



CHAPTER 3

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT



INTRODUCTION

Today the possibility of any sustained eradication of illicit crops is usually met with a sceptical response. Actual experience, however, belies this scepticism. There are many examples of sustained crop eradication which should strengthen our confidence in what is known as alternative development. Since the 1920s, when an international drug control system was established under the rubric of the League of Nations, the elimination of illicit crops has been both achieved and maintained in many producing countries. At the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, global production of opium was estimated at approximately 20,000 tonnes per year. Today it is less than a third of that: global licit production of opium is about 1,300 tonnes and illicit production around 4,800 tonnes. Within this large global picture, there is an even more interesting example of successful, sustained crop elimination. The bulk of the 20,000 tonnes produced annually at the beginning of the twentieth century was produced in China. Licit opium production in China today is almost negligible, at about 20 tonnes, and illicit cultivation has been virtually non-existent for the last fifty years. Similarly, once widely grown in Formosa (now Taiwan, Province of China) and Indonesia, the coca bush has not been cultivated in either country for half a century.

The history of drug control has many such examples. Other cases of successful and sustained eradication, to name a few, are Iran, Thailand, Pakistan, Lebanon and Guatemala. The very fact that the elimination of illicit cultivation has been sustained in these countries has a odd result: it is often forgotten that some of them were once major illicit producers of narcotic drugs.

For example, in 1934, officially reported world production of opium was 7,023 tonnes. Of this, China produced 83%, Iran 7%, India 5% and Turkey 2%. Though Chinese production decreased over the next two decades, it was still substantial in 1949. Between 1950 and 1952, the new People's Republic of China instituted a massive campaign to extinguish opium production and consumption. By 1952, China was considered to be virtually drug-free.



Alternative development
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Similar successes were achieved in India in the middle of the twentieth century. In 1949, the newly independent state of India drew up a ten year plan to prohibit the non-medical use of opium. In 1950, the cultivation and manufacture of opium throughout the country was brought entirely under government supervision and control. By 1954, production had decreased, prices increased, and consumption was down by 45%. The end of the decade saw the achievement of a total prohibition on the sale of opium. Thereafter the government supervised control system was further rationalized, in accordance with international obligations. Today, India is the world's largest producer of licit opium for medical purposes. It also has in place a control system which prevents any significant diversion of this licit opium into illicit markets.

Illicit cultivation has also been successfully eliminated in Iran. By the law of 30 October 1955, opium production and consumption were prohibited in the country. In 1969, however, pressure from influential landowners and farmers led to the law being rescinded. A decade later, the Islamic revolution of 1979 brought a total prohibition on opium poppy cultivation. For more than 20 years, this has been maintained and today there is no opium poppy cultivation in Iran.

In Turkey, illicit cultivation emerged as a major problem only in the 1960s. Clandestine exports of heroin to Europe and the USA became a serious problem, leading to the complete transformation of illicit cultivation into strictly controlled licit cultivation. This was achieved in the 1970s by means of the government's firm commitment and resolute policy, supported by the United Nations and the U.S.A. The initiation of controlled cultivation was accompanied by rigorous law enforcement action to ensure the elimination of illicit cultivation by farmers. The success of these actions has been maintained; in Turkey no illicit cultivation takes place today.

Past experience demonstrates that although elimination of illicit cultivation may be difficult to achieve and sustain, it is by no means impossible. It does, however, require a number of prerequisites. These include resolute political commitment from the government and from bilateral and multilateral partners working together within the framework of the international drug control system. Effective sovereignty over the areas of illicit cultivation is also a prerequisite. In all four of the cases noted above, elimination was achieved and sustained because governments were able to exercise control over the areas where illicit crops were grown.

Today, the situation is different, and the majority of illicit crops are grown in different circumstances. This cultivation puts parts of the rural population into an extremely precarious and insecure situation. Because of their geographical remoteness or because of political instability or civil war, there is often a lack of effective government control in the illicit crop producing areas. Since these marginal areas are frequently outside the control of the national government, the people living there have little or no access to even the most basic of services, such as education, sanitation and healthcare, which are normally provided by the government. Communities also may find themselves in the very vulnerable situation of being outside the protection of the law, either because of the lack of government control or because they make a necessary

economic decision to remove themselves from the rule of law in order to engage in an illicit activity. Once outside the rule of law, they become vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups and lose some of their most basic human rights.

These differences are now better understood and appreciated. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s there has been a growing recognition in the international community that the programmes designed to eliminate illicit cultivation can only be sustained if they respond to the complex factors which lead to the peasant household's decision to engage in an illicit activity and grow an illicit crop in the first place.

Based upon the recognition that economic necessity often plays a key role in the decision to cultivate illicit crops, there is now a consensus in the international community that the economic reliance on narcotic crop cultivation can only be removed when viable, sustainable income-generating alternatives are available in the legal sector. "Alternative development" has been the method used by the United Nations to achieve this objective since the late 1970s. In practice, alternative development is simply the implementation of a coordinated set of programmes with the intended objective of addressing the factors which are at the heart of the drug problem. Emphasizing human development, the security of the individual and the community, rural agricultural and industrial development, these programmes are intended to achieve not only a viable eradication of narcotic crops in the near term, but to sustain the elimination of these crops and the violence and insecurity that are almost always attendant to their cultivation.