



“Drugs and poverty in the context of international development”

Drugs and Poverty

Poverty is considered a multidimensional phenomenon consisting of an economic, human, political, sociocultural and protective dimension. This fact sheet describes how these dimensions of poverty are related to drug production and consumption in developing countries and presents relevant concepts and approaches aiming at poverty reduction and drug control.

Poverty and Drug Crop Production

Production areas of opium and poppy are found in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Colombia and Mexico. Coca is mainly produced in the Andean countries, such as Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. 90 per cent of households in cultivation areas depend on agriculture for livelihood. Although drug crops generate the greatest proportion of household annual income in these areas, there is little evidence that it has actually led to sustainable economic and social development.

Poverty can be cause and effect of drug crop production. In general opinion, drug producing households are considered as relatively wealthy. But this estimate is not supported by sufficient available data. In fact, the inhabitants of cultivation areas often lack access to physical and social infrastructure, they suffer from malnutrition, infant mortality, illiteracy and are excluded from political and legal rights. Drug producing households do not sustainably improve their economic status through coca or poppy production.

In drug crop producing areas of Asia and Latin America, poverty is often more prevalent than for the countries as a whole. In Vietnam, communities in poppy cultivation areas have the lowest household income in the country. In Pakistan, the average income for drug producing households was half the national average and even in Afghanistan, poppy farmers earn little more than one US dollar a day in cash income per head of household.

Drug production is also confronted with several risks, such as the risk of eradication by law enforcement the high volatility of prices, environmental risks as well as crime and conflict.

Poverty and Drug Abuse

Poverty and drug abuse are also interrelated problems. Stating that there is a direct causal relationship between the two would ignore the complexity underlying the reasons as to why people resort to drug use and abuse. However, there is evidence that poverty is a considerable risk factor for drug abuse and vice versa, but that neither problem would be sufficient, by itself, to cause the other.

There are however some clear links. Drug addicts generally use all or a large part of household income in order to buy drugs. One consequence is the pauperisation (concerning food security, shelter, education, etc.) of the addict and the people living with him or her. Drug abusers are more often absent from work or work less productively, which can subsequently lead to loss of employment and income. Dependence on a substance frequently leads to criminal behaviour and resorting to sex work. Subsequent marginalisation and exclusion from society reduces individuals' ability to participate as an active member of a community and partake in political processes. Drug addicts often constitute one of the poorest and easily forgotten vulnerable groups.

Drugs have been used traditionally for centuries. However, with a decline of social structures, rituals and controlled settings, increased poverty and a lack of perspectives, the use of traditional drugs becomes more and more problematic.

Drugs are used to escape the reality of poverty or deal with the hardship experienced. Many of the drug users are young (between 12 and 30 years), male, street children or of other vulnerable groups.

Especially **Women** are – direct or indirect – victims of the cycle between drug consumption and poverty. They are often economically dependent on male family members and suffer from severe difficulties arising from an addicted husband or father i.e. by having to find work or increase their work load. Female drug users are generally more socially stigmatised than men, resulting from their perceived violation of social codes of behaviour and diversion from the traditional expectations of women in their society.

The pro-poor potentials of Alternative Development programmes include:

- Systemic implementation of Alternative Development combined at micro-, institutional and macro-level, the right use of conditionality and well sequenced law enforcement.
- Securing livelihoods through the generation of alternative farming and non-farming income sources, the establishment of rural credit systems, the creation of market access for legal products and access to land.
- Development measures in poor migratory areas as indirect alternative development.

The loss of traditional values and social structures, broken homes, political, economic and social marginalisation and a lack of future perspectives generally put young people at a higher risk of drug abuse. In addition, living in poverty makes it harder to recover from a drug abuse problem once it has developed, as access to health services or insurance is more limited.

Challenges for development cooperation

The analysis of drugs and poverty at a global, national and local level is the pre-requisite for a successful pro-poor drug control. The vicious cycle between drug production, drug abuse and poverty has been shown above. So the integration of the drug dimension in an overall national strategy on poverty reduction is recommended where drug production and consumption pose a threat to poverty reduction efforts. On this basis, collaboration between development agencies and drug control agencies should be encouraged.

Development-oriented drug control

Though international drug control is not per se poverty oriented, the approach of Development-oriented Drug Control (DDC) is a pro-poor multi-sectoral and comprehensive strategy. Two of its major working areas are Alternative Development and Drug Demand Reduction.

Alternative Development

In the DDC context Alternative Development recognises the multifunctional role of drug crop production and is based on the assumption that a sustainable solution can only be reached through integrated developmental measures. Law enforcement measures like eradication are not effective unless viable alternatives are in place. The aim of Alternative Development programmes is to create an economic

and social environment in which households are not dependant from drug crop cultivation anymore.

Drug Demand Reduction

According to Germany's as well as the European Union's Action Plan on Drugs, Drug Demand Reduction includes drug prevention, counselling and treatment, survival aid and harm reduction as well as law enforcement, each of which address the drug problem from a different angle. Concentrating mainly on the first three pillars in development cooperation, the approach aims to address the underlying risk factors (including poverty) and to enable individuals and communities to stay drug-free and lead healthy lives, thereby breaking the vicious cycle between drug abuse and poverty.

Specifically pro-poor potentials of Drug Demand Reduction include:

- Empowerment of young people and other vulnerable groups to address the drug problem in their communities
- Provision and improvement of treatment and harm reduction services for highly marginalised and stigmatised groups of people
- Promotion and implementation of drug policies that focus on addiction as a health and social issue rather than from a criminal and law enforcement perspective

More information: Discussion paper "Drugs and Poverty", www.gtz.de/drogen



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