

**Forum:** Commission for Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

**Issue #27-01:** Policies to sustain alternative development in illicit drug crop cultivations

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## Introduction

Through the years, a new vicious cycle regarding illicit drug crop cultivations has caught the attention of many. This cycle starts with the rising of illicit crop cultivations. Several countries around the world, such as Colombia and Peru, have been involved in the production of illicit drug crops, including those of coca, opium, poppy, and cannabis. These are categorized as “illicit” because the cultivations are not authorized by the countries’ respective governments, and instead, go against of what is considered to be legal. This then leads to the weakening of the rule of law, the second stage of the vicious cycle. “Rule of law” is basically the legal principle which establishes that law is what governs a nation, instead of government officials. What this means is that the governing of law is no longer, which results in a decrease in overall growth of the country's legitimate economy. Because of this reduction, investments into licit sectors reduce as well, resulting in the strengthening of organized crime and a dramatic increase in violence. Like common organized crime and violence, this has shown to bring dramatic consequences to countries involved, including an overall economic struggle, insecurity of many, and of course, death. Alternative development seeks to break this vicious cycle. By increasing investments into licit sectors with the help of different governments, countries will be able to shift these illegal industries into ones that can be accepted into, and help the economy. This will then strengthen the “rule of law” once again and decrease poverty. Therefore, illicit drug production will potentially fall, resulting in the weakening of organized crime and falling violence.

The United Nations General Assembly has recently defined alternative development as “a process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotics and psychotropic substances,” by implementing distinct developmental measures into societies in need, as well as encouraging countries to take action against drugs. Alternative development also highlights the socio-economic characteristics of

target communities, and seeks to formulate a permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs.

## **Farmers in Illicit Drug Crop Cultivations**

Many farmers in different countries depend on illicit drug crop cultivations. For example, things such as food shortages, insufficient income due to lack of markets, whether uncertainties and different types of conflict have made it difficult to survive on cultivating standard crops. Unable to call themselves “farmers” nowadays, many have become employees of commercial farms that are owned and sustained by drug traffickers. However, relying on the commerciality of drug crops is not sustainable in the long run. Because these cultivations go against the law, many of them have been threatened to be eradicated by the government, which results in an enormous effect on the farmers social and economic conditions. Since their work payment is not sufficient to meet their needs, many farmers are faced with dramatic poverty. Unstable unemployment is common now that governments have eradicated these illicit cultivations, and also a primary cause of poverty, due to the fact that farmers relied on the commerciality of drug crops, and are not able to become employees elsewhere. As a result, these people encounter serious conflicts with their health and well-being, facing hunger, deprivation, and other conditions that they are not able to solve.

## **History of Alternative Development**

Alternative development has not been always been considered as a plausible solution to mend the negative effects of illicit drug cultivations. Before the 1998 Declaration on Countering the World Drug Problem passed, alternative development was not considered to be the best solution. The concept was not part of early drug control treaties. Instead, early conventions simply prohibited the cultivation of drug crops, such as the cannabis plant, opium poppy and the coca plant, other than for medical or scientific use. Eradication of these cultivations was a common solution for the breaking of the law. Sanctions that entailed the destruction of such crops, as well as punishment, deprivation of liberty and imprisonment were all considered to be solutions to the issue as well. In 1998 however, the Political declaration, which was passed unanimously by the General Assembly in June of the same year, relied on the use of the concept “alternative development”, and identified it as a must in order to solve the recurring issue. Rather than relying on the total destruction of crops and as a result, formulating an increase in unemployment and other consequences for the farmers, the UN seeks to engage in finding the best solutions for the unemployed, by implementing alternative development into their program, changing completely the original approach.

## **Roadblocks**

### ***Budget***

Alternative development has demonstrated its effectiveness through the years, but challenges have always been hand in hand with this. One of the biggest challenges countries often face is their budget to implement alternative development. Even though alternative development programs are being supported by national budgets, it is often hard for a country to get this kind of help. Alternative development seems to be more expensive than common eradication of crops, because it does not only entail the shutting down of drugs, but also re-implementing the employees into better jobs and helping them conceive better health, education, and more. As a result, only some alternative development programs are implemented by some national and international organizations.

