



Alternative Development

Poverty, crises and conflicts, and no alternatives to secure their livelihoods can lead rural families to illicitly cultivate drug plants. Many cultivation areas are remote and offer inadequate social and economic infrastructure. Alternative Development (AD), nowadays also often referred to as Alternative Livelihoods, helps to promote sustainable development processes in drug producing areas (particularly where coca and the opium poppy are grown). Its prime objective is to improve the quality of life of the rural population. The main countries where the opium poppy is cultivated are Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, Colombia and Mexico; and for coca, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.

The Approach

The concept of AD, as promoted by the German Federal Government, pursues a multisectoral approach to rural development and drug control. It merges the complex and politically sensitive problem of illicit drugs with sustainable rural development. A balanced approach between development-oriented strategies and law enforcement is necessary.

In the past 25 years, AD has come a long way from just the promotion of crop substitution strategies – which had very limited success – to comprehensive rural development strategies designed to benefit farmers and communities. AD consists of strategies for the identification and promotion of sustainable farm and household livelihood systems, social development initiatives, and infrastructure projects designed to improve service delivery and market access. It furthermore provides strategies that aim at reducing violence and social problems (including drug misuse) in drug production areas. Finally, AD promotes the social integration of the affected population.

AD has two interrelated objectives: to alleviate poverty and to improve people's living con-

ditions through integrated rural development, and to reduce drug problems predominantly in terms of production, but also of consumption.

AD should be participatory, open, flexible and easily adaptable to local conditions. There is no rigid prescription or "one-size-fits-all" solution, but instead several different strategies and measures that depend on the economic and social needs of the affected population.

Measures and Activities

The broad range of activities and measures that are intended to improve the quality of life of the population in drug producing areas comprise the following:

- Joint planning implementation and monitoring of projects in tandem with the target population and local institutions.
- Creation of alternative agricultural and non-agricultural income opportunities and value chains.
- Conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.
- Improvement of social infrastructure: schools, health posts, hospitals, markets.
- Improvement of physical infrastructure: roads and feeder roads, bridges, wells, irrigation systems, etc.
- Support of health, education and social service delivery systems.
- Strengthening of community institutions and self-help groups, local protection and self-governance.
- Securing access to land through participatory land-use planning and the facilitation of land use rights.

Conditionality and Eradication

Germany's AD approach rejects conditionality, i.e. binding development cooperation to drug control objectives. In general, the eradication of illicit drug plant cultivation is a critical is-

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sue because it has a negative impact on conflict dynamics and on the economic situation of cultivating households unless viable alternatives are in place. However, the interdiction of drug processing and trafficking needs to be strengthened and implemented as a separate strategy to AD.

Lessons Learned

Sustainable AD is a process that is successful from a long-term perspective. Most AD programmes take ten years to implement. In order to succeed, AD projects require favourable political and economic framework conditions. A clear political commitment to drug control with a balanced approach and a long-term perspective is as necessary as the acceptance and active cooperation of the population in planning and executing the projects.

The experience of the last decades shows that interventions to reduce drug cultivation need to go beyond single alternative development projects, and instead must consider the socio-economic, political and ecologic conditions. This is particularly important with respect to the fact that drug cultivation is increasingly concentrated in conflict regions.

Impact

Experience in Asia and Latin America shows that AD can, as part of a coherent drug control strategy, contribute to a sustainable reduction in drug production. The liberal approach creates a higher level of acceptance among the affected population than repressive drug control strategies. It has proven much more effective and sustainable with positive impacts on the people, the communities, the environment and the regions as a whole.

AD creates economic and social conditions in which households can achieve their desired quality of life without being dependent on drug mafia. It prevents the expansion of production to neighbouring regions, and halts the exodus of labour to drug growing areas. It promotes improved and diversified farming practices and investment in the agricultural sector and val-

ue chains. In northern Thailand and elsewhere, AD has proven its effectiveness for sustainable poverty reduction, for the establishment of health, education, administrative and private sector services as well as for infrastructure development and environmental conservation by improving the target group's participation in the development process.

Furthermore, AD has shown positive impacts on governance and the civil society by promoting cooperation between state, private sector and civil society organisations, all of which has engendered trust and helped to prevent or reduce violent conflicts.

Challenges for Development Cooperation

The insight that the reduction of coca and poppy cultivation is connected to broader development goals, such as institution-building, promotion of governance, the civil society and social security, is far from new. However, more understanding and greater commitment on the part of bilateral and multilateral donors are required, in order to include drug control measures in national development strategies in countries with severe drug problems. BMZ and GTZ are increasingly seeking to mainstream drug issues into development cooperation. This involves dealing with drug issues as a cross-cutting issue, and systematically integrating drug-specific measures into relevant organisations, programmes, projects and sectors. In Afghanistan and in other countries, where the drug economy represents a major obstacle to development, mainstreaming entails integrating drug control as a national priority action field into all relevant development programmes and sectors. Here, other donors such as the World Bank are also using mainstreaming as a way of reducing the drug problem from a multi-sectoral perspective.

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