

27 February 2019

English only

Commission on Narcotic Drugs**Sixty-second session**

Vienna, 14–22 March 2019

Item 10 of the provisional agenda*

**Implementation of the Political Declaration and
Plan of Action on International Cooperation
towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to
Counter the World Drug Problem****Conference room paper submitted jointly by Germany, Peru,
Thailand and UNODC, titled: “The Future of Alternative
Development”****

Disclaimer: This report summarizes the discussions and conclusions of the Expert Group Meeting, but does not necessarily reflect the positions of all participants.

Summary

As mandated by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) at its 61st session (Resolution 61/6), the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Alternative Development took place from 23 to 26 July 2018 in Vienna. The EGM was co-hosted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Government of Thailand, the Government of Germany, the Government of Peru, and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage. This paper summarizes the main points discussed over the course of the three-day meeting.

* [E/CN.7/2019/1](#).

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I. Introduction

1. In the past decade, alternative development has increasingly been recognized as a strategy to address the world drug problem. Alternative development aims to address poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities which are, in most cases, recognized as, among others, root causes of illicit drug crop cultivation. The 2009 Political Declaration and its Plan of Action on International Cooperation along with The United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (2013) and the United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016 (UNGASS 2016) further provided an opportunity to place alternative development high on the global agenda as a development-oriented drug control strategy. This meant that a growing number of Member States of the United Nations were increasingly recognizing that alternative development should contribute to an improvement in the socio-economic situation of small farming communities and therefore indirectly to a reduction in illicit crop cultivation. Given that during this time the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) gave way to the SDG's, it became apparent that in fulfilling the development aspects of alternative development many of the targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals would also be met. Against this backdrop and with the elements of Chapter 7 of the 2016 UNGASS Outcome Document, the necessity to better understand how to address the many drug related challenges facing the international community became apparent.

2. The scope of alternative development, once limited to crop substitution and reducing opium poppy and coca bush in a handful of countries, has now evolved and expanded. Although the concept was established in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (2013) as a rural development and crop control strategy, new challenges in the field of development-oriented drug policy require persistent discussions in order to produce a more inclusive and potentially updated understanding of the role of development in the current drug control context. This clearly involves linking outcomes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) brought together 116 participants, comprising of representatives from 32 Member States, representatives from regional and international organizations, civil society, academia and affected communities. This EGM embodied the most diverse representation of all recent expert group meetings on alternative development. The key discussions of these representatives form the basis for this conference room paper which will be provided to the Member States in advance of the 62nd session of the CND.

II. Reflections for the 62nd session of the CND in 2019

1. **Alternative development – reducing farmers' dependency on the drug economy by diversifying and strengthening their licit sources of income**

Alternative development not only contributes to the goal of drug crop reduction but also to the enhancement of the overall well-being of affected communities.

4. Alternative development is regarded as a sustainable strategy to address illicit drug crop cultivation, focusing not only on reducing illicit drug crop cultivation, but also on improving the socio-economic situation and the overall well-being of affected communities. In general, participants agreed that alternative development should be part of a larger development agenda and that implementing alternative development should be undertaken with the full participation of affected communities. To identify appropriate solutions, an emphasis was placed on the importance of better understanding the reasons why communities grow illicit crops in the first place. Many participants agreed that the principal drivers leading to illicit drug crop cultivation were poverty and a lack of livelihood opportunities, which make illicit drug crop cultivation the only available income generating activity. Furthermore, lack of access

to infrastructure, markets and land as well as ongoing internal armed conflicts were also recognized as additional drivers for illicit drug crop cultivation.

