

24 February 2025

English only

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

Vienna, 10–14 March 2025

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 the UNODC titled, “Moving Towards the update of the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGP on AD)”****

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 9th EGM “*Moving towards the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGP on AD) update: roadmap for the Next Steps*” was held to launch the discussions on the need to update the UNGP on AD, considering the latest evidence and lessons learnt over the last decade, in order to provide a UN-level framework for development-oriented measures that properly responds to the evolving dynamics of drug-related crime and related challenges in sustainable development. Likewise, the 9th EGM on AD continued to share best practices, lessons learned and expertise, this time with a focus on aspects such as environmental protection, climate change, biodiversity conservation, territorial approaches, women’s and girl’s empowerment, and indigenous peoples and local communities’ inclusivity.

The meeting took place from November 28 to 30, 2024, in Bangkok, Thailand, and was co-hosted by the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) of the Kingdom of Thailand; 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) of Germany; the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs (DEVIDA) of

* [E/CN.7/2025/1](#).

** This document has not been edited.



Peru; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

I. Lessons learned and suggestions on the need for updating the UNGP on AD

1. The long-standing experience and success of Thailand in implementing long-term, people-centred, integral and sustainable development measures to address illicit opium poppy cultivation has served as a reference to promote the continued presence of Alternative Development in the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), as well as to further exchange of knowledge and best practices internationally. Given the evolving global context of illicit drug economies, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the progress made since the adoption of the UNGP on AD by the UN General Assembly in 2013 (on the recommendation of the CND at its 56th session and ECOSOC), it was crucial to discuss whether the UNGP on AD should be reviewed, complemented and/or updated.

2. The experience of Peru in Alternative Development to address illicit drug crop cultivation showcased the challenges associated with replicating and adapting successful practices and experiences in projects and programmes to broader regions and contexts. It was emphasized that the UNGP on AD are an UN-level document with sufficient flexibility to guide the formulation and implementation of development-oriented drug policies. International cooperation, stakeholder ownership and coordination were emphasized as key aspects for the sustainability of Alternative Development programmes, as well as the need for a long-term commitment and the involvement of the private sector. Concerns about the lack of markets for alternative products/livelihoods and the expected short-term results in terms of illicit drug crop cultivation remain challenging.

3. At the UN level, Alternative Development policies need to evolve to incorporate new language, latest developments, and performance indicators. This will allow to adapt these policies to new global priorities and facilitate cross-sectoral synergies within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This would involve, for example, further highlighting the potential contribution of Alternative Development to climate change mitigation and environmental protection, as well as recognizing that illicit drug economies often overlap with other criminal activities (e.g. crimes that affect the environment) that frequently involve the same vulnerable communities at the territorial level. Some participants emphasized the need for more ambitious action to restore funding levels, and how updating the Alternative Development framework at the UN level helps to ensure its continued relevance in promoting sustainable livelihoods and effectiveness in addressing illicit drug economies.

II. Alternative Development initiatives in 2024

4. The presented experiences comprise a broad range of policy developments in Member States in Latin America and the Caribbean, West Africa and Southeast Asia. The insights presented by governments and international organisations showcased diverse territorial contexts in which Alternative Development can be implemented to address illicit drug economies. The session covered a range of settings, including illicit drug crop cultivation, transit and trafficking, as well as border, rural, peri-urban and urban areas.

5. The cases of Colombia and Peru showcased the latest developments in their approaches. On the one hand, Colombia's current approach seeks to incorporate "biocentrism" at the core of the programmes to address the negative impact of illicit drug economies on communities and ecosystems. This entails prioritizing niche markets for legal products rather than regular commodity markets for products such as cocoa and coffee, focusing on environmental sustainability over productivity and

mere economic dimensions. On the other hand, Peru’s model of Comprehensive and Sustainable Alternative Development consists of a counter-cyclical model to the business model of drug trafficking, which makes it possible to curb the growth of the illicit economy and generate sustainable development with socio-economic profitability and environmental sustainability, focusing on vulnerable families trapped in the illicit economy of drug trafficking.

6. In Brazil, Alternative Development aims to address key challenges in drug policy, such as social inequality, racism, age-related vulnerability to recruitment by organized crime (e.g. children, adolescents and youth), and environmental impacts. Adopting a people-centred and human rights-based approach, the measures are designed to prevent, mitigate and repair the impact of drug-related issues while enhancing protective measures. This development-oriented initiative targets urban areas in the Amazon and border areas where illicit drug trafficking occurs. The experience of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines showcased the role of Alternative Development to advance a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable legal cannabis value chain for medical purposes.

7. The implementation of Alternative Development in illicit opium poppy-growing areas in Southeast Asia has yielded several key insights and best practices. These include people-centred approaches, cross-sectoral and multi-level coordination, incentives for public and private investments, product diversification, and the involvement of women in project decision-making bodies. In Nigeria, recent policy efforts have focused on integrating law enforcement and development within drug policy to address illicit drug crop cultivation. The recently established Alternative Development Unit promotes people-centred projects, local ownership, equal opportunities, and environmental protection, among others.

