than without UNFDAC, UNDCP, and UNODC and the Royal Project. In a process of learning by doing, making mistakes and then (usually) correcting them, AD work improved significantly over time and was also accepted by government planners (mainstreaming) as well (in its improved form) by indigenous groups and interventions such as the Uplands Program which tries to bring all the stakeholders together productively. This was to benefit the work carried out later in Myanmar and the Lao PDR. How this was done regarding drug treatment is one example.

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<sup>1</sup> Neef, Andreas, et al. 2006. "Participatory and Integrated Research in Mountainous Regions of Thailand and Vietnam: Approaches and Lessons Learned. *Journal of Mountain Science* 3:4.

## *Integration of AD and Drug Treatment*

Resolution 2 of the 1961 Single Convention observed that “the most effective methods for the treatment of addiction is treatment in a hospital institution having a drug-free atmosphere.” This statement, however, was made without information from poppy-growing areas. For hill people in the 1960s, going to the hospital required a long trek to an unfamiliar institution where the staff did not speak languages they understood. Once the treatment, mostly only detoxification and recovery, (usually ignoring health problems that contributed to the opium habit), ended the person returned to rejoin old friends, face the same problems, and be encouraged to resume smoking. In the early years, when UNFDAC sent users to be treated at facilities in Chiang Mai, such as the Northern Drug Dependence Treatment Center, the relapse rate was over 90 per cent. At this time, also, the opium suppression being carried out in Thailand caused heroin use to expand just as it had in Bangkok following the ban in 1958.

UN and other project staff realized that changes had to be made. The Thai-German Highland Development Programme (TG-HDP) took the lead. In 1992, ONCB organized seminars on drug treatment, inviting representatives of UN, bilateral, and NGO initiatives. A follow-up study by TG-HDP<sup>1</sup> was made with the major finding being that success depended on an integrated and continuous approach involving prevention as well as pre- and post-treatment care involving the family and the community.

TG-HDP staff members first worked in the Lahu community of Ya Pa Nae in Mae Hong Son Province because of its heavy drug use. On a drug caravan route, near the border, and close to a heroin refinery, selecting this village may have been overly challenging because of the high relapse rate. A comprehensive effort was carried out with provincial public health and medical personnel. Through the village committee, itself newly set

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<sup>1</sup> Chupinit Kesmanee & Rita Gebert. 1993. Drug Abuse in Pang Ma Pha Sub-District: Genesis and Current Situation. Chiang Mai: TG-HDP Internal Paper 169.

up by TG-HDP<sup>1</sup>, the villagers made their own commitment to solve the problem. Through bottom-up confidence building and encouragement from village leaders, users who were treated were provided with extra attention. The Women's and Youth groups were strengthened to provide additional support and use declined significantly. Although some users remained, after a year, no new addiction had occurred<sup>2</sup>. Drug prevention information was also provided in the local schools. This represented a significant improvement over the institution-based efforts that had preceded it. Similar efforts were to be implemented with even better results in Myanmar and in the Lao PDR by UNODC as well as other agencies including of course GTZ, the agency which sponsored the TG-HDP.

### ***Mainstreaming AD in National Social and Economic Development Planning***

In the Sixth NESDB five-year plan (1986-1991), "human quality" was highlighted, including people's participation. Highland development was reworked through a new Rural Development Plan. This comprised three objectives:

- establish permanent settlements
- reduce opium poppy cultivation
- conserve natural resources, in particular the watersheds

Priorities included identifying areas for introducing administrative measures (such as legalizing villages, a requirement for providing citizenship and land rights), preparing an integrated Master Plan among all government agencies, extending basic health services, and improving infrastructure.

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1 With support from the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University and a network of NGOs with which it was affiliated.

2 Thai-German Highland Development Programme. 1996. Review of Implementation of Community-Based Drug Abuse Control. Chiang Mai: TG-HDP Internal Paper 204.

Although it was not possible to carry all of this out, AD concepts were increasingly integrated into national planning.

The Seventh Plan (1992-1996) placed emphasis on promoting sustainable growth with stability. At the same time, and addressing increased drug usage of ATS and other substances, the Drug Prevention and Suppression Plan and National Strategy for Drug Control was drawn up. This type of planning continued through the Eighth Plan that was drafted in cooperation with an NGO umbrella organization and finalized in 1996 as the People's Development Plan. This Plan stresses people's participation, the importance of civil society, and role of local governmental agencies such as the Tambon Council in drug control initiatives. These features applied to the highlands as well.

Thailand had also entered into several international drug control agreements. The country signed all three UN Conventions on Drug Control. It had signed the UNDCP MOU and agreed to the subregional action plan to address drug issues. It had made bilateral agreements to control drugs with the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Cambodia, China and several other countries. Thailand is a part of the ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs (ACCORD) mechanism and other ASEAN agreements. Many agencies, including ONCB, the Office of the Prime Minister, several ministries, and provincial and local units of the Thai government have mainstreamed drug control into their activities .

In the forty years since AD work began in Thailand, techniques have been made more sophisticated, it has become more participatory, and the concept has been accepted by the Thai Government. Practices developed here have been adopted by neighboring countries so that they are now regionally accepted and widely implemented.

It should be remembered, though, that AD was accepted as an innovative practice through the actions taken over decades by the Royal Project and UNFDAC / UNDCP / UNODC initiatives, rather than initiatives from within the government itself.

While problems of implementing these measures continued, such as how to apply them in national parks where other rules required the

former settlers to move out, the point to be made is that AD concepts by now had reached the national planning level. How this worked out in the two neighboring countries can be seen in the following chapters on the Lao PDR and Myanmar where AD work was also to be integrated into national development planning.



# **Lao PDR: Adoption of AD into National Growth and Poverty Reduction Planning**

## *Early AD Work*

**D**ue to the unsettled conditions in Laos prior to the establishment of the Lao PDR in 1975, most of the poppy growing areas in the country were in conflict zones for many years. Almost all the rural development carried out in the country was near urban areas such as Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Pakse.

At that time, the Lao PDR had no policy targeting highland areas. The national model, such as it existed, aimed at overall growth similar to the early Thai five-year plans. While hill peoples, such as the Hmong were often much better informed of lowland life than their Thai cousins, and some Lao were more aware of highland cultures, a gap between the two still remained.

When the Pathet Lao (often officially referred to as “Patriotic Forces”) came to power and the Lao PDR came into being, their first task was to establish a new administration. All the country’s laws were annulled to be replaced over the years with a new constitution and law codes, a process still underway (with the new drug law just enacted in 2007).

Within the new framework, partly because of greater familiarity between lowlanders and highlanders as well as the cooperation between many during the fighting between the Pathet Lao and the royal government, a more comprehensive policy regarding national ethnic groups emerged. To stress the fact that all the different peoples were Lao, the government reinforced an already-existing threefold categorization of Lao: Lao Soung (Highland Lao, such as the Hmong and Mien), Lao Theung (Midland Lao, such as the Khmu, Phou Noi, Brau and Suai), and Lao Loum (Lowland Lao, such as the so-called Lao and including others such as Tai Deng and Tai Lu). In so doing, the Lao government established a process for integration that had evaded the Thai government. Citizenship was issued more easily in this context and some of the major obstacles facing the Thai government were not faced by the Lao.

Nevertheless, during the first years of the Lao PDR, the international aid agencies that funded development work for some years reduced support as a period of reassessment ensued. During this time, for countries such as Vietnam and the USSR that provided assistance to the Lao PDR, alternative development in poppy growing regions was not a priority. Opium production was allowed to carry on for over a decade before conditions began to change with the adoption of the New Economic Mechanism in 1986 through which a market economy was adopted and economic development supported. Not only has the Lao PDR grown economically and effectively at the national level, with GDP growing by an average of over 6 per cent since the 1980s (except during the Asian Economic Crisis in the late-1990s), this brought the realization that the country should address poppy production due to the negative impact it had on growth.

The first AD project supported by UNFDAC in Laos started in 1989 in the opium growing area of Palaveck, north of Vientiane and east of the Nam Ngum Reservoir. The Project Area was located in Palaveck and Phou Ngou subdistricts of Muong Hom District in Vientiane Province. The total population of Muong Hom District was estimated in 1990 to be 17-18,000 people, of which 80 per cent were Hmong. The Project Area (which changed during the project life) had 11 villages 591 households and 4,233 people of whom over 90 per cent were Hmong.

The Hmong had been involved in fighting on both sides of the conflict before 1975 and the government was eager to integrate all the Hmong into the new civil order. One way was to relocate people, including those on both sides of the conflict, into lowland areas. From the Government's point of view, this placed them in areas closer to its control as well as moving them away from areas where they could carry out shifting cultivation (and grow poppy). Furthermore, when these people were moved into the lowland, the various small highland communities were grouped together in order that more viable communities be established and for which providing infrastructure support, such as schools, clinics, and digging paddy fields would be feasible.

The village of Palaveck was established as a part of this scheme in 1979 when villagers were moved down from different areas in the hills. One group of 16 households came to Palaveck from Phu Samliem/Xaisomboun Village. In carrying this relocation out, the government was hoping that by bringing shifting cultivation to an end, this important highland watershed could be preserved.

In this new settlement area, Palaveck was the second biggest village with 951 people (138 households). Government planners had identified the valley area as a place where lowland rice cultivation could be expanded.

There were already a few groups of people in the Palaveck Valley, mainly ethnic Lao and apparently a few Hmong. These people, at least the Lao and probably some Hmong were doing some paddy cultivation. They also practiced shifting cultivation to grow hill rice and cassava on the lower slopes of the valleys at an elevation of approximately 500-600 meters. Above that, they grew corn and, at the highest elevations, 1,000 meters or more, the Hmong were growing poppy<sup>1</sup>. Even when the Hmong were relocated into the valley they continued to work some of their highland poppy fields to earn cash which they used to buy rice to supplement the little they were able to grow in the paddy fields.

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1 Jones, P.R. 1990. "Consultant report on Upland Agricultural Extension". For the Highland Integrated Rural Development Project (Lao/89/550.)

When UNFDAC work started, 850 kilograms of opium were being produced per year of which 50 kilograms was by those living in the valley. The estimated yields were low. In nine villages a total of 405 hectares were cultivated with an average yield per hectare of 2.1 kilograms, about half which was consumed by the growers.

One reason that people were living in the Palaveck Valley was that there had been very little fighting in the area, partly because of it being relatively close to Vientiane. When UNFDAC work started there, Muong Hom District had already received international assistance through two consecutive three-year UNDP projects in the mid-1980s of about US\$1 million each. These projects provided basic infrastructure, including building a dry-season track and ferry across the Nam Ngud River from Muong Hom to Palaveck. By the end of the second project (Muong Hom Rural Development Support Services LAO/88/024), the track covered the 55 kilometers to Palaveck<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, at the start of the UNFDAC project, during the rainy season it usually took 3 days by car, boat, foot and swimming across rapid mountain streams to reach Palaveck. UNFDAC had its job set out and it would not be easy.

The project inherited the approach carried out in other UNFDAC projects in northern Thailand comprising diverse sectors. According to the Project Document, the project aimed at 1) improving road access and communications, 2) increasing food self-sufficiency and agricultural productivity, 3) improving health, sanitation and clean water supplies, and 4) providing assistance to educational and women's development activities. Malaria was the major cause of death with 50% of children under 5 dying from it as well as unsanitary conditions and practices, respiratory diseases, and diarrhea. There was at this time no other comprehensive rural development project working in the Lao highlands.

From this start, participatory activities were increased through the guidelines proposed by a staff member who later became the Chief Technical Adviser (CTA). These called for asking the villagers what they wanted from the project prior to the start of implementation. Thus it was

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<sup>1</sup> Hopkins, R. 1990. "Report on Done Hom to Phalavek Road." Prepared for the Muong Hom Rural Development Support Services Project.

that the Palaveck Project was one of the first in the world to use a bottom-up approach with highland groups. Although everything the village requested (such as elaborate infrastructure) could not be provided, this approach involved the villagers in project formulation and contributed to a more cohesive and forward-looking project. This also kept expectations by villagers from growing too high and stimulated the local people to contribute more to project work.

A major advance occurred when this approach was endorsed by the Phya Hmong, head of one of the major clans, who had been a highly-regarded officer with the Pathet Lao. Although this endorsement may have been assisted by the fact that the UNFDAC official in question was a native of Southeast Asia, the Hmong leader took this step partly because of UNFDAC's open and consultative approach. By bringing the Hmong into the planning process and making a serious effort for them to participate in planning, this pioneered the Participatory Approach in the Lao PDR. However, since this project was implemented in an out-of-the-way place by a small agency not given to publicizing its accomplishments in a landlocked country away from the world development spotlight, few people knew about it.

The Palaveck Project carried on until the mid-1990s, and contributed to the inclusion of AD as a key drug control component as endorsed by UNGASS in 1988. The project's success contributed to a growing awareness by government leaders of benefits poppy elimination brought and how it could reduce crime. In response, the government established the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision in 1990, comprising the Prime Minister's Office and six ministries: Foreign Affairs, Public Security, Agriculture, Health, Finance, and Education. This inter-ministerial agency was to be developed as a coordinating agency (such as existed in Thailand) that would have links with all the ministries responsible for drug control work. Rather than allowing drug control to be dealt with disjointedly by individual agencies, LCDC was led by a coordinated, productive and cost-efficient team.

At that time, and although there had been pioneering work on drug treatment carried out by people in Laos before 1975, they had all dispersed leaving virtually no trained people in the country to run the

organization. Drug control professionals would have to be retrained in order for the agency to be able to operate effectively.

To make this a reality, UNFDAC worked with the government to carry out a national Drug Abuse Assessment in 1992-1993. Then with (now UNDCP) help, it prepared a Comprehensive Drug Control Programme, which would serve as the first Lao national drug control masterplan that was to run from 1994 to 1999. The foremost objective was the “gradual elimination of opium poppy cultivation”, principally through AD projects planned for other places in the country. The AD projects being formulated and implemented supported international efforts to promote participatory initiatives and benefited from advances in the rest of the world. AD workers for UNDCP in Laos benefited from a growing awareness of what the local people could contribute to the AD process.

This can be seen clearly in infrastructure projects implemented in Thailand and Laos. When the UbolRatana Dam on the Nam Phong River, in Khon Kaen Province was completed in 1966 under the Lower Mekong River Valley Development Program and the Thai Government, the project’s souvenir book made no mention of any impact the dam would have on people—it only described technical aspects, such as the dam’s design, construction, and electrical engineering aspects. However, by 1980, when the Nam Chon Dam was built in Kanchanaburi, the impact statement described all the technical aspects as well as the dam’s impact on ecological resources, human use values, and quality of life. An entire section covered adverse affects such as on mineral resources, land transportation, resettlement, public health, archeological treasures, aesthetics, and tourism.

And this pales compared to the decade-long process the World Bank took prior to approving the Nam Theuan 2 Dam in 2005. In the International Advisory Group’s fifth report to the Bank in 2005, the last one prior to the Bank agreeing to support the Dam, the focus was on the impact on people, compensation, and restoration. The report highlighted the need to consult studies by the IUCN on developing alternative livelihoods. The change in focus of development work had changed from simply promoting large infrastructure to considering the situation of the people themselves.

UNDCP contributed to this process in various ways such as through the Palaveck Project. Following its completion, a new initiative was started in an adjacent area. Other new projects were begun in Nonghet District of Xieng Khouang Province, Sam Neua District of Houaphanh Province, Long District in Luang Namtha Province, as well as Beng District in Oudomxay Province. The project in Luang Namtha was run with Norwegian Church Aid. NCA received funding from Norway's national church and then implemented the project as full partners of UNDCP through which it managed implementation with the local district (as it had in the Thai-Norwegian Church Aid Project earlier).

