

## **Roundtable 5**

# **Alternative development; regional, interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented balanced drug control policy; addressing socioeconomic issues**

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**(i) Drugs, addressing socioeconomic issues and fostering alternative development, including preventive alternative development;**

**(ii) Enhancing regional, interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented, balanced drug control policy;**

### **Introduction**

From illicit cultivation and production to trafficking and use, the world drug problem, with all its ramifications, is intertwined with a vast array of social and economic issues. This exerts great pressure on development efforts, which in turn have an influence on the world drug problem. Interventions made in response to the world drug problem themselves generate further interplay with the broader development context and introduce additional complexity to this dynamic. The importance of this interaction is increasingly recognized by the international community, as reflected in the preparatory discussions for the 2016 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem.

The concept of sustainable development, and the engagement by the international community in this area, is reflected in the recently formulated 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The new agenda recognizes that sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security and that peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development.

Environmental sustainability is embedded throughout the goals of the 2030 Development Agenda, including promotion of sustainable food production systems, resilient agricultural practices and sustainable forest management, as well as reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials. The cultivation and production of narcotic drug crops touches on all of these. Illicit crop cultivation and production of drugs can result in adverse consequences on ecosystems, such as clearing forests to cultivate illicit crops or illicit cultivation in protected areas and its possible effect on biodiversity. There is evidence that drug trafficking contributes to deforestation when strips of forest are cleared to enable take-off and landing of light aircraft. Moreover, it has triggered land grabs, generated conflict over land tenure, attracted licit and illicit activity and generated a need to launder illicit proceeds, a need which has resulted in further deforestation.

Clandestine laboratories processing and manufacturing plant-based and synthetic drugs require significant quantities of precursors and other chemicals, many of which are hazardous for human health and potentially damaging for the environment. The by-products and unused chemicals are frequently disposed of in urban sewage systems, other urban settings or, in the case of processing of plant-based drugs in non-urban areas, the natural environment, including rivers and forests.

Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, marginalization and lack of sustainable livelihoods may drive farmers in rural areas to engage in illicit cultivation, and are manifestations of poor levels of development which, alongside issues of governance, constitute root causes of large scale illicit cultivation in rural areas. Research findings confirm that poverty is one of the drivers of illicit crop cultivation<sup>1</sup> and that the income obtained is used for buying food, paying debt and paying household property expenses. Yet not all poor farmers are engaged in illicit cultivation and for certain households and communities the decision to engage in illicit cultivation is related to development issues that go beyond income levels, such as access to markets, absence of basic development facilities, lack of security and governance.

Illicit drug crop cultivation often takes place in isolated areas, involving people that are marginalized - socially, economically or geographically — from the main societal groups and suffering from poor

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<sup>1</sup> UNODC World Drug Report 2015 [https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf), p 103.

socio-economic conditions. This means that people in such areas have limited or no access to basic services including education, sanitation and health care. It may also involve marginal ethnic groups in isolated areas, migrants or the descendants of migrants. In countries with significant cultivation of illicit crops in rural areas, the elimination of illicit crop cultivation can impact the income source and employment opportunities of labourers and farmers, and it is therefore only sustainable/effective when efforts to control drug cultivation are accompanied by long-term comprehensive, integrated, balanced and sustainable development-oriented measures to ensure provision of alternative livelihoods that communities can enjoy positive economic development.

Alternative development continues to be recognised by Member States as a fundamental pillar of a comprehensive international drug crop control strategy, alongside law enforcement and eradication, and plays an important role as a development-oriented drug control approach grounded in the three international drug control conventions<sup>2</sup>. Over recent years, a growing number of Member States have made a commitment to incorporate alternative development in their national drug control strategies.

