

Drugs, International Challenges



DRUGS AND DEVELOPMENT: NEW PROSPECTS AHEAD?

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In April 2016, following several years of discussions initiated by the presidents of Colombia, Mexico, and Guatemala, the international community, at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGASS), agreed to continue its fight against the “world drug problem” by proposing a roadmap focusing more closely on the new realities of the phenomenon and the multidimensional nature of its potential solutions. In this approach, which is meant to be more “effective” – particularly in view of the failings observed in the fight against drug trafficking –, several “operational recommendations” have been drawn up, including towards “international cooperation on development-oriented balanced drug control policy” (United Nations General Assembly, 2016). The objective of this issue of *Drugs, international challenges* is to take stock of the relations sustained by drug control and development policies, initially returning to the concept of “alternative development” so as to clarify its intricacies and limitations. A second part will explore the emergence of a

new conception of the issue, drawing on lessons learned from previous setbacks.

Programmes benefiting geopolitical interests

The “development” issue has been incorporated into drug control strategies by trial and error. Several programmes with changing labels – “crop substitution”, “integrated rural development”, “alternative livelihood” or, more broadly, “alternative development” – have been implemented in the main countries producing poppy and coca, for more than fifty years, based on the assumption that introducing agricultural alternatives, com-

1. This overview is part of a doctoral research project in political science, focusing on the current changes in international drug policy-making. It is based on empirical research, including archive studies, several assignments within international organisations specialising in issues relating to drugs and development, together with approximately a hundred of interviews with stakeholders connected with these issues.

INTRODUCTION

Bans on production and forced eradication have long been prerequisites for economic development among the measures utilised to reduce or eliminate illicit drug cultivation. There have been numerous successive programmes and projects aimed at reducing the illicit cultivation of cannabis, coca and opium poppy since the 1970s. Strategies and names have varied over the decades, but successful outcomes have rarely been achieved, and this type of drug control action is still controversial. Despite its disappointing results, “alternative development”, a generic term for a range of measures, cannot be rejected as a whole. Although alternative development has clearly failed, it has not been any less of a failure than forced eradication. Above all, in contrast to the latter, development creates wealth, with very little or no counter-productivity. Its failure therefore raises the question of the (in)appropriate drug policies and monitoring instruments, both on a local and global scale.

The failure of alternative development seems more attributable to its designs, methods, and resources, particularly financial resources, than the approach to the issue of illicit drug cultivation in terms of socioeconomic development. In fact, alternative development does not appear to have failed because it is an inappropriate strategy, but because the decrease in illicit cultivation has all too often been separated from measures to reduce poverty or food insecurity, which are the two main underlying causes for these practices, causes which repressive approaches will only exacerbate. The war on drugs was lost a long time ago and only by reducing extreme underdevelopment will we effectively help to reduce illicit drug cultivation, whether in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Colombia, Morocco and elsewhere.

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bined with totally eradicating illicit cultivation, would encourage farmers to permanently abandon illicit activities. Historically on the fringes, these programmes were based on a two-fold dynamic: from generally forced eradication operations (manual, mechanical and/or by aerial crop spraying, depending on the regions) on said crops, and technical/financial support (equipment, subsidies, infrastructure, etc.), to the introduction of alternative licit crops with an economic yield likely to dissuade farmers from returning to prohibited crops and generating sustainable lawful income. Now, finding a balance between these two components has often been problematic, with economic assistance often given secondary importance and sometimes exploited for political and geopolitical objectives aimed at fighting the enemies within at that particular time (Labrousse, 2000).

From the Golden Triangle to the Andes: the limitations of an imbalanced approach

Theoretically designed as a measure part way between drug control and official development assistance policies, alternative development soon revealed its limitations in the exploratory trials carried out. Thailand in the 1960s is a striking example of this.