### ***Adoption of Sustained Poppy Cultivation Elimination in National Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Planning***

National leaders supported AD because of its positive impact on economic growth but without any evidence that it actually fostered improved livelihoods.

The first survey evidence that poppy cultivation contributes to poverty came from the socio-economic impact survey of poppy cultivation carried out by LCDC/UNODC from in 2005. The National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI) collaborated with UNODC in conducting in-depth surveys of four villages in six provinces where poppy was grown. NAFRI conducted the study in Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, and Oudomxay<sup>1</sup> provinces while a UNODC team working with the Regional Illicit Crop Monitoring Project did the study in Houaphanh, Luang Namtha, and Phongsaly provinces, where the surveyors were assisted by UNODC AD projects operating in the field.

The surveyors used several tools, including a questionnaire administered to a sampling of well-to-do, middle level, and poorer families (based on relative income in each village, not on a universal scale). The survey team carried out focus group discussions, met with men's and women's groups separately to discuss opium cultivation and other issues such as their plans for the development of the village. They mapped the

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<sup>1</sup> NAFRI. 2005. "Livelihood Study: Luang Prabang, Oudomxay and Xieng Khouang Province" Submitted to UNODC.

villages, and conducted open-ended interviews with both village leaders and local government officials. In certain areas, such as in Muong Long of Luang Namtha Province, where a local INGO had made a seriously negative report about the effects of poppy elimination, the survey team made a deliberate effort to find such villages by both visiting the local office of the INGO and by talking to local officials.

The socio-economic component of the 2005 Opium Survey found that poppy growers had an annual cash income of \$139 compared to \$231 for their non-growing neighbors. This was consistent with findings carried out by the ground survey team which conducted much briefer socio-economic surveys in a much larger number of villages.

Based on interviews with growers and non-growers, the major reasons for this significant income disparity between poppy-growing and non-growing households was that the non-growers had a more diverse economy, usually cultivating several crops or relying on more income generating activities such as collecting non-timber forest products, livestock raising, or various handicrafts such as textile weaving. A second reason was the higher rate of addiction among the growers. Usually these were men, who were often the physically strongest member of the household. If they consumed an average of 2-3 grams per day (2-3 kilograms per year) they generally did less physical labor than non-addicts, with the result that other members of the family such as the women and children had to try to work harder to compensate, in addition to their normal duties. The other family cultivators were unable to clear as much forest land resulting in smaller areas cleared and lower yields. The women had less time to do other activities, many of which were related to income generation. They also had to prepare the opium for the men to smoke. This had a strong negative impact on income generation since women contribute more to the highland household's cash income than men.

Furthermore, addicts used much of the opium that the family might otherwise have sold. Since most farmers in Laos produced only about one kilogram of opium per year, (less than the average user smoked), the family had to either barter for or buy additional opium. This further reduced their actual cash income. If there were more than one addict in the family, the household cash was stretched even further.

Women in families with users who were interviewed by the survey team universally expressed delight when asked if they appreciated it when their men folk stopped using opium. They said men were healthier, worked harder, the family had more income, and they themselves had more time to do their own chores and raise children. The women also said that they no longer had to fear being beaten when they could not obtain enough opium or prepared it too slowly. Women also made comments such as, “the men do not smell as bad anymore so we can sleep close to each other” or “the men are stronger and they want to sleep with us more often.” Many villages experienced small baby booms following detoxification.

There have been, however, dissenting views. Among them is Australian academic, Professor Paul Cohen. In a recent talk at the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development at Chiang Mai University<sup>1</sup>, he claimed that, based on his interviews, mainly in the GTZ project area of Muong Singh in Luang Namtha, farmers claimed that opium use did not reduce their ability to farm. They told him they could manage their addiction so that when heavy work was required they could do it.

This may be possible as there are well-documented cases of recreational opium use by field workers (just as people can engage in social drinking and not suffer for it). Also, since opium is an analgesic there are individuals using it to overcome pain that would otherwise keep them from working.

However, in the context of rural poppy growing villages in the north of Laos, the responses that were given to Professor Cohen are more likely to be addicts trying to gloss over addiction and pretend it did not exist - statements to this author by other villagers in Laos claimed just that. As for the comments by women such as were noted above, Professor Cohen said he had heard similar comments himself but (apparently) did not place much stock in them. However, neither he nor others making similar conclusions conducted in-depth socio-economic studies such as

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<sup>1</sup> Attended by the author of this report.

UNODC did<sup>1</sup>. The same type of study was carried out in parts of Myanmar where the results were similar although the income disparity was less (see the discussion in the following chapter.)

The selection of villages by the 2005 socio-economic survey team was not quite random. Since the total number of villages to be studied was limited due to budget and time constraints, the survey team aimed to reach villages meeting various criteria, such as differences in ethnicity, proximity to the road, relative wealth, length of time since opium was abandoned (some villages had given up opium growing years before), recent migration history, and whether they had been part of an alternative development project. However, due to time and logistical constraints, and in order to see if the reports of villagers facing severe problems (“dying like flies<sup>2</sup>” claimed one), were true, the team made a concerted effort to find problem villages.

Thus it was that the team visited the Lahu village of Ai Saeng in Luang Namtha. The villagers, however, said that they were not suffering because opium had been eliminated. Rather, when they were growing poppy and consumption was high, the women said that they were poor because it was difficult for families to make a living. The women often went to nearby Akha villages to exchange labor for opium for their husbands. Now that opium had been eliminated the government (partly helped by the UNODC/NCA project) was building rice terraces. The officials planned to move the village from its present location, which was the most suitable place for terraces, to a place closer to the road. The villagers and their friends and relatives seem to have concurred since Ai Saeng Village was increasing in size because of in-migration. People were voluntarily moving to Ai Saeng to take advantage of the help from the government. Being nearer to the road was for them an advantage because they could send their children to school or get to the health clinic in Muong Long city easier than before.

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<sup>1</sup> UNODC was unable to carry out follow-up studies of this type since then due to budgetary constraints.

<sup>2</sup> By Chiang Mai-based British correspondent, Tom Fawthrop, who in 2007 told the author that this was an exaggeration.

Even though the cash income earned by poppy growers was less than their neighbors, there are many, both poppy growers, and developers, who do not recognize this, since opium usually brings a high amount of income all at once. The fact that this is not better known is because the socio-economic study was carried out under the UNODC opium survey which had no budget or policy for publishing the socio-economic survey report, and because the results are not available in print or online. This, as in other similar situations where information useful to UNODC has not been publicized, made it more difficult to carry out its mandate. This is not the only case.

### ***The Asparagus Story***

Many crops were tested as cash crop alternatives to poppy. Though many could not compete with the poppy's many advantages (high price, light payload, no need for refrigeration or special handling, and no special skills needed to process it). There are crops that can rival the poppy, something that was known from the time the King of Thailand saw those peaches on Doi Pui, west of Chiang Mai in 1969. Poppy does have disadvantages, including when recently some growers began experimenting with ways to get higher yields, it was only harvested annually. If rain fell at the time the capsules were slit and the gum had oozed, the entire crop could be destroyed. Poppy growing also raised risks of, at least in recent years, law enforcement officials destroying the plants or through having to deal with criminal elements in the opium trade.

In Laos, asparagus has proven, at least under conditions found in Nonghet District of Xieng Khouang Province, to be an alternative crop that competes favorably with the poppy. Like the poppy, asparagus is a native of the Mediterranean. Asparagus is a perennial in the lily family that comes back from the same root system each year and can easily produce good yields for a decade. In the UNDCP Xieng Khouang Development Programme (UNDCP/OPS LAO/91/551-553), a Kachin agricultural expert from Myanmar, Seng Hkum Nhkum, introduced the California 500 variety of asparagus<sup>1</sup>. It is nutritious, can be marketed fresh or sold to processors

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<sup>1</sup> A rust resistant and popular strain of the Mary Washington variety of asparagus that was developed in California by the United States Department of Agriculture.

who freeze or can it. Like for the poppy, no high technology is required and the villagers have learned how to pack it so it remains fresh when sold outside of the Nonghet area. One drawback is that three years are required before the asparagus can yield a satisfactory harvest. So it is not surprising that although initial tests proved positive, the actual widespread adoption of asparagus occurred in a later initiative, the Nonghet Agricultural Development Project, with the Hmong village of Keo Patou growing the most.

Among the activities carried out by the latter project was the construction of two marketplaces in the Nonghet area, one at Tamxay Village, close to the district office and the other, on the road to Phonsavan, in Khangphanien Village. Following a longstanding tradition, vendors and shoppers from throughout the area came to market their goods there on a weekly basis, every Friday in Khangphanien and every Saturday in Tamxay. Having a wooden structure with a waterproof roof made a big impact by facilitating the selling of many more goods than in the past and encouraged some dealers to establish permanent shops in these places.

At least as important was the upgrading of Highway 7 that connects Luang Prabang, Phonsavan, Nonghet, and Nghe An Province of Vietnam with an all-weather paved road as well as passing the two markets mentioned above. The two governments then turned the local border post into an international crossing point. This further encouraged local trading. During the life of the Nonghet Project, from 1999 to 2003, the number of mini-busses running from Phonsavan to Nonghet increased from 3 to 37 and has steadily increased since then. The project further facilitated local transportation by arranging with villagers to upgrade feeder roads from their villages to main roads and then to make it possible for the local people to maintain these feeder roads over the long-term after the end of the project.

Asparagus, which by now was being raised widely in Nonghet, became the best-selling cash crop and is now available in all local markets. Traders come from Phonsavan and even Vientiane to buy it. The price in the village in 2003 was 5,000 kip/kilogram, 6,000 in Nonghet, and in 8,000-

9,000 in Phonsavan<sup>1</sup>. Also, some growers are selling their asparagus at the larger markets themselves. Among women interviewed in 2003 in Keo Patou and also in the Tamxay market knew the price all along the way, from outsiders coming to buy it in the village to them going to sell it in the Morning Market in Vientiane. Some is now being exported to Thailand and Vietnam. The development and promotion of asparagus, with the initial input and support provided by UNODC (and the road by ADB) and sustained by the locals is a success for which UNODC is rarely credited. It is one of the best examples of AD work in Laos that has provided for the sustainable livelihoods to hundreds of people. Of course there are other efforts that were less successful. But examples such as this have provided sustainable livelihoods for hundreds of people.

### *A War on Drugs?*

Despite such successes, much negative press surrounds the replacement of the opium poppy in the Lao PDR. This is based in a confused understanding of the history of drug control in the country. Following UNGASS 1998, the UNDCP Executive Director, a professor of sociology and expert on the Mafia, Pino Arlacchi, declared a War on Drugs. He planned to use techniques such as brokering a deal with the Taliban by which US\$25 million would be given to support the livelihoods of farmers who stopped growing opium poppy. He set out also to eliminate coca production in South America through similar deals which he hoped to broker with the heads of the drug cartels.

Arlacchi's plans were consistent with what the Lao PDR was doing to eliminate opium production and consumption in Laos by 2006, although he believed AD as well as law enforcement were the correct measures to take. This made it easy for the president of the Lao PDR, Khamtay Siphandone, to make an agreement with the Executive Director to eliminate opium production and consumption by 2006. In support of this, Arlacchi indicated that UNDCP would provide 80 million USD to fund the six-year program, which was to follow a balanced approach of demand reduction, law enforcement, and AD that would facilitate this program.

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<sup>1</sup> At that time, 1 USD equaled about 10,500 kip.

This plan, however, resulted in much misunderstanding. Some observers confused the Lao balanced approach with the War on Drugs and the law enforcement approach adopted for use in Latin America and elsewhere. The six-year timeline also raised fears by donors that eliminating opium so rapidly would cause the farmers to lose their “traditional livelihood” and suffer a damaging loss of income from which recovery would be difficult. The fact that the lack of publicity about what UNDCP’s AD work had already accomplished in Palaveck as well as in Thailand gave rise to a lack of confidence in the donor community in UNDCP’s ability to replace poppy cultivation in a supportive and participatory manner by which the farmers would gain sustainable livelihoods. At about the same time as well, in December of 2001, Pino Arlacchi was being replaced as the Executive Director, further damaging UNDCP’s reputation. In the end, only a few million dollars were raised by UNDCP as a result.

The government of Laos, however, was fully committed to eliminating opium having concluded that cultivating poppy countered efforts in the country to reduce poverty. Although AD was not fully mainstreamed, the Government had by now accepted the AD concept. While the Government had agreed with UNDCP on the policy to take, the decision to eliminate opium was not primarily motivated by the hope of millions of dollars (although that was a factor). Most of the external support came from UNDCP (and its donors) and the Narcotic Affairs Section of the American Embassy. The work in Laos relied on law enforcement but did not resort to the violent tactics sometimes used elsewhere, and only rarely to the actual destruction of fields, which was always done manually by the police or the army and never by spraying.

The commitment of the Lao Government to eradicating the poppy meant opium cultivation was almost entirely eliminated. From a total production of 134 tons in 2001, production declined to 43 tons in 2004 and then to 14 tons in 2005. The area under cultivation decreased from 19,052 hectares in 2001 to 1,800 by 2005 while the number of involved villages dropped from approximately 2,000 to 270 in the same time period<sup>1</sup>. By any standards this is a rapid decline that would cause significant change to a

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1 UNODC. 2006. Opium Poppy Cultivation in the Golden Triangle Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand. Vienna: UNODC.

great many people's lives. Addiction to opium also declined sharply, from about 63,000 to about 7,700 during roughly the same period.

It was possible to do this partly because of the support of the Lao people (but not all the growers) and partly because the Government had sufficient authority to enforce its will in remote areas. Partly too this was because the people were not desperately poor and were able to utilize coping strategies to find alternatives to poppy. Since many growers were producing opium in order to sell for the cash to buy rice, the immediate solution was to produce more food crops, thus making it unnecessary at least in the short run to find ample cash crop alternatives. Despite the success of asparagus, more alternatives were needed to meet all the needs.

### ***Integration of AD into National Poverty Reduction Policy***

The Lao PDR has been integrating drug control into its national planning for well over a decade. Soon after beginning work with UNFDAC, the country signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNODC in 1993 to implement its Regional Action Plan to reduce drug use. The Lao PDR then participated in the United Nations General Assembly's 20th Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Situation in 1998 which led to the government formulating a Balanced Approach to Opium Reduction, the basis for eliminating opium in the country through the country's second masterplan (2000-2005). Immediately following on from that was the third plan, the National Programme Strategy for the Post-Opium Scenario (2006-2008).

The Government would continue its expanded support for the elimination of poppy cultivation as a poverty-focused program in its 6th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010). By 2008, the fourth national drug master plan (2009-2013) was being formulated. This was a comprehensive plan covering all aspects of drug control from trend analysis, law enforcement, international cooperation, to an emphasis on AD and demand reduction. The Prime Minister of Laos showed the importance given to this master plan by mentioning it at the Summit Meeting of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam held in Vientiane in December 2008.

Among the inputs provided by UNODC and its donors to the Balanced Approach, was help in establishing the Project Facilitation Unit (PFU), based in Vientiane. Similar to a UNDCP Projects Coordination Unit in Chiang Mai from the late-1980s to 1994 when there were several AD projects active in Thailand, the PFU has been a cost-effective way to support the presence of experts (such as in AD and Demand Reduction) in a central place from which they could assist the AD projects being carried out at the same time. Funding constraints, however, impeded the support that the PFU could provide. However, and since it was located in the same office as the LCDDC, PFU was able to provide on-the-job training, strategic assistance, and capacity building to the national drug control program for many years so that drug control work could be carried out more effectively. The PFU has in this way supported AD and been instrumental to its being mainstreamed since its inception in 2000 and until present.

