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

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Item 6 of the provisional agenda\*

**Follow-up to the implementation at the national, regional and international levels of all commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the world drug problem****Conference room paper submitted jointly by Germany, Peru, Thailand, and UNODC titled, “Towards more inclusive Alternative Development”\*\***

*Disclaimer:* This report summarizes the discussions of the Expert Group Meeting but does not necessarily reflect the position of all participants.

*Summary*

Within the framework of a series of annual Expert Group Meetings (EGM) on Alternative Development, the seventh EGM was convened to continue to share lessons learned, best practices and expertise. The EGM also continued to promote dialogue on development-oriented drug control policies and programmes and the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, with the emphasis on promoting inclusiveness in alternative development.

The meeting and field visit took place from 29 November to 1 December 2022, in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, Thailand, and was co-hosted by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage (MFLF); the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru, the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs (DEVIDA) of Peru, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It provided a platform to continue discussions on advancing development-oriented drug policies by focusing on recent developments in alternative development, gender and ethnic considerations, development-oriented interventions in non-traditional settings, and alternative development and the environment.

The EGM brought together 44 participants, comprised of representatives from 14 Member States, representatives from international organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector. This paper summarizes the main points discussed over the course of the meeting.

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\* E/CN.7/2023/1.

\*\* This document has not been edited.



## **I. Current affairs and recent developments in alternative development**

1. There is an increased tendency of Member States to focus drug policy on human-centred approaches when dealing with illicit drug crop cultivation and related phenomena. Development-oriented approaches in drug policy are more and more widespread and are at the core of many national drug strategies, especially in countries affected by illicit drug crop cultivation and massive drug economies in rural settings. To a growing level, environmental and climate concerns are being introduced into national drug strategies, given the negative impact of drug economies on the environment and climate, as proven by the World Drug Report 2022 and its special booklet on drugs and the environment.
2. Participants agreed that gender-responsive approaches and the involvement of indigenous and ethnic groups are key success factors to reach sustainable outcomes in alternative development interventions. However, some participants mentioned that there is still a gap to empower women in some alternative development programmes. For alternative development to be inclusive, the affected communities, women and young people, and representatives of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups, should be engaged in the planning and implementation process of development programmes.
3. In the course of the meeting, it became clear that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has had a massive negative impact on marginalized communities and the prospects for alternative livelihoods in many countries.
4. There was a concern about the blurring lines of licit and illicit cannabis markets in some countries. Traditional cannabis-growing communities may be excluded from emerging licit cannabis value chains given the dominance of corporate actors and high-quality thresholds. At the same time, international markets are difficult to access for traditional communities, given the many existing technical, legal, infrastructure and quality constraints.
5. Alternative development is highlighted in the UNODC 2021–2025 strategy as a key intervention in addressing the world drug problem. National and regional sustainable livelihoods strategies should get more support with a special focus on marginalized and vulnerable communities, promoting gender equality. Income diversification schemes, food security, environmental protection and basic health care should be included in alternative development programmes to enhance their sustainability. Additionally, partnerships with the private sector to facilitate global market access to alternative development products is crucial. Quality control and international standards such as Fairtrade are significant to increase market access for alternative development products. UNODC's existing cooperation with the private sector, selling alternative development products from Bolivia (Plurinational State of), the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to the European market, illustrated one of these successful partnerships.
6. Participants encouraged more exchanges on alternative development in non-traditional settings, beyond drug crop cultivation areas, and will explore the connection between alternative development and climate change to attract new funding sources from climate finance.

## **II. Development-oriented interventions in non-traditional and drug trafficking settings**

7. The meeting provided case studies of development-oriented drug policies in non-traditional settings. The cases illustrated that in areas with high levels of violence of drug trafficking networks, some people, particularly youth, have to serve drug trafficking organizations members, which limits occupational choices

and income-generating opportunities for local people in the drug trafficking environment in both rural and urban areas.

8. The examples from Brazil, Colombia and Thailand presented at the meeting highlighted the applicability of a holistic development-oriented drug policies approach as a potential means to reduce violence and vulnerabilities of people living in drug trafficking contexts. For instance, the example in Thailand showed that a health component in development programmes can help to build community trust and engagement in development activities. The examples from Brazil and Colombia illustrated that engaging with youth in giving advice on their education plan and setting up a sport centre can support significant changes in the communities.

9. Cases from Latin America showed that providing licit livelihood options reduced violence rates and may as well lead to a reduction in illicit activities. In addition, capacity-building measures for income generation opportunities, community-based approaches, bottom-up processes, women empowerment, youth engagement and strategies to support people who use legal and illegal substances were noted as good practices for development-oriented interventions in non-traditional settings.

10. The study visit to the Roi Jai Rak Project in Thailand, an alternative development project in a non-traditional setting, has showcased the practicality of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, with particular emphasis on close collaboration with central and local governments, securing community buy-ins for alternative development options, as well as engaging the private sector to improve the quality and access to markets for alternative development products. In addition, the Thai case presented an effective community-based drug rehabilitation and social reintegration programme where former drug users engaged in the conversation to prevent drug addiction in the community and became change agents accelerating the development process.

### **III. Gender and ethnic-sensitive alternative development**

11. Participants discussed that women in illicit drug crop cultivation areas experience higher vulnerabilities such as poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to land and land rights, natural resources and infrastructure, low literacy and education levels, and poorer access to health services than men.

