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

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**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, the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States ES-CICAD/OAS and UNODC titled, “Joining International Efforts on Alternative Development”\*\***

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

*Summary*

Within the framework of a series of annual Expert Group Meetings (EGM) on Alternative Development, the 8th EGM “Joining International efforts on Alternative Development” was convened to continue to share best practices, lessons learned and expertise among Alternative Development experts. In the light of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGPs on AD) by the United Nations General Assembly, the EGM continued to promote dialogue on development-oriented drug control policies and programmes with emphasis on environmental sustainability, applicability of the Alternative Development concept in a non-traditional setting, gender inclusiveness, participation and rights of the indigenous peoples, and the integration of Alternative Development into national drug policies.

The meeting took place from 11–12 October 2023, in Lima, and was co-hosted by the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs (DEVIDA) of Peru; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru; the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany; the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American

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\* E/CN.7/2024/1.

\*\* This document has not been edited.



States (ES-CICAD/OAS); the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) of the Kingdom of Thailand; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage (MFLF).

The EGM brought together 69 participants, comprised of representatives from 22 Member States, representatives from international organizations, civil society, academia, and farmers associations from Peru. This paper summarizes the main points discussed over the course of the meeting.

## **I. A decade of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development**

1. Over the past decade, there has been a steady evolution in the understanding of Alternative Development as one of the fundamental pillars of a comprehensive and balanced drug control strategy that also contributes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This evolution builds on decades of knowledge and experience in different regions of the world, in rural and non-traditional settings, and emphasizes people-centred and comprehensive approaches that are environmentally sustainable, and inclusive.
2. Some participants stressed that the evolution of the understanding of Alternative Development is also linked to a broader comprehension of the illicit drug supply chain as a global business model that is highly profitable at the highest levels of the criminal organizations involved in drug-related crime. This illicit business model comprises cultivation, manufacture and production, and trafficking along the value chain, and affects vulnerable populations. In this context, alternative development in rural and non-traditional settings becomes a sustainable and effective development-oriented drug policy measure to address the socioeconomic vulnerabilities of populations dependent on illicit drug-related activities and to promote their transition to licit economies.
3. The information collected through the Annual Report Questionnaire (ARQ) by the UNODC revealed that some Member States have recently embarked on Alternative Development interventions in non-traditional settings, as well as preventive measures in areas potentially affected by drug-related crime. These settings go beyond traditional illicit drug cultivation area, encompassing areas affected by illicit drug economies in urban and peri-urban settings, in border areas and other drug transit regions. In addition, various Member States have also reported on environmental sustainability measures within their Alternative Development interventions. Although the available data has provided initial insights of landscape, there is a need to improve the data collection to effectively monitor, measure and analyse the outcome of these various Alternative Development activities.
4. The implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development in Peru has demonstrated the contribution of the comprehensive and sustainable Alternative Development model to the sustainable reduction of illicit drug crop cultivation. The Peruvian example highlights the importance of a cross-cutting and results-oriented approach that addresses productivity and income generation, promotes access to land, respects ethnic and gender diversity, incorporates environmental considerations, and promotes peace and security, placing communities at the centre of Alternative Development projects.
5. Thailand demonstrated the applicability of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development in both rural and non-traditional contexts. Through Thailand specificities, the examples underscore the importance of long-term development-oriented interventions, backed by unwavering commitment of all stakeholders. Comprehensive, context-sensitive approaches, and community agreements are identified as key success factors. In addition, lessons learned in drug-trafficking affected settings emphasized the need for enhanced coordination

between development and law enforcement agencies, comprehensive drug-rehabilitation programmes, and inclusive social reintegration measures, as well as income acceleration strategies.

6. The implementation of Alternative Development projects over the last decade has been evolving to recognize the link between drugs and development, expanding from illicit crop eradication and short-term crop substitution programmes to a more holistic, long-term, and people-centred approach. However, it was discussed that this holistic approach is still facing challenges, partly due to the urgent need of reducing illicit crop cultivation in the short term, and the difficulty to find the right balance between security, law enforcement and development. To overcome this, some participants suggested a meaningful community involvement at the earliest stages of Alternative Development strategies, through bottom-up approaches, reviewing the criminalization of smallholders involved in illicit drug crop cultivation, and a security-led approach that focuses on enabling local communities and authorities' engagement in Alternative Development initiatives.

## **II. Alternative Development and Environmental Sustainability**

7. The United Nations World Drug Report 2023 chapter on the Amazon Basin highlights the impact of a complex criminal network on the environment and communities in the Amazon. Drug trafficking facilitates other criminal economies such as land grabbing, illegal logging, illegal mining, wildlife trafficking and convergent crimes that have increased the impact on the environment and on indigenous peoples and local communities. Participants discussed these issues in the light of the potential contribution of Alternative Development to address and mitigate the impacts of these illicit activities and convergent crimes.

