

(d) Cross-cutting issues: new challenges, threats and realities in preventing and addressing the world drug problem in compliance with relevant international law, including the three drug control conventions; strengthening the principle of common and shared responsibility and international cooperation

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New challenges and threats

New challenges have emerged in recent years related to new harmful substances, new trafficking routes and modes, which impact upon the efforts to bring drugs under control, as well as illicit drug markets worldwide. Innovative drug policies have yielded tangible results in terms of reduced illicit cultivation, improved health and treatment awareness raising and capacity building. Challenges remain in ensuring that the approaches adopted offer the right balance between reduction of the demand and elimination of supply.

A new challenge to both supply and demand reduction efforts and legislative control is the rapid emergence of new psychoactive substances, substances of abuse that are not under international control but which may pose a public health threat. New psychoactive substances are emerging on the global market at an unprecedented rate. The use of new psychoactive substances has not yet been widely studied, but the limited information available suggests that the levels of use are far from negligible and that the use of new psychoactive substances can have serious health effects, contrary to how they are usually advertised.¹

The high levels of illicit opium poppy cultivation, particularly in Afghanistan, are an on-going challenge to the world. Cultivation levels reached a record high in 2014. Afghanistan's production of opiates reaches all regions of the world. The massive increase in the global supply of opiates observed in 2014 is likely to have severe implications on the use and availability of opiates in the years to come.

Terrorists benefit from transnational organized crime in some regions, including from trafficking of illicit drugs. Countries are facing challenges related to terrorism financing derived from organized crime.

Global market for synthetic stimulants expanding

The expansion of the illicit market for synthetic stimulants in the global market is another threat. Data on the illicit use, and manufacture and trafficking of controlled synthetic drugs remain sparse, but point to an increase over levels in 2007,² particularly in the case of

¹ For more information, see UNODC *World Drug Report 2013* (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/secured/wdr/wdr2013/World_Drug_Report_2013.pdf).

² Ibid.

methamphetamine. Several reasons related to the control of both demand and supply can explain this expansion. Controlling the manufacturing of synthetic drugs is more challenging than controlling the production of plant-based drugs because the production of plant-based drugs is less dispersed — it requires more time and more steps (cultivation, harvesting, manufacturing) and that provides more opportunities for control measures to intervene. Precursor control is a key supply reduction strategy for reducing illicitly manufactured synthetic drugs. Despite the progress made in recent years in controlling precursor chemicals, controlled under the 1988 Convention³, existing strategies have not succeeded in effectively curtailing the clandestine manufacture of methamphetamine, as organized criminal groups have identified a number of innovative ways to circumvent precursor control measures: the use of pharmaceutical preparations that are not under international control; the development of methamphetamine manufacturing sites in countries with rather weak precursor control regimes; the diversion of precursors at the national level and subsequent smuggling into other countries; and the increasing use of “pre-precursors” that are not internationally controlled and that can be exported to other countries and then converted to the precursor chemicals required for the manufacture of methamphetamine. On the demand side, the prevention of illicit drug use is largely not substance-specific; therefore, the prevention of the illicit use of synthetic stimulants suffers from a lack of sustained drug prevention interventions and policies based on scientific evidence. On the care and rehabilitation of drug-dependent persons, lack of a pharmacological therapy greatly hinders the treatment of people who are dependent on synthetic and other stimulants.

New trafficking routes

Traffickers continue to try to circumvent national efforts to reduce drug trafficking by identifying new routes and exploiting weak law enforcement capacities. Successes in curtailing trafficking in, and demand for, cocaine in developed countries, notably in North America, have prompted the drug cartels to explore new market opportunities in South America, as well as in Oceania, Asia and Africa. Many of the new market countries are less equipped to deal with this new problem. The vulnerability of West Africa and Eastern Africa to illicit drug use and trafficking has increased over the last decade. New sea routes for Afghan opiates are opening up along the coast of East Africa while large-scale production of illicit methamphetamine manufacture is emerging in West Africa. More cocaine and heroin being reported trafficked through these two sub regions with a resulting spill over effect of increased use of these drugs.

³ *Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2012 on the Implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XI.4), pp. 32-34; and *Precursors and Chemicals Frequently Used in the Illicit Manufacture of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*, pp. 28-31.

