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**Alternative
Development
and Eradication**



A Failed Balance

Drugs and Democracy Programme

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In the area of failed alternative development (AD) projects, the Andean region has its sorry share to contribute. The constant peasant uprisings in the Bolivian Chapare and the social tensions rife among *cocalero* peasants in the South of Colombia are woeful indicators of such failure.

In January, TNI attended a conference in Germany, hosted by the German government and UNDCP. The purpose was to critically evaluate experiences in AD and draw conclusions for its future.

In 1961, the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs prohibited planting crops having no medical or scientific purpose, fixing a period of 15 years –for opium– and 25 years –for coca– as deadlines for their ultimate extinction. Those targets were clearly not met. In 1998, ignoring decades of lack of success in addressing the issue of illicit crops, the UN set the year 2008 as yet another deadline by which to eliminate coca and opium. At the UN Special Session on drugs, AD was identified as a key instrument to be used in fulfilling this objective, as part of an integral anti-drugs strategy. The strategy's other components were eradication and law enforcement. Experience has demonstrated that the simultaneous use of these means –commonly known as the 'carrot and stick approach'– is counterproductive.

This issue of *Drugs & Conflict* is dedicated to this central theme in international drug control policies. Supply reduction, one of AD's objectives, has proven a failure in the Andean region. To what was this failure due? What may be expected of AD programmes in the future, given the accumulated experiences?

In reference to eradication pacts and AD projects undertaken in the Putumayo (Colombia), Ricardo Vargas points out that there is no fair compensation between what is expected of peasants: destroying the main source of their livelihood, and what the state offers them in exchange: non-viable projects

doomed to fail and the impending threat of fumigation should deadlines not be met. International anti-drugs policy forces the Colombian government to measure its results by the number of hectares eradicated, without regard for the region's specific development conditions.

State institutions in Colombia have no capacity to operate effectively in the Putumayo. Locked into a crisis combining US pressure to intensify aerial spraying, a collapsed peace process and guerrilla action against the economic and services infrastructure, the central government is not in a position to guarantee the adequate running of AD programmes. To add fuel to fire, there is now the argument that finance for terrorism must be combated. This further erodes the social and economic rights of the peasants and downplays the impact of aerial spraying on health and the environment.

In spite of widespread recognition of the failure of current 'carrot and stick' policies (a mixture of AD and repression), a 'zero option' mentality persists and deceit about success still abounds. The final declaration issued at the German policy conference is not radical in this sense. It does, however, offer some leaps forward in terms of fine tuning the AD concept, based on a better understanding of livelihood decision making processes, the importance of regular evaluations and, the acceptance of the reality that the communities most affected have not been allowed to participate sufficiently in their own development process. The declaration also manages to define somewhat more precisely the troublesome balance between AD and repressive law enforcement. It is worth noting that the UNDCP participated actively in the conference, displaying real willingness to seriously exchange opinions on these issues. This yields a modicum of optimism regarding the possibility that international bodies can learn to identify best practices and see the need to separate these from the current repressive policies, increasingly recognised as more harmful than drugs themselves.



“**A**lternative Development should neither be made conditional on prior elimination of drug crop cultivation nor should a reduction be enforced until licit components of livelihood strategies have been sufficiently strengthened.”

This is one of the recommendations of the *Feldafing Declaration*, the outcome of a conference in January hosted by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and organised by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Foundation for International Development (DSE) and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). The conference on *The Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation* provided a unique opportunity for 100 international policy officials and experts –including TNI– to discuss lessons from 25 years of experience in this field and draw conclusions for the future of Alternative Development (AD).

One of the main concerns in this policy debate has been the problematic relationship between developmental and repressive approaches to illicit drug crop cultivation. GTZ, which took the initiative for the conference, has a long history as the major donor for crop substitution and AD programmes in Asia and Latin America. The accumulation of field experience has led the agency to take a clear stand on the need to completely separate AD from forced eradication. The tension between GTZ’s developmental approach and the increasingly repressive eradication efforts in Bolivia and Colombia has now brought the agency to the brink of retreat. Growing frustration and despair over the incompatibility of sustainable development aims and rigidly applied drug control objectives prompted GTZ to convene a global reflection on the future of AD. The clash of concepts is symbolised by the physical destruction of GTZ-funded projects by aerial fumigation in Colombia and the militarization of project areas in the Chapare region of Bolivia. The application of strict drug control condi-