In a context defined by the Vietnam War and the regional development of communist guerrilla movements (Laos, Myanmar (formerly Burma), and Cambodia), King Bhumibol decided to introduce an alternative development programme in the northern regions (Chiang Mai) inhabited by ethnic minorities (Hmong, Karen). This political turning point was explained by the unexpected and counterproductive consequences of the forced eradication programmes in the previous decade (Chouvy, 2009), which merely succeeded in further marginalising the farming populations, resulting in greater distrust of the state, and, in all likelihood, movement of crops. From 1985 onwards, the regime decided to promote and implement the principle of a supported transition to the licit economy (provision of farming equipment, seeds, financial support) and more gradual eradication (six to eight years before total forced eradication). Although the king announced his aim to make Thailand a “drug-free country”, this policy also aimed to encourage the integration of ethnic minorities at the Thai-Burmese border, perceived as vulnerable to communist ideas and thus a threat to the central state. Despite attracting criticism, the king’s long-term commitment to this approach would help forge a “Thai

model” (text box p. 6), “centred on communities” rather than on the demand for eradication– the focus of programmes implemented in other regions. This policy would be supported by the United Nations from the beginning of the 1970s, via the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), and would be implemented with assistance from Norway and Germany throughout the 1980s with varying success (Andersson *et al.*, 2006; Renard, 2010). Although some degree of success was achieved, given the substantial reduction in the surface area of poppy cultivation in Thailand², several pernicious effects gradually emerged, which will be discussed later in this article.

Other programmes were implemented around the globe, notably at the instigation of the United States. Back in 1975, the US government financed “crop substitution” projects in Pakistan (the Bruner project), in Bolivia, then, in 1981 through its own development aid agency (USAID), in Peru and Colombia, before extensively investing in “alternative livelihood” programmes in Afghanistan towards the end of the 2000s. These projects did not always serve their stated objectives of socio-economic support towards licit livelihoods. From the early 1970s, the US approach was often based on geopolitical and security processes, where the implemented programmes were mere instruments of an interventionist policy aiming at containing the development of guerrilla movements (Shining Path, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), etc.) and/or social movements deemed “hostile”. The objective was also to exert pressure on local governments – whether they were allies or not. The various US governments perceived alternative development as a combination of implementing security measures in a given territory and a mix of targeted eradication, prohibition and

A long-standing issue

Drug control has taken socioeconomic factors into consideration since the end of the 1960s, with the emergence of programmes based on the concept of “alternative development”. In this approach, the fight against drugs is examined from the perspective of the socioeconomic integration of those involved in the parallel economy, particularly illicit crop producers often from the poorest and most socially excluded populations. Implemented over the years in the five main countries of illicit coca and poppy cultivation (Afghanistan, Bolivia, Colombia, Peru, and Thailand), predominantly with U.S. financial support, the various approaches to alternative development have not generally succeeded in reducing illicit crop cultivation, or in offering the targeted populations a sustainable way out of the illicit drug economy. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the links between drug policies and development was soon settled once the success of these schemes was seen to be highly relative, with alternative development being perceived as a relatively unconvincing hybrid public intervention approach, both in terms of drug control and development assistance goals.

2. Thailand was producing approximately 130 tonnes of opium at the time. In the 1990s, production fell to approximately twenty tonnes, compared to 4 tonnes today, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2015).

development operations; these actions were offset by economic assistance measures, for instance, including special access to the US market (Tokatlian, 2009). In the majority of cases, US aid conditionally required prior total, and often forced eradication. This approach was harshly criticised in view of its limited or, indeed, negative impact on the socioeconomic integration of targeted communities (Vargas Meza, 2011).

Alongside this unilateral policy, the international community (United Nations, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD) struggled to define its own framework for intervention. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) are attempting to formalise this concept via tentative assessments of the various programmes implemented in the field; however, “alternative development” remains mainly apprehended as a tool of supply reduction policies. Although “support for integrated rural development lea-

ding to economically viable alternatives” (1988 Convention, Art.14.3.a) is suggested as a possible “measure” for eliminating illicit cultivation or as an “instrument for controlling drug abuse” liable to allow a “sufficient level of development in order to end drug production” (UNDCP, 1993), this is clearly not a priority and is still a vague concept. This conceptualisation is particularly fragile due to the limited commitment by other specialised UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with greater expertise in development support.

In this context, alternative development has long been a hybrid and misunderstood concept, lacking adequate resources (human and financial, etc.). These shortcomings are apparent in the divergent implementation of these programmes, with conceptualisation also varying depending on the donors (see text box below), but also in the absence of an assessment system and appropriate impact studies going beyond geographical indicators of reduced cultivation zones. Ultima-

tely, the “development” effort comes down to a security approach, largely driven by foreign donors, but without the stated objectives being reached. These initial experiences are characterised by confusion between the demand for elimination of cultivation in the short term and a sustainable transition to a viable socioeconomic situation. Hence, these “overlapping agendas” (Mansfield, 2006) not only opened up this option to multiple criticisms, both on a political level and in the field, but also ultimately discredited this approach (Mansfield and Pain, 2005) and compromised the possibility for a broad consensus around a credible development-oriented drug policy (UNODC, 2017).