III. Current trends and insights on development-oriented drug policy

8. UNODC’s most recent data on drug demand and supply was presented for discussion, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for Alternative Development. Key recent dynamics mentioned included increased cocaine supply and use, increased synthetic drug production, broader territorial settings of illicit drug production, and crime convergence (particularly with crimes that affect the environment, such as illegal mining, illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, corruption, and illicit financial flows). A comprehensive environmental strategy for Alternative Development should try to address not only illicit crop-driven deforestation, but also the adverse effects of synthetic drug production and other environmental crimes. These strategies may emphasize the promotion of local conservation efforts and payment for ecosystem services. Furthermore, the need to further promote local ownership as well as gender-responsive measures, including intersectionality, was underlined.

9. The findings of a study on “Innovative Alternative Development Approaches in Latin America and the Caribbean”, conducted within the framework of the Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drug Policies (COPOLAD III), provided insights from this region in a diverse range of contexts. The study reflects the evolution of the concept of Alternative Development through the tailoring of development-oriented measures to specific illicit drug economy contexts. The outcomes of the study underscore the necessity to target the enabling conditions and drivers of illicit drug economies through evidence-based, human-centred and territorially tailored interventions.

10. Civil society representatives emphasized the long-standing underfunding of Alternative Development programmes in contrast to the allocation of resources to law enforcement within the drug control system. It was stressed that available data suggest that law enforcement measures, such as forced eradication of illicit crops, have been the priority. However, these measures have not been effective in curbing illegal drug production, but have caused violence and enhanced insecurity, affecting the human

rights of vulnerable small-scale farming households. It was emphasized, that addressing human rights issues, promoting social justice, and adopting more human-centred approaches in Alternative Development as a drug control strategy is essential.

IV. Climate change, environmental and biodiversity considerations for Alternative Development

11. The experiences from Thailand, Peru and the UNODC Practical Guide on Alternative Development and the Environment ¹ formed the basis for the discussion on the environmental dimension within the scope of Alternative Development. It was noted that current challenges extend beyond cultivation areas, encompassing non-cultivating regions and transit areas, leading to environmental degradation and convergence with other crimes that affect the environment at the territorial level. Some best practices on the integration of the environmental dimension include carbon credit schemes, forest and biodiversity conservation, environmentally sustainable practices and payment for environmental services (PES) schemes.

12. During the panel, the importance of aligning Alternative Development efforts with broader global agendas, such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to facilitate cross-sectorial funding was emphasised. This alignment would involve enhancing the evidence and visibility of the environmental benefits of Alternative Development interventions. Some participants noted that there is a need to position the message related to the environmental damage caused by illicit drug economies more strongly at international level. The identified measures include identifying new and appropriate environmental indicators for Alternative Development, further engagement of the private sector for funding, and empowering indigenous peoples and local communities to actively protect and manage forests. It was also emphasised that climate change adaptation measures should be considered to reduce potential risks to legal sustainable livelihoods promoted by Alternative Development programmes. The importance of continuing to explore non-agricultural activities as alternative legal livelihoods (e.g. ecotourism, non-timber forest products) was also highlighted.

V. Fostering women's empowerment and engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Alternative Development

13. The intersectionality of challenges faced by women, indigenous peoples and local communities in areas of illicit drug crop cultivation was discussed, with a focus on the importance of agrarian and environmental justice. The devaluation of women's care work and historical discrimination against indigenous and rural communities were identified as key factors contributing to their economic vulnerability and dependence on illicit crops. The necessity for genuine community participation in development and policy-making processes to ensure more equitable and sustainable outcomes was also discussed. Finally, the connection between environmental conservation and the role of Indigenous Peoples was identified as a significant opportunity for Alternative Development.

14. The experiences from Peru regarding women's empowerment and the engagement of indigenous peoples and ethnic groups underscore the significance of an intersectional approach. This approach facilitates the design and implementation of Alternative Development strategies that are tailored to meet the diverse needs of these communities.

15. Colombia's recent developments in drug policy emphasise the need to foster inclusive dialogues with ethnic groups and women. The current drug policy includes a gender perspective and will involve consultations with ethnic groups. A new

¹ Available at: [Practical_Guide_Report_web.pdf](#).

monitoring and evaluation system for the national drug policy, including specific indicators with a gender and ethnic perspective, is currently being developed.

VI. Territorial approaches to address illicit drug economies

16. The panel discussed various aspects of territorial approaches to address illicit drug economies. Key points included the importance of community involvement in decision-making, the challenges of remote locations, and the need for tailored approaches to address local socioeconomic and environmental needs. The discussion emphasised achieving the right balance between centralised policies and local participation, the impact of political stability, and the necessity of understanding and respecting local cultural and social dynamics.