A major component of AD work was to sustain the opium ban by helping the farmers find new livelihoods. Although the situation of the ex-poppy farmers was severe but not dire, they did face various problems. According to the 2005 survey in six provinces, 66 per cent of households reported that they had enough food to eat while 55 per cent reported that they produced enough rice. Of the 45 per cent who were rice insufficient, 32 per cent had enough rice for 10- 12 months, 53 per cent had enough for 7-9 months. 65 per cent had enough for 4-5 months and 100 per cent had enough for 0-3 months. Of those 45 per cent, almost half reported a situation where they did not have enough food or money to buy food in the previous 30 days.

Despite these conditions, by which almost a quarter of the population faced the threat of food shortages regularly, coping strategies did exist. These kept the vast majority of the population from facing malnutrition, but did not by any means ensure long-term stability. If the possibility existed, farmers sold livestock as an immediate coping strategy. For the short-term they most often sought some form of labor opportunity. Over the long-term they grew more rice or used varieties with higher yields.

The government faced the problem of how to provide for the welfare of these farmers at the low end of the income scale. Without

the projects and technical support envisioned when this policy was promulgated, Lao leaders were challenged to find options for their poorer villagers. Nevertheless, the villagers usually managed to provide for themselves, as shown in the following table of coping strategies.

Over half the respondents reported that they had received assistance for coping with the elimination of opium. The government provided the most assistance through various agencies but development projects also contributed. UNDCP, besides the Nonghet Project, implemented projects in Muong Long of Luang Namtha Province, Sam Neua in Houaphanh Province, and elsewhere. The American Embassy supported a Lao-American project in Luang Prabang and Phongsaly. In the last year, three new projects have begun operations.

In Sam Neua and Sam Tai districts of Houaphanh Province, UNODC and ADB are cooperating in the Alternative Livelihoods for Upland Ethnic Groups Project. This is a manifestation of an agreement signed between UNODC and ADB in 2005 to cooperate in AD with the Lao PDR being one of the priority countries. Funding has been received to support the project also from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction as well as Luxembourg.

Furthermore, UNODC, in conjunction with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, (UNIDO) in Hoon, La, and Xai districts of Oudomxay Province, are cooperating in a three-year project with funding from the Trust Fund for Human Security. In this project, UNIDO is focusing on developing alternative sources of income, such as through improved marketing of forest products cultivated in the village while UNODC is supporting drug treatment and other aspects of development. Another AD project is being implemented by UNODC in Muong Khoa, Muong mai and Samphan of Phonsaly Province with funding support from the government of Germany.

GTZ is also supporting an AD project in Muong Singh of Luang Namtha Province. Other agencies, including NGOs, worked in other places. However, due to the lack of funding because of the confusion over the role of AD and opium elimination, UNDCP and the other agencies only reached a small percentage of the ex-poppy growers who needed help despite the organization's ability to provide assistance.

Advances were also made in community-based drug treatment, partly through former staff members of the Thai-German project coming to Laos, most importantly to the UNDCP-NCA project in Luang Namtha. The approach was refined, such as by adding a ritual at the start of the process in which users destroyed their smoking paraphernalia. Additional follow-up care was provided through the involvement of family members in providing aftercare. Relapse declined, aided of course by the increasing price of opium following the ban. Luang Namtha, however, remains the province with the highest opium use principally because of its location near trafficking routes entering the country through Special Region 4 in Myanmar.

The number of opium users was estimated to have been as high as 63,000 in 1997. With the decline in poppy cultivation, the availability of the drug also declined, resulting in more interest in the users in getting treated. With the reduced supply, greater motivation by the users, and more effective treatment methodologies, by 2007 there were an estimated 7,700 users. However, since about 4,000 treated users have relapsed, the total number is now estimated to be over 12,000, still much lower than before but also posing the risk that some ex-growers who still are taking opium will resume growing poppy.

Through these efforts, there has been a general increase in rural income. However, incomes in former opium poppy growing villages are rising more slowly than in non-opium poppy growing villages. In no small measure, this is related to the lack of success that UNODC and others in the field have had in raising funds to sustain the elimination of opium.

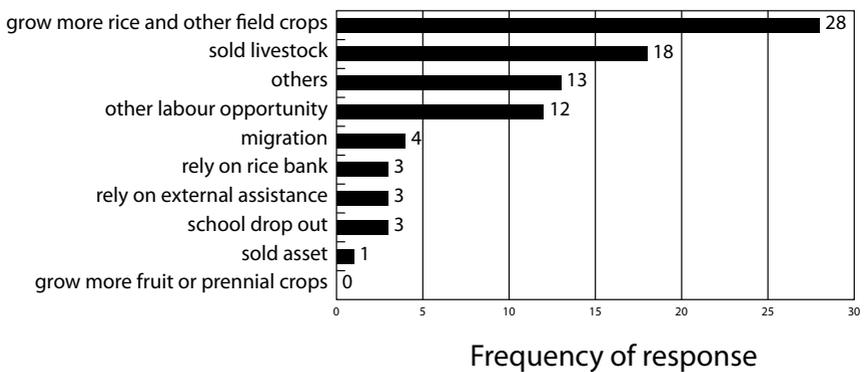
This increasing disparity, along with the high price of opium, raises the likelihood that ex-growers will resume poppy cultivation. If that occurs, eliminating it again will be all but impossible due to the reduced trust farmers will have in the Government as well as the spread of transnational organized criminal activity related to the promotion of the drug trade in border areas. A UNODC survey found that about 50 per cent of former opium poppy farmers were in danger of relapsing because of the lack of alternatives.

Opium elimination remains fragile despite the Government making it a high priority and committing resources to sustain it. Government officials have recognized the association of the cultivation and production of opium with poverty and opium abuse. Of the 47 poorest districts identified by the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy 32 districts used to grow poppy.

Although Thailand carried out a large amount of highland development, the Lao PDR has gone further through its integration of AD into national policies and through its recent passing of a new drug law. The new National Drug Control Master Plan presents a wide response to drug use and related criminal activity. AD remains at the core of work because of the need to sustain the poppy ban which will lead to the ex-poppy growers taking up new livelihoods contributing to a life free from the criminal elements that manage the international drug trade.

This approach is also consistent to the needs of the country. A key person in the Planning Department of the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry commented to the evaluator in late-2008 that foreign investment in his country was booming. What his ministry (and the country) needed,

**Coping strategies of farmers in study area following opium elimination**

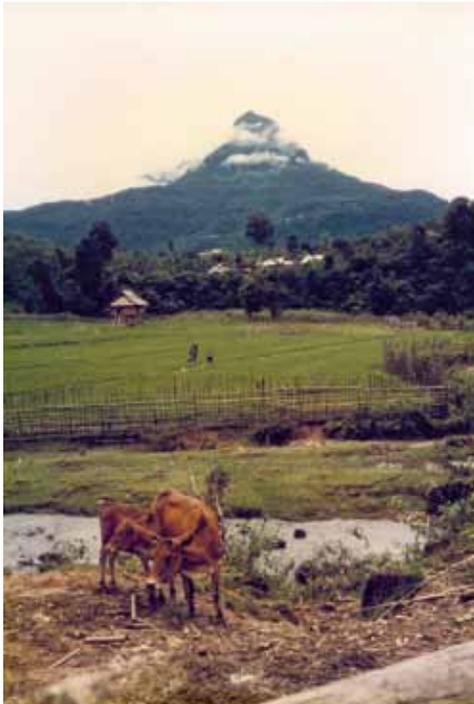


- 27% Never grown opium
- Others = mainly collecting more NTFPs

*Source: LCDC/UNODC Socio-Economic Survey 2005.*

he said, were guidelines and strategies for integrating the people into this process and giving them clear roles for doing so. The ministry, he added, also needs the scientific and technical background for identifying the most suitable roles that the people can play in different contexts related to rural development. Mainstreaming will only be complete when opportunities are available equally (or almost equally) to people at all levels of society.

Consolidating the elimination of opium together with building new livelihoods for so many in the distant parts of the Lao PDR will require the sustained effort that Thailand has made. King Bhumibol's advice to UNDCP Executive Director, Giuseppe di Gennaro, that sustaining the elimination of opium takes thirty years also applies to Laos. For the country to implement its post-opium scenario programme strategy and Action Plan targeting 1,100 impoverished former opium poppy cultivating villages, an integral part of its National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, will require continued long-term political will and commitment of resources.



*Photo: Alexander Seger*

Phou Lavek, Lao PDR, August 1990





# **Myanmar: Facing AD Challenges and Mainstreaming among Development Agencies: KOWI in the Wa Region, 1996-2008**

## *Opium Cultivation in Remote Areas and Conflict Zones*

**M**yanmar is the second largest illicit opium producer in the world after Afghanistan, with its potential 2008 opium production of 410 tons. Cultivation is linked to poverty: opium is cultivated primarily to generate cash to offset food deficits and to buy clothing and medicine. However, since UNODC surveys have shown that poppy growers mostly earn less than their non-growing neighbors, the reasons cultivators say they grow the poppy are often confused. This is the case in Myanmar as much as in Laos and elsewhere. Farmers in Myanmar, however, face more challenges than almost all the others because their overall cash income is so low<sup>1</sup>.

Over 130,000 households (about 600,000 individuals) are involved in poppy cultivation, representing 10 per cent of the total in Eastern and Southern Shan State. This cultivation has contributed to Myanmar being a “least developed country”, ranking 130<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries by UNDP in 2006.

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<sup>1</sup>The situation in Kokang was worse since the local people who had cultivated opium poppy had few alternatives. Since UNODC did not work in this area, it is not discussed in this report.

Poppy cultivation has declined in recent years, with UNODC statistics showing approximately an 80 per cent decrease in the area cultivated from 1996 to 2005. However, for the last two years it has been increasing.

Almost 90 per cent of the country's poppy is grown in Shan State. Most of the growing area is mountainous, often inaccessible, and under varying degrees of control by ethnic minority groups and militias. While the people of major growing areas in Kokang and the Wa Region have almost completely stopped growing the poppy, new cultivation has recently been observed in Southern Shan State, particularly in areas such as Pinlaung and Pekon south of the area's capital of Taunggyi. Since this area is not far east of the new capital at Naypyitaw, the government is quite concerned about this development and the trafficking routes leading from them, one passing close to the capital and heading north to Kachin State where opiate addiction is high.

This concern has been decades in the making. Since the early 1960s, much of the poppy growing areas have also been the site of rebel group operations. These included much of the northern and eastern parts of Shan State as well as large areas of Kachin State where militias and other armed groups were in rebellion against the central government. During this time, the government was more concerned with maintaining authority and ensuring the integrity and stability of the country than with opium suppression. At the same time, the country's economy declined.

Nevertheless, the Government considered drug control as a priority but one that could not be implemented. The Government of U Nu signed the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, but with the condition that cultivation could continue east of the Salween for twenty years. In response, in 1964 the Government planned the Kokang Development Project with the goal of providing sustainable livelihoods after poppy cultivation was eliminated.

The situation changed considerably when the Burma Communist Party moved into Kokang. The Party's armed wing had been in revolt against the government since 1948 and after being defeated in the delta

in 1969, the BCP moved to the northeast border of Shan State where they made agreements with leaders from Kokang, the Wa, and areas to the east. When these areas became involved in fighting the government, one result was the shelving of the Kokang Development Project<sup>1</sup>.

The Government nevertheless established an Opium Enquiry Commission to investigate how to reduce cultivation (such as by using AD) and end addiction. Their aim was to address the recent and rapid rise of heroin use in the big cities as well as to undermine the growing strength of rebel and anti-government groups, such as the Kuomintang<sup>2</sup>, Shan armies, and the Burma Communist Party which traded in poppy to buy arms and support their rebellion.

This led to the government of General Ne Win, which took power in 1962, changing its drug policy. In 1974, the government passed a drug control law that made poppy cultivation illegal in all parts of the country, including Shan State for the first time (even though it was unenforceable). Two years later, the government established the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) to coordinate implementation. Based in the Ministry of Home Affairs, the CCDAC was an inter-agency office linking relevant ministries. In this way, the Government took its initial steps to eliminate opiates in the country.

At the same time as the establishment of CCDAC, UNFDAC laid plans for a programme to be implemented in conjunction with a number of Government agencies through CCDAC. AD work began in Shan and Kachin States, with financial support mostly from Norway in the mid-1980s.

The United States was also supporting anti-drug efforts. Unlike in Thailand, where the U.S. funded UNFDAC, the U.S. here worked directly

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<sup>1</sup> As an alternative, the Government was also hoping that opium poppy cultivation could be legalized in this area such as it was in France, Turkey, Tasmania in Australia, and India. However, this plan was rejected by the United Nations out of concern over how cultivation could be policed and controlled.

<sup>2</sup> After the Kuomintang's defeat by Ma Zedong's forces in 1949, some KMT forces fled to Myanmar where, after giving up on trying to unseat Mao, became involved in the opium trade.

with the government, mostly through aid to the army and air force. This included spraying opium fields with planes provided by the U.S. Although some fields were destroyed, the long-term impact is dubious since the spraying alienated growers and caused health problems. Also, there were reports that some of the planes were used in anti-insurgency operations which violated the terms of the agreement. Since the 1980s, U.S. Government (although doing so elsewhere) has not provided any resources for spraying poppy fields in this country. Instead, the Narcotics Affairs Unit of the State Department would be directly funding a major project implemented by UNDCP and then UNODC. However, before much AD work could be supported, either by UNFDAC or the U.S., political events intervened.

### *Socio-Political Changes in Myanmar*

In 1988, major changes occurred in Myanmar starting when General Ne Win was forced out of office. Protests arose throughout the country over his replacements (as well as living conditions under the socialist state he had promoted) which led to more changes in the government and the loss of thousands of lives in the violent repression of the unrest.

Following the protests and changes in government, all bilateral aid to Myanmar was cut by the traditional OECD donors. Among these was Norway, causing UNDCP's AD and other initiatives to be halted for years. As noted by the former UNICEF representative in the country, Rolf Carriere, "The recent history of bilateral assistance to Myanmar can be characterised as 'all or nothing'--all prior to August-September 1988, nothing thereafter. Though one of the world's poorest countries in 1987, aid was cut off, creating a catastrophic situation that would not change until the mid 1990s when concerns over humanitarian issues began to outweigh concerns over political matters. During this time, per capita income fell while inflation accelerated. In the early 1990s, the country faced severe economic difficulties and its rural population grew increasingly impoverished.

Despite whatever people thought about the Government's actions in 1988, UN agencies, bilateral organizations, and donors recognized the poverty and health problems that the Government could not address.



Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

They proposed providing aid to reduce malnutrition and health problems, as well as to empower people with information on supporting themselves. The same was true regarding drug control. An increasing number of NGOs grew sympathetic to the thinking of Carriere (and others), who wrote, "The time has come to extend...humanitarian assistance to help victims of the silent emergency."<sup>1</sup>

The government made efforts to adapt to the changing political and economic conditions. The Government brought the "Burmese Way to Socialism", which had begun in 1962, to an end principally because, it had contributed to Myanmar becoming "least developed". Fiscal reforms in the early-1990s allowed, first private, and then foreign banks to operate. Private moneylenders were authorized in 1995 and other attempts were made to boost the economy. The State Law and Order Council (SLORC) was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Partly in response to these changes, the country was able to join ASEAN in 1997.

The 1997 Asian Economic Crisis, however, hit the country hard, compounding the enduring dissatisfaction many still felt over the crackdown. In addition, increases in production and tourism expected by the Government did not materialize. Although the big cities took on a more modern look with luxury hotels, shopping complexes, convenience stores, fancy restaurants, and vehicles, the development was mainly in appearance. The causes of poverty remained and many people in poorer urban areas and the countryside still lacked basic necessities. Whatever development aid was provided there was too little to change the basic situation.

