(e) Alternative development; regional, inter-regional and international cooperation on development-oriented balanced drug control policy; addressing socioeconomic issues

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

Alternative Development (AD) continues to be recognized by Member States as a fundamental pillar of a comprehensive drug control strategy and plays an important role as a development oriented drug control approach. The concept of AD is much broader than just crop substitution and eradication, it also takes into account the various aspects of rural development and attempts to make structural changes in the socio-economic environment of rural farming communities.

By designing and implementing AD programmes, UNODC adheres to the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action entitled “International cooperation on eradicating the illicit cultivation of crops used for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and on alternative development”, as well as the 2013 United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development and the Lima Declaration on Alternative Development. UNODC addresses key elements of the AD approach and makes clear that the approach should include a comprehensive set of multisectoral interventions. When developing AD programmes, UNODC aims to take into consideration the various social, cultural, economic, political, educational and environmental aspects, in addition to incorporating, where appropriate, demand reduction measures. The efforts of UNODC so far have particularly been focused on regions in South America, Central- and South-East Asia.

UNODC conducts its technical cooperation programmes in an integrated fashion, to translate the organizational medium-term strategy and biennial planning into operational technical cooperation action that meets Member States priority needs. Subprogramme 2 of the UNODC Strategic Framework on “Sustainable Development and Alternative Livelihoods” includes measures to develop balanced drug control policies, address related socio-economic issues, foster alternative development, including preventive alternative development, and promote international and regional cooperation in these areas.

UNODC Thematic Programmes then provide the framework for UNODC tools, services, expertise and priority areas that facilitate UNODC operational interventions at global, regional, and country levels. UNODC delivers its technical cooperation through its network of eight regional offices, ten country offices and two liaison and partnership offices situated in key regions. In addition, UNODC

establishes temporary project offices in close proximity to clients to deliver specific technical cooperation projects.
(ii) Enhancing regional, interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented balanced drug control policy

UNODC offices currently implement sixteen regional and country programmes in full cooperation with partner countries and regional entities (nine regional programmes and seven country programmes). All programmes provide the operational cooperation platforms to support Member States in their national drug and crime control priorities, contribute to the implementation of common regional strategies and action plans, and also contain alternative development components in key drug cultivation countries and regions.

AD programmes have proven to be successful, resulting in an improvement in the socio-economic situation of target communities and in reduction of illicit crops. AD programmes in the Andean region have effectively targeted coca bush cultivation. Over the past 35+ years, these programmes have improved the social and economic situation of families in coca bush-growing areas through farmer-led small business enterprises, which were able to increase revenues through the placement of quality products on international markets. Furthermore, the AD programmes strengthened farmer associations in the region and exports of products stemming from alternative development are continuously gaining market share in niche markets. Many of the farmer families involved voluntarily eradicated coca crops in lieu of AD support.

Reforestation programmes are also a significant part of the AD programmes. For example, in South America, following the eradication of coca crops, reforestation of vast areas of former coca plantations took place. As a result, large amounts of carbon dioxide is being sequestered and the deterioration of natural resources, via for example, coca bush monoculture, has been halted. In addition, proper soil and water management for sustainable agriculture has been an integral part of many of the UNODC AD programmes. Both in Central and South East Asia, and in the Andean region, AD has widely contributed over the years to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 1 on eradicating poverty and hunger and Goal 7 on ensuring environmental sustainability. In Central and South East Asian regions in particular, UNODC is supporting long-term land stabilization projects and helping build resilience in communities affected by climate change and the loss of productive agricultural land. As a result, in addition to the AD programmes generating jobs and legitimate income through productive forestry and agroforestry practices, they are also contributing to conservation efforts.

Poverty and food insecurity remain among the key factors driving the illicit cultivation of crops used for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. Therefore, the focus of AD programmes is oriented to addressing the underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity by improving the socioeconomic conditions of these communities. AD programmes implemented in South-East Asia, focus on reducing levels of poverty and ensuring food security in opium poppy growing communities. AD programmes in South East Asia
particularly promote advanced farming practices to increase basic food crops, establish long term cash crops and diversify farm and off-farm income-generating activities.