Limited interest from the International Community

Although early mobilisation of certain stakeholders such as the United States, despite the geopolitical agendas at work, helped alert donors to the importance of development in the drug-affected contexts, the primacy of national interests has prevented genuine shared efforts by the various stakeholders in drug control and international co-operation (Buxton, 2015). From the 1980s, while the US “war on drugs” intensified and Western Europe was plagued by a heroin epidemic, the United States, via the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) bringing together the main donors of foreign aid, attempted to convince its partners³ of the need to offer illicit crop-producing populations alternative income possibilities, with the aim of cutting off supply to western markets. Hence, the drug issue was on the agenda of several DAC meetings (1979, 1987, 1989) based on the following rationale: as illicit crop producers belong to the

More balanced interpretations: the European Union approach

Although largely dominated by the United States, European stakeholders are increasingly committing to the alternative development agenda. Although its subsidies have been lower than the United States, the European Union has recently become a key partner in this field. In 2011, for example, the introduction of a bi-regional Cooperation Programme between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union on Drugs Policies – COPOLAD – offers a system of “horizontal exchanges of good practices” on alternative development and pilot subsistence farming projects. More broadly, the European Union perceives alternative development more as a long-term voluntary strategy for rural development and reducing poverty specifically in territories affected by illicit cultivation, than as an instrument for eradicating illicit cultivation, strictly speaking. The dedicated programmes should take into account wider issues of human security, governance, human rights, and food security. Depending on the territories, this approach includes introducing unconditional economic assistance, reinforcing the technical capabilities of targeted communities and the institutional capabilities of local authorities, while consolidating social infrastructure and services. Member States are also encouraged to weigh up the socioeconomic drivers of illicit cultivation when deciding on their respective foreign aid agendas destined for countries affected by this illicit economy.

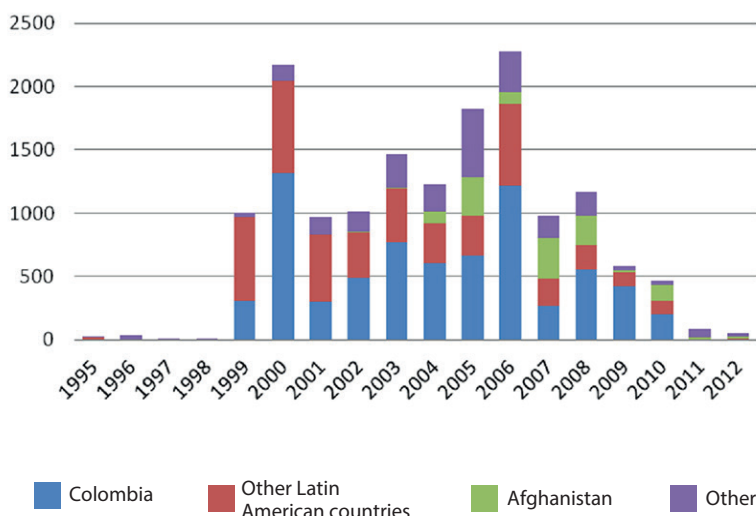
Sources: European Union (2006) *The EU Approach on alternative Development*, CORDROGUE 44, 18 May; EU Drug Strategy 2013-2020.

3. The Administration at the time clearly defined the role of foreign aid in the fight against drugs, notably in the Rodino Act (1971), which authorised the president to suspend all economic and military support in countries which refused to co-operate, whether they were allies or not. In addition to the pressure exerted on producing countries, the United States also needed the support of other donors to curb illicit drug supply while consolidating the capacities of the states concerned.

lowest socioeconomic groups, it is in the interests of donors to lend them support and, at the very least, to ensure that the aid going to producer countries is not diverted. For the members of the DAC, it was clear that their action should only apply to the socioeconomic dimensions of the drug problem – other measures relating to drug control already had their own specific co-operation mechanisms (police, customs, foreign affairs, etc.). Hence, the convincing arguments put forward by the United States as to the importance of strengthening the institutional and economic capabilities of beneficiary countries in terms of drug control were largely met by scepticism, particularly with respect to the role actually played by development agencies⁴. According to DAC archives, many donors were, in fact, concerned that the allocated budgets might be used for the security objectives of the “war on drugs” rather than those of foreign aid. In the absence of a real consensus, this issue was gradually removed from the DAC’s agenda.