5. As a result, alternative development programmes must be designed in a way that interventions address these root causes. Recognizing that the provision of only one activity cannot compete with illicit income generation, diversification and value addition are crucial in strengthening licit sources of income. For example, single crop substitution is not enough, however, by diversifying the different crops produced combined with livestock and processing activities, communities will be able to reduce the risk of reliance on one crop as well as create larger income margins. In addition, participants urged that an alternative economy must be provided, including varieties of off-farm livelihood options such as hospitality, tourism, commerce, etc. Participants agreed that engagement should be viewed as a long-term endeavour, be integrated, comprehensive, supported with a clear political will and built on mutual trust between the government and the community as well as committed to multi-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

6. A comment that participants had was about the ultimate goal of alternative development programmes: whether they aim to reduce the supply of illicit drug crops or to reduce poverty and strengthen licit sources of income. There were various viewpoints on both sides without an explicit answer to the question. However, the conversation (was) narrowed down on the need to invest in the sustainable development of people. Therefore, it was mentioned that successful alternative development should not exclusively be measured against the reduction of illicit crops, but also against human development indicators linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which create the appropriate incentive structures to achieve both the reduction of poverty and reducing the supply of illicit drug crops.

2. Alternative development as part of a broader development agenda and SDGs

There is a direct link between alternative development as a development-oriented drug control strategy and the achievement of the SDG targets.

7. Participants highlighted the importance of integrating alternative development strategies and programmes into larger national and global development agendas. International guidance is clear that there must be a vision of broader development, one that is not singled out nor disconnected from other development initiatives. The mainstreaming of alternative development within national development agendas is necessary because alternative development programmes are already aligned with and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals through the promotion of healthcare, infrastructure, education, economic opportunities, gender equality, sustainable environmental management, governance, and partnership building.

8. Participants mentioned efforts made to analyse the 17 SDGs in relation to alternative development and found that there are connections between alternative development and almost all of the 17 goals. As such, some participants believed that the main challenge lies in explicitly communicating the alignment of alternative development with the SDGs. There is global attention on the SDGs and if alternative development can clearly be linked to these goals, it will gain more political weight and facilitate political consensus, potentially leading to increased resources such as data and funding, and therefore to better outcomes. There was a general agreement that the SDGs can be used as an existing framework to be built upon.

3. Multi-agency and multi-disciplinary cooperation and policy coherence on alternative development

Alternative development needs to be part of the broader development agenda and involve multi-agency and multi-disciplinary cooperation, under the leadership of UNODC.

9. The understanding of alternative development solely as a crop substitution intervention is outdated. Alternative development must be integral and

comprehensive in the sense that it not only promotes substituting crops, but also addresses infrastructure, education, health, economic growth, and social inclusion. Participants recognized the need for alternative development projects to be closely linked to the development plans of the involved state ministries and institutions. This requires multi-agency and multi-disciplinary cooperation from all relevant stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, civil society organizations, development organizations, affected communities, the private sector, academia and donors. It was stated that alternative development measures should be implemented simultaneously with reforms of the institutional, legal, commercial and agricultural setting in which illicit economies flourish. By changing these conditions, the farmers' dependency on illicit drug crop cultivation may be reduced.

10. Participants agreed that national agencies need to work closer together concerning the design and review of strategies and projects and that there must be a broad recognition by the national governments that all relevant agencies must be involved in the national alternative development plan or strategy. As a start, alternative development projects need long-term government commitment in the form of political will and resources (human and financial), an understanding that affected communities must be involved in each phase of the programme design, monitoring, review and implementation. It was recognized that currently, global funding for alternative development is significantly inadequate. Therefore, it was discussed that alternative development should be mainstreamed into a broader development framework to leverage existing interventions and attract additional funds.

4. Strategic coordination on alternative development

There is a need for better strategic coordination as well as a more comprehensive and balanced approach to addressing alternative development in the context of drug control and the 2030 Development Agenda.

11. Participants emphasized the importance of strategic coordination for the implementation of a balanced approach, acknowledging that the rule of law and alternative development must mutually reinforce and complement each other in order to be effective. Policy and interventions should be based on the proper sequencing of programmes. In this way, communities are able to have forms of livelihoods in place throughout the course of the transition. The reduction of drug crops should be a consequence of development processes and not a requirement. Strategies should not be focused on short-term reduction of illicit crops, but on changing the conditions for communities involved in their cultivation.

