

Alternative Development in drug control

The 'alternative development' concept – potentials, successes and limits

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The problems associated with the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs are currently a major obstacle to development for many development cooperation partner countries. Alternative development projects can help reduce the illegal cultivation of opium poppy and coca. Alternative development however, is dependent on the national government's firm political commitment to drug control, and requires favourable economic and social framework conditions. Drug problems are a global phenomenon, and producer and consumer countries are equally responsible for reducing and resolving them.

The concept of 'alternative development' is based on the assumption that drug problems are closely linked to development problems, and that effective development policy measures can bring about a sustainable reduction in drug cultivation. The decision to promote this approach pro-actively must base on a political will to establish a counterweight to repressive drug control strategies. Alternative development is therefore also a response to what is viewed as the low impact and effectiveness of military measures to combat drug trafficking.

In the late 1980s, heightened public and political interest in these issues in the Federal Republic of Germany led to the launch of the National Drug Control Plan. Its chapter on 'International Cooperation' created the basis for the German Government to step up its commitment to reducing illegal cultivation of drug crops through bi- and multilateral development cooperation (DC). Since then, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has provided a total of 200 million euro in funding for drug and development programmes, most of which has been targeted towards alternative development. 45 percent of the funds have been allocated to technical cooperation (including GTZ), 35 percent to financial cooperation (KfW), and 20 percent to multilateral cooperation with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). Germany is thus one of the major donors to UNDCP.

In the field of technical cooperation, the first bilateral project which focussed on alternative development – the Thai-German Highland Development Programme – was launched in 1981 (see article on pages ###). Most projects did not begin operations until the early 1990s. The Drugs and Development Programme (ADE) was established in 1990 and is implemented by GTZ. It is a supra-regional project which creates an interface between drug control and development cooperation.

The GTZ's Drugs and Development Programme offers various services, including:

- design of conceptual approaches and strategies for development-oriented drug control;
- compilation of relevant information for use in development cooperation, and provision of advice to government agencies and NGOs;
- identification, planning and implementation of rapid, limited-scope drug control measures; preparation and planning of technical cooperation projects in development-oriented drug control and specialist backstopping;
- promotion of exchange of experience among organizations.

The 'alternative development' concept

In the early 1970s, the international community began to support crop substitution projects in Asian developing countries where poppy was cultivated for opium production. The first of these projects were implemented in Thailand, with others being launched in Pakistan a few years later. The primary aim was to replace illicit drug cultivation with other legal crops. It became apparent after a few years that in order to address marketing and transportation bottlenecks and other economic, ecological and social problems, reducing illicit drug cultivation required more comprehensive measures than merely cultivating 'alternative' crops. In the 1980s, *integrated rural development approaches* were therefore adopted in Asia and, from the mid 1980s, in Latin America as a means to curb drug cultivation.

In the early 1990s, the strategy was overhauled once again. The result is the 'alternative development' concept (AD). Alternative development aims to create economic and social conditions in which households can achieve an acceptable standard of living without having to resort to drug cultivation. The Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) in June 1998, defined alternative development as: *"... a process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national economic growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognizing the particular sociocultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs."*

[Bildunterschrift, S. 9] Since the 1980s, the 'integrated rural development' concept has become a key element of drug control, setting a course towards 'alternative development'.

Alternative development, as pursued through German development cooperation, includes target groups in the decision-making process and promotes institution-building and community development. It thus aims to create stronger links between the various drug control measures. Alternative development should not be carried out in isolation, but be cross-cutting within the overall context of regional or national development.

German development cooperation now also distinguishes between 'direct' and 'indirect' drug control. Indirect drug control primarily comprises rural development projects in the immediate vicinity of drug cultivation areas or in regions where workers are likely to migrate to drug cultivation areas. It is designed to curb the emergence of, or an increase in, drug problems.

Projects can include a variety of measures:

- Creating alternative income-generation opportunities in or outside agriculture;
- Safeguarding the natural resource base on which livelihoods depend;
- Improving social and physical infrastructure, e.g. by expanding the road network and communications in order to improve trade links;
- Supporting health and education services, primarily by setting up schools and healthcare facilities;
- Strengthening community institutions and self-help groups, e.g. in order to encourage greater participation by citizens in development processes;
- Improving the institutional framework for sustainable human development by promoting local self-government, participatory land-use planning, and an environmentally compatible use of natural resources.

In South-East Asia, a significant amount of opium is both produced and consumed in regions with ethnic minorities; the same applies to heroin in Thailand. Since the early 1990s, alternative development projects have therefore also promoted strategies to prevent or reduce drug use. Pakistan and Iran currently have the world's highest per capita consumption of opium and heroin. Drug abuse has a particularly severe impact on women.

Alternative development programmes are intended to be a useful and viable instrument, not only from a drug policy perspective but also in development terms. The criteria applied in 'conventional' development cooperation – including target-group orientation, participation, a gender perspective, sustainability, economic viability, and environmental protection – thus point the way forward in development-oriented drug control.

The major challenge for alternative development projects is how to respond to the needs of different client groups, preferably simultaneously, and establish social and economic conditions which encourage voluntary renunciation of drug cultivation and consumption. Specifically, this means that the different motives and constraints prompting peasant farmers and landowners to cultivate drug crops must be analysed and dependency structures identified. These analyses are a necessary basis for strategies to reform these dependency structures and devise effective development measures. However, the projects themselves often face major time constraints. Rare are the cases in which projects can influence the scope and timing of police action to enforce a ban on drug cultivation to such an extent that such action is made dependent on the success or failure of development policy measures.

