

Illicit crops reduction is about people, not only about illicit plants.

Key note speech by Dr. Sandro Calvani ¹
at the SIDA Conference:

A COHERENT APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN THE ANDEAN REGION²

Executive summary

At the beginning of the new century, the known global nexus of illicit drugs, under-development, failing states, poverty, corruption and terrorism has become a well known threat to sustainable development and peace in various parts of the world. Drug production and trafficking is a strong link of the mentioned chain of evils. The cultivation of drug crops does not genuinely improve the living conditions of small holder families. On the contrary, it often leads to dependence on illegal trafficking organizations and can aggravate poverty and existing conflicts.

Countries that have shown the best results in the fight against organized crime, in good governance and in environmental protection in high risk areas have torn down the old fashioned wall of separation between soft and hard strategies, i.e. between poverty reduction and the strengthening of the rule of law.

Development oriented drug control has become the *leitmotiv* of smart technical assistance and international cooperation in countries most affected by low human security rates. In marginalized areas affected by illicit cultivations, alternative development is the most effective and sustainable eradication strategy. Indeed, a good sustainable livelihoods strategy guarantees that the producer himself destroys or abandons the illicit crop, replacing it with an alternative socio-economic thinking and life experience. As soon as a sustainable and profitable economy takes roots in the rural community, there will be no risk that the peasants go back to growing illicit crops anywhere. By giving farmers violence-free, legal and profitable alternatives and by improving the living conditions in rural areas affected by illicit cultivation, the scope for organized crime will be reduced since it will eliminate potential and indirect militancy of the criminal and armed groups. The results of alternative development are not immediate, but they are sustainable.

The support given in the creation and strengthening of rural organizations is the best strategy to build development processes at regional level. Such strategy generates social capital, promotes effective social control mechanisms within the community, and becomes an efficient consultation mechanism between the rural communities and the national and local governments. An important factor for the success of an alternative development process lies in the capacity of projects to transfer the necessary knowledge to the communities. Positive results are achieved because the community is not only seen as the beneficiary, but also as carrying out its projects and being their protagonist. Nevertheless, the strengthening of social rural organizations does not make sense if these organizations do not come together around productive activities that are profitable and can increase the farmer's quality of life. The marketing factor is decisive for the success of alternative development programs. Without a strong private sector that can offer new technologies and supplies for the diversity of the production and market system, the growth of alternative and sustainable livelihoods is impossible. Moreover, the private sector can be a good pointer for which products are in demand, and can thus sell the products emanating from alternative development before producing them.

The paper presents an analysis of major Andean human security challenges due to drugs production and drug trafficking, including comparative statistics of illicit crops and other land use, never published before. In the second part the paper also highlights a few successful examples of marketing, micro-credit, and negotiated or pledged sales before production, which strengthen the credibility of the development oriented process and accelerate the mind-set change of former illicit crop growers.



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The author's statements do not necessarily represent the opinion of the United Nations.

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