New technologies

The rapid development of new technologies also threatens the efficacy of law enforcement efforts. The global reach of the internet as a platform both for communication and coordination between traffickers is impacting upon the movement of illicit consignments and the modus operandi employed by trafficking groups. Law enforcement effectiveness is challenged if agencies do not adapt to the growing role played by cyber technologies in drug trafficking and related money-laundering activities.

Misuse of prescription drugs

A number of countries in various regions have also been experiencing growing misuse of prescription drugs, such as painkillers containing synthetic opioids, tranquillizers containing benzodiazepines or sedatives containing barbiturates. These substances are often widely available, as measures to control their use are often circumvented, prompting the establishment of parallel markets. Though they are legally produced and required for medical purposes, many of these substances can cause dependence and their use — especially if it is not in line with medical guidelines — can be harmful or even fatal.

Violence related to drug trafficking

Drug-related violence has long been known to have a deadly impact on society.⁴ In the past few years, however, drug trafficking has triggered a new surge of widespread violence in Latin America, West Africa and West Asia, and the affected countries are paying a high price in terms of human lives. Some Central American countries have been facing homicide rates that are the highest in the world, with rates often surpassing those of countries in armed conflict. Although violence clearly has diverse roots, countries in the Americas are drawing increased attention to the profits drawn by transnational organized crime groups through the exploitation of a highly profitable illicit market and have underscored the manner in which transnational organized crime groups are able to mobilize financial resources that allow them to penetrate and corrupt institutions.

Health-centred approach

Addressing illicit drug use and drug dependence through a health-centred approach is still not sufficiently implemented in all countries, even though significant progress in this direction has been made in several parts of the world over the last few decades. Some national drug control systems still rely to a large extent on sanctions and imprisonment, instead of health care. Despite the progress made, compulsory treatment and punitive measures in the name of treatment are still common practice in some countries. Similarly, stigma, discrimination and human rights violations are common problems

⁴ Drug trafficking has, for example, triggered violence among organized criminal groups in Colombia, Italy and the United States of America since the 1970s.

among people who illicitly use drugs and people who are dependent on drugs and living with HIV/AIDS, discouraging such people from seeking the health and social services they need. Though the coverage of services based on scientific evidence has increased in some countries, it is still inadequate in many countries.

Data collection and analysis

The effective monitoring of the drug problem, as well as responses to that problem, is still not possible in a number of thematic and geographical areas. Many countries still lack the capacity to systematically compile, analyse and disseminate even the most basic drug-related information. It remains a challenge to globally quantify phenomena such as the cultivation of cannabis plants, the manufacturing of synthetic drugs or the illicit financial flows of drug profits. On the demand side, global estimates have a very high level of uncertainty. Some difficulties relate to the fact that the dynamics of illicit drug markets remain largely hidden in illegal activities which are difficult to measure. Estimating flows of drugs, for example, remain challenging because only a few of the elements, such as seizures or arrests, are usually known and they cannot always be used to characterize changes in drug trafficking. Other challenges relate to the broad nature of the drug problem and its cross-border characteristics, which require a concerted effort on the part of all countries to implement quite demanding data collection activities covering the whole spectrum of the drug problem using comparable methodologies. The lack of financial and human resources makes it impossible to accurately quantify the drug problem in a number of countries, and that, in turn, makes it difficult to accurately identify trends at the global level.

There are also problems 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 accessibility of treatment services, the actual impact of evidence-based prevention and treatment programmes, the extension of alternative development programmes and their impact, as well as the impact of measures taken to control the illicit drug supply and fight money-laundering.

(ii) Strengthening the principle of common and shared responsibility and enhancing international cooperation, including technical assistance, leading up to 2019

The principle of common and shared responsibility is a recognition of the global nature of the challenges associated with the world drug problem, requiring joint efforts of the international community at the national, regional and international levels, including by means of

enhanced and coordinated technical and financial assistance.⁵ It encompasses all activities related to the illicit production and trafficking as well as distribution and use of drugs under international control, and it requires harmonized policy and legislative approaches to reduce the illicit demand and supply of controlled drugs, with the aim of enhancing public health and in accordance with applicable international law.