Also during this time, while the economy was growing, if only slowly, the rebellions that had been waged for decades were weakening. There were cases where the Government gained the upper hand over rebel armies, such as the Karens who suffered a severe defeat at Mannerplaw in 1995. There were other cases that were resolved in other ways, such as with the Burma Communist Party.

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<sup>1</sup> Carriere, Rolf. 1997. "Responding to Myanmar's Silent Emergency: the Urgent Case for International Humanitarian Relief and Development Assistance." In Peter Carey, ed. *Burma: The Challenge of Change in a Divided Society*. Oxford: St. Antony's College.

From 1971 onwards the Burma Communist Party was fighting the government with local allies in Kokang, the Wa and areas to the east. After nearly two decades, some local chiefs had grown dissatisfied over what they saw as a lack of direction by the BCP leaders, their disregard for the foot soldiers (who were seen to be used as cannon fodder), and alleged misuse of funds earned from opiate sales. In early 1989, when Peung Kya Shin, Deputy Commander of the BCP Northeast Military Command announced, for many of the above reasons, that he was quitting the BCP and establishing the Kokang Democratic Alliance Army, two Wa leaders, Zhao Nyi Lai and Bao Yu Xiang, were ordered to suppress the rebellion. They were unwilling to do so and decided instead just to ask the BCP leaders to reform their ways<sup>1</sup>.

On 16 April 1989, in the area of Ta O, near the “British Pagoda<sup>2</sup>” (about 20 kilometers north of Pang Kham, the Wa capital), Wa soldiers massed. However, word of their plans had leaked and the top BCP leaders escaped except for one whom the Wa soon turned over to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The takeover was bloodless, quick, and a surprise to the Wa.

The Kokang, Wa, and the leaders from an area east of the Wa Region with a population of Shan, Akha, and Tai Loi<sup>3</sup> as well as Chinese in the main city of Mong La then made oral agreements with Secretary 1, General Khin Nyunt. These became known as Special Regions 1, 2, and 4. According to the agreements, the three constituencies agreed to remain within the Union of Myanmar forever while at the same time being accorded considerable autonomy. As a part of the agreement, the Wa could maintain an office in Yangon and in Lashio while one Government

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1 Interview with Zhou Dafu, Deputy-Chief, Wa Central Authority General Office, October 2007.

2 It appears to be Buddhist in nature but all the Wa elders I asked said they did not know the history of the place or how it got its name except that it might have had something to do with the formerly rich opium poppy fields in the area.

3 Tai Loi are a Mon-Khmer group usually referred to as Blang or a similar term. They often prefer others to call them “Tai Loi” (Mountain Tai) because they wish to be thought of as similar in status to Tai groups such as Shan who are Buddhist, literate, and possess other “civilized” traits.

army battalion was stationed in Pang Kham and another in Mong Mau, both of which are disarmed.

### *Indigenous (Wa Authority) Drug Control Plans and Constraints*

The discussion in this report will concentrate on the Wa because it was the largest poppy growing region in the country at the time and also the site of the most intensive UNDCP/UNODC AD project in any of the three countries covered. This also will highlight issues of mainstreaming where there is an additional layer of authority between the central government and the people, namely the Wa Authority. Furthermore, these layers differ in terms of education, experience with development, and in what role the others should play in the region's development. Mainstreaming here faced severe obstacles.

When the local rulers took control of the region, they had to establish an administration of their own and planning for the development of the Wa Region. In 1989, the Wa leaders possessed few administrative skills. Their senior ranks were adept in jungle fighting and upland cultivation but little else. Few had any formal education and most were illiterate. What schooling they had came from Chinese primary and middle schools. They had no city planners, rural developers, engineers, or other specialists. In the whole Wa Region there was only one medical doctor, and at the start, they had almost no money in the treasury since the fleeing BCP leaders had taken it all<sup>1</sup>.

The area in which they lived posed its own challenges. The population of approximately 400,000 was mostly Wa, but comprising many small groups speaking different dialects as well as over a dozen additional ethnic groups including Lahu, Akha, Shan, Tai Loi, Kachin and, in the towns, Chinese. The soil was mostly sedimentary and nutrient poor. The land was hilly, with steep ridges descending into shallow valleys. Rainfall, although generally adequate, did not occur evenly throughout the year. Few roads of any kind entered the area (much as in the north of Thailand and the north of Laos in previous decades). A trip from Yangon to

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, army salaries were paid through loans from the personal savings of Wa leaders.

the capital of Pang Kham could easily take several days making the region all but inaccessible from the main part of the country.

Health problems were severe. There were only four hospitals, and eight clinics in the Wa region. Dr. U Tun Kyi, the head of the Wa Medical Bureau (who studied at Rangoon University and in China) and who has lived in the Wa Region since the early 1970s, insists that child mortality was approximately 80 per cent in the early 1990s. Reasons he gave were the absence of midwives, cutting the umbilical cord with rusty scissors and a range of diseases including tetanus, worms, polio, mumps, measles, pneumonia, and dysentery (complicated by malnutrition). He gave the example of Ta Shao, a local chief with several wives: of his 32 children, only four survived to adulthood (Interviews with Dr. U Tun Kyi).

As an integral part of Wa economic planning, they decided in November 1989 to ban opiates over a series of three five-year plans (by 2005) -this was a decision made by the Wa independently. In 1990, when the schedule for the ban was first announced, international organizations, such as UNDCP, and most other countries, such as the United States, had little influence over decisions made by the Wa Authority, nor did the government of Myanmar have sufficient leverage to cause the Wa to ban opium cultivation. While they had heard of international efforts to control opiates, this was their decision, albeit with significant Chinese encouragement—the Chinese being strongly opposed to opium poppy cultivation on its borders.

Wa leaders were not confused about the negative effects of expanded poppy cultivation. They realized that banning poppy and finding alternatives would be difficult. On 26 August 1990, a strategy for doing this was announced and on 24 June 1991 a Drug Control Order was promulgated.

However, before they began implementation, poppy cultivation expanded. As the Wa Authority consolidated control over the entire region they found that because of the peaceful conditions prevailing in the Region and also the growing market for opium after the reduction of cultivation in Thailand from 1984 on, conditions were conducive for expanded cultivation.

### Shan State and Action-area



Soon the Wa Region was full of poppy, with cultivation on, as estimated by United Wa State Party (UWSP) Chairman, Bao Yu Xiang, 10,000-15,000 hectares<sup>1</sup>, much more than during the BCP era. If the average yield was 10 kg/ha (as UNODC surveys found it from 2002-2004), this would constitute 7 metric tons, or almost two kilograms per person living in the Wa Region in the early 1990s.

This increased cultivation diverted growers from re-establishing rice farming. It also increased confusion about why Wa grew poppy. By the mid-1990s, when government and international AD efforts were beginning to reach the Wa Region, most observers—government officials, UNDCP staff, and even some Wa leaders—had come to believe mistakenly that the Wa had been growing poppy for years to offset food shortages intrinsic to the “backward” way of life they were believed to follow. In fact, the shortages were a recent occurrence. Although the people of the Region hardly ever enjoyed food surpluses, the shortages they experienced for 3-6 months annually in the early 1990s were mainly caused by the fighting in the BCP years. Thousands of young men died, disrupting farming communities where the people could not maintain their agricultural fields<sup>2</sup>.

When the chance arose in the early 1990s to grow poppy in peace and sell opium at a relatively high price that would enable them to buy enough rice to overcome the shortages, many did so. However, this was a new situation arising from a unique combination of peace, a depleted household labor supply, and a ready market. Wa farmers also appreciated having opium which, in the absence of other medicines and medical personnel, was the only way they had to treat various ailments.

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1 Interview with Bao Yu Xiang. Chairman, United Wa State Party, Pang Kham. Several times, in 2003, 2005, 2006.

2 Despite little hard evidence, but based on British reports and accounts of Wa elders, food production in the Wa before poppy cash cropping grew widespread, was satisfactory, even in the north where shortages are common now. The population density was sufficiently low that enabled farmers to practice shifting cultivation with long rotations that negated problems of poor soils. The fact that the British mentioned crowded villages while not mentioning hunger, illness, or related problems, hints that the Wa enjoyed reasonably good health at that time.

The Wa administration also inherited a top-down system from the BCP. In 1999, UNDCP consultant, Rita Gebert, who investigated the role of stakeholders in the Wa Region pointed to a high level of authority held by the top leaders.

*“Even the Mong Pawk District Chairman, who is a respected military leader in his own right and a member of the Central Committee, has said that district-level authority is limited to minor projects, and issues, which are of a purely local nature. Otherwise, his main tasks are to ‘await instructions and orders from Pangsan [Pang Kham],’ and help to implement Pangsan’s plans and orders.”*

The Wa approach to providing alternatives to poppy cultivation began with massive resettlement. The leaders believed that the small Wa villages, mostly scattered along ridge lines, could not be easily provided with infrastructure such as roads, schools, and clinics. They brought down people from well over a hundred villages, integrating them into existing settlements or establishing new ones. In some cases, when people were put into the lowlands they contracted malaria in great numbers. In other cases, because they did not have enough seed or other resources, they ran short of food, leading to the continued cultivation of poppy<sup>1</sup>. Wa leaders today realize that this mass movement caused major problems, but claim they had little option if they wanted to eliminate opium and develop the region.

For other help, the Wa turned to China. Not only did Pang Kham rest on the border of China, but most Wa leaders spoke Chinese and had attended Chinese schools. Chinese, in the absence of a mutually understood Wa dialect, became the working language of the Wa Authority. China was also the main market for Wa produce as was the main source of supplies. Whereas such Yunnanese cities as Monglien were within an hour or two by car, major cities in Myanmar such as Lashio or Kengtung were over a day away and in bad weather, much more than

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<sup>1</sup> As for those relocated to the Thai border, see below.

that. As communication facilities improved, the Wa started to use Chinese telephones and the Internet through China. Chinese currency was much more commonly used than the kyat.

This led to increased Chinese influence. Wa leaders accepted many values and attitudes common to the Chinese including their approach to development. The Wa five-year plans favored macro-development and infrastructure projects such as were promoted during the Great Leap Forward. Chinese influence also, as stated above, had pushed the Wa to banning opiates<sup>1</sup>.

### *UNDCP Regional Center and Regional Projects*

At the same time as the Wa Authority was establishing itself, UNDCP was setting up a Regional Center in Bangkok to support work in the Greater Mekong Region countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and Yunnan Province of China. This responded to economic reforms taking place in countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, by which pro-growth policies were adopted and led to greater cooperation in the region. The Regional Center addressed drug production and drug use issues common to all these countries which could now be more effectively reached than in years past.

After Myanmar agreed to the 1993 MOU framework established under the Regional Center, two cross-border projects involving Myanmar were started, one with China and one with Thailand. Their project documents covered opium control, rural development, supply interdiction, and drug use prevention. A subregional demand reduction project initiated in 1996 and working with highlanders in the six MOU countries has project sites in Kachin and Shan States. These projects were to soon bring UNDCP into contact with the Wa by which the agency's

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<sup>1</sup> Also arising from this were many cases of Chinese taking advantage of unskilled Wa in business ventures and in the purchase or extraction of raw materials from Wa villagers.

largest AD project in the region and probably the largest by any agency in Myanmar would be initiated - the Wa Project<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Wa Relations with the Government***

In the early 1990s as national-level changes were unfolding, Khun Sa and other rebel leaders began to recognize that changes in their operations were required since it would be difficult to continue having such large areas under poppy cultivation. They also recognized that amphetamines represented a potentially much bigger business than opiates. While the number of heroin addicts (especially injectors) probably would remain stable, there were many more people who would try taking a pill to give them more energy, such as to drive a truck or just to feel good regardless of what negative consequences might result<sup>2</sup>. Unlike opium which depended on vast fields, amphetamines could be produced from a small extract that could be processed in a laboratory no bigger than a single room. As a result, from about 1992, the old opium producers began producing amphetamines, and a number of Wa leaders also became involved in amphetamine production and sales.

Coinciding with this, the Government finally sought to defeat Khun Sa. To do this, it requested help from Pang Kham. The Wa provided troops and in 1996 managed to push Khun Sa to surrender. The government thereupon gave the Wa access to Shan-held land close to the Thai border that Khun Sa had controlled, including the area known as Yawngkha, just opposite Doi Tung in Chiang Rai Province.

Wa leaders saw this as a good opportunity to wean the people away from poppy since Yawngkha was at too low an elevation for poppy to produce high yields. In a process lasting 7-8 years (and which may

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1 In its life from 1996 to 2008, the project had several names (such as the Wa Alternative Development Project) and sometimes comprised more than one project document. For the sake of simplicity, this project, in all its forms, will be called the Wa Project.

2 While that may be true, there are mining centers, such as at Hpakant, or the city of Lashio, where thousands of users inject—one shocked Wa Project physician called one such place he saw as a “festival”. Nevertheless, ATS still has a bigger potential market than heroin by far.

not be over yet), tens of thousands of Wa were relocated here where they, in many cases, displaced the Shan and Tai residents. Although this alarmed Thailand, which saw this as a tactic for trafficking drugs (which may indeed have occurred), the settlers were mainly poor who arrived with few supplies and needed much assistance to get started. According to the Wa, their region now included both the area on the Chinese border and the area on the Thai border, with a total population of over 400,000.

### *Myanmar Government Policy and Initiatives*

Starting in 1989, the government reworked its drug control policies. Two agencies were given primary responsibility for drug control, including AD work.

The first, CCDAC, was reorganized on 9 October 1989 with the aim of increasing its effectiveness. Chaired by the Minister for Home Affairs, its participating agencies include the People's Police Force, the Prime Minister's Office, Attorney General's Office, the Development of Border Areas and National Races (NaTaLa), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. In 1999, the government drew up a 15-year master plan calling for the elimination of the cultivation, production, and use of drugs by 2014 through three five-year plans. According to this plan, poppy cultivation is to be eliminated progressively in different parts of the country, concluding with Southern Shan State.

The second was the Ministry for Progress for Border Areas and National Races Development (better known as "NaTaLa," the Myanmar language acronym commonly used in both Myanmar and foreign circles) which was established as a Central Committee in 1989. In 1992 it was upgraded to ministry level. NaTaLa works in 18 areas throughout the country, in ceasefire areas, along the border, and with national minorities, including places where the opium poppy has been cultivated and sometimes far from the border in the country's interior.

NaTaLa's primary objective is to develop the "economic and social works and roads and the communications of the national races at the border areas." Following a master plan adopted in 1994 and subsequently

revised, NaTaLa places emphasis on infrastructure such as roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and electrical generation. Sometimes it operates in cooperation with Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to improve farm production.

The country's drug law was revised as the 1993 Narcotics Drug and Psychotropic Substance Law and in 1995 as the Rules Relating to Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Government policy is twofold. First, drug eradication and prevention are priorities so that they will be accomplished quickly. Secondly, the elimination of poppy is called for by raising the standard of living of the growers. However, implementing this balanced approach met obstacles in ongoing rebellions and political instability not present in Laos. CCDAC tasked with coordinating the fifteen-year masterplan, was constrained by the extreme difficulty Myanmar faces in raising funds from international agencies<sup>1</sup>.

### *The UNODC Wa Project*

Following the regional projects in Eastern Shan State (including one that could not be completed because Khun Sa's forces were operating in the area), the groundwork for sustained activities in these border areas had been laid, with the work showing sufficient promise that donors were willing to support more extensive projects.