8. The recent increase in illicit drug crop cultivation within protected areas in some countries underscores the growing urgency for synergies between drug policy and the environmental initiatives. Examples from Asia and Latin America demonstrate how climate finance instruments like carbon credits and payments for ecosystem services (PES) schemes can be leveraged within Alternative Development programmes to contribute to environmental protection and benefit to local community that care for their natural resources. An ongoing triangular cooperation project between Peru, Colombia and Germany aims to improve the cooperation between these sectors to find feasible development-oriented measures in protected areas.

9. Experiences in Thailand and Peru on environmental sustainability underlined the importance of setting long-term goals. Aligning Alternative Development strategies with the Paris Agreement agenda remain essential, not only as an additional source of finance, but also a booster to the resilience of licit livelihoods, ecosystems, and communities to climate change. Furthermore, adapting market access strategies to new environmental regulations, such as the European Union's regulation on deforestation-free supply chains directives, is vital for a long-term success of positioning Alternative Development products in national and international markets.

## **III. Gender Equality in Alternative Development**

10. The success stories of women-led initiatives from communities in Peru highlight how gender mainstreaming in Alternative Development is imperative to enhance female income and improve women's quality of life. By ensuring their involvement along the value-chain of agricultural products and non-agricultural livelihoods, as well as in decision-making bodies in productive and social organizations, women have been able to generate their own income and strengthen their position within their families and communities.

11. Alternative Development offers a lifeline for women's empowerment. Best practices in Afghanistan include tailored agricultural technical trainings, providing

modern equipment and machinery to improve efficiency and value addition, fostering non-agricultural skills to increase women's income sources. By supporting women-owned micro and small enterprises, traditional barriers can be overcome, providing an income and thereby financial independence to women.

12. A tool for strengthening the practical implementation of gender-responsive Alternative Development, developed by the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug Policies (COPOLAD III), was used to further discuss how to improve outcomes in terms of women's empowerment. Discussions highlighted the importance of designing interventions to improve women's access to rights, equal and meaningful representation in decision-making, and equal access to resources, including land, training, and economic opportunities. Participants underlined the need to further promote women's participation in the formulation phase of Alternative Development projects, as well as the definition of targets and indicators as measures to enhance gender equality in implementation.

#### **IV. Regional update on Alternative Development efforts**

13. The presented experiences encompassed a wide range of national experiences and policy developments from South America, Southern Europe and the Caribbean regions countries, comprising insights from governments, international organizations and civil society on development-oriented efforts in both rural and non-traditional settings.

14. Albania's efforts include revising its strategic framework on organized crime to include development-oriented approaches as preventive measures. Similarly, at the implementation level, good practices include the social reuse of confiscated assets and the development of legal livelihoods with a strong focus on gender equality in areas vulnerable to illicit drug crop cultivation.

15. Recent policy developments in Colombia on Alternative Development in ecologically strategic areas were presented. Recognizing the cultural diversity and complexity geographical landscape, development-oriented measures include voluntary relocation linked to land titling and confiscated assets management, alongside bioeconomy initiatives, agroecology, non-agricultural activities such as ecotourism and handicrafts, carbon credits and PES schemes, all in line with sustainable development and climate change agendas. One strategic action proposed involves the establishment of an international debt-for-environment swap fund. This fund would direct investment in environmental protection towards strategic areas currently burdened by illicit drug crops cultivation.

16. It was highlighted that, drug cartels have formed alliances with criminal organizations in the Amazon, affecting local communities and indigenous peoples. Addressing underlying root causes such as extreme poverty, racism, and marginalization through development-oriented drug policies and international cooperation is considered essential.

17. In the Caribbean region, recent efforts to address illicit cannabis cultivation were presented, including recent developments in emerging legal cannabis markets for medical and industrial purposes. Issues analysed include financing and economic sustainability, community selection criteria and skills development.

18. COPOLAD III has commissioned a study on innovative approaches in Alternative Development in Latin America and the Caribbean that seeks to explore and understand how these approaches may be extended beyond traditional rural contexts to encompass urban settings, border areas, ethnic territories and prevention actions in vulnerable zones. The importance of building evidence on the adaptability of best practices that contribute to sustainable development responses to drug-related issues was emphasized.

19. ES-CICAD/OAS stressed the importance of developing a better and wider understanding of the concept of comprehensive and sustainable alternative development as part of a policy that helps reduce the supply of raw material for the production of illicit drugs, and that strengthens the legal economy as well as the social, institutional, cultural, and environmental improvement of areas affected by the cultivation of illegal drugs and other illicit activities related to drug production and trafficking, this in line with CICAD's Reference Framework for the Understanding of the Concept of Comprehensive and Sustainable Alternative Development.