⁵ See Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, 2009, paragraph 12.

Regional cooperation

The international community increasingly recognizes regional cooperation as being critical to an effective and coordinated response to the drug problem and other cross-border problems. The regional approach can play a key role in strengthening incentives and accountability at the national level and regional organizations provide an increasingly strong platform for action. This point was stressed also in the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The five regional meetings of heads of national drug law enforcement agencies, which are convened each year, provide a strong foundation for regional cooperation. At the same time, in the past few years, UNODC has promoted a series of regional initiatives to address the drug problem. New regional criminal intelligence centres, modelled upon good practices of INTERPOL, the European Police Office (Europol) and the World Customs Organization, have been established in the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) and the Gulf Criminal Information Centre (GCIC), together with a joint planning cell covering Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Regional networks of prosecutors of organized crime have been established within the UNODC Global Programme for Strengthening Capacities to Prevent and Combat Organized Crime. Other regional operational initiatives supported by UNODC to address drug trafficking and other criminal activities in partnership with other organizations include the Container Control Programme (CCP); the joint West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI), the Airport Communication Project (AIRCOP), the CASH initiative (which counters illicit money flows and confiscates the assets of drug trafficking networks in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries), the STOP initiative (which focuses on interdiction efforts within the Triangular initiative involving Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan) and the Maritime Regional Security Initiative (MaReS) (which is aimed at strengthening maritime cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan). UNODC also has promoted regional cooperation through a still increasing set of regional and country programmes that are better integrated and better connected. At present, UNODC is implementing 9 regional programmes: in Eastern Africa; in East Asia and the Pacific; in Central America; in South-Eastern Europe; in the Arab States; in West Africa; in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries; in Southern Africa; in South Asia; and in the Caribbean. In addition, nine country programmes are ongoing. These programmes support the implementation of the international drug control conventions (through a balanced approach addressing both demand and supply), the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its protocols, the United Nations Convention against Corruption, and the United Nations Standards and Norms on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

Interregional cooperation

Successful global and interregional activities of the past few years include the Paris Pact Initiative, a well-established key international partnership (which includes

58 Member States and 20 organizations) to counter the trafficking in and consumption of opiates originating in Afghanistan, and the UNODC Global Programme against Money-Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, which assists national authorities of Afghanistan and neighbouring countries in collecting information on illicit financial flows linked to Afghan opiates and further disrupting such payments and, by doing so, attacking the high echelons of organized criminal groups. Recognizing the need to tackle the drug problem at the interregional level, UNODC has promoted cooperation between the regional law enforcement centres, as well as with other recognized and well-established international and regional organizations, such as INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, Europol and others, through the so-called “networking of networks”, which is aimed at leveraging the combined strengths of those individual centres. UNODC has also developed a new generation of regional programmes, which are integrated and connected with each other, and an interregional approach which allows for the strategic implementation of activities across regions.

Exchange of data and information

At the core of international cooperation there is the effective exchange of data and information, but there are still many knowledge gaps which prevent the targeting of common responses. There is a need for more investment in improving existing national, regional and global monitoring systems. This entails investing in improving the coverage of existing monitoring systems and implementing new data collection tools and new scientific approaches. Given its transnational nature, the drug problem cannot be understood by examining only the situation within a country’s borders; therefore, sharing data and other information is essential to obtaining an accurate picture of the drug situation. There is also a need for countries to renew their commitment to providing accurate data and other information to UNODC, pursuant to the International Drug Control Conventions.

The way forward

The discussion offers an opportunity for member States to identify best ways of how to balance the drug control system, in particular by: focusing on health and respect for human rights, emphasizing evidence-based prevention and treatment; giving due consideration to the needs of drug-dependent persons, countering cultural stereotypes, stigma and discrimination, which limit access of drug users to health and social services; scaling up action to ensure access to controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes, while preventing diversion and abuse; intensifying data collection at national levels and the exchange of factual data and information; and implementing drug control policies within the framework of the rule of law.

A renewed effort to enhance and better coordinate technical and financial assistance would help to harmonize efforts of the international community and their results at legislative, policy and operational levels, in compliance with the international drug control conventions and applicable human rights law.