More extensive projects were to be in the Wa Region. Wa Authority representatives had visited UNDCP staff at its site in Special Region 4 to invite them to carry out such a project in the Wa Region<sup>2</sup>. Negotiations with the Myanmar Government resulted in an agreement to implement the Wa Project (with China as another signatory). This was eventually to be carried out in participatory manner in three phases although this was not envisioned at the start, and did not always proceed smoothly. Through this, the Wa Region was opened to alternative community development with learning by all parties in all three phases. The Project Area was initially

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<sup>1</sup> For example, despite all the troubles related to the government in Zimbabwe, it receives several times the international development assistance that Myanmar does.

<sup>2</sup> The UNDCP Myanmar-China Project (AD/RAS/94/711), known locally as the Silu Project.

three of five townships in Mong Pawk District, in the south of the Wa Region. This was adjacent to some government-controlled areas as well as Special Region 4 and peopled mainly by Lahu and Akha.

When UNDCP staff reached the Wa they were entering a situation with political, environmental, and health complications. The ceasefire agreement gave the Wa considerable authority over the region. However because the Wa Region was in Myanmar, the central government controlled access to the region for international staff and had considerable influence over how the project should be implemented. This resulted in the government having more influence in project formulation than the Wa.

The Wa leaders were confident from having formed an administration that built roads and provided other services. Although flaws existed in execution, they controlled the region, had established working relationships with China, the special regions bordering it, and the Government of Myanmar. Throughout all this time as well, the region had been peaceful. They were not open to outsiders telling them how to run their region. They were also careful to keep Myanmar Government influences at a low level<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the government's involvement in formulating the Project Document, the area's physical remoteness as well as the ceasefire conditions limited Yangon's inputs in the region. The result was that UNDCP was essentially on its own in the Wa Region to deal with the Wa who neither understood nor appreciated participatory development and had their own ideas on how to develop the region so that poppy cultivation could be replaced.

Wa leaders told UNDCP that they could manage the development of their region by themselves. Instead of money, they informed UNDCP

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<sup>1</sup> This ranged from restricting the amount of Myanmar-language education provided in the region and activities by other government agencies. It also led to troubles with NGOs who brought in what the Wa mistakenly thought were too many "ethnic Myanmar" workers (although they might belong to some other group such as Karen) leading to increased restrictions on the agency.

and government officials that preferred to receive experts in development projects, by which they meant mining or dam building.

The Wa leaders saw the UNDCP project as a way to fund much of their five-year development plan. Just after the start of the project, they wrote to the Project in 1998 to request support for rice terraces, inputs to improve shifting cultivation, support for medical infrastructure, educational centers, fish ponds, power line construction, and road improvement.

It soon became clear that not all of what the Wa leaders wanted was the same as what was in the Project Document which called for a participatory community development approach. The Project staff responded to the Wa letter that the project could not provide everything they had requested.

Nevertheless, the Project started some small-scale infrastructure, such as feeder roads and irrigation schemes as well as beginning community development work in six strategically located "priority village tracts." Village Alternative Development Groups along with Mutual Help Teams were organized so that members of these communities would learn how to participate in all aspects of village development and to be able to sustain the activities after the end of the project. 'Natural' village leaders were identified so that the activities could follow what the staff assumed was an effective way to community development.

Although this adhered to practices, such as suggested by Robert Chambers, the Wa leaders, especially in Mong Pawk District, the local townships, and not incidentally, the Wa army units stationed in the area, found this threatening. The Wa were convinced they knew the most appropriate approach. Through mass organizations such as the Youth Group and the Women's Group - or the direct intervention of the leaders themselves--they believed they could rally the villagers to unified (and obedient) action.

This came to a head in a community-based drug treatment camp at an Akha village named Hah Dah on 6 June 2000. This village was selected because it was poor, principally because 19 per cent of the people were smoking opium. The Project convinced Wa leaders to take

the unprecedented step (for them) of allowing a treatment camp to be held in the village and not in a health institution as was customary for the Wa Authority. Unknown to the Project staff, however, one of the patients was a Wa battalion commander not on good terms with some current members of the Wa army.

When some noisy group events of the camp attracted the attention of the Wa army unit based nearby, military leaders suspected a plot was being hatched. In the middle of the night, they raided the camp and detained all the patients and UNODC staff. One Wa member of the Project immediately fled the Wa Region into an adjacent government-controlled area. The battalion commander was executed. The UNODC staff were taken at gunpoint to a hotel where they were detained until other staff could get them released. This brought to an end virtually all community based work in all sectors. Even though the villagers wanted the Project to work there, no subsequent activities by an international agency has yet been implemented in Hah Dah.

This was the beginning of a learning process that carried on through (not always in a linear or upward pattern) for the three phases of Project implementation. Following this difficult start, for the rest of Phase I, which lasted until 2002, the Project carried out mostly infrastructure work in order to build trust among the Wa leaders so as to facilitate later community-level activities which the Project still planned.

In response to requests from the Wa Authority, the Project Area was increased to cover the whole of Mong Pawk District, comprising over 29,000 people in 234 villages including Mong Kar District with the largest flatland area in the Wa Region.

Because there was so much about the Mong Pawk area for UNDCP to learn, the Project carried out considerable amounts of data collection, much more than called for in the Project Document, a process started in 1999. Besides a baseline socio-economic survey, the Project hired a Finnish company, Finnmap, to carry out aerial surveying and mapping. One of the benefits gained from China being a signatory to the Project was that Beijing gave permission for slight overflights into China so that the entire Wa Region could be mapped properly. The Project also began

hiring a multi-ethnic team comprising some Wa from the local area as well as Akha, Lahu, Shan/Tai, Tai Loi, Chinese and ethnic Myanmar to work along with the international staff.

Collecting data was difficult. Carrying out surveys was slow because measurements were not standardized. People in the area measured rice by a unit known as a pong that weighs about ten kilograms. Pong, however are bamboo baskets, but they vary from village to village<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, relationships between local people differed. The Wa people (who of course were not much found in Mong Pawk) are very locally-oriented, and not trusting of people from other areas speaking variant dialects. Partly this comes from a history of Wa living in very small groups sometimes in conflict with one another. Also, and this is true for all the ethnic groups in the Wa Region, they were worried about tax obligations they had for the Wa Authority and do not want to admit to high production.

Such impediments soon made Project leaders realize that accomplishing results in the Wa Region took much more time and human resources than elsewhere. With the Project Area so large and many villages not reachable by road, as well as the diversity of needs and the bureaucratic and political sensitivities, the Project was unable to achieve what it should have.

To a certain degree, misunderstandings between the Wa and the Project were overcome by the first Project Manager agreeing to a major infrastructure project. The Wa Authority had hired a Chinese contractor to build the road from Mong Hpen to Mong Pawk in 1997-1998. The Wa had asked the Project for the money because this was listed in the Project Document. However, UN regulations prevented the Project to pay for it since the work was finished. However, when the Manager paid for the electrification of Mong Pawk at a cost of \$600,000, the Wa were delighted but UNDCP headquarters was so upset that he lost his job. But to this day, at the bridge entering Pang Kham from China there is a large billboard showing that Manager's picture.

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<sup>1</sup>To address this, the Project, when doing Food for Work activities, villagers could only borrow and repay rice in the same size pong. Cooperative work with the World Food Programme also followed this principle. In 2007, discussions were beginning on creating a standardized pong but this has not yet been established yet.

After three years and the end of Phase I, the Wa and UNDCP had learned what the other wanted and more about what each could do - in both cases less than desired. The Project had accumulated a considerable amount of information on the Mong Pawk area (more than had ever been gathered before) and had begun activities. The focus was on how Wa farmers could make a living after the opium ban which was still scheduled for 2005. However, local Wa had made it clear that they strongly opposed community-based activities all the while themselves not being able (at least in the eyes of UNDCP staff) to provide for them while asking for inputs that UNDCP either could not provide or did not think were productive.

Community work was able to resume in Phase II in 2002 but at a slow pace, monitored closely by Wa leaders, especially at the local level. Many leaders still were hoping that UNDCP would follow the development approach they knew from Communist Party work in China. The Wa leaders still insisted on coordinating all community-level interventions because they feared that the involvement of others threatened their leadership.

At the same time UNDCP also faced another difficulty regarding information and isolation of the Wa Region, namely too little news about the Project reaching the outside world. This isolation, political and physical, obscured conditions in the Wa Region which were then colored by old stereotypes, such as the Wa having been wild headhunters. They were also colored by images of UNDCP waging a war on drugs in the Wa hinterlands similar to those imagined by many in other parts of the world. To overcome this, the UNDCP Country Office promoted visits to the Project Area by diplomats and journalists both to help raise funds and to promote a better understanding of the area.

One example of inaccurate reports about the Project was about the promotion of tea in Mong Pawk starting in 2002. Land was developed, a Chinese tea expert hired, and villagers encouraged to grow tea, but not as a cash crop. Not everything went as planned. As reported on the Shanland.org website<sup>1</sup>, the farmers showed too little interest and the operation failed at great expense.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.shanland.org>

However, this report was premature. One farmer, a Kachin from Pang Lim village did profit from the scheme. In 2006-2007 he earned over 1,500 yuan from tea.

Beyond that, and in a process going into Phase III, the Project promoted tea in another way. Some Lahu villages in Mong Pawk had started their own tea project at a place called Kekala. UNODC provided technical assistance enabling the farmers to increase production, bring in more growers, expand cultivation, and then market the tea more profitably. The initial target market was Mong Pawk so that the local people would not have to buy imported tea from China. As they progressed, other farmers joined. By 2007, several hundred households from a few dozen villages were involved in what seemed to be a growing enterprise. However, this was never mentioned on Shanland.org or elsewhere.

AD takes time and takes learning. In this case the efforts to promote tea turned out to be promising. However, most of the outside world knew only about the initial efforts which were largely unsuccessful. Only after villagers themselves initiated their own process, which UNDCP-UNODC then supported, did it show promise, and that was after five years. But as noted above, the way tea promotion in the Wa Region was reported, UNODC's efforts were incorrectly portrayed as a failure.

After a couple of years of such visits with reports in the press disappointing the Myanmar Government, a ban was put to journalists visiting the Wa Region. Although some items were sensationalistic and most focused on political issues, some information on the work of UNDCP was released and may have positively impressed some observers, including a few donors.

In any case, relations between the Wa and the Project were improving. One place this was manifested was in Mong Kar, the largest valley in the Wa Region, located south of Mong Pawk. After the Mong Kar Valley was added to the Project Area, Wa leaders surveyed and designed a road there with help from the Project. The Wa Project took over the Mong Kar irrigation scheme from private companies. Funding was obtained. The main canal, along with laterals were built. The system became operational in 2003, irrigating 400 hectares of newly developed paddy as well as areas

which could be cultivated twice a year instead of only once as before. Villagers contributed labor in exchange for food rations in a Food for Work scheme.

After the work was completed, the Wa Authority resettled people in the valley to places where it previously had not been possible to grow rice. Based on a UNDCP cadastral map using GIS for the newly-developed paddies, the Wa Authority granted usufruct rights to 3,200 persons (about 600 households). Of these were 2,000 persons moved into the area from the Northern Wa Region, each adult being allocated 1½ mu<sup>1</sup>.

The Project tried to ensure that the people moving into the valley were needy. However, data collection problems, and clashing with the vested interests of the Wa, meant this was not always possible. Another obstacle was that when the Wa Authority relocated people to the Mong Kar Valley they did not always give the settlers sufficient inputs to survive for a growing season. Thus many had to borrow rice from local merchants for months until their rice crop came in. As for maintaining the system, the Wa Authority seems to be able to do the job. After heavy rainfall in September 2006 led to a landslide that clogged the canal leading from the dam, the Mong Pawk District Chief asked the Japanese Ambassador, who was visiting Mong Pawk several weeks later, for about \$50,000 to fix the canal<sup>2</sup>. The Ambassador, however, said his Government had no money for such repairs. Within two months, the local Wa Authority had managed to clear the landslide and make repairs, that, while perhaps not up to international standards, nevertheless allowed the irrigation scheme to operate. The Mong Kar project, thus, was a learning experience for UNODC regarding activities that were, on the whole, successful but not always as beneficial as possible to the individual families relocated.

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1 Mu is a Chinese measure equal to 15 hectares, and not to be confused with a Shan measure of weight equaling 2.35 grams and pronounced almost the same.

2 He knew that the Japanese Government funded the Trust Fund for Human Security which had provided the money for the Mong Kar project.

### *Kokang and Wa Initiative (KOWI): AD Mainstreaming and Partnership*

In 2003, even before the Mong Kar scheme was operational but with the opium ban of 2005 growing near, UNODC recognized that the needs of the region were greater than for what UNODC could provide. The ban would affect the whole region, especially the north where most of the poppy was grown but where no AD work had been conducted by UNDCP (or any other international agency).

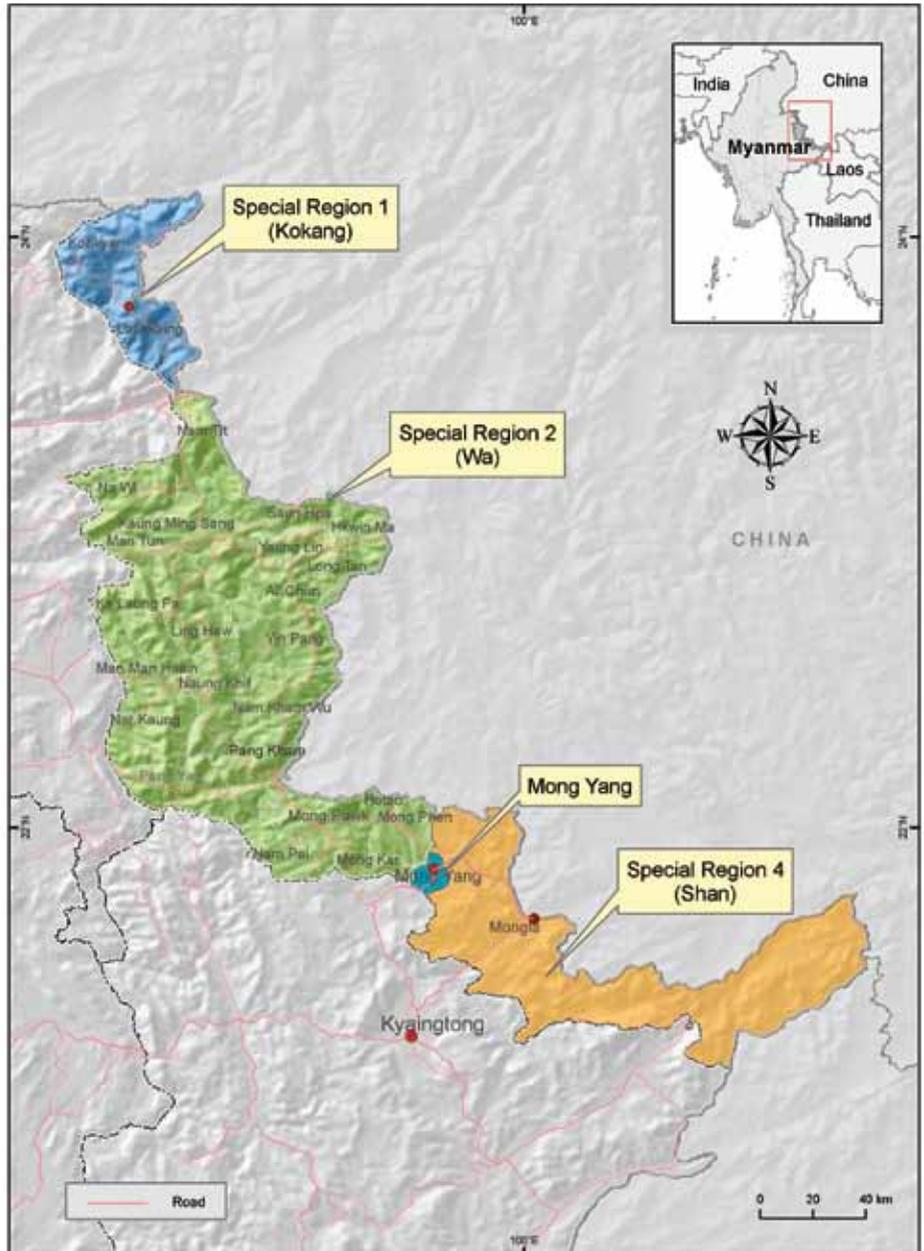
UNDCP was also worried that the problems arising in Kokang after opium was banned would also occur in the Wa Region. Kokang leaders, the Myanmar Government, and the Japanese Government had in 1998 devised a project to provide cash income for farmers to replace opium poppy.