Alternative development means providing an economically viable, legal alternative to poor rural communities involved in growing coca bush, opium poppy or cannabis plant. It extends beyond crop substitution and sets a framework for a broader sustainable rural development approach in the areas affected by illicit crop cultivation. The 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, as well as the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UN Guiding Principles) provide a comprehensive set of multi-sectorial interventions that take into account social, cultural, economic, political, educational and environmental aspects whilst incorporating, where appropriate, demand reduction measures<sup>3</sup>. The UN Guiding Principles in particular offer the sufficient flexibility so countries and communities can adapt them to the prevailing socio-economic, cultural and legal circumstances. There is no “one-size fits all” approach to alternative development, and interventions must be adapted to the particular local contexts and to the broader sustainable development strategies and programmes. The UN Guiding Principles are fully compatible with the new 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

There is a need to address the livelihoods of affected communities in the development oriented drug control context beyond illicit crop cultivation in the rural areas. Looking at demand reduction side of the world drug problem, in 2005, in an effort to address shortcomings relating to drug prevention and treatment, the International Narcotics Control Board stressed the importance of provision of sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable populations within the larger framework of drug

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<sup>2</sup> Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol; Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971; United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

<sup>3</sup> UNODC World Drug Report 2015 [https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World\\_Drug\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf), p 3.

abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, noting in particular that “illicit drug users are often marginalized, living under difficult circumstances such as in the slums of large cities, and may require special development efforts to overcome their problems”.

Problems such as illicit drug use, drug dependence, HIV as it relates to drug use, and drug-related crime appear to be connected to the production and large-scale trafficking of drugs, as well as to the difficult socio-economic conditions in many cities. In particular, extreme poverty in suburban areas, inequality, social exclusion, deprivation due to internal migration and displacement, lack of education and employment prospects, as well as exposure to violence and abuse are leading to an increase in the proportion of the population at risk which falls victim to criminal organizations, drug abuse and other health risks, or which become involved in drug dealing and other kinds of unlawful and antisocial behaviour<sup>4</sup>.

Provision of sustainable livelihoods to populations affected by drug abuse and HIV in urban settings is therefore another important dimension to be addressed, given a complex relationship between drug use, employment status and poverty, which is characterised by reciprocal causality: drug use exacerbates the risk of unemployment, while unemployment increases the risk of drug abuse. While drug abuse can limit the opportunities of a person entering or remaining in the workforce, frustration caused by the failure to find adequate employment can increase drug consumption, creating a vicious cycle, particularly in the case of dependent drug users. Although not all people with drug dependence live in a state of poverty, many are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty due to a wide range of factors, such as family breakdown, lack of education, unemployment, war and conflict, and limited access to employment opportunities and health care.

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## **Stocktaking: what works and what does not work**

Alternative development, including preventive alternative development, where appropriate, works when initiatives are informed by a long-term vision, sustained with adequate funding and political support, and integrated into broader national development, poverty reduction and country assistance strategies. Alternative development works if properly designed to meet the needs of the end beneficiaries in terms of viable licit income alternatives and basic socio-economic services.

Illicit crop cultivation often takes place in areas with weak institutions, ongoing conflict and limited State presence. Security, good governance, access to land, and the rule of law are therefore critical factors and minimum conditions that must be in place to ensure that alternative development is successful. Alternative development interventions must be thoroughly and transparently designed, implemented, evaluated and monitored with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders (central

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/alternative-development/SL%20Paper/Final\\_ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/alternative-development/SL%20Paper/Final_ebook.pdf)

government, local authorities, local leaders, and equally important, the beneficiary communities). Existing infrastructure, access to markets, cultural sensitivities and the commitment of beneficiary families to the programme must all be taken into consideration at the programme design stages.

Given that alternative development is by definition a drug control strategy, it is important that due consideration is granted to a proper sequencing between providing licit livelihood opportunities and eradication. In this connection, prior to undertaking eradication measures, it is essential to ensure that small-farmer households have adopted viable and sustainable livelihoods<sup>5</sup>.