### ***Corruption***

Countries with a high degree of corruption, such as Colombia, have a harder time establishing alternative development in their areas of trouble. Because countries are corrupt, few citizens trust them with handling the law. For example, Colombia is known to have distrustful agricultural institutions, which results because of its corruption. Even bureaucracies are corrupt and inefficient, despite the fact that they are managed by international financial institutions. Although alternative development could be established, the fact that countries are not engaged in illicit drug crop cultivation elsewhere could be questioned. In other words, distrustful reputations can lead to the conflicting relationships between nations. Because a great part of alternative development is based on donations and agreements between nations or countries, conflict in relationships between them can result in the diminishing of agreements and therefore a harder time establishing alternative development programmes in countries that need it.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### **Illicit Drug Crop Cultivations:**

Cultivation lands where illegal narcotics or substances taken for stimulant effects are grown. The objective of alternative development is to change this type of cultivations into legal and sustainable ones.

### **Development:**

State of growth and advancement; process of developing or changing through refinement. By implementing Alternative Development programs, countries in need will achieve development in terms of economy and anti-drug policies.

### **Political Declaration:**

Formal statement formulated by the UN that stresses their concern on drug usage and development, and provides possible measures/solutions to tackle the serious world drug problem. The 1998 political declaration voted by the UN was one of the first steps that triggered the use and implementation of alternative development programs in countries that found themselves struggling against the drug problem

### **Interdiction:**

Prohibiting or forbidding something. Interdiction of drug crops (prohibiting the planting and growing of such) was one of the primary solutions that the UN reached out to in order to solve the recurring illicit drug crop issue.

### **Stand-alone Alternative Development Strategy:**

A type of strategy that is able to operate without the dependency or control of another system, or in this case, government. Countries that use these strategies when implementing alternative development do not have an alliance with other countries, and instead are able to independently strategize and achieve alternative development.

## **General Overview**

### **Traditional Crop Eradication/Interdiction**

For several decades, drug crop eradication and interdiction been conducted through a supply reduction strategy: in the past, when illicit drug crops were cultivated by different countries, respective governments reached out to crop eradication as the best alternative that would resolve the recurring issue. Basically, the process consists of the destroying of crop cultivations. There are several ways to eradicate crops cultivations, including measures such as aerial spraying and manual eradication. Aerial spraying consists of the fumigation of different areas, which has not only resulted in disastrous damage of healthy food crops around the illicit cultivations, but also in the contribution to human displacement in the country.

Colombia is the only known major party that has relied on Aerial Spraying because of these damaging side-effects. Manual eradication requires teams of eradicators, mostly composed by workers accompanied by police and military, who pull the crops from the ground or chop the crops across the fields. However, this measure has been considered to be a non-suitable solution, seen as it has been turned into “forced” labor, resulting in the abuse of human rights across different countries, including Colombia and Laos. For this reason, it is known that the UN does not support forced eradication. Because of all of these negative outcomes and a desperate need to resolve the recurring issue of illicit cultivations around the globe, alternative development was proposed by the UN, hoping for it to be a valid solution that would result in positive outcomes.

### **Objectives of Alternative Development:**

Countries who are currently fighting the issue of illicit drug cultivations reach out to alternative development for the specific purpose of contributing to the economic development, mostly in rural areas, in order to combat and reduce the root causes and damages of illicit drug economies. It has as an objective to reduce the supply of raw material used to produce drugs, as well as re-establishing and substituting a legal economy in drug producing areas and cultivations in those areas devoted to the illicit production of drug products.

### ***Major Controversies:***

Even though there is evidence that proves alternative development as a viable alternative to fight illicit drug cultivations and their influence in different economies, there is also evidence that proves alternative development has no significant influence on the reducing of drug production. The following three countries are examples of these cases, which have provoked a major controversy among countries and organizations.

### **Peru**

In the 1980's, concerns regarding the increased cocaine consumption arose internationally. Interventions towards this eventuality began in the Andean region, starting with crop substitution, and later the implementation of different methodologies, including forced manual eradication and alternative development in 1985. Peru, however, never declared a ban on coca, claiming that it was harmless and was

crucial to the country's economy. There was an eventual drop in coca production in Peru without eradication, but this cannot be attributed to alternative development because there were many other factors involved. As well, most recent analysis have shown that there has been a recovery of prices, as well as an increase in coca production near Colombian borders and Peruvian trafficking of products of this sort, which could support the idea that Alternative Development program was not such an influential factor on drug production and consumption in Peruvian areas.