The situation in Kokang differed from the Wa Region because the residents were mostly descendants of Chinese refugees dating back to Ming Dynasty times. Kokang was one place where villagers who grew opium made more money than those who did not. After well over a century of poppy cultivation in Kokang, 95 per cent of the population was making a living from opium sales. They had few local industries, there was poor forest cover, and the villagers lacked livelihood skills.

Through the intervention of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Buckwheat Cultivation Project was started, the purpose of which was to grow buckwheat and sell it to buyers in Japan for making the popular soba noodles. Buckwheat was grown in several areas of Northern Shan State, including Kokang. By 2002, 7.6 square kilometers were being cultivated, producing buckwheat of quality satisfactory for the Japanese market. However, heat damage in the post-harvest phase and the long shipping route to Japan reduced quality and the crop could not be sold.

When the opium ban was enforced, in that same year, the farmers had almost no alternatives. Thousands moved to areas such as in the Northern Wa, where opium poppy was still cultivated. Other ex-growers reduced expenses such as by taking their children out of school and not visiting clinics or hospitals. Most began consuming less desirable food or smaller amounts of food.

### Action-area



Notes: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement of acceptance by the United Nations.

To avoid a repetition of such a situation in the Wa Region by learning from Kokang and assessing conditions in both the Wa Region and Kokang, UNDCP and JICA then organized a multi-agency assessment mission in March and April 2003. Besides UNODC and JICA staff, mission members included representatives of the Japanese Embassy, FAO, UNDP, WHO, an INGO, CCDAC, Military Intelligence, and NaTaLa, as well as Wa and Kokang officials. Out of this exercise, the Kokang and Wa Initiative (KOWI) was established as a forum to address the problems in an organized way over the long-term, and it was this that defined the focus of Phase III.

Based on the conclusion of the mission report, KOWI was established to find cooperative ways to deal with development issues as well as to coordinate various bureaucratic tasks. Within the first year, two international NGOs, Malteser International of Germany and Aide Médicale Internationale of France started working in the Wa Region with a focus on health issues. UNODC assumed the coordinating role of KOWI both in Yangon as well as in the Wa Region. To do this more effectively, and to better coordinate work with Wa senior officials, UNODC opened an office in Pang Kham.

At about this time, the United Nations World Food Programme started work through an Emergency Operation that was extended to a second year, and then expanded into what WFP called a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation that is scheduled to end in 2010. Other organizations, such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, CARE International, and Terre des Hommes came to work in the Wa Region. By and large, these agencies followed the same approach as was initiated by UNODC and its predecessors. Inputs were aimed at helping villagers support themselves through increasing their agricultural output. Food for Work was an important tool for providing assistance in a cost effective way. WFP mostly worked with partner agencies, such as UNODC and INGOs, who supervised the actual work but also directly implemented work as well. The villagers played an important role in deciding on the reliability of water supplies from certain sources, the best routes for feeder roads, and other technical information.

UNODC itself however, had by this time recognized that it had to take stronger action to safeguard the chances of the villagers enjoying sustainable livelihoods.

The ban was announced officially in February 2005, after the end of the harvest of the previous poppy crop. A second Wa ceremony was held on International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, 26 June, 2005. The top-down system of the Wa Authority saw to that with considerable effectiveness—estimated by Wa leaders at 99 per cent. After the growing season had started in September-October, they caught 2-3 offenders, fined and incarcerated them. None of the UNODC staff of over 100 in 2005 reported seeing any poppy being grown. Both Chinese and American officials indicated they were satisfied with the effectiveness of the ban. In the words of one DEA official in 2006, “At the very least, it [the poppy] is way down.”

However, at that time, all the international staff of UN and NGO agencies had been evacuated by the Myanmar Government in late-January. Apparently this resulted from the Government’s worries about a violent aftermath of indictments by the Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York and the New York Field Division of the DEA in January 2005 against eight Wa leaders. According to U.S. officials in Myanmar, after the indictments were made, the Wa made death threats against the three DEA agents in Myanmar—and this may well have been the reason for the evacuation. These threats also seem to have been why the Narcotic Affairs Unit of the United States State Department, the main donor for the Wa Project, immediately cut off funding to the Wa Project, leaving it with few funds to implement work.

This raised doubts among Wa leaders over whether the international agencies could provide sufficient support. However, UNODC was joined by both the Myanmar and the Chinese Government in efforts to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Through NaTaLa, the Myanmar Government provided rice and other inputs. The Wa Authority discontinued its rice tax but lacked the resources to do much else. The Chinese Government provided a total of 10,000 tons of rice to border areas including Kokang, the Wa Region, and Special Region 4, of which half was allocated to the Wa

helping to ease rice shortages. However, assistance tied to development initiatives by which the people can support themselves is what was needed in the long run.

Partly because Wa leaders felt that UNODC and the other KOWI agencies were not providing assistance in the amounts promised, or because of a lack of the chance to make a profit from such ventures, they began supporting the expansion of rubber cultivation. As the price of oil rose and as the Chinese economy boomed, a large market for rubber developed in China.

The cultivation of certain varieties of rubber, as pioneered in Xishuang Banna since the 1950s, was well-suited for the Wa Region despite its poor soils. At elevations below 1,000 meters, rubber produced viable yields that resulted in high profit margins. With paved roads leading from Pang Kham and other Wa towns to China, transporting the rubber to markets there was easy and ways were found to overcome red tape and other restrictions on border trade.

Wa leaders saw this as a legitimate way to make money. Making deals with Chinese investors that were estimated in 2007 to cover 500 square kilometers, rubber plantations spread throughout the region and sometimes impinged on land used for farming, particularly shifting cultivation. There were cases where leaders simply used their authority to acquire the land, most of which could have been used for farming food crops. The only land spared was paddy land in the valleys<sup>1</sup>.

Not only does the recent and rapid increase in rubber cultivation in the Wa Region threaten agricultural development, but it also threatens Wa farmers (along with Chinese immigrants) who are hired to work in the plantations. They are in danger of losing traditional skills and indigenous knowledge which will leave them less well equipped to face future challenges: this would undermine much of UNODC's (and KOWI's) efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> In one case in early-2006, UNODC had made an agreement with the central Wa Authority that a certain sloping area in Ling Haw Township, to the north of Pang Kham, be converted to rice terraces. However, while senior UNODC officials were on leave, an influential family gained possession of the land for the purpose of rubber cultivation.

To prevent this from happening, UNODC reworked its AD approach in view of the threats posed to the Wa farmers. UNODC decided (since it realized that the first priority of the people was to produce more food and that cash was a lower priority) it had to emphasize increased food production. Seeing that paddy was the most secure form of landholding, and also a means to obtain high rice yields, developing rice terraces became one of the most favored approaches. A variety of open-pollinating rice<sup>1</sup> known as “China 203” which provided yields of 2.5-3.0 tons per hectare, or approximately twice that of most traditional varieties, was found to grow well in actual village conditions. This proved a viable means for improving food security, creating conditions that could be sustained by villagers, and at the same time, resist the tendency of some leaders to take advantage of their people. Although some irrigation schemes were difficult to build in the hilly terrain in order to utilize the scarce water sources, the approach was sound<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the approach was acceptable to both the Wa Authority and the Myanmar Government. When NGOs came to the Region, both German Agro-Action and Malteser International (in 2006 when irrigation projects were in its mandate) employed much the same approach as pioneered by the UNODC.

Similarly, When the Nam Du Canal and irrigation scheme in Hotao, Mong Pawk District, was being designed, a key component was wealth ranking so that the Project could ensure that the poorest farmers would get the new land being developed. When local officials stalled so long on approving this component, the Project halted work on the canal. Eventually, a year later, and following prodding from Pang Kham, the local officials agreed to the wealth ranking. In the end most of the land was distributed equitably. Just before the dedication of the project in 2006, when the handover was all but finalized, and with international diplomats already traveling to attend the opening ceremony, the local Wa leader announced that one part of the canal bank had collapsed and that UNODC’s workmanship was substandard. At the same meeting, a member of the Wa Central Authority was present who stated that this project had

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1 This means that the rice was not hybrid and could be multiplied by random fertilization so that the farmers did not need to buy new seed each year.

2 Some schemes were up to 7-8 kilometers in length and traversed terrain with considerable fluctuations in elevation.

already been handed over to the Wa and it was their responsibility to fix it. He went on to say that if the central Wa Authority was not prepared to purchase the cement and other supplies needed for the repairs, he would do so himself. Even then, the farmers who received the new land faced problems of indebtedness (as in Mong Kar) because when they started using the new land they lacked the capital to buy seed, and they were being victimized by local financiers. This points to the need for long time commitment for AD work, especially in areas like the Wa Region where local leadership is weak.

Regarding drug treatment, UNODC made use of a similarly adaptive approach. The Wa Authority had, since before the Hah Dah incident favored institution-based treatment. When the Project began treatment work in Mong Pawk's local hospital, the relapse rate remained at 43 per cent, which although lower than many other places in the world, was unacceptably high. In order to respond to the needs of the people, the new



Akher villager in Food for Work Programme, Nam Du Canal, Wa Region, Myanmar

Project physician, Dr. Sai Seng Tip of Kengtung adopted a new approach<sup>1</sup>. He made an agreement with the Wa Authority to build treatment centers near towns, but in rural areas. The buildings were constructed mainly out of bamboo with local help. He introduced the teaching of vocational skills, such as carpentry, as well as providing aftercare by having staff visit patients in their homes and helping the family provide for them financially and emotionally. The result was that (also because of the opium ban and the rapid increase in the opium price) relapse fell to under 5 per cent, so low that he said even his friends did not believe him. What they did not realize was that when ex-users have new livelihood skills, they take pride in their ability to make a living and are much more resistant to drug use. With family support (and a strong anti-opiate culture in place) relapse was almost eliminated. The Wa people recognized the value of this treatment, witnessed by the shortage of places when new treatment sessions began. The Wa Authority and the Government both accepted this approach since it built skills and enhanced self-reliance.

Towards the end of the UNODC Wa Project, when the KOWI approach was being organized, it carried out much work as a partner agency of WFP, with most activities done as Food for Work initiatives. Under the approach outlined above, the Project became increasingly effective, as shown by the results of work in September 2007—all the more impressive since it was done in the rainy season when many roads were difficult to traverse.

<b>ONE MONTH AND ONE YEAR OF UNODC WORK IN THE WA REGION</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>September 2007</b>	<b>January-December 2007</b>
<b>Irrigation Canals</b>	<b>45 km.</b>	<b>200 km.</b>
<b>Rice Fields Developed</b>	<b>60 ha.</b>	<b>260 ha.</b>
<b>Feeder Roads</b>	<b>30 km.</b>	<b>500 km.</b>
<b>Fish Ponds</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>606</b>
<b>Villagers Trained</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>1850</b>

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Dr. Sai Seng Tip, Former UNODC Wa Project medical doctor from Kengtung, 2005-2007. Several times, 2006-2007.

Little word of these accomplishments reached the outside world. The main outlet for the work done was in official reports by UNODC and WFP. Even at this late date, UNODC was not taking steps to publicize its work so that the positive steps it had taken could be appreciated. Thus it was that The Australian ran a story in October 2007, just days after the above accomplishments were completed, about the “highly dubious UN-backed drug eradication program.”<sup>1</sup>

After a sense of accomplishments over a lengthy time scale the UNODC (although in this particular article, WFP was featured) was still being blamed for the Wa’s own decision to ban opium. Quoted in the article is a representative of the Shan Herald Agency for News who commented that the people “were starving after being forced to give up growing opium poppies under a 2005 UN-supported program”. As noted above, UNODC lacked the capacity to have convinced Wa leaders to abandon poppy cultivation. Rather it was the Wa themselves (with Chinese encouragement) that led them to their decision. What is dubious is whether the Wa will have the wherewithal to sustain the gains made and adopt policies promoted by UNODC and its KOWI partners to provide more beneficial assistance for their people.

Among the foremost of their challenges will be addressing their educational policy. Despite the efforts of Education Chairman, Yan Sheng Ping and his associates, an enormous amount of work will have to be done to provide a useful educational system. To outline the main obstacles, the Wa Region recognizes four languages: Wa, Chinese, Myanmar, and English. The “Wa language” is made up of dozens of dialects, many mutually unintelligible. The Wa Authority has never made any significant effort (except in the army where there was a desire for commands to be understood by all) for any one dialect to become pre-eminent. Although there is an alphabet there are very few books, far too few for a useful curriculum. As for Chinese, the central government opposes using this language as a medium of instruction. At the same time, many people in the Wa oppose the use of the Myanmar language. And as for English, there are no instructors in the Region. A UNICEF official visiting the region referred the educational situation as akin to “the Twilight Zone”, but this

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<sup>1</sup> Dodd, Mark. 2007. “Aid for Burmese ‘benefits regime’”. The Australian. 26 January.

did not stop the organization from providing humanitarian support in the form of educational materials and schoolhouse repairs. UNODC's efforts to build schools, subsidize teachers' salaries, and provide other inputs were not sustainable even though appreciated both by the Government and by the Wa Authority. These should be seen as humanitarian rather than developmental efforts.

In the end, UNODC organized an approach that responded to the needs of the people that was also acceptable to the Wa Authority and to the Myanmar Government. Possible excesses of irresponsible local Wa leaders were reduced while providing verifiable increases of food production on the poor soils and steep slopes of the Region. Other agencies were brought into the Wa Region to take over the work so that by 2007 more money and more developmental assistance was being provided than ever before. This served also to encourage the Chinese Government to provide its assistance. Although word of these accomplishments has barely escaped the Wa Region, there is an increasing awareness that positive results have been achieved in the Wa Region as can be measured by a steady stream of diplomats and development aid agency representatives to the Wa Region in recent years.

Mainstreaming in the Wa Project has reached a crescendo. The Myanmar Government has integrated AD into its national planning. The Wa Authority, after several years of learning about participatory development, has begun to accept the approach, and allow its people to make their own contributions to the course of development in the Wa Region. Problems with special interest groups continue to impede the work (as they do in other areas, such as the GTZ project in Muong Sing), but enough work could be done with partners so that a humanitarian disaster is not only avoided but a constructive approach is formulated that has a good chance of leading to sustainable livelihoods for the greater part of the rural population.

This differed from the initial approach in Kokang, where the entire focus of the initial development effort was focused on buckwheat. This did not live up to expectations, principally due to a top-down imposition of a rigid agenda without sufficient risk assessment identification of

alternatives, or involvement of the local people. Then with the ex-growers having fewer resources and skills on which to rely, serious problems for the people arose after the ban in Kokang in 2002. The effects of this are still being addressed, now by the combined effort of JICA, WFP, and several INGOs as well as local groups.