It is equally important to focus on a long-term approach based on permanent cash crops and move away from subsistence farming, which often only addresses food security. The long-term approach requires capacity building and the development of new, or the strengthening of existing, farmer-led organizations to benefit from economies of scale and to promote social cohesion. Experience also suggests that the implementation of sound agro-forestry systems allow for the production of cash crops, high value food crops, as well as for reforestation activities aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability. The identification of permanent cash crops must be based on a number of criteria collected at the field level. This includes socio-economic and agronomic data coupled with research on national and international market needs. The provision of training to beneficiary families on technical and entrepreneurial skills, agricultural and environmental best practices, marketing and production management is essential for effective and sustainable alternative development programmes. At the same time, and wherever feasible, opportunities outside of the agricultural sector must be explored to diversify income streams.

The establishment of farmer-led organizations can ensure sustainability of alternative development and licit income opportunities over the long term, enabling access to credit, ensuring quality control of products, and creating links with local and international markets. The involvement of the private sector can support the sharing of skills and provide important guidance on commercialisation, especially marketing, as well as generate further financial and technical support to farmer-led organizations.

When promoting agricultural production, specific crops proposed should be considered only when secure markets have been identified and when the necessary infrastructure, as well as the beneficiaries' buy-in, is secured. Farmer communities are more likely to benefit from global markets and obtain better prices for their products if they are able to tap into niche markets. Accordingly, identifying speciality markets for high quality alternative development products is a critical aspect of strategy and programme development.

Given the nature of small-scale farming in many parts of the world, gender equality in alternative development interventions must be promoted and equal conditions for full participation in decision-

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<sup>5</sup> 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation Towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, p. 45.

making within farmer-led organizations must be ensured. Environmental conservation must be seen as a cross cutting issue and proper attention given to ensuring that up to date forestry management practices are employed and that awareness is raised on the importance of maintaining a stable ecosystem (flora and fauna). The comprehensive alternative development approach includes an emphasis on reforestation; water management; reducing slash, burn and move on practices; avoiding crop monoculture; and promoting sustainable land use planning.

Alternative development challenges are closely linked to broader governance and agricultural issues. This requires work on a wide front that includes rule of law, administration of justice, access to markets, land titling, and infrastructure development. In promoting alternative development at the field level, it is important to transfer knowledge and experience and to promote South-South cooperation.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights, on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. The impact of the world drug problem on sustainable development is multifaceted and ranges from creating an economy based on illicit activities in the rural areas of developing countries affected by the large scale illicit cultivation of illicit crops, to discouraging business by fuelling violence, corruption, extortion and protection rackets, notably in transit countries, and to creating costs associated with consumption for individual consumers and for society at large. Given the fact that the world drug problem is intertwined with a vast array of development issues, it is fair to say that sustainable development can only truly occur if the world drug problem is addressed.

In November 2015, the governments of Thailand and Germany, supported by UNODC, organized an International Seminar and Workshop on the Implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development in the context of the International Conference on Alternative Development (ICAD 2) held in Thailand. The ICAD 2 outcome document recognized that alternative development is intrinsically linked and complementary to the recently adopted 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, considering that its implementation can contribute and create conditions conducive to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>6</sup>, in particular SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 17. With an emphasis on poverty reduction, sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, peaceful and inclusive communities and good governance, the SDGs offer a perfect platform for alternative development to deliver the intended results. The effectiveness of alternative development will also be contingent on promoting gender equality, reducing inequalities, as well as partnerships for sustainable development.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=E/CN.7/2016/13>

Evidence-based results of UNODC programme on provision of basic socio-economic livelihoods to vulnerable populations affected by HIV and drug use have consistently demonstrated that by meeting their basic social needs and gaining licit income opportunities, vulnerable populations significantly increase adherence to antiretroviral treatment and use of prevention and treatment services, as well as better reintegrate into society. Efforts must continue to provide access to such socio-economic services as food, hygiene and shelter, vocational training as well as basic unconditional social assistance, in particular for women, in urban settings.