12. Participants observed different gender roles in different illicit drug crop cultivation regions. In Latin America, women tend to be more actively engaged at community and communal level, and their involvement in coca bush cultivation-related activities might have enhanced a shift in the power balance between males and females as women can independently obtain income. In some countries in Asia, the role of women in opium poppy cultivation areas tends to be more restricted and subordinated by men's decisions, resulting in women having to work mostly as unpaid labourers.

13. Participants discussed women empowerment cases through alternative development. In some examples, women have been able to gain positions in decision-making spaces, such as agricultural producer's organizations and boards of directors in cooperatives, thereby engaging in economic and technical project activities and spearheading new ideas for income generation for women. Another case focused on well-being as well as economic and social empowerment of women through sustainable development. This case reflected the potential of a long-term and people-centred approach that contributes to gender equality.

14. The impacts of illicit coca cultivation on indigenous communities comprise environmental, social and economic aspects, such as illegal logging and deforestation, disruption of the communities' social structures and enhanced economic dependence on illicit coca cultivation. Participants recommended that a successful alternative development strategy for indigenous communities should

include land registration, support to communal administration, strengthening of indigenous communities' self-management capacities, family and community self-sustainability and community forest preservation, among others. It is crucial to guarantee the right of indigenous peoples to autonomy and self-government to ensure an ethnic-sensitive approach in alternative development programmes.

15. The discussions on gender and ethnic approaches reflected the need to bring forward alternative development policies that properly incorporate gender- and ethnic-sensitive and responsive approaches. Concerning gender equality and women's empowerment, although some indicators allow measuring women's participation, and income generation, impact measurement on women of alternative development programmes is still lagging. Further discussions and research are needed to enhance more inclusive development-oriented drug policies.

#### **IV. Alternative development and the environment**

16. Participants highlighted the relevance of the Resolution E/CN.7/2022/L.2 titled "Promoting alternative development as a development-oriented drug control strategy, taking into account measures to protect the environment" adopted at the 65th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, being the first resolution to address environmental and climate concerns related to illicit drug economies in a comprehensive manner.

17. The UNODC World Drug Report (WDR) 2022 booklet on "Drugs and the Environment" provides an analytical framework on the effects of illicit drug crop cultivation, drug manufacture, drug use and drug policy responses on the environment. Participants welcomed the WDR 2022 booklet on "Drugs and the Environment", and although the research on the environmental impact of illicit crop cultivation is still an emerging area of study, the booklet provides a current state of research on the impacts of plant-based drugs and alternative development interventions on the environment. It includes insightful data on deforestation and the carbon footprint of illicit drug crop cultivation, as well as similar data for legal agriculture crops. It also compares the carbon footprint of licit drug crop cultivation to its illicit peer.

18. There was an agreement of participants that environmental and climate-sensitive approaches should be at the core of the design of alternative development interventions, including measures to prevent the expansion of illicit drug crops into protected areas. Some alternative development projects have already incorporated environmental protection objectives, related mainly to deforestation through instruments such as special management regimes for protected areas, carbon credit schemes, payments for environmental/ecosystem services (PES) and agroecology. Using these policy tools in alternative development programmes is an opportunity to streamline environmental protection and biodiversity conservation through community-based approaches. A holistic environmental approach, not only focused on forest protection and carbon offset, may not only offer a sustainable response to illicit drug crop cultivation, but also to other illegal activities sometimes linked to illicit drug economies, such as the illegal wildlife trade or illegal mining.

19. As recent initiatives on environmental sustainability, an interactive map for designing payments for PES schemes in areas affected by illicit coca crops in Latin America is a practical example of how data on illicit coca crops and environmental zoning may be utilized to target areas for PES schemes in illicit crop cultivation areas with environmental relevance.

20. Participants identified that a long-term and people-centred approach, the alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change mitigation agendas and collaboration with the private sector are factors favouring the achievement of forest conservation and protection goals, as well as an income-generation mechanism for communities and projects. Participants discussed how financial support of alternative development programmes can be enhanced

through additional funding from climate finance. Moreover, the need for the private sector to offset its carbon footprint can provide additional income opportunities for the communities.

21. “True Cost Accounting (TCA)”, a digital tool for assessing the environmental and social costs of coffee production, was mentioned as one of the innovations that could support coffee farmers to move up the value chains and raise awareness of customers on the hidden environmental and social costs of agricultural products.

## **V. Conclusions**

22. The EGM on AD continued to provide space for the sharing of best practices and lessons learned from alternative development experiences. For the first time, the EGM on AD prioritized gender and ethnic-sensitivity topics. The meeting continued its open exchange on alternative development interventions in non-traditional settings, and highlighted the link between alternative development and environmental impact.

23. Participants echoed their views on several suggestions for a more inclusive design and implementation of alternative development programmes. Success stories and voices from women and indigenous communities in alternative development should be amplified.

24. Alternative development programmes in non-traditional settings can contribute to violence reduction while targeting the youth, integrating support measures for drug users and other affected populations.

25. The implementation of environmental mechanisms in alternative development programmes such as PES schemes, carbon credits and environmental accounting of licit value chains can uplift the livelihood of affected community in drug crop cultivation areas.

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