The experience in the Wa Region shows also that with sufficient preparation, AD can be carried out in areas that had recently been conflict zones or in areas where transnational criminal groups remain active, such as is common where poppy cultivation has just been eliminated. This was the case in the 1980s with the Doi-Yao Pha Mon Project in Thailand and the Palaveck Project in Laos, and it remains the case in areas of northern Laos where groups promoting the cultivation of poppy continue to have influence.

UNODC, through careful collaboration with all stakeholders and the rapid delivery of useful inputs in cooperation with the local people, showed it could operate productively under conditions that might well have precluded the participation of other agencies. Then, once the entry of development work had been consolidated convincingly, UNODC was able to facilitate the entry of more conventional development partners, such as WFP or FAO and INGOs.





## Future Directions for AD

### *Establishing a Shared Vision*

**W**hen AD work first began in Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, poppy growers followed lifestyles divergent in many ways from the rest of the people. Besides speaking different languages, relying on radically different agriculture practices, and adhering to administrative systems quite unlike each other, the growers were living in areas controlled by rebel groups actively fighting their governments.

One might suspect that when these governments made the decision to ban opium poppy cultivation they would have come into direct conflict with the growers. Even though most farmers in fact earned less money from growing opium, their leaders and those organizing the opium trade profited from poppy cultivation. Those individuals could well be expected to oppose government efforts to eliminate poppy cultivation. They would have had their own interests, their own livelihoods, and their future plans to consider and would certainly not have wanted to let them be compromised by anti-poppy efforts. However, a different set of events unfolded. Agreement was reached in various ways with government leaders and heads of minority groups that poppy cultivation should be brought to an end. Rulers as diverse as Field Marshal Sarit Tanarat, in Thailand, and Bao Yu Xiang, chairman of the Wa Authority in Myanmar,

agreed that the practice was uncivilized, out of date, and interfered with the development of their constituencies.

In the early 1990s, information was already being received that heads of opium trading groups, such as Khun Sa in Myanmar, were turning to amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) as a new drug-related enterprise. Partly this was because ATS was chemical-based, did not rely on a cultivated crop and could thus be manufactured out of sight. Furthermore, since ATS has a much wider potential market than opium, the chance for bigger profits was also attractive to these drug cartels.

The fact that eliminating opium was in some way connected to the growth in popularity of amphetamines is not an indictment of AD or the efforts to control poppy. Rather it is a symptom of the growing strength of the criminal culture that had emerged during the time when poppy cultivation was legally possible for some but not for others. In this way, the criminal element of drug production was able to expand to the point where it could take advantage of new opportunities even while control measures on poppy cultivation were being implemented.

This has led to security becoming an increasing issue for AD projects. There have been several cases in recent years of staff members in projects both the Lao PDR and in Myanmar being questioned, apparently by persons connected with drug cartels, about their actual intentions. This will continue to be a concern in AD work in the Mekong region and elsewhere.

As for AD work in the three countries, while the political will to eliminate poppy growing materialized, in all cases the governments lacked the financial, technical, and human resources to do the job in ways that would provide new and appropriate livelihoods for the ex-growers. This was the case with Thailand in the 1970s as well as more recently in the Lao PDR and Myanmar.

The first agency to work with all three governments was UNFDAC (later UNDCP and UNODC). Although some other agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or World Food Programme (WFP), had carried out some development-related activities

in or around the poppy-growing areas, these were small, short-term, or left incomplete.

Since the start of UNFDAC's work in 1971, the agency has been able to gain cooperation from all the stakeholders, even in ex-conflict zones. By the 1970s, all the governments had reached the conclusion that uncontrolled opium cultivation interfered with national development. Smaller groups, even those who had been in rebellion against the state, also agreed that opium cultivation should be halted. In 1990, even before UNDCP had begun working in the Wa Region, the Wa leaders had proclaimed that they wanted to ban the substance after a certain amount of development occurred so that the growers would not face serious problems in making a living. In the Lao PDR, other priorities delayed the implementation of measures addressing poppy cultivation for another decade until the turn of the century.

The control of opium elimination has evoked a rarely displayed unity between the UN, national governments, and ethnic minority groups. The use of opium has been almost universally recognized as having so many negative features that all those involved in rural development in the Mekong region agree that opium replacement is a priority.

This shared vision is as rare as it remains incomplete. While much has been learned about how to carry out AD, there are many contending ideas on how it should best be done. When AD was first being implemented in Thailand, UNFDAC cooperated with the Royal Project (see Part 2, Thailand, in this report) in following the concept of crop substitution. There were others, though, such as the Royal Forest Department, that advocated resettlement as the best way to deal with the growers. In Laos, questions arose between UNDCP and the Lao Government over how quickly opium elimination should be implemented. In Myanmar, UNDCP/UNODC and the Government took some time to work out a satisfactory method of implementation that allowed for the appropriate relationship with the Wa Authority to be established.

This also highlights the fact that the learning process is on-going. In the early years, UNFDAC was learning how to replace opium. Various techniques were devised and adapted until a viable, flexible approach

was put together. Cooperation with the governments and also with the cultivators increased. After time, most stakeholders generally accepted the approaches being presented, including community-based, participatory work that leaders in all three countries initially doubted would be effective. Even within Thailand's Royal Forest Department which has had a number of disagreements with poppy growers and ex-growers, the Community Forestry Unit (with direct links to UNFDAC's projects in the 1980s) has grown more vibrant and more influential as a result of its contact with AD. Similarly, very rural groups, such as the Wa Authority, who initially actively opposed such local initiatives, later came to tolerate participatory approaches if not actually support them.

Apparently it still has not been fully considered since in November of 2008 I heard a prominent Australian scholar who had worked as a consultant for GTZ explain that the people of Muang Sing had seized upon the idea of developing paddy fields along with small irrigation schemes. When I explained that UNODC had done this in the Wa Project several years earlier (and other UNFDAC/UNDCP projects 10-20 years before that in Laos and Thailand) he was surprised.

Similarly, while this report was being prepared in Vientiane, two lavishly-prepared publications on poverty in Laos were published: *The Geography of Poverty and Inequality in the Lao PDR*<sup>1</sup>; and the *Socio-economic Atlas of the Lao PDR. An analysis based on the 2005 Population and Housing Census*<sup>2</sup>. Although the Epprecht report stated that poverty is linked with non-economic factors such as "vulnerability to various kinds of shock, the lack of opportunities for participating in decision-making, and the lack of access to information," and although such diverse factors as cooking by charcoal and having a zinc roof are investigated, opium - a potential contributing factor to poverty in the region - is not considered. The word, 'opium,' does not appear even once in either publication.

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1 Epprecht, Michael, et al. 2008. *The Geography of Poverty and Inequality in the Lao PDR*. Berne: Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South.

2 Messerli, Peter, et al. 2008. *The Geography of Poverty and Inequality in the Lao PDR Socio-economic Atlas of the Lao PDR. An analysis based on the 2005 Population and Housing Census*. Vientiane: Ministry of Planning and Investment Department of Statistics.

## *Learning Environments and an Anti-Drug Culture*

UNODC as a whole needs to communicate the fact that its AD work has largely proceeded as a learning process. Project workers have gone into activities with a willingness to learn from the villagers in order to enact the most useful interventions. The fact that UNODC has met with the success it has is because it blends the knowledge of its staff and the related government officials together with what the villagers tell them. If UNODC wants to maximize its impact, it certainly should make its approach better known to the outside world.

This will serve to overcome the misconception that UNODC is only a control agency that “abuses” people. The organization will be far better served by explaining that its AD projects serve the needs of vulnerable peoples in fragile environments where all stakeholders appreciate the project objectives.

One starting point is that reducing opium poppy cultivation does not impinge on farmers’ indigenous cultures. Besides many villages having only started growing poppy commercially in the past few decades (and only very few even a century ago), poppy growing usually makes the cultivators poorer with a less diverse economy and less healthy. UNODC should point out that its AD projects positively address problems such as:

- Poverty; arising from the addiction of many cultivators, usually adult males. By taking opium, they lose the energy to work hard which thus leaves heavy tasks to women and children which then impoverishes the entire household.
- Illness; despite opium’s medical benefits. Addiction weakens people, productivity declines, and fewer services, such as clean water supplies, are in growing villages thus leading to diseases such as diarrhea.
- Hunger; is found in growing areas. When people depend on opium sales for money to buy food, they often disregard food production.
- Incompetence; is common where poppy has been grown and farmers abandon traditional skills to cultivate poppy. Because these areas are remote or sometimes in conflict zones, people have little new information, formal education, or skills training.

- Apathy; includes farmers under the control of leaders controlling the opium trade. These top-down leaders are domineering, leaving little room for local initiatives, group formation, and decision-making.

### *The First Agency*

Since UNFDAC started work in Thailand in 1971, the organization has been quick to identify issues that need to be addressed. From the Crop Replacement and Community Development Programme, UNFDAC expanded operations throughout the hills of the north before other UN or bilateral agencies became involved. In the Lao PDR, it was among the first to start work in various remote areas such as the Palaveck Area in Muang Hom District, north-east of the capital Vientiane. Although UNDP had implemented two small projects in that district, they were for infrastructure development, such as building a 55 kilometer dry season track from the district to Palaveck. However, it was UNFDAC that pioneered work in the area itself with an integrated development program including health, agriculture, infrastructure, and other sectors. Similarly, after a UNDCP Regional project started work in Special Region 4 in Shan State in 1992, contacts were forged by which the agency could start the first international project in the Wa Region, the single largest opium growing region in Myanmar at the time. For seven years, it was the only agency working the Wa Region until 2005 when, through its own negotiations with the government, two European NGOs began working there as well.

Because this agency works in opium growing areas and because opium growing areas are often found in areas beyond the reach of central government control, this has placed UNFDAC, UNDCP, and UNODC in conflict zones in all three countries. In this way, this organization has been the first to recognize problems, the first to develop responses, and first able to manage implementation.

### *Government Ownership of AD*

In all the three countries, the governments have accepted the idea of rural development in the hills with former (and sometimes current) poppy growers. At the start of the AD process in 1971, there were no such plans and no such approach. Although differing in terms of implementation

and degree of local participation, all three countries have accepted the AD approach as promoted and “learned” by UNODC.

Besides the plans and strategies discussed in the chapters on each country, most recently, the Lao Prime Minister mentioned the new Master Plan on 18 November 2008 at the Development Triangle Summit of Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. This is being formulated and elaborated now in a consultative process between the Lao government and UNODC.

As this process moves ahead, there are three issues regarding development in the hills of these countries where poppy was grown. These include land use and relocation, rubber (and sugar cane, for example in Phongsaly Province, Lao PDR), and the applicability of revolving funds (including access to credit, training, and to markets).

Land Use has been an issue since before the inception of the first UNFDAC project. Providing for an equitable sharing of land resources is problematic for all concerned. It depends on diverse factors such as the original environment and how it may have been degraded, agricultural practices, access to roads and other infrastructure, legal issues, and security concerns. Governments in all three countries (the Lao PDR more than the other two) have resettled highland groups to resolve these issues. However, not everyone has been dealt with fairly.

Rubber is being intensively promoted as a cash crop in the northern regions of Laos and Myanmar and, to a lesser degree, in Thailand. To many, rubber seems to have many advantages. There is a steadily growing market in China (although at the end of 2008 the price fell). Rubber grows in most areas where poppy used to grow (but not over 1,000 meters in elevation). The skills needed to grow rubber are not complicated and can be learned easily. Little special handling and no refrigeration is required. The rubber can be transported easily in most places where it is being promoted on the developing road network to the markets in China. The potential income is higher than for almost all other alternative crops.

However, there are risks. Although in China there have been very successful rubber schemes, such as among the Khmu in Mong La in Xishuangbanna who have grown it for years and are probably the richest of their ethnic group in the Mekong Region, the private enterprises promoting its cultivation elsewhere are not always fair in their dealings with local people or even provincial governments. Also while the soil under rubber cultivation is not particularly damaged, biodiversity will be reduced. Traditional skills of the growers could be lost if they abandon their former crops. There is a delay of seven years before the rubber trees yield a marketable amount of latex. If the villagers end up monocropping rubber, they will be subject to fluctuations in prices. Many of these risks apply also to sugar cane cultivation.

### *Revolving Funds*

Revolving funds and small credit schemes have been introduced in AD projects in all three countries for at least two decades. These schemes have gained considerable popularity since Bangladeshi economist Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank he created won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. There is no doubt that it has provided much assistance to individuals, cooperatives, and other small groups. There is also no doubt that making such schemes work in ways that allow for products to be marketed at a profit is not easy. Groups have to be trained in financial management and bookkeeping. There must be access to markets where people want to purchase what is produced. Sometimes, as in the case of handicrafts, the items must be produced to meet special needs of the market and this may vary over time and from place to place. In some areas, particularly the interior areas of Phongsaly and the Wa Region which are quite remote from the outside world, such schemes may not be applicable.

### *Dealing with Crime and Addiction*

By the very nature of commercial opium poppy cultivation, the growers inevitably will come into contact with criminal elements and will also be at risk of addiction. This applies also to the people who live along trafficking routes.

AD projects in these areas have to take this into consideration. The projects and those implementing them, including the government counterparts, will need to be sure that the villagers are able to carry out the proposed interventions without being pressured by those who would want them to continue poppy cultivation.

Furthermore, a strong demand reduction component will have to be used in all cases because there is a good chance that the drug cartels will encourage heroin or amphetamine use. The latter are a large problem because in the ex-growing areas which are located near ATS labs, the amphetamine pills can be produced and sold at a very low price. Whereas heroin usually ends up being injected, ATS can be taken much more easily and safely in pill form.

To keep this new addiction from expanding beyond the control of the authorities, AD projects and local governments should provide for a comprehensive drug prevention program that includes education on the drugs of risk. This education should be provided in user-friendly ways that speak to the local people in languages they understand with appropriate audio-visual materials.

Also, it will be productive to start work in villages or communities with strong leaders. While sometimes useful, it is not necessary that this strong leader be the official village headman. This person could be a traditional religious chief or have gained authority in some other way. Not only will they be less susceptible to outside pressures, but they will be in a better position to bring about positive change in their areas. Although they may not be in areas where conditions are the worst or the need the greatest, positive change will make progress that will serve as an example to others where the situation is more problematic. For AD to work, personal security for the villagers must be guaranteed for the long-term.

## ***Operational Guidelines and Applications***

### ***Find Ways to Promote Highland Products in an Equitable Way***

The introduction of highland crops, if it is to benefit all concerned, should be done cautiously and in consultation with others who have experience in such ventures already. There is much to be learned still about its benefits and disadvantages. Once the inputs have been provided and production is underway, changing to another crop or land use system would be difficult.

By now commercial investment in the highlands of the region has reached all three countries. In the 1980s, one of the first was the Nestlé Company in Thailand which purchased and helped market coffee produced in the hills. More recently the Thai conglomerate, Charoenpokphand (CP), has invested in highland development involving ex-poppy growers. In China, a wide range of development initiatives have been started in the Wa Region, Kokang, and other border areas.

Of all of these, the most pervasive has been the investment in and introduction of rubber cultivation. All the governments, at the appropriate level (i.e. national, provincial, state, district), should treat rubber as a possible solution but should do so carefully. They should conduct surveys where rubber is now being cultivated in China and in the neighboring countries, including Vietnam, to see what the arrangements are being made for the cultivation. This survey should collect information on what role the local people have (if any) in the cultivation and how the profits are shared. Also, information on the marketing should be collected so that the profitability of rubber cultivation can be accurately assessed. The long-term impact of introducing mono-cropping on a broad scale and other environmental hazards should also be studied.

At some point a regional conference, including representatives from Yunnan, should be organized to exchange experiences, assess risk, and come up with a common strategy. Rubber cultivation will continue. But there should be ways to adapt it for use by small growers so they can profit, the environment is not damaged, and their traditional way of life can go forward (as it has in Mong La, Xishuangbanna).