17. A case study highlighted the Brazilian Amazon context, where drug trafficking and deforestation have been critical issues. The region has experienced a significant presence of organised crime reflected in the convergency of various criminal activities, including illegal mining and deforestation, as well as exacerbated violence and instability in the area. In this context, the importance of a territorial, comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach was underscored. This approach emphasises the inclusion of indigenous communities and the development of economic alternatives to address the dual challenges of drug trafficking and environmental degradation.

18. The challenges and potential contributions of territorial approaches for Alternative Development in Andean countries, particularly in the context of illicit crop cultivation, were discussed. The main challenges that were identified included high levels of poverty, limited state presence, and a deep-rooted distrust in institutions. To address these issues, several recommendations were put forward, including the need to better connect isolated territories (e.g. social infrastructure provision), strengthen state institutions, and promote inclusive governance. It was stressed that policies should be tailored to local contexts and actively promote community participation for Alternative Development strategies to be successful.

19. The Roi Jai Rak Project, a development initiative set up to address trafficking, selling and consumption of synthetic drugs through the implementation of United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development concepts from Thailand, was also presented. Through the implementation of integrated Alternative Development concepts and strengthening the rule of law, local communities were given licit livelihood options while targeted law enforcement measures were directed towards those who are involved in organized crime. The project emphasized on community participation throughout the process, including listening to the local needs, involving the local community in assessment, implementation and evaluation of the project, as well as engaging the community in capacity building and leadership training at all levels of the project. The project also includes a 1,000-day drug rehabilitation programme for individuals with drug dependence together with skill training and employment opportunities in order to restart their lives.

VII. World Café- Update of the UNGP on Alternative Development

20. Drawing on the insights from the previous 2-day panel sessions, the participants provided input on a potential update to the UNGP on AD in four key areas: i) development-oriented solutions and strengthening the rule of law for drug-related crime; ii) Alternative Development and the Environment; iii) Inclusive Alternative Development implementation; iv) Other challenges and considerations.

21. With regard to the topic of “development-oriented solutions and strengthening the rule of law for drug-related crime”, participants pointed out the significant diversity of contexts along the illicit drug supply chain (e.g. rural to urban settings,

illicit crop cultivation, micro-trafficking) involving vulnerable populations. In that sense, some participants stressed the importance of having in place a policy framework that enables the implementation of development-oriented measures to address every part of the illicit drug supply chain. The participants further suggested exploring the adoption of territorial approaches to tailor Alternative Development interventions, the enhancement of institutional coordination (including with law enforcement authorities) and the strengthening of local governance structures.

22. The discussion on “Alternative Development and the Environment” focused on the need to explore opportunities and benefits of integrating Alternative Development into the environmental and climate change agendas, recognizing its potential to contribute to environmental conservation efforts, whilst preventing and reducing the impacts of illicit drug-related activities. The participants’ contributions included a shift in focus from drug supply reduction to a more human-centred approach, emphasizing environmental benefits to attract investments and new partners. They also suggested repackaging Alternative Development as an approach that could address other environmental crimes (e.g. wildlife trafficking, illegal logging). It was also suggested that the key performance indicators of Alternative Development need to be updated to explicitly align with the agendas of climate change and biodiversity conservation.

23. During the discussion of the thematic group named “Inclusive Alternative Development implementation”, the concept of intersectionality, as well as targeted measures for people with disability, and migrant populations were considered for an incorporation within Alternative Development, as well as to define indicators including relevant human development indicators that are tailored to the needs of specific groups (e.g. women, Indigenous Peoples). Territorial and participatory approaches were also mentioned as tools to enhance inclusiveness in Alternative Development interventions.

24. Among the “other challenges and considerations” highlighted by participants was the necessity for Alternative Development to consider the evolution of illicit drug economies, moving beyond farmers as the primary target group. From the UN level to the local level, the lack of multi-sectoral partnerships was also stressed as a challenge to be addressed. Additionally, ensuring the comparability of monitoring and indicators across diverse contexts is identified as a future challenge. Other considerations included revising existing strategies for private sector engagement as a key factor for economic sustainability and integrating Alternative Development fully within national-level planning to facilitate funding.

VIII. Conclusions

25. The EGM on AD reaffirmed its lasting significance as a forum for exchanging best practices and insights from various Alternative Development initiatives and perspectives, highlighting the broader applicability of development-oriented drug control policies along the illicit drug supply chain (cultivation, manufacture, transit areas, micro-trafficking), and its potential to contribute to global development agendas.

26. In line with the 67th CND Resolution 67/3 “Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development: Effective implementation and the way forward”, the 9th EGM on AD launched the discussions on the need to update the UNGP on AD. The discussions allowed to discuss challenges and share experiences on the implementation of the UNGP on AD with an aim to identify key aspects to enhance the UN level framework for development-oriented drug policy. The EGM on AD co-hosts will continue their efforts to further develop the Alternative Development international framework, in order to adequately adapt development-oriented drug policy responses to the evolving dynamics of drug economies.