

Drug Policy Reform is a Development Issue: We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals unless we end the 'war on drugs'.

Context

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out a plan of action that will shape the mainstream development agenda for the next 15 years.¹ It is therefore essential that the global response to drug use, production and supply aligns with, and contributes to the achievement of, the SDGs – and that the development community pays greater attention to the role of drug policy in this Agenda. The current approach to global drug policy, dominated by strict prohibition and the criminalisation of drug cultivation, production, trade, possession and use, has not only failed in its objectives: it is also undermining efforts to tackle poverty, improve access to health, protect the environment, reduce violence, and uphold the human rights of some of the most marginalised communities worldwide.² Below, we set out some of the ways in which drug control efforts impact upon development. Overleaf, we outline some key recommendations for the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in New York, 19-21 April 2016.

- Current drug policies fail to address the socio-economic root causes of the so-called “world drug problem” (including poverty, inequality, discrimination, and social and cultural marginalisation) and, in many cases, exacerbate them.
- Crop eradication and alternative development programmes, particularly those involving eradication as a conditionality, have extensive negative impacts for crop producing communities, including deepening **poverty** and **food insecurity** through the destruction of rural livelihoods; displacement and negative health impacts; and damage to the land and water sources that cultivators and their communities rely on to survive. Negative **environmental** impacts also include the destruction of biodiversity, environmental degradation and deforestation through the expansion of agricultural frontiers (the so-called ‘balloon effect’).
- The absence of harm-reduction services leads to negative **health** impacts. These include preventable HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis infections associated with injecting drug use, as well as overdose deaths. Even where services do exist, the criminalisation of people who use drugs acts as a significant barrier for people accessing health care.
- Overly strict enforcement of the international drug control conventions, to prevent the diversion of controlled medicines to illicit markets, results in significant constraints on **access to essential medicines**, such as opiates for pain relief, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.
- Efforts to control the illicit drugs trade fuel **insecurity and conflict**. Criminal competition over control of the illicit trade is often violent, with significant impacts on homicide rates and other forms of insecurity. Heavy-handed securitised - or even militarised - responses from authorities often only fuel cycles of violence. In some conflict settings, the trade is used to finance armed groups, exacerbating conflict duration and intensity.
- The vast profits from the illicit drug market lead to the **corruption** or collusion of security services, judiciaries, politicians and even whole electoral process. This undermines people-focused security and justice service provision, as well as the effectiveness and **accountability** of governance institutions. This not only hampers development, but also can drive state fragility and increase conflict risks in the long-term.
- The negative impacts of drug control policies, particularly disproportionate sentences for minor offences and forced crop eradication, disproportionately affect **women**, who are most commonly engaged in drug markets at a very low level.

***Drafted by Health Poverty Action and an informal coalition of UK Development and Drug Policy NGOs.**

¹ See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

² Schleifer, R et al. Addressing the development dimensions of drug policy. New York: United Nations Development Program, 2015.

Recommendations for the UNGASS

We welcome the inclusion of a pillar focused on development in the UNGASS outcome document. However, it is crucial that the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs (in New York, 19-21 April 2016) addresses the fundamental connections between drug policy and sustainable development. By including the recommendations below in the UNGASS outcome document, governments can ensure that drug policies positively contribute to peace and development and the achievement of the SDGs.

- Welcome the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, noting that drug control policies must not undermine the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Recognise the current drug war paradigm as a major obstacle to achieving many of the SDGs, and place all alternative policy options on the table at UNGASS to fully consider how these might better facilitate the achievement of the SDGs.
- Make the SDGs a central consideration in the development and implementation of all drug control measures. Actively promote 'development sensitive' drug policy, dismantling initiatives which negatively impact on development and prioritising initiatives that contribute to improved sustainable economic development, secure livelihoods, food security, strengthening of local institutions, improving infrastructure, access to markets, gender equality and the meaningful consultation and participation of local communities, as part of national development policies and action plans.
- Establish an expert panel to conduct a thorough and regular review of areas where drug policy is positively or negatively impacting progress to achieve the SDGs, and propose concrete measures to increase coherence between drug policy and development mechanisms within the UN system, including increased oversight for relevant UN agencies working on development.
- Develop new metrics and indicators in the sphere of drug policy which are aligned with the SDGs, and develop new guidelines which reflect the socio-economic foundations of involvement in the drugs trade.
- Address the environmental consequences of forced crop eradication, and the movement of illicit crop cultivation into areas of ecological importance to evade forced crop eradication, by ending this practice in line with efforts to meet SDG 15;
- Take active measures to reduce heavy-handed and militarised responses and develop creative policy responses to reduce the violence associated with drug trafficking, while increasing the understanding of its impact on the promotion of peaceful societies, in line with efforts to meet SDG 16.
- Recognise the provision of harm reduction and evidence based drug treatment, as well as HIV prevention, care and treatment, as core obligations of Member States under the right to health, and scale up access to these services in line with efforts to meet SDG 3, and particularly Targets 3.3 and 3.5.
- Ensure access to controlled medicines, particularly in developing countries, through national legislative and regulatory frameworks that prioritise access to essential medicines in line with efforts to meet SDG 3, and particularly Target 3.8.
- Develop and adopt alternative measures to conviction or punishment for drug related offenses of a minor or non-violent nature. Support decriminalisation and alternatives to incarceration for people who use drugs and small scale producers and address disproportionate sentences for drug offenses, particularly taking into consideration the needs of women and other marginalised groups, in line with SDGs 5 and SDG 10.

These recommendations are endorsed by the following organisations:

UK based Organisations:

Health Poverty Action

Christian Aid

International Alert

Saferworld

International HIV/AIDS Alliance

Advocates for International Development

STOPAIDS

Penal Reform International

Doctors of the World

Joliba Trust

International Drug Policy Consortium

Transform Drug Policy Foundation

International Doctors for Healthier Drug Policies

Harm Reduction International

WDP

Tipping Point North South

Release

The Beckley Foundation

International based Organisations:

Transnational Institute (TNI) – Netherlands

Mexico United Against Crime (MUCD) – Mexico

International Centre for Science in Drug Policy (ICSDP) – Canada

Evangelical Protestant Church of El Salvador – El Salvador

Drug Policy Alliance - USA

Brazilian Harm Reduction and Human Rights Network (REDUC) - Brazil

Intercambios Civil Association - Argentina

Drugs and Human Rights Research Centre (CIDDH) - Peru

Kenya Hospices and Palliative Care Association (KEHPCA) - Kenya

Students for Sensible Drug Policy - USA

New Zealand Drug Foundation – New Zealand

Washington Office on Latin America - USA

Espolea Mexico - Mexico

Asociación Costarricense para el Estudio e Intervención en Drogas (Aceid) – Costa Rica

Uganda Harm Reduction Network - Uganda

Persaudaraan Korban Napza Indonesia (PKNI) - Indonesia

StoptheDrugWar.org - USA

Mainline Foundation the Netherlands - Netherlands

Rumah Cemara - Indonesia

Forum Droghe – Italy

Federation Addiction - France

The Centre for Supporting Community Development Initiatives (SCDI) - Vietnam

Women and Harm Reduction International Network

Rights Reporter Foundation - Hungary

Itardd - Rete Italiana di Riduzione del Danno (Italian Harm Reduction Network) - Italy

Gruppo Abele – Italy

India HIV/AIDS Alliance - India