Donor reluctance is apparent in the available data (Figure 1) relating to the financial commitments of OECD countries in Official Development Assistance (ODA), especially when taking into account the fact that this includes both drug control, i.e. anti-trafficking measures, and alternative development. Although not representative of all international efforts in this area, these data indicate the minimum commitment of the international community. Donor commitments are predominantly seen to focus on “narcotics control” over the 1998–2008 period, and 97% of these commitments are made by the United States, with minimum ODA amounting to almost one thousand million dollars per annum over the 2000–2008 period (Hynes and Alimi, 2015). Donor support for “alternative development”, on average, only accounts for a minute part of ODA, i.e. 0.2% (UNODC, 2015). However, despite limited investment, commitments for alternative development, and particularly for drug control, increased at certain times, which is notably explained by the

Figure 1 - ODA commitments to “Narcotics control” by recipient, 1995-2012



Source: OECD DAC - Creditor reporting system, as per Hynes and Alimi, 2015

international context in Latin America. 2000–2008 was largely defined by the geopolitical interests of the day: the increased commitments were largely due to the signing of Plan Colombia, in 2000, which was, in reality, designed “to save” an allied state and client of the United States. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, alternative development still got the smallest share with approximately 87 million dollars per year between 2004 and 2013⁵. Furthermore, in Colombia, and this is still true for other beneficiaries such as Afghanistan, some expenditure under the guise of alternative development was, in fact, used for training the police or military in the context of technical support for eradication. Certain US representatives also suggested⁶ that allocation of part of this expenditure was merely based on accounting data, not necessarily reflecting the actual nature of the operations deployed in the field. These measures would only be relatively stepped up in the short term since, after reaching a peak in 2007–2008, commitments then fell by 59% (Figure 2). Consequently, in 2013, although total ODA continued to increase, the share assigned to alternative development fell to its 1998 level (i.e. 0.1% of total ODA, versus 0.3% in 2008 – at its peak).

Over the entire period, “alternative development” thus remained the “poor cousin” of ODA. Since 2012–2013, renewed interest has nonetheless been observed, which is mainly explained by the political impetus generated by the drafting of the 2009 Plan of Action towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem which establishes alternative development as one of the main pillars of drug control (UNODC, 2015). While commitments are stabilising, donors are becoming increasingly diverse, with the European Union at the forefront, followed by Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands⁷.

4. During high-level DAC meetings in 1989-1991, donors were particularly divided on the role of this authority in managing the drug problem. Norway and Sweden expressed doubts as to the preferred measures to be taken in fields of operations falling under the prerogative of law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. Furthermore, other donors, notably the Netherlands, Canada, and the United Kingdom, believed it would be more effective to prevent abuse in so-called demand countries rather than investing in foreign aid supply-reduction programmes (OECD archives, 1989, 1991).

5. These data should be interpreted with caution as the funded activities do not always appear to meet ODA criteria and funds are not always used in accordance with the reported objectives.

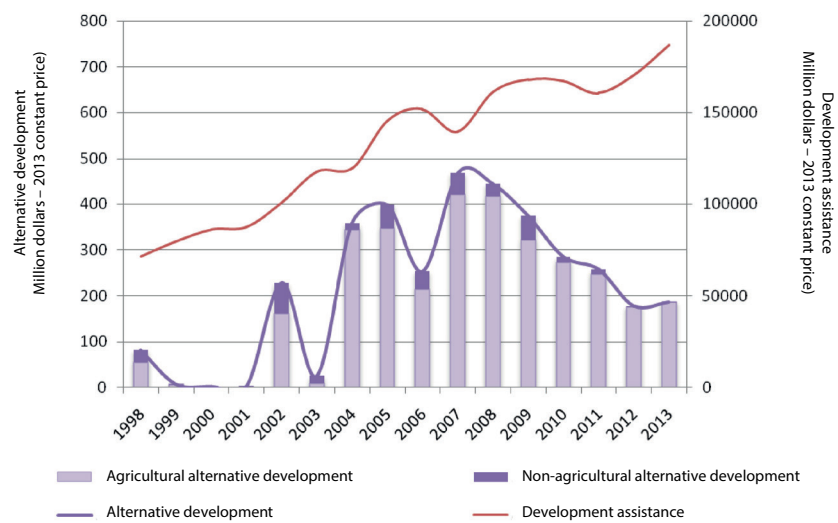
6. Interviews with the author.

