

**Seminar on Alternative Development as a Drug Control Strategy
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1. Alternative development: what makes it different from integrated rural development?

The concept of alternative development was created out of the United Nations Conventions on International Drug Control. It aims to a social and negotiated solution to the worldwide phenomenon of illicit crops.

According to the UN Conventions, alternative development is the best answer to the need of a balanced focus to illicit crop eradication. The international community welcomed alternative development as a process dedicated to avoid and to eliminate illicit crops through the adoption of rural development measures in order to enable a sustainable development, incorporating the particular social and cultural characteristics of communities and target groups.

In 1988 the Declaration by the UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs stated that *“where farmers’ low profit production exists, alternative development is the most sustainable measure, and it is more appropriate socially and economically than forced eradication.* This answers the questions around the United Nations position regarding forced eradication. It clarifies that there are limits to be forced eradication and alternative development, with respect to the worldwide principles of drug control policy. Furthermore the United Nations decided to use alternative development as a main strategy against illicit crops instead of only considering rural development as a goal “per se”.

The purpose of alternative development is the same of rural development; that is to improve quality of life, public services, infrastructure and productive chains. There are some features that make the two policies different and separate. For instance, rural development mainly focuses on rural poor areas. However, as poverty is characteristic of the illicit crops areas, it is not the main reason for the existence of such crops. Colombia is in fact the main coca producer in the world, and the first producer of opium poppy. However the country occupies the eight place in the richness scale in Latin America, above countries as Ecuador and some Central American countries who do not engage in illicit crops notwithstanding their favourable climatic conditions.

For alternative development poverty is an economic variable and a challenge, but the main aspect of the target areas is the high presence of illicit crops and conflict.

This relation is not unique to Colombia. In the last decade opium poppy production in Asia has concentrated in conflict countries, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, where ethnic guerillas became financed by the drug business. In Latin America the Peruvian terrorist

group Sendero Luminoso financed its attacks with profits from coca crops.

In Colombia there is a strong relation between the armed groups, the narcotrafficking and the illicit crops production, which together represent a vicious circle. Public order problems jeopardize alternative development activities: the mobility of project personnel and beneficiaries, and the transportation of products is not easy. Advances in the peace negotiations are important for Alternative Development. Therefore the UN conceives alternative development as a condition for peace.

Another difference between alternative development and rural development is the need to design ways for negotiating with farmers. Alternative development projects foster farmer associations to sign voluntary eradication agreements, where farmers commit themselves to eliminate illicit crops, while they receive support for social and productive activities. The commitment of the farmers is of the utmost importance to eliminate illicit crops and to achieve success in the alternative development strategy. This negotiation can be achieved before, during or after the implementation of the alternative development strategy. At present, Plan Colombia demands peasants to be free of illicit crops before benefiting from the projects. Obviously, to be successful, agreements must include total trust and fulfillment from both parties.

Those alternative development projects where there has not been any eradication negotiation or agreement –like those assuming that financing legal products would lead to areas free of illicit crops- have a lower success rate. In Colombia, voluntary eradication experiences have shown that there are weaknesses; both in their conceptual framework, and subsequent implementation, sustainability and monitoring (like the recent “Social Pacts” in Putumayo). In some cases it was assumed that financing legal products would “therefore” lead to zones that were free of licit ones, and in others, deadlines and times were established for peasants to gradually carry out the respective eradication. Nevertheless, instead of changing “illicit crops for development”, “development with illicit crops” has been occurring. This means that farmers accept the benefits of alternative development but keep their illicit crops that become their “petty cash or safety box to be used when the family faces economic problems.

2. What measure may be taken to improve current alternative development projects?

The United Nations has a wide and long experience with alternative development. The alternative development concept and policy have changed and have enriched from country experiences all over the world.

In Colombia, alternative development started in 1985 with the support of the United Nations bodies such as UNFDAC (the UNDCP and today UNODC) through a pilot project in southern Cauca. Another three projects started in 1991 in Caquetá, Putumayo and Guaviare.

Among the lessons learned from these projects was the need to assure the Government commitment. During this phase, the UN committed around US \$ 13 million. However, the national or local counterparts never contributed more than US \$ 1 million. No specialized government agency was responsible to support,

organize and lead the alternative development investments.

With the intention to address such problem the Colombian Government created in 1995 the Alternative Development national Plan – PLANTE, then financially supported by the United Nations.

In 1988 the United Nations interventions continued in Cauca, Putumayo, Caquetá, Guaviare, Meta and South of Bolívar. These projects, besides the illicit crops substitution, intended to create and to strengthen the farmer organizations. In other words, they focused on the strengthening of the *social capital* in areas with illicit crops.

This social capital was important since the legal social nets were scarce in the coca cultivating areas, and the armed conflict had increased distrust among neighbours.

This argument was supported by Coleman, Putnam, Amartya Sen or Dasgupta, scholars who investigated the impact of social. They stated that social organizations were essential for the fast and sustainable economic development of any region. Putnam found that small social organizations participation means a better government, democracy and more economic development. Rose, another author of “social capital”, found that in Russia, people with lots of reliable friends, had higher and stable incomes.

Under these considerations, the project identified the farmer organizations as the target population, with support by the existing organizations (Agroamazonia in Putumayo, Cosurca in Cauca and Asohjeca in Caquetá) or by groups who had a good potential to become organized (Asogec in Guaviare, Asocalima in South of Bolivar and El Cedral in Nariño).