Information should also be collected, perhaps in cooperation with UNODC or some other involved agency, on the growing arrangements in places like Mong La where the system has worked well for years and the local people find it acceptable. Information on as many such arrangements as possible should be collected so that there will be a range of possibilities for introduction in the AD work. No one answer will be appropriate for all so having a variety of options will make it easier for the governments and local people to make the right choices.

### ***Promote Marketing with the Private Sector***

In most areas, the AD interventions, especially in Myanmar, so far have managed to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Concerted action, in the Wa Region, by the Myanmar and Chinese governments, UNODC, WFP and NGOs has helped the local people increase their food production so that they are approaching self-sufficiency (as they are in an increasing number of places around the region).

The next priority in such places is finding ways to increase their cash income. Forest produce is one possibility. There is a steady market in China and neighboring countries for these products that include highly prized orchids, oil-yielding species, dyestuffs, and fragrant woods. There is also a market for processed forest produce, such as paper mulberry, that is processed to some degree and in so doing is made more valuable. However, this must be done in ways that do not place too much pressure on the local environment or push valuable forest produce into near-extinction (as was already happening, for example with rattan in Doi Inthanon, Thailand, in the 1920s).

Involving the private sector will facilitate the growth of AD product marketing. From the time of the Thai/UN Highland Agricultural and Marketing Project (HAMP) (1980-1984) and the early years of the Thai-German Programme, which began operations in 1981, private enterprises have been encouraged by AD implementers to cooperate in promoting alternative development products. The private sector, if motivated, will advise on project design, quality control, and technological innovations. The villagers will learn negotiating skills and other matters such as inventory

and accounting. In such an environment, the private sector can shield the villagers from being tricked at the hands of unscrupulous merchants until the villagers are better able to protect themselves.

In Thailand, the Royal Project and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation played this role along with the private sector (and in some cases acted exactly like the private sector). In the Lao PDR and Myanmar, where there are no such organizations, the government and development agencies will have to help the private sector provide support in this way.

NGOs, both local and international can also play a role since they are smaller, can often act more flexibly, and can access resources beyond the reach of the government or UN agencies. The Myanmar Anti-Narcotics Association (MANA) has wide networks with several retired government officials who have technical capacities and long experiences that have proven very useful in drug treatment.

The expanding road network will facilitate the marketing of produce to the ever-growing population. AD projects can support this by building supportive infrastructure, as the United Nations Nonghet AD Project did in Nonghet where it built marketplace structures. They quickly became trading hubs, especially for the very popular asparagus that was introduced into the area a decade earlier. However, the effective marketing of it, which led to increased sales and income for the growers, came only with the completion of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-sponsored upgrading of Highway 7 connecting Xieng Khouang Province, in the Lao PDR with Nghe Anh in Vietnam.

### *Work for a Balanced Gender Orientation*

With all the attention given to gender balance it sometimes seems trite or unnecessary to mention that maintaining gender balance is important. However, it is particularly important in AD, from the beginning—with data collection—to the end, in promoting local businesses and marketing produce. AD tends to be heavily dominated by men. To get a proper understanding, and especially when staff (and also the ranks of the addicts) are always male-dominated, an extra effort must be made to capture the ideas and other contributions of women.

In data collection, women's groups' aspirations for the future of the village usually differ from those of men's groups. In Luang Namtha Province of Laos in 2005, for example, women told UNODC interviewers that they wanted better social services, such as health care and education for their children, while the men said they preferred better infrastructure, such as roads.

The need for balance in training is clear. In 1987, I helped assess activities of the Thai-Norwegian Project in Chiang Mai. At a Karen village we found that many women who were spraying pesticides were getting sick. We then discovered that the male training staff were training the male villagers. However, women were doing the spraying. Somewhere, there was an imperfect transfer of knowledge between men and women. When the project manager told us there were no trained women, we replied that he should create a framework by which women were given the skills to communicate directly to the men and reduce their getting sick.

In many ethnic groups, women contribute more to the household economy than men. In starting self-help groups and revolving-funds and to make sure they operate effectively, women should be involved at the management level. This will enable them to promote better marketing schemes and to make use of connections they already have with buyers outside the village.

### ***Create Understanding***

The main purpose of AD is to work with ex-growers to find acceptable, self-sufficient, and sustainable livelihoods after they have stopped growing opium poppy. This means that from the start, (as the missionary Paul Lewis told the UN three decades ago in Thailand) UNODC or other implementing agencies must work towards an understanding with all the stakeholders, including different levels of government officials, the villagers and their leaders (official and unofficial), and others such as members of the private sector, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and mass organizations.

### ***Be Patient***

Sometimes taking time seems like wasting time to the type-A personalities found in agencies and the government. However, AD projects take time and over-eager staff will have to learn to go slow (most of the time). The Thai-German Programme in Thailand ran for 18 years, which as the former Senior Advisor wrote, allowed for “learning and consolidation of experiences” and a holistic approach focusing on “land use planning, integrated farming system development and watershed protection<sup>1</sup>”. The Thai Royal Project started 39 years ago and is still improving. Learn as you go along.

### ***But Quick Action is Useful Sometimes***

When emergency situations arise, quick action must be taken. When the Wa Authority resettled people in a malarial area and villagers were dying, the Wa Project brought in a doctor to create more suitable conditions, provide pertinent information (many villagers did not know mosquitoes caused malaria) and reduced mortality in a few months.

When the USAID Mae Chaem project was starting in Thailand in 1980, members of the baseline survey team learned that the villagers were tired of answering questionnaires. When His Majesty King Bhumibol heard of this he advised the project to devise some quick to implement activities, such as village clean drinking water schemes, and to carry them out so the villagers would see what the project could do. In such a way, villagers will see results quickly. They will also get a better idea of what the project can do which will lead to better cooperation.

### ***Remember the Community Focus***

Villagers focus on their community. Projects should work at the community level, from drug treatment to agriculture to credit schemes and marketing. Project officials should learn about the life of the people. Many local people only trust their own group, not even those speaking other dialects on the

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<sup>1</sup> Dirksen, Hagen. N.d. “18 years of the Thai-German Highland Development Program—has it been a success story?” Mimeo (ca. 1998.)

next hill. Learn about them. In the Lao PDR, remember that the terms “Lao Loum,” “Lao Theung,” and “Lao Soung” are being superseded by reference to 47 different ethnic groups (plus “other” and “not stated”). Much, such as preventing drug users from relapsing, can be done better and for less money at the village level than in any other way. AD staff should learn about the village and take an interest in local people.

### ***Recommendations on Mainstreaming and Integrating Lessons Learned into AD Work***

Almost always, AD work starts where there is a wide gap between the government officials and the poppy-growers and ex-growers. First, the AD project staff should learn from the people in order to get closer to them so they can function within the mainstream of the country. At the same time, the staff needs to help bridge the gap between government officials and the growers.

### ***Exchange Information***

Every effort should be made to publicize what the project is doing and to explain why AD is productive and helpful to the people. Use a range of media in different languages. A wide audience should learn that helping farmers become more productive and move out of poverty is good for themselves and for the country as a whole. Join networks, make presentations at meetings, and let others in neighboring countries understand what AD is doing. This will go far in overcoming the negative publicity that occurs when UNODC and its partner agencies do not publicize the good things they are doing in the hills.

Information of all kinds should be shared with others in the government, including different agencies and ministries. This will further understanding and make the process of mainstreaming go forward more effectively.

The more that all agencies and high-ranking officials learn about the AD process, the easier it will be to mainstream activities. When there are successes on the ground, higher ranking officials will want to have a

share of the productive work and will seek out ways to align their agency's priorities with what is going on in the AD projects.

### *Use Inter-agency Bodies to Coordinate*

In all three countries the drug control agency is an inter-agency body. NaTaLa also has links with many agencies and ministries due to the nature of its work. Working through such bodies is an important way to mainstream AD work. Each country will have its own way to do this best.

### *Draw up an Indicative Regional AD Plan*

Using the Global Partnership on Alternative Development Project as a coordinating mechanism, a regional plan for AD work should be drawn up and involve a range of stakeholders including UNODC, other UN and bilateral agencies, the governments of the region, NGOs, as well as mass organizations and peoples' groups. This will contribute directly to the establishment of a unified vision on how the common goal of sustained opium poppy cultivation elimination can become a reality.

The Global Partnership can decide how to align this plan with similar efforts by the UNODC Regional Centre, the ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs (ACCORD) mechanism, and ASEAN as well as the bilateral and trilateral arrangements in place throughout the region. Even if it is not possible to fully implement such a plan, the effort, thinking, and cooperation required to draw it up will yield positive benefits in terms of increased mutual understanding and more cooperation. Bringing clearly visible unity to this task will, through its shared wisdom, create positive publicity for AD in the region. This will then bring about its own heightened momentum for more collaborative work with growers and ex-growers in the Mekong Region and beyond.





# Annex

*Livestock in the Hills: Foraging and Grass Strips*  
(with expert input from Trevor Gibson, longtime UNFDAC,  
UNDCP, UNODC agricultural/livestock expert and soil scientist)

### *Livestock in the Hills: Foraging and Grass Strips*

One suggestion made in a 1967 UN survey of opium production in the northern hills was that livestock be released in the ex-poppy fields to graze the forages (similar to practices in Australia and elsewhere outside of Southeast Asia). However, in this region, forages are generally cut and carried to the animals instead of the grazing in fields. To make a long story short, this approach did not work.

Explains Trevor Gibson, “We failed at appropriate community consultation and participation techniques. As scientists, we did not fully appreciate the importance of the social side of extension.” What we had been doing was top-down development rather than bottom-up development.”



Grass Strip Demonstration Plot

The next approach, by an Australian project in the early 1980s was to adopt technology tested by the Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT) in Mindanao in the Philippines. One technique adopted was the introduction of vegetative contour buffer strips in farmers' fields. The farmers were encouraged to divide their fields into horizontal sectors divided by grass strips running along the contour. After a year or two, the crops in the sectors were rotated so as to maintain soil fertility. The grasses were selected for various purposes, such as, in the case of vetiver, for long roots so as to resist erosion, and, in the case of ruzi (*Brachiaria ruziziensis*), because it easily produced seed for propagation elsewhere. Initially some farmers were paid to maintain grass strips. This approach seemed so beneficial that many highland projects in the north of Thailand were making use of it. During the 1980s, most agricultural experts thought that the answer to opium poppy crop replacement had been found.

However, farmers were not convinced. They saw that it was difficult to keep the grass in the strips. One of the most popular introduced grasses was ruzi which is free seeding and creeps along the ground into cultivated areas, where it was difficult to weed out. There were cases of farmers ripping out the grass strips once the subsidies stopped. By the mid-1990s, grass strips had almost all been abandoned.

However, there were productive applications for grass strips where farmers have adopted and maintain them without continuous outside support, such as in the Philippines and in West Timor. Another factor in Thailand was that the farmers were familiar with shifting cultivation, a system by which the land regenerates naturally. Many of them thought that if this was going to happen they did not need grass strips since the land was going to revert to forest anyway. Thus, since the villagers did not see the value of the new system, they did not adopt it. Finally, there were other grasses, such as setaria (*Setaria sphacelata*) which was of the bunch type and did not spread like ruzi.

Based on this experience, in the Wa Project of Myanmar, the staff introduced forage crops, including legumes such as a vetch called *Viscia villosa*, cassia, stylo (CIAT 184) and some others.

This was new technology that required introduction to both the local staff and to the farmers. Once in 2006, Trevor Gibson, on the Wa Project staff noticed that the forage crops next to the pig pen were exceptionally lush. On asking the Project extension worker if he had fed the forage crops to the pigs, he replied "Oh the pigs don't eat that." At which point Gibson ripped off a handful of one of the crops and put it front of the pigs who immediately ate it. Gibson took the opportunity to explain that the banana stalks the farmers customarily fed the pigs only served to fill up their stomachs but were poor in nutrients. From this point on the extension worker was more convincing in his discussions with the farmers in that village and also those nearby. A year later, without help from the project, they were continuing to grow the forage crops and feed them to their pigs. Thus it went, livestock foraging to grass strips to forage crops, the last being adopted and maintained by the farmers in a grassroots level example of mainstreaming.





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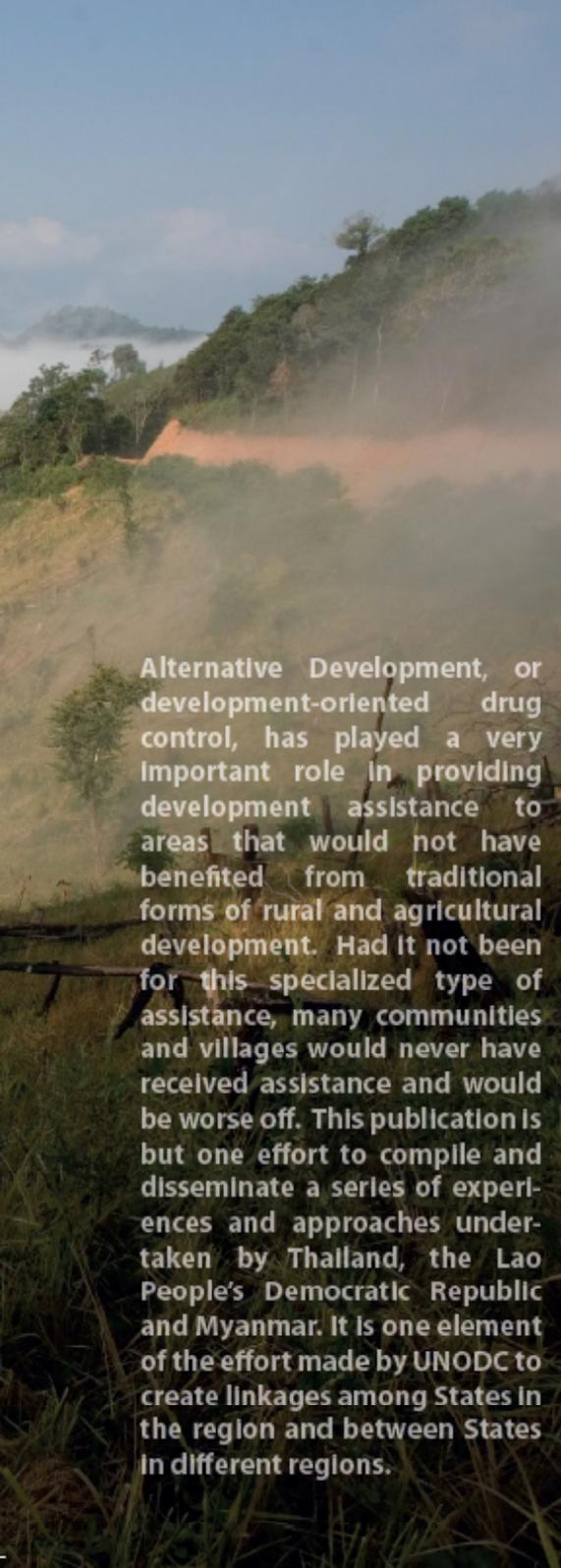
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Zhou Dafu, Deputy-Chief, Wa Central Authority General Office, October 2007.





Alternative Development, or development-oriented drug control, has played a very important role in providing development assistance to areas that would not have benefited from traditional forms of rural and agricultural development. Had it not been for this specialized type of assistance, many communities and villages would never have received assistance and would be worse off. This publication is but one effort to compile and disseminate a series of experiences and approaches undertaken by Thailand, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar. It is one element of the effort made by UNODC to create linkages among States in the region and between States in different regions.



The Global Partnership on Alternative Development: UNODC in partnership with the Government of Germany.



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