7. European commitments are considered separately from bilateral agreements signed by its Member States.

A new strategic focus in view

Alternative development policies, subordinating assistance to socio-economic integration based on the principles of security and eradication⁸ (Chouvy, 2013), have been widely criticised. Several studies documented the difficulties faced by stakeholders in the fight against drugs in sizing up the multidimensional role potentially fulfilled by illicit drug cultivation within the beneficiary communities – and therefore in implementing solutions adapted to specific local needs, aimed at offering a way out of the parallel economy (Mansfield *et al.*, 2016; Windle, 2016)⁹. In Thailand, for example, in the latter half of the 1980s, the focus on poppy substitution while overlooking the age-old use of opium (whether medicinal or ritualistic) in certain rural communities resulted in a number of pernicious effects, including the rise in heroin use in response to the declining availability of opium (Labrousse and Koutouzis, 1996). In Colombia, failure to consider the role played by rural communities and associations in organising local life and, in particular, their specific needs and capacities, resulted in alternative crops being imposed out of step with the technical capabilities of local stakeholders. Combined with military interventions and aerial spraying operations, some programmes tended to compromise the introduction of alternative crops, thus threatening food security and the environmental balance, and led to increased violence against farmers perceived as “criminals” (Ojeda, 2011). Also, more generally, the problematic sequencing of these interventions (aid conditionally dependent on often forced eradication) and the lack of dialogue with communities and coordination with the authorities, with a history of failed strategies in beneficiary countries (whether in terms of infrastructure development, access to national markets or land ownership, in particular) have contributed to exacerbating the economic and sanitary insecurity of targeted communities.

Figure 2 - ODA commitments to alternative development and global ODA, 1998-2013



Source: OECD DAC - Creditor reporting system, as per UNODC 2015

However, a series of recent action has promoted strategic review of the concept. Thailand and Peru – two countries which are pioneers in implementing alternative development, supported by Germany¹⁰ –, on the back of promising results, have prompted a thorough review of their past experiences. Two high-level conferences on alternative development, in Lima, in November 2012, then in Bangkok, in 2015, brought together representatives from beneficiary countries, civil society organisations, and also potential stakeholder countries, leading to the definition of the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (2013). The latter recognised the need to address the “root causes of illicit crop cultivation” and to assess the impact of the implemented programmes, while encouraging long-term support as part of national development strategies in the concerned countries, and national leadership in project design and implementation. Although no consensus has yet been reached on eradication interventions, stakeholders agreed on broader considerations including environmental protection together with the participation of beneficiary communities in public implementation. At the same time, an expert group was created¹¹ and regular events are organised on the fringes of regular

CND sessions, to discuss the implementation of these Principles, and to reflect on the limits and “success stories” of alternative development, and with a proactive approach in an international context challenging the repressive policies currently in force (Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 2014).

8. For many farming communities, alternative development is identified with crop fumigation campaigns initiated by government authorities with the support of external donors.

9. This is particularly the case in terms of spatial and temporal scales which often pay little attention to national strategies, and are implemented over insufficient time frames: two years on average.

10. As a historical donor in the field of alternative development through the action of the former technical support agency, GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) and owing to its status as a non-interventionist power, Germany has adopted an approach which prioritises rural development and sequential action integrated into national strategies. It is one of the only countries having a development agency – currently Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) – on the CND and to have developed a specialised unit in its agricultural support department.

11. Once a year, this expert group brings together (Expert Group Meetings – EGM) approximately twenty state, civil society and university representatives. With the support of Germany, Thailand, and UNODC, its conclusions are submitted to the CND and serve as a basis for proposing dedicated resolutions. These meetings notably serve to maintain cooperation networks, reinforce the community of field workers around key countries such as Colombia, Peru and Afghanistan, and outline potential future joint projects, particularly on cannabis cultivation.

