

Factsheet: Alternative Development*

The 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem places Alternative Development within a framework of broad national rural development, emphasizing the need to address a multitude of factors, such as poverty and food insecurity, inter alia, as well as to use non-traditional approaches to assessing the effectiveness of development oriented drug control strategies.

Many Alternative Development projects continue to primarily measure impact by the reduction in the cultivation of crops used for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Yet one question is whether this is the only appropriate method to measure impact, as it does not take into account the conditions under which these crops are cultivated and does not take into consideration the issue of replanting following eradication.

Poverty and food insecurity remain some of the key factors driving the illicit cultivation of crops used for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Therefore, the focus of Alternative Development programmes should be oriented at addressing the underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity and improving the socioeconomic conditions of these communities. For example, an opium risk assessment was conducted in Afghanistan in early 2012, where the study found a strong association between insecurity, lack of agricultural assistance and opium cultivation. Villages with a low level of food security and that had not received agricultural assistance in the previous year were significantly more likely to grow poppy than villages that had good food security and had been targeted by an anti-poppy awareness campaign.

Achievements

– Over the past 3 years, Alternative Development programmes improved the social and economic situation of families in targeted coca bush-growing areas through farmer-led small business enterprises, which were able to increase revenues on the international markets. In one Member State, exports of products stemming from AD reached in excess of \$150 million in 2012.

– While in one Member State the focus of the AD programmes was to generate jobs and legitimate income through productive forestry and agroforestry practices and to halt the deterioration in natural resources due to the coca monoculture, Alternative Development programmes in other Member States targeted the improvement of food security in opium poppy growing communities. The programmes promoted advanced farming practices to increase basic food crops and the diversification of farm and off-farm income-generating activities.

* ⁸ Prepared by the Secretariat as part of the preparations for the high-level review (shortened version, original paper including references can be obtained from: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/commissions/CND/session/session-57.html>)

– With a view to fostering South-South cooperation, an International Seminar/Workshop on Sustainable Alternative Development was organized in November 2011. The outcome consisted of inputs for the draft international guiding principles on Alternative Development, which were developed at a follow up High-Level International Conference on Alternative Development in November 2012 in Lima. The outcome of the Conference was the adoption of the “Lima Declaration”, including a set of International Guiding Principles on Alternative Development meant to provide both policy and technical guidance on Alternative Development. At its fifty-sixth session in March 2013, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs recommended to the Economic and Social Council the adoption by the General Assembly of the International Guiding Principles, (as United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development).

– The Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its fifty-sixth session also adopted resolution 56/15, which, inter alia, invited interested Member States, consistent with applicable international trade rules, to explore, in close cooperation with relevant international organizations, international financial institutions, private sector partners, civil society and other interested parties, opportunities for international cooperation to expand their efforts with regard to the development of strategies on voluntary marketing tools for products stemming from alternative development, including preventive alternative development.

Challenges

– Poverty and food insecurity remain the key driving factors of illicit crop cultivation.

– Alternative Development is a high-investment endeavour. It can only yield results if implemented over a long term with adequate funding. A serious problem facing AD programmes is that traditional sources of funding are becoming scarcer. Against this background, international financial institutions and relevant development organizations are encouraged to incorporate illicit crop control strategies into poverty reduction strategies, country assistance strategies and other forms of development assistance.

– Promotion of value added AD products, access to markets for products stemming from AD projects and inclusion of environmental protection into AD programmes need to be further strengthened.

– The focus on opportunities for legitimate income generation must be diversified and options outside of the traditional agricultural sector must be assessed.

– Given that a small fraction of farming communities engaged in illicit crop cultivation are provided with AD assistance, more must be done to broaden the coverage.