## **Proposals for addressing the issues and way forward**

Alternative development requires a long-term commitment to achieve sustainable results at the economic, social and environmental levels. However, alternative development programmes must also provide for short-term deliverables in order to create an environment of confidence among all parties involved.

Alternative development policies, strategies and programmes must adapt to the dynamic and multi-factorial nature of the problem. Member States must take responsibility for coordinating alternative development interventions at the national level to maximise the efficient use of resources and to avoid duplication. Alternative development works best when it spearheads or complements mainstream objectives, including governance, security, health, education and infrastructure investments.

It is important to promote an area-based and people-centred approach, based on the empowerment and ownership of local communities involved in the cultivation of illicit crops. Farmers and their communities, as well as relevant stakeholders, must be included in all steps of alternative development policy, strategy and programme formulation and implementation. The provision of agricultural support is important but insufficient. Support to communities must be broad and entail a host of social services, since alternative development must be viewed as more than just income.

Improvement in research, data collection and analysis is critical to better understand the factors contributing to illicit crop cultivation, taking into account local and regional specificities. Knowledge is indispensable also to inform programme development. The progress and impact of alternative development programmes must be consistently monitored and evaluated during the life span of interventions, on the basis of a broad range of social, economic and environmental criteria which go beyond measuring illicit crop surface estimates. This means using human development indicators, as well as criteria related to environmental sustainability and SDG measurements.

New and innovative strategies are needed to ensure long-term success and sustainability of alternative development. This includes the need for a market-driven approach to product

identification and development, as well as the identification of internal and external markets for the sale of alternative development products.

Legitimate income generating opportunities offered to small rural farming communities must look at both on and off farm activities, and seek to help small farmer enterprises throughout the entire cycle (farm-gate, production, value added, market).

New funding mechanisms must be identified so that programmes can be sustainable and meet the needs of farming communities. This should be coupled with efforts to mainstream development oriented drug control in broader national and international assistance programmes. In spite of its mandated crop reduction focus, certain components of alternative development must be viewed through the lens of broader rural and agricultural development.

There is a need to strengthen international cooperation. Greater efforts must be made to build on the many years of trial and error, of successes and errors. An initial starting point is improving South-South cooperation. International cooperation must also be viewed more widely, involving not only international assistance but also, wherever feasible, the private sector and non-traditional partners.

Alternative development must be undertaken in a broader development context through an integrated and holistic approach implementing actions oriented to promoting and reaching the SDGs. Reducing poverty and creating more equal and sustainable socio-economic conditions, as well as enhancing the welfare of the affected population through licit alternatives and social services are at the core of a long-term comprehensive and sustainable development-oriented and balanced drug control approach. Alternative development must be incorporated into broader national development strategies in order to mainstream actions and provide wider financial and technical support to achieve expected results and successfully contribute to poverty reduction and socio-economic development.

It is recommended to address the issue of sustainable livelihoods in urban settings to support populations affected by illicit drug markets and related activities. This can be achieved by providing basic socio-economic services such as food, hygiene and shelter, vocational training as well as basic unconditional social assistance.

## Questions for discussion

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- **What are the factors that make alternative development different from mainstream rural development?**
- **What steps can be taken to ensure that alternative development is mainstreamed into broader national development plans?**



- **How can the gap between political and financial commitment to alternative development be bridged?**
- **What are the links between alternative development and peacebuilding/conflict-resolution?**
- **To what extent does the private sector have a social responsibility to include development goals in their business plans?**
- **Given the clear links between the SDGs and alternative development, how can the SDGs be used to garner additional political and financial support for alternative development programmes?**
- **What needs to be done in order to apply alternative development strategies to address the cultivation of cannabis?**
- **What steps can be taken to ensure that addressing the socio-economic causes and consequences of the world drug problem are taken into consideration in national sustainable development policies/plans?**