Aiming for a “sustainable” approach

The recent overlap of UN schedules has had the benefit of creating new spaces for policy discussion, allowing new bridges to be built. With UNGASS being brought forward to 2016, committed stakeholders seized the opportunity to communicate their concerns and recommendations. In this context, shared interests were built around a richer concept of alternative development. By giving a new boost to the expert groups in particular, the new challenge, contrary to those in recent decades, is apparently to make alternative development a central feature of international drug policy and, in the longer term, a doorway to sustainable development policies. At the same time, the international community, having reached the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, has started to rene-

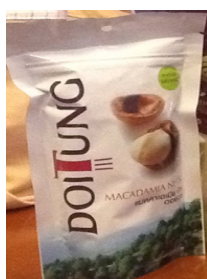
gotiate a Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030. Obviously, management of the drug problem in the 2030 Agenda is still subject to a relatively binary interpretation of the phenomenon (health-security); however, having these two discussions simultaneously nonetheless opened up a new window of opportunities to rethink the links between drugs and development (Gutierrez, 2015).

Uniting these various actions has provided a new impetus – despite the United States’ reserved attitude – as shown in the final UNGASS document. While certain aspects are still problematic (eradication, option of preventive alternative development), the importance given to better sequenced and integrated alternative development programmes – with a national strategy including rural development (infrastructure), access to land and legal markets and local

participation, in line with the 2013 Principles – undoubtedly constitutes progress. The political momentum which began building prior to UNGASS¹² was, moreover, established by a round table at the UNGASS and the drafting of a specific chapter in the Outcome Document recognising the need to address the socioeconomic issues inherent in the drug problem, and to consider a development-oriented approach¹³. A “Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development” (GPPDD) was created on the initiative of Germany to encourage research in this field together with knowledge sharing, while several stakeholders are discussing the harmonisation of drug policies with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). UNODC, concerned with its prerogatives on these questions, has embarked upon long-awaited assessment studies for alternative development with a view to more closely documenting the presumed project impact and encouraging the public response to adapt accordingly¹⁴. Furthermore, the dynamic of these global debates has prompted the United Nations Development Programme to propose “innovative approaches” to reducing the impact of illicit activities and repressive policies connected with development; these measures are still relatively limited, but represent a new step forward nonetheless (UNDP, 2016).

The “Thai Model”

Since 1986, on the initiative of the royal family, the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF) has supported crop substitution programmes associated with gradual eradication, followed by agricultural support and reforestation in the 1990s, which led to the creation of the Doi Tung firm and the construction of an ecotourism hotel complex in the 2000s.



Spanning several generations, the Doi Tung experience – although controversial, particularly given the nature and role of royal investments –, is presented as an innovative example, which perceives development no longer as “charity”, as described by representatives of the MFLF, but rather as an “investment”. Programmes prioritize schemes for renting trees or plots of land to local populations and salary schemes. Continued support by the royal family has, moreover, helped build relations of trust. The decision

for gradual diversification of products (coffee, macadamia nuts, paper, porcelain and fabrics) and the gamble of small-scale production open to the local then national market - products “with a story behind” have allowed partnerships to be developed with the private sector (often close to the royal family), which exports and markets certain products (six Thai and Japanese firms have invested to date).



Sources: UNODC 2015, MFLF, author archives.

12. Back in 2014, there was growing political recognition of the Post-2015 Agenda and of the validity of the alternative development approach, notably via the 2014 Ministerial Statement (E/CN.7/2014/L.15) and presentations by the director of the UNODC on larger platforms (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2014).

13. This momentum is starting to have concrete results as it is now recognised that “efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to effectively address the world drug problem are complementary and mutually reinforcing” (introduction). This is also seen through the UNGASS operational recommendations “to address the most pressing drug-related socioeconomic factors, including unemployment and social marginalization”, improving “co-operation with the international development community” and introducing “comprehensive and sustainable development-oriented and balanced drug control policies and programmes, including alternative development” (Chap. 5.v, 6 and 7).

14. Furthermore, the thematic chapters of its 2015 and 2016 global reports specifically focus on this subject.

These institutional dynamics as a whole should not, however, overshadow the much faster changes at work in certain countries, such as Thailand, where development policies have met with success (Chouvy and Laniel, 2007).

The Colombian gamble

Given its position as a leading coca and cocaine producer worldwide and as the preferred target of US eradication programmes, Colombia could prove essential to the future of this approach. The 2016 Peace Agreement places at the heart of the resolution of drug trafficking issues, the issue of rural development. This country, deeply involved in the discussions and expert groups on the subject, seems, at least to a certain extent, to have learned from the failed alternative development policies of the past, particularly during Alvaro Uribe's presidency (INHES, 2005), by promoting a "territorial-based development" roadmap, based on land reform¹⁵, economic and social integration and the political participation of rural communities and demobilised guerrilla groups.