tionality to AD interventions, and the resulting mix of AD, law enforcement and forced eradication has de-legitimised the concept. In practice, the mix has led to increased social tensions –as is currently patently obvious in Bolivia. One of the Feldafing recommendations therefore reads: “*Alternative Development programmes cannot solve all social problems on a national level, but it should be stressed and expressed more clearly that Alternative Development should never lead to increased social conflicts. When designing Alternative Development programmes their potential for crisis prevention, conflict management and peace keeping should be taken into account.*”

Also present at the conference was Ulrich Künzel, one of the GTZ experts working on an AD project in the Cauca department, who was kidnapped by the Colombian FARC guerrillas in July last year and finally released in October. Warmly welcoming him to the event, GTZ Director

"It must be made clear to everyone that alternative development has nothing to do with fumigation or eradication"

General Wolfgang Schmitt said in his opening address: “*This tragic event showed that it is impossible to combine in one region, and at one point in time, alternative development with eradication. It must be made clear to everyone that alternative development has nothing to do with fumigation or eradication. I do not want to imply that the kidnapping would not have taken place if there had been no eradication, but I am convinced that the security situation is only exacerbated when eradication measures take place parallel to alternative development. [...] Project areas must be free of forced measures (fumigation, eradication, military intervention) against the target population. This is the only possible basis for integrated and sustainable development.*”

Carrot and Stick Strategies

In recent years, international drug policy discourse reveals an increasing acceptance of the alleged need to integrate AD concepts into a so-called comprehensive “*three-pronged strategy of eradication, interdiction and alternative devel-*

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opment.” At the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs (UNGASS), the marriage of eradication and AD was maintained throughout the preparations and the final documents. The Political Declaration calls for strong support for alternative development, but also for an emphasis on “the need for eradication programmes and law enforcement measures to counter illicit cultivation.” Moreover, it welcomes a global approach to the elimination of illicit crops and commits member states to working closely with UNDCP “to develop strategies with a view to eliminating or significantly reducing the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy by 2008.”

The Action Plan on International Cooperation on Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development approved by UNGASS is a typical consensus document, constructed on the basis of drafts from the European Union (under German leadership), the United States and UNDCP, with written inputs from Mexico and Colombia. According to Dorothe Buddenberg, the UNDCP Alternative Development expert who moderated the negotiations: “Only two countries insisted that the link between law enforcement and alternative development should be elaborated in the drafting of the Action Plan. While I expected other countries to voice opposition, the principles outlined were not strongly contested.”

The final text stresses that AD alone is not enough: “Balanced approaches are likely to result in more efficient strategies and successful outcomes” and “National drug crop reduction and elimination strategies should include comprehensive measures such as programmes in alternative development, law enforcement and eradication.”

The terms ‘balanced approach’ and ‘comprehensive measures’ are the euphemisms used for what is commonly referred to as the ‘carrot and stick’ approach. Ms. Buddenberg noted: “The balanced approach, originally a term developed to denote a balance between supply and demand reduction measures, has been used here to denote a balance between repressive law enforcement approaches and more liberal development oriented approaches.”

The language of the Action Plan thus legitimises the use of force to reduce coca and opium

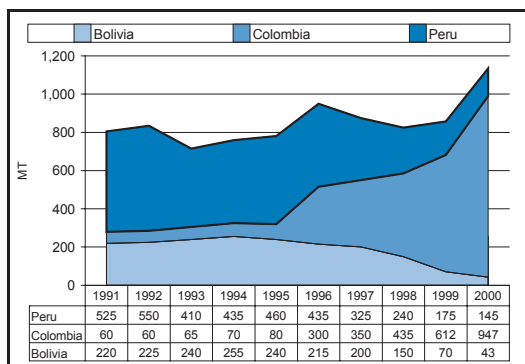
poppy cultivation. It does, however, specify criteria under which AD should be complemented by forced eradication: “When there is organised criminal involvement in illicit drug crop cultivation” and “In areas where viable alternative sources of income already exist.” The Action Plan also includes a warning about possible incompatibility: “In areas where alternative