5. Alternative development and cross-cutting issues

There is a need to address the different socioeconomic realities of communities and to consider human rights and gender dimensions.

12. It was generally agreed that alternative development recognizes the different socio-economic realities that both countries and communities face. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. It is essential that the design, review and implementation of alternative development programmes are tailored and adjusted to the realities on the ground. However, while addressing the different socio-economic realities of the communities, participants noted that alternative development must integrate a human rights and gender-sensitive approach to ensure proper outcomes, and promote and maintain trust with the affected communities.

13. In this context, participants recognized that human rights affect every aspect of drug policy. It was underlined that states have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights when planning alternative development programmes and policies. This means that states need to guarantee their citizens the right to an adequate standard of living, to be free from hunger and to engage in legitimate income generating activities.

14. With regards to gender sensitivity, participants highlighted how women face different challenges such as the lack of access to property rights and economic opportunities, and bear a larger share of domestic responsibilities. While awareness on gender discrepancy is gaining support in global drug policy, some participants stated that there is little progress in practice. Some participants noted that many alternative development programmes targeting women and providing them with additional income appear to lift up the overall social situation of the whole family as women plant and harvest crops, ensure household food security and carry out domestic work.

15. In order to better understand the impact of gender (roles) on the design and implementation of alternative development programmes, some participants urged for more gender-oriented research to verify the correlation and potentially increase positive outcomes.

6. Alternative development and the environment

As drug crop cultivation and environmental degradation are closely related, alternative development programmes should include environmental aspects.

16. Overall, there was broad agreement that illicit drug crop cultivation has a profound effect on the environment. As illicit drug crop cultivation often results in over-exploitation and depletion of natural resources, there is a direct link to land degradation, deforestation, water pollution as well as to the loss of biodiversity. Participants recognized that clearing land for illicit drug crops causes direct and indirect deforestation and soil erosion. Additionally, it is accompanied by other forms of economic activity that cause forest clearing: cattle grazing, shifting cultivation, unsustainable food crop cultivation, infrastructure, etc. Monoculture farming often results in severe soil erosion and desertification, which endanger biospheres. Fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides used on both licit and illicit drug crops with no regulation or physical protection may cause health problems.

17. Therefore, participants agreed that responsible environmental management practices need to be introduced and practiced in the transition from illicit to licit livelihoods. Alternative development strategies can also help protect the environment, e.g. forest conservation agreements, sustainable use and management of forest and timber products, environmental education, integrated pest management/bio-control. The environmental impact of alternative development programmes should be assessed in the planning stage and be coupled with remediation plans if the risks are high.

7. Identifying root causes for illicit drug crop cultivation and providing evidence

More research is necessary to identify factors driving illicit drug crop cultivation in order to design better impact assessment.

18. Representatives from affected communities shared first-hand experiences: according to them, illicit drug crop cultivation was the only choice for many people due to factors such as living in remote areas with no access to infrastructure, lack of citizenship, lack of land rights, armed conflicts and military presence. Based on this, participants advocated for more research and improving evidence and available data in this field. Assumptions, prejudices and ideological convictions that often take effect in relation to the topic of drugs need to be replaced by facts and sound knowledge. Once the driving factors can be identified, the design of policy and programmes as well as impact assessment can be more effective.

8. Measuring impact and success of alternative development

There is a need to measure the outcomes of alternative development through human-development indicators in addition to the traditional law enforcement indicators.

19. Participants recognized that the indicators used for measuring the impact and success of alternative development contribute to the public understanding of the

impact and results of alternative development programmes. Traditional impact assessments have been mostly undertaken with a perspective based on measuring quantities (area under cultivation). While this has been used to show the impact of interventions on the change in area under illicit crop cultivation, it does not allow for an understanding of the developmental change in the social and economic situation of affected communities. The approach to impact assessment should incorporate measuring the outcomes for people and societies (“people-centred approach”) through human development indicators, considering all aspects of well-being, including social, environmental, and cultural aspects. To reconcile the debate for either law-enforcement-oriented indicators or human development indicators, participants pointed out that promotion of law enforcement metrics and human centric metrics are not mutually exclusive and should be carried out in parallel for the purpose of measuring the complete impact of alternative development.