Following recognition of the very limited effects of aerial spraying interventions and manual eradication on coca cultivation¹⁶, point 4 of the Peace Agreement stipulates the implementation of a National Integrated Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (NIPSIC) which, in the planning stages at least, appears to address a number of past failings. Focused on "populations and territorial vulnerabilities", and following a "concerted bottom-up design", between government representatives, the FARC, local authorities, and farming communities, this programme is structured around two components. The family-based component, over a two-year period, provides for instant, regular financial support for producers¹⁷ (subject to declaration and destruction of illicit crops within 45 days¹⁸) aimed at guaranteeing food security in the short term, while boosting the introduction of a sustainable production project. The other community-based component¹⁹, over a ten-year period, incorporated into the national land reform

plan (RRI), provides for the development of essential public services and infrastructure for the integration of territories which have been marginalised, mainly due to the conflict, and where there is no state presence. Implementation of the programme is determined by signing a family and community participation agreement, symbolising its "voluntary" nature. In 2017, out of 120,000 families having signed up, more than 50,000 committed to destroying their crops, while half started to receive subsidies. The ambitions of this programme should not, however, mask its limitations. The delay in implementation (notably inspection of crops and payment of financial benefits), related to the slow bureaucratic process and technical difficulty in accessing the targeted territories, is stoking frustration in the communities and undermining the creation of relations of trust with the state, while rural associations²⁰ and international civil society organisations point to the limited room left for farmer initiatives. Moreover, the continued presence of rebel factions opposed to the Peace Agreement, and the ongoing eradication operations in the country question the sustainability of a policy faced with the challenges of decades of inequality and political violence. This is further compounded by the reported hostility of the winner of the Colombian presidential elections on 17 June 2018 and the neighbouring United States, traditionally highly influential, and which remains relatively sceptical of the validity of this approach given the record levels of cocaine production in 2016 (UNODC, 2017).

Conclusion

Owing to the long-standing predominance of the security paradigm and the resulting war on drugs, alternative development has long been perceived, at best, as a "humanitarian" alibi for a supply reduction policy, in reality, fundamentally focused on eradication, and, at worst, as a pretext for interventions motivated by geopolitical interests. However, a strategic balance is now being restored,

benefiting from past experience, with practices focusing on a less restrictive and more global understanding of development issues, with increasing commitment by the United Nations, European Union and also governments in affected countries, after years of unilateral action by the United States. After simply being secondary to eradication policies, alternative development is now envisaged more as an instrument of long-term strategies and socioeconomic integration policies adapted to the territories concerned, taking into account all aspects of the rural condition, together with the primary local drivers to illicit cultivation: ranging from access to land, to participation in political life, through viable integration in economic circuits. Although this general approach to drug control policy is still in the early stages, this new focus currently at work and its tentative applications in the field bring the possibility of a development-oriented drug policy to the table, as a legitimate and credible alternative to the strategies followed over the past forty or so years.

15. This is a vital issue in Colombia, particularly considering that, according to a UNODC study, landowner farmers are less inclined to grow illicit crops (UNODC, 2017).

16. The government ended (temporarily) aerial pesticide spraying in 2015.

17. This represents aid packages amounting to approximately 350 dollars per month per family signing up to the programme for a year, so as to promote self-subsistence, then 3 separate aid packages per family, corresponding to 630 dollars in the first year, to support the introduction of cash crops, 3,150 dollars for starting up fast-yield production projects (poultry farming, for instance) and 1,145 dollars in technical and material support. An aid package of 3,500 dollars per family is planned for the second year to support transition to long-term production projects.

18. An in-situ inspection is carried out by UNODC, which also conducts surveys on family socioeconomic conditions on behalf of the government, with a view to adapting proposed services and programme assessment.

19. It corresponds to two projects, the Immediate Community Attention Plan (PAI) and the Comprehensive Community and Municipal Substitution and Alternative Development Plan (PISDA).

20. The choice is effectively restricted to community commitment to the programme and thus to destroying illicit crops – the main source of income – or, failing that, to compulsory destruction of crops by the law-enforcement services.

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