Another lesson learned is that the support in the creation and strengthening of farmer organizations is the best strategy to perform development processes at the regional level, since it generates social capital, promotes effective mechanisms for social control within the communities and becomes an effective tool of communication between the national and local government and the farmers' communities. Also, the associations offer a guarantee of the quality and replicability of the alternative development results. One of the main factors for the Alternative Development success is in fact the project capacity to share with the concerned communities the knowledge on management, leadership, democracy, equality, participation, and responsibility. The positive results were made possible because the community not only was conceived as beneficiary but also as a protagonist-operator and self-implementer of the projects.

The strengthening of social organization has no sense if it does not focus on productive activities that are profitable and may increase the quality of life of concerned farmers. The social organization by itself does not guarantee profit making on licit crops. By recognizing the United Nations' strategy to support and to strengthen social organizations as an essential first step, one can then start to identify profitable productive projects that generate economic and sustainable impact in the coca cultivating areas.

Three types of products were identified: those for “capitalization” with high profitability but long maturation (cattle, rubber, hearts of palm, cocoa, coffee and forestry), those for “cash” to minimize the advantage of illicit crops (fish breeding, beans, fruits and dairy) and finally those for food security at the farms or the local market (minor animals, yucca and maize).

The lack of land titles is the alternative development's most common problem. During the last years in Colombia, a land concentration process has occurred. The expulsion of the farmers to areas with no land titles has been observed. Generally, the farmers cut the forest in order to clear land for new crops. The soil

quickly loses fertility and it becomes unproductive. Then the farmer sells their depleted land to someone who uses it for pasture. In this cycle coca crops maintains some subsidiary role element since it represents the only profitable crop when peasants face bankruptcy.

In order to effectively support alternative development policies, the concerned states should legalize and entitle land property legalization as a strategy to detain the displacement process as well as the increasing pressure on the land viable for agriculture.

In the new UNODC project's the negotiation with producers associations made evident their concern on marketing as a condition to make alternative development sustainable. At the end of the project, marketing concerns grew considerably, as the peasant organizations could produce beans, rubber, cattle, but they were not automatically also good traders on the market. Furthermore for an agricultural product to become successful merchandise, it has to fulfill the quality, sanitary packaging and transporting requirements as well as to be supported by an enterprise marketing skills. These considerations encouraged the project managers and some peasants associations, to design and build agro-industrial plants to obtain more processed products. They also started to actively search their own market niche.

Among the lessons in the field of marketing, is that the economic policies of concerned countries in the agricultural sector of countries should be considered. For instance, foreign trade may affect the prices of agricultural products and may determine the customer's behavior when buying products promoted by alternative development. Thus to sign long term agreements that prevent prices fluctuation is often a required measure. It is also important that the farmers' organizations get access to consumer markets, thus avoiding traders that reduce the income of the project beneficiaries.

Similar considerations inspired the UNODC marketing agreement with the Supermarket chain Carrefour for the sale and distribution of palm hearts and beans from Putumayo, bananas from Meta, tomatoes from Nariño, beans from South Bolivar, coconuts from the Pacific Coast of Tumaco and coffee from Cauca, among other alternative development products. At the same time, COSURCA obtained the license for direct export and shipped organic coffee and social coffee to its overseas customers. It is also signed a commercial agreement with Nestlé for selling milk from Caquetá.

Most recently the concept of Alternative Development in Colombia was affected by the creation of the national Plan Colombia. A government decision merged alternative development activities with forestry development. The assumption that different strategies are required for different soils inspired a comprehensive approach to the whole land development of the country.

Consequently, the UN now implements new alternative development projects also by fostering forestry, productive and sustainable uses of wood, commercial plantations and to develop the timber productive chain. The high Colombian forestry vocation is seen as an asset for new productive activities to fight crops in the country.

At the same time the government developed its "Familias Guardabosques programme ("Forest Warden Family Programme"). Doubts exist in this regard as to the sustainability of these programmes, especially in view of the fact that there is no coordinated productive plan to take over those areas when economic cash aid to peasants will end. This recently-introduced programme is nevertheless being reviewed by the government for sustainability.

3. Achievements in Colombia

Most alternative development results are not immediate but they are sustainable. During its twenty years of work in Colombia, the UN projects have contributed to generate social and human capital in areas with illicit crops. The process of forming social capital has focused on the farmer organizations strengthening in seven departments: Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo, Caquetá, Guaviare, Meta and South Bolívar. Today, all the producer's organizations have commercial agreements and participate actively in their departmental planning bodies.

Around 10,000 families have been benefited with alternatives such as double purpose cattle (meat and milk), forestry and traditional crops as coffee, beans, cacao, banana, fruits, palm hearts, coconuts and sugar. It is estimated that UN projects have eliminated around 6.000 hectares of coca crops and prevented the cultivation of more than 50.000 hectares.

The marketing agreements with the private sector made possible important changes on alternative development. Since there is now a permanent demand for legal agricultural products, the chances for farmers to compete against illicit crops are real.

Alternative development farmers have established regular exchanges with European markets through organizations as FLO International and Max Haavelar. The shipping of eight containers of organic and social coffee to France and United Kingdom markets in April 2004 represent the beginning of a new solid legal economy for former coca peasants who now introduce themselves as independent rural entrepreneurs. They are now growing products which are mostly sold before production, thus strengthening their self-esteem and their total belief in a licit open market activity. And they always reiterate that they have no wish to go back to the conditions of enslaved labour and violence imposed by coca crops.