



“Drugs and Conflict in the context of international development”

Drugs and conflict

Links between drug economies and violent conflicts exist at many levels. The main cultivation areas of the opium poppy (Afghanistan, Myanmar, Colombia and Laos) and coca (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) are almost without exception the scene of violent conflicts, civil war, instability and violence. Drug trafficking permits and fuels conflicts and violent disputes. Meanwhile, drug abuse is increasing among people in crisis areas and post-conflict regions.

Crises and conflicts

The risk factors for violent conflicts include the lack of democratic processes and an uneven distribution of power, social injustice, uneven distribution and lack of access to resources, control of natural resources by one group and demographic changes.

Conflict

Conflict is an unavoidable element of human co-existence in all societies and one that is essential for social change. Conflicts are an expression of tensions and differences between various interdependent parties with incompatible needs, interests and values. Especially in phases of profound socio-economic change and political transition, such disputes lead to crises engulfing society as a whole and to destructive escalations. This happens when living opportunities and participation possibilities are being redistributed among various groups.

(Federal German Government 2004, Action Plan, “Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building”)

The nature of conflicts has changed since the end of the cold war. Intrastate disputes, which occur for ethno-political, economic or resource-related reasons, are on the increase. Political instability and social unrest find their expression in armed conflict and war. The increasing weakness of state institutions and the broadening of the scope for illegal economic activities in turn offer greater scope for violence.

Weak states and drug economies

Social, political and economic problems can have a debilitating effect on states and governments. An increasing deterioration of the state’s monopoly on the use of force and the rule of law produce what are referred to as “failing states”.

Regions over which the state holds little sway provide an ideal environment for the illegal drug trade. The lack of a sound economic and legal infrastructure along with inadequate state services and control allow a power vacuum to form.

This favours corruption and the formation of new groups and networks. In such areas, the outcome can be violent clashes between rival groups or rebel organisations and a central state trying to regain its monopoly on power. Violence is frequently used as a tradable commodity (by warlords, paramilitary forces and guerrilla groups) and to satisfy economic needs and thus becomes a cornerstone of the economic system (economies of violence).

This leads to a trivialisation of violence and to the formation of mafia-like structures and grey markets, which helps to intensify and prolong the conflict situation. Violent or criminal bands are hence given plenty of scope to develop profitable drug cultivation and marketing structures.

Role of the drug economy

Weak states are weakened further by drug economies, e.g. by growing corruption, violence and crime, the declining attractiveness of legal activities, widening income disparities and the financing or stabilising of parallel war economies. The illegal drug economy operates alongside the state with its own rules, which are often enforced by violence.

Challenges for development cooperation

Lasting cross-sectoral solutions are vital if an effective and sustainable reduction in drug-related problems and the associated conflicts is to be achieved. At the political level framework conditions must be set in place to reinforce alternative ways of life and to enhance the economic and political strength of the communities and institutions over that of the drug economy.



Within the framework of development cooperation, alternative development is endeavouring to use a holistic and participatory approach to develop alternatives to drug crop cultivation and to improve the living conditions of the populations concerned. To address drug consumption, methods deriving from an integrated local drug policy are a good way of bringing together those affected and those participating in drug services in order to set about dealing with conflicts.

Conflicts and drug economies are often closely interconnected and have very complex backgrounds. To make sure a project does not further aggravate the situation, it makes good sense, before starting to plan and implement drug control measures, to carry out analyses of the specific situations behind the conflicts and to see how they are connected with drug economies and drug-related problems. The drug profile analysis, which was developed as one method of development-oriented drug control, reveals the specific interaction of drug-related and development problems with conflicts, enabling it to be taken into account in the systematic planning and implementation of development cooperation activities.

Particularly to enhance awareness among parties to the conflicts and to defuse conflicts, it is also important for drug control to incorporate crisis prevention and conflict transformation methods. Development-oriented drug control and crisis prevention / peace-building have the same goals: the promotion of stability, sustainable development, good governance and the rule of law.

Cultivation and trafficking

In countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia or Myanmar drug production is closely bound up with the activities of armed bands. Most of them are active in the drug economy and are involved in drug production and trafficking. The revenue from the illegal drug trade is used to finance weapons and activities. Hence existing conflicts are kept alive and power struggles for the control of cultivation areas and trade routes can lead to an escalation of the dispute and new conflicts.

trafficking. National and international efforts to reduce drug crop cultivation solely by repressive measures have so far not proved to be a lasting solution and have often led to further conflicts and violent clashes.

Repressive measures are frequently used as the means of accomplishing political goals and interests in other sectors: annihilation measures may, for example, be misused to suppress politically undesirable groups and to extend and reinforce the perpetrator's own claims to power.

Drug consumption

The international community has increasingly been turning its attention to the problem of drug consumption in developing countries. Drug abuse can lower resistance to the use of violence. Members of militias and soldiers sometimes take drugs to dull their own sensitivity and to enhance their willingness to resort to violence and risky behaviour.

More information: www.gtz.de/drogen



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The impact of drug control

International drug policy is actively opposed to the cultivation of drug crops and the production, trafficking and consumption of drugs. Violent disputes assume primary significance when combating drug production and