## **V. Ethnic communities' inclusiveness and challenges in Alternative Development**

20. During the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, a resolution on sustainable and inclusive Alternative Development<sup>1</sup> was notably tabled and adopted. This resolution marked a significant step forward by highlighting, for the first time, the inherent connection between illicit drug crop cultivation, indigenous peoples and ethnic communities, and the importance of developing appropriate counterstrategies to protect these vulnerable groups.

21. Insights from representatives of indigenous communities involved in Alternative Development projects in Peru, from Alternative Development programmes in Colombia, and a study of the illicit economy in the Amazon provided the basis for a discussion on ethnic inclusion and the challenges of Alternative Development.

22. Some of the case studies presented suggested further expanding the implementation of development-oriented approaches in ethnic territories to address illicit drug crop cultivation and related crimes and their negative impacts. The discussions evidenced the possibility of Alternative Development to further preserve the cultural traditions of indigenous communities.

23. Recommendations on ethnic inclusiveness include promoting meaningful participation of ethnic communities while recognizing their autonomy, governance, and economic sustainability model that aligned with forest and biodiversity protection efforts, further articulation between law enforcement agencies and ethnic self-governments, and strengthening the capacity of project implementers to adhere to the "do-no-harm" principle.

## **VI. Implementing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development**

24. During the discussions on indicators and impact assessment of Alternative Development, it was emphasized that long-term measurement is essential to rigorously assess the effectiveness of different Alternative Development intervention models. This long-term assessment should include multidimensional development and drug supply control indicators. Some participants mentioned the need to develop a set of comparable indicators between Alternative Development initiatives to highlight their impact and facilitate the support, continuation, and expansion of development-oriented drug policy approaches.

25. Participants discussed the issue of proper sequencing when implementing Alternative Development interventions. Building trust with communities was highlighted as an essential first step. The issue of voluntary and/or forced illicit crops eradication at the earliest stages ignited controversy. Some participants cautioned that such measures at the early stage can be a barrier to development interventions. Furthermore, multi-sectoral dialogue, including with development departments, law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, is needed to design comprehensive

<sup>1</sup> E/CN.7/2023/L.3

responses. The lack of clear guidelines and robust evidence on optimal sequencing was also acknowledged.

26. Participants emphasized the need of diversifying funding sources and to endorse technical cooperation on the ground to ensure sustainability of Alternative Development programmes. The identified measures encompass several strategies: utilizing confiscated assets in Alternative Development projects, aligning with broader development agendas for wider funding sources, collaboration with the private sector, establishing community cooperatives, and enhancing international financial and technical cooperation.

27. Participants discussed the inclusion of Alternative Development into countries' national drug strategies and plans of actions as this facilitates accountability, the exchange of evidence-based practices, the promotion of evaluation processes, and generation of country baselines to compare and analyse progresses. The need for a better balance between law enforcement and development from a budgetary perspective was also noted. Some participants suggested that Alternative Development should be anchored to State policy, to ensure the allocation of resources from national governments that dedicate to sustainable funding for development-oriented measures within comprehensive and balanced drug control strategies.

## VII. Conclusions

28. The EGM on AD proved its enduring value as a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned from diverse Alternative Development experiences. Discussions transcended traditional boundaries, revealing the wider potential of development-oriented drug control policies in the last decade. These policies move beyond mere illicit drug crop cultivation control, extending their reach to address drug trafficking and related illicit activities.

29. Discussions at the EGM, in commemorating a decade of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, demonstrated the remarkable progress made over the last decade. Never before have we seen such a large number of Member States supporting and actively implementing Alternative Development interventions. Similarly, political support for these policies at the CND level has never been stronger.

30. Alternative Development has undergone a crucial shift, prioritizing environmental sustainability alongside its traditional goals. Examples from Asia and Latin America demonstrate how programmes can leverage climate finance instruments like carbon credits and PES to empower communities who act as stewards of their natural resources. Additionally, integrating environmental standards into Alternative Development products can open doors to potential markets.

31. The EGM strengthened its emphasis on gender equality, spotlighting gender-responsive Alternative Development measures and women's empowerment strategies. It also deepened the dialogue about fostering more inclusive approaches that prioritize ethnic sensitivity as a safeguard measure. Sharing success stories and challenges of women and indigenous peoples in Alternative Development across areas such as product diversification, governance, leadership, environmental protection, provide a more valuable insight for designing more inclusive and sustainable Alternative Development programmes.

32. Ongoing cooperation and knowledge exchange are vital to advance Alternative Development forward. By actively sharing best practices, research findings including impact assessment tools, and optimal intervention sequences, we can secure long-term financial commitments and foster sustainable solutions, ultimately empowering communities, protect the environment and mitigating the impact of illicit drug-related activities.