Experience in Asia and Latin America has shown that alternative development can help reduce drug production. In Thailand, alternative development projects played a major role in reducing opium production from 146 to 6 tonnes between 1968 and 2000. In Pakistan, the area under opium poppy cultivation has decreased from more than 9000 hectares in 1992 to less than 1000 hectares in 2000. In Peru and Bolivia, coca production decreased significantly during the second half of the 1990s thanks to an effective package of law enforcement and development measures.

[Zitat, S. 10] The advantage of alternative development in drug control is that it helps to improve living conditions for farmers and communities alike.

In the main opium poppy-producing countries (Afghanistan and Myanmar) and coca-producing country (Colombia), the political, economic and infrastructural conditions tolerate or even encourage illicit drug production.

Although drug production could enable farmers to achieve higher incomes over the short term, the advantage of alternative development is that it helps improve living conditions for farmers and communities alike and integrates marginalized regions. This cannot be achieved through the drugs economy. Experience has shown that some groups of farmers and communities have clearly recognized that the aim is not simply to maximize income in the short term, especially under illegal conditions. Compared with other drug control strategies – such as the violent destruction of drug crops – a further benefit of alternative development is that it is most likely to be readily accepted by all participants, from affected population groups to NGOs, local and national government institutions, and donor countries and the international community. It also enables the negative effects of crop eradication campaigns, such as conflicts or impoverishment of the local community, to be avoided.

Limitations and criticisms

Despite the official UN definition of alternative development adopted in 1998, there is still a lack of clarity among policy-makers and practitioners about the concept of alternative development and the right way of implementing it. This is because relatively little time has elapsed since the concept was introduced around five years ago, and because of the development community's continued adherence – based solely on economic criteria – to 'crop substitution', which is claimed to be the only alternative to drug cultivation. Applied alternative development strategies also vary widely according to region, method of implementation and the specific priorities of donor countries. Even at multilateral level, the UNGASS definition has yet to be translated into a practical framework for balanced contributions to development and drug control.

The alternative development concept itself has already undergone various stages of technical refinement and trials. This has occurred in a critical process in which experts, in particular, have repeatedly questioned the concept's focus and objectives. For example, some critics have pointed out that local successes cannot necessarily be attributed directly to alternative development, since little research has been undertaken into the motives and circumstances leading to drug cultivation. A further criticism is that the specific socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors which influence these decisions are not taken into account to a sufficient extent during project development. Critics also claim that alternative development concepts have often tended to adopt a uniform approach which emphasizes the high yields and profits derived from opium poppy and coca cultivation, with too little focus on the multifunctional role of drug cultivation and the diversity of the rural households affected.

The failure to include farmers in decision-making processes has implications for the current strategies' cost-effectiveness, and also raises questions about the unintended effects of alternative development, especially its impact on the poorest groups and the possible shifting of cultivation areas. These criticisms clearly indicate that the concept requires further adaptation. An ongoing process of conceptual development is therefore under way.

Unfortunately, the debate on the concept's further development has yet to focus adequately on the widening gap between theoretical objectives and operational reality. The organizations commissioned to implement alternative development projects have been forced to acknowledge the discrepancy between more global 'ownership' of the alternative development concept during the 1990s and the practical realities – above all, the increasingly limited resources available for development

cooperation. A paradoxical situation has thus emerged: while the importance of alternative development is increasingly underlined at international conferences, the financial resources available to implement it are decreasing at the same time. It is obviously difficult for governments of drug-producing countries to spend their limited resources on ensuring compliance with international drug control agreements, and very few industrialized countries can 'sell' the concept of development assistance in far-off countries to a sceptical electorate. A mismatch is evident between the need for long-term flexible projects and the limited, short-term, results-oriented funding options available. This raises a basic question: what can alternative development realistically achieve under these circumstances, especially in light of the growing demand for illicit drugs and the entrenched rural poverty in the drug-producing countries?

Lessons learned and potential for the future

Since 1995, GTZ's Drugs and Development Programme (ADE) has worked intensively to promote alternative development, both at a regional and a conceptual level. It has prepared studies into drugs and development policy for the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and regional and country-specific strategies and recommendations have been developed on this basis. These can be accessed on Drugs and Development Programme website (www.gtz.de/drogen). The experiences gained in implementing bilateral projects in Thailand, Laos, Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, and through the multilateral projects funded by the Ministry in these countries as well as in Vietnam and Afghanistan, have been evaluated and compared with international know-how.

The achievements of alternative development and the limits and constraints it is facing clearly show that the viability and success of alternative development programmes are dependent on:

- the national government's firm political commitment to drug control, appropriate legislation, adequate financial resources, and the establishment of administrative and specialized institutions in the field of drug control;
- a balance between law enforcement and development-oriented drug control, and a clear separation of these strategies in project work;
- effective government control of project areas and protection from rebel groups;
- 'ownership' of the projects by the local community;
- a sustainable economic environment which reduces the attractiveness of illegal cultivation;
- infrastructural conditions, such as the development of roads and communications networks.

Experience to date has shown that the importance of 'good governance' as a success factor in implementing development-oriented drug control strategies and ensuring the necessary coordination between different policy areas is often underestimated. Thus the formal adoption of drug control legislation and standards is a necessary, but not the only step in achieving a sustainable reduction in drug cultivation and consumption. As in practice, appropriate conditions are often not in place, alternative development programmes should include measures to create them.

Alternative development is an open and flexible concept which must be adjusted to suit local conditions, since the drug problem and local conditions vary from country to country and change rapidly. The potential offered by alternative development in the fields of crisis prevention, conflict management and poverty reduction need to be made more visible and developed further in conceptual terms.