20. In terms of methodology, there are existing tools. Particularly, human development indicators and the SDGs should be utilized. However, these tools need to be adapted to the circumstances, in consultation with the community.

21. It was agreed that data collection has proven to be challenging. This limited the extent to which data could be used for analysing development impact. Challenges discussed included the non-systematic collection and analysis of data, the need for capacity-building on data collection for Member States, as well as the challenge to obtain data due to security issues. Better data sets could help to create a better evidence basis for value-for-money analysis.

22. In the context of reporting, the requirement of short-term versus long-term results was also discussed. Short-term results are sometimes needed to satisfy donors and show improvement against original baseline conditions. At the same time, alternative development is a long-term process, which requires more time to see distinct transformation and results. Moreover, attention should be paid to the “balloon-effect” where the problem is simply shifted to another area.

9. Application of an alternative development approach in urban settings

Some lessons learned from rural alternative development programmes could be applied to development in urban settings.

23. Chapter 7 of the UNGASS outcome document provides a number of operational recommendations for alternative development. The Chapter through its paragraphs § h, j, k asks Member States to consider comprehensive development-oriented approaches and the creation of alternative sources of income for communities affected by or at risk of illicit cultivation of drug crops and other illicit drug-related activities in urban and rural settings.

24. Participants acknowledged the changing trends of the global drug problem, specifically a shift from illicit plant-based drug crop cultivation to the production of illicit synthetic drugs. These drugs can be produced in urban settings and have different use patterns. Participants extensively discussed the relevance of this changing reality and how it affects the role of alternative development. Some participants stated that as a result of the changing nature of the drug issue, there is a need to better understand how alternative development can be used as a tool to address this dynamic. Some argued that alternative development would need to be redefined. Other participants argued that this was unrealistic given that alternative development as a concept is very much subject specific to the rural setting and is a well-established concept.

25. The use of separate paradigms was discussed: on the one hand alternative development, on the other hand urban development. It was mentioned that the principles of alternative development such as the application of a people-centred approach, addressing vulnerabilities and providing opportunities, are principles that can also be applied to the urban context. Participants pointed to existing international

documents that provide sufficient guidance for socio-economic programmes in urban settings.

26. Operationally, viewpoints also varied. Participants stated that by applying a similar approach towards alternative development, using the same tools of community participation, empowerment, access to resources, among others, interventions can be just as effective in urban settings. Other challenges that were expressed include the difficulty of identifying the target population and the ability to translate agriculture-based knowledge from alternative development to an urban setting. Participants also expressed the need to approach other agencies to help address the global drug problem. They voiced their concerns on the limitation of resources for alternative development programmes and mentioned that mixing alternative development with urban development could pose a risk on the ability of alternative development to garner resources. Further research was recommended in order to properly identify the connection between urban development and the world drug problem, as well as how the existing United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development can be leveraged to tackle the drug challenges in the urban context.

10. International cooperation and partnership for alternative development

International cooperation and partnership, including among others governments, the private sector, and civil society, is important in increasing financial and technical support as well as ensuring the sharing of best practices.

27. International cooperation and partnerships through broad coalitions with governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society is important to the progress of alternative development. Participants agreed that these cooperative initiatives must be fostered, incentivized, and nurtured to increase financial and technical support, promote knowledge exchanges, and the sharing of best practices and challenges. The global drug problem requires interconnected and aligned initiatives to achieve internationally agreed objectives. The continuation and growth of public-private partnerships as well as the continuation of developing new partnership models, specifically trilateral partnerships, were recommended as a path to promote alternative development and fully push its agenda forward.