UNODC also promotes AD programmes focused on strengthening national policies and capacities to implement AD programmes and improve coordination between government and non-government stakeholders. These programmes are of particular importance in regions of South and Central Asia.

UNODC continues to exercise its catalytic role to promote South-South cooperation, foster the exchange of experiences among Member States and provide field-based technical assistance. In 2010 UNODC sponsored focused workshops, bringing together practitioners from concerned Member States, to promote the sharing of best practices and lessons learned and fostering personal contacts. This work served as the basis for the development of the International Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (IGPs), led by the governments of Peru and Thailand. The IGPs were adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs at its fifty-sixth session (2013) and by the General Assembly at its 68th session (2013). The IGPs provide both policy and technical guidance to Member States, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders.

Many of UNODC’s AD programmes also focus on and significantly contribute to empowering women in challenging situations. Women often play an equal or higher role in ensuring that basic socio-economic means are assured for the family. These and other gender-sensitive issues are mainstreamed into all UNODC development assistance programmes, done so with full respect to the cultural sensitivities of the target areas. In South America, for example, UNODC implements AD programmes dedicated to sustainable agricultural development to reduce poverty through environmentally sustainable approaches and women empowerment. Training has been provided to women on food security, quality and nutritional value of food crops and permanent cash crops, agricultural practices and participation in all decision making processes.

The financing of AD and the facilitation of market access for products stemming from alternative development made possible by donors and the international community has proven to be a pillar of sustainable crop control strategies if implemented in a framework of long-term commitment. Recently, it has become apparent that national support to AD programmes experienced a shift, especially in South America, where the Governments are taking over almost entirely the funding. AD programmes in Central and South-East Asia however continue to depend largely on international donor assistance. Although national funding has increased, donor assistance has not kept the same pace perpetuating a low coverage rate for farming communities engaged in illicit crop cultivation.

One of the challenges with AD programmes is in measuring, from a global perspective, the coverage, quality and efficacy of programmes and services being provided in countries to address the drug problem.
While some countries report on the existence of programmes and policies, information available at the global level does not permit an assessment of the extension of AD programmes and their impact. AD projects are using the reduction in the cultivation of crops used for the production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as a measure of impact. However, this method ignores the conditions under which these crops are cultivated and does not take into consideration the issue of replanting following eradication. Nor does it measure changes in human development indicators. This was illustrated by an opium risk assessment conducted in South- and Central Asia in early 2012. The study found a strong association between insecurity, lack of agricultural assistance and opium cultivation. Villages with a low level of security that had not received agricultural assistance in the previous year were significantly more likely to grow poppy than villages that had good security and had been targeted by an anti-poppy awareness campaign.

A further challenge UNODC faces when implementing AD programmes is the fact that AD programmes are long-term and high investment endeavours. They can only yield results if implemented over a significant period of time with adequate funding involved. Although in some regions, governments have taken over funding of the projects, a serious problem still faced by many AD programmes is that traditional sources of funding are becoming scarcer and, national drug control budgets are diverted to other types of programmes, and new and emerging challenges. The involvement of international financial institutions and relevant development organizations is critical. AD programmes should be incorporated into illicit crop control strategies, poverty reduction strategy papers, country assistance strategies and other forms of development assistance. Furthermore, AD programmes should be integrated into broader national development strategies in order to mainstream actions and provide wider financial and technical support to sustainably reduce illicit crop cultivation and successfully contribute to poverty reduction and socio-economic development.

AD assistance has been provided to only a small fraction of farming communities engaged in illicit crop cultivation. Increased awareness, new funding mechanisms and policies facilitating market access for products stemming from AD must be identified so that programmes can be supported to levels of sustainability and farming communities requiring assistance can be supported. AD projects become sustainable and have the potential to generate high revenues when there is access to the market, promotion of the products and support via international cooperation. UNODC’s AD programmes around the world have demonstrated that well financed, field designed long-term interventions can have a lasting impact on improving the lives of rural communities and reducing illicit crop cultivation.