## **Thailand**

Currently, the annual production of opium in Thailand is reported to be 5 to 6 tonnes, which has significantly decreased since 1968, where the reported opium production raised up to 146 tonnes. The notable decrease took place without any type of crop eradication or substitution. There was, however, a first crop substitution running during this time, there is no sustained relationship between this and the drastic change in opium production. The only valid explanation to this sudden decrease was the adjustment made to regional illicit market developments, which caused a reverse effect of the "Balloon Effect"; seen as trafficking patterns and regional productions changed, this prompted many Thai growers to shift to other means of survival. A natural disaster reinforced this trend, leading to the tripling of opium price. Despite the fact that this did contribute to an overall development for Thailand's economy on opium production and the prevention of illicit crop cultivations and selling of these, the causes and results cannot be attributed to alternative development.

## **Pakistan**

Similar to Thailand, Pakistan began with a relatively large amount of opium production in 1979-1980, with an estimation of 800 tonnes of opium. Despite this fact, Pakistan is known to have a small-scale licit opium production for medicinal purposes, where opium needed to be imported. Parallel to this, the government sustained legal sales to opium registered addicts through opium-vend systems. In the middle of the 1980's, opium prices began to rise again, and cultivations started to slowly increase, reaching a sum of 181 tonnes of opium in 1992. Between the 1986-1997, UNODC (United Nations Office of Drug and Crime) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) attempted to achieve illicit crop reduction by investing more than \$150 million dollars in rural development, and later implementing the largest AD project in that phase, spending more than \$38 million dollars in between 1989-1998. However, the process was not put into practice until a decade later, and when so, it was in a repressive form. In 1987, poppy fields

in Gadoon Amazai were destroyed, but many workers were killed and several conflicts arose. Alternative development may have been implemented to better the circumstances and the country's situation, but instead turned out to form various setbacks and even tragedies among the people.

## **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

### **Colombia**

Colombia originally relied on traditional crop eradication methods in order to reduce or eliminate drug cultivations that turned against the law, but simply did not achieve beneficial results. Today, Colombia has alternative development programs on its soil. It also implements and supports preventive alternative development and counts with an alternative development strategy within a broader national economic development plan.

### **Pakistan**

Pakistan counts with a stand-alone national alternative development strategy, similar to Thailand, Peru and Myanmar.

### **Mexico**

Similar to Colombia and Myanmar, Mexico counts with an alternative development strategy that is within a broader national economic development plan. As well, Mexico plans to implement or support alternative development interventions.

### **Thailand**

Alongside Colombia and other countries, Thailand relies on alternative development programs on its soil. Also, it counts with a strategy/national plan to support alternative development abroad, as well as a stand-alone national alternative development strategy and supports other preventive alternative development strategies.

### **Bolivia**

Bolivia is one of the countries that is most involved with alternative development, seen as not only does it count with alternative development programs on its soil, but also supports alternative development

abroad and counts with a stand-alone national alternative development strategy.

## **Afghanistan**

Afghanistan also finds itself within the list of countries that count with alternative development programs and projects on its soil, and also supports preventive alternative development strategies.

## **Ecuador**

Ecuador finds itself within the list of countries that support preventive alternative development and counts with a strategy/national plan to support alternative development abroad.

## **Myanmar**

Myanmar counts with an alternative development programme(s) on its soil. Its alternative development strategy lies within a broader national economic development plan.

## **Timeline of Events**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Description of event</b>
1998	UNGASS defines Alternative Development 10-year action plan.
2000	Colombia's first alternative development program is implemented.
2002	MFLF's (Mae Fah Luang Foundation) launched the first international Alternative Development Project.
2006-2008	ECOSOC resolutions 2006/33, 2007/12, 2008/26.
2009	CND Political Declaration and Plan of Action for innovative strategies to support alternative development.
2013	UNGA adopts the United Nations Guiding Principles of Alternative Development.
2015	Thailand hosts the second International Conference on Alternative Development



in Bangkok.

## **UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

The UN, more specifically the UNODC, has been involved in alternative development in different ways. Because the UNODC is in charge of facilitating and encouraging international cooperation, it is easy to say that its contribution is crucial. Because of the UNODC's high position, it has potential to act as a platform to coordinate and promote alternative development in different areas. It also recommends areas where alternative development is needed, and regulates where crops should go to next in order for them to develop and therefore contribute to the economy. Currently, the organization's most important job is its involvement in alternative development projects in many different countries, including Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Afghanistan, Laos and Myanmar, as well as formulating new partnerships with countries who seem to be affected by the issue, with the hopes of decreasing both the global production of illicit drugs and the food insecurity. There have been and are new resolutions and events relating to alternative development, all of which follow:

- The Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971
- United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988:
  - o One of the three major drug control treaties in force currently.
  - o Cautions drug trade and use, and attempts to warn the steadily increase of these activities
  - o Alternative development policies uses this as background to explicitly state the urgency of the matter
- Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem (2009)
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolutions **2006/33**, **2007/12** and **2008/26**
- ICAD-2, 19-24 November, 2015

## **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

Currently, the UNODC has alternative development at the top of the its topic list. Throughout the recent years, alternative development has reached a high level of importance and concern among the UN. As

previously stated, alongside different organizations, the UN has attempted to implement alternative development in different problematic countries/areas that desperately need a change, regarding economy and the diminishing of the world drug problem. There have been various “success stories”, as the UN calls them, of alternative development, in countries such as Laos and Thailand, where both countries now count with alternative development programs, as well as newly improved crop areas where sustainable crops are grown, with the support of, not only the law, but their respective communities. This is shown to be extremely important for the outcome of alternative development programs, seen as much of what it aims to do relies on the communities’ support and willingness. Failure can result from communities not cooperating with the government’s plan, like Bolivia’s case for example. Several programs have been implemented in Bolivia for the last 30 years, but despite the efforts, little progress has been shown in the fields and the economy of the country. According to the article by Ali Unlu, “Failed Alternative Development Programs...,” “Governments’ political and economic frameworks may shape programs, but field implementation has rarely yielded the expected outcomes.” The situation was studied by various experts, who reached the conclusion that this little progress was a result of little interest and cooperation from part of the Bolivian society and communities that were in need. Even though alternative development has been very successful throughout the years, there are significant stories like these that deserve to be known in order for the future programs to be successful.

## **Possible Solutions**

Coming up with viable solutions for this issue is crucial, seen as crop cultivations are often the base of a country’s economy, much like the case of Thailand, Colombia and Pakistan. Without the correct management of these crop cultivations, and even more without the approval of the government, countries of this sort will find themselves among many different conflicts, not only in their territory, but potentially with other nations. Possible solutions to this issue could include forming different resolutions that offer alternative development as a plausible solution, where it is open to any and all nations who seek for help or don’t have means to do so, or even implementing alternative development programs in affected countries with the collaboration of other nations who already count with the programs and have the means necessary. The preservation of opium and other drugs for medical purposes, while the rest of the crops in cultivations that seem to affect a country’s economy are developed alternatively is also a viable solution to the recurring issue,

seen as not all the crops that are considered necessary will be lost, and at the same time, crops that are illicit will be substituted with approved ones , resulting in an increase in development and potentially positive results in a country's economy.

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## **Appendix or Appendices**

- An extensive overview on Alternative Development:

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/WDR15\\_Chapter\\_2.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/WDR15_Chapter_2.pdf)

- A thorough evaluation on Alternative Development projects:

<https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2013-en-alternative-development.pdf>

- For the illicit drug crop cultivations in Colombia:

<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Mejia-Colombia-final-2.pdf>

- Assessing the effectiveness of drug crop interventions:

[http://www.issdp.org/conference-papers/2013/2013\\_papers/Higginson%20A%20-%20%20The%20effectiveness%20of%20crop%20targeting%20interventions%20for%20drug%20control.pdf](http://www.issdp.org/conference-papers/2013/2013_papers/Higginson%20A%20-%20%20The%20effectiveness%20of%20crop%20targeting%20interventions%20for%20drug%20control.pdf)

- Video on the importance of alternative development and eradication of drug crops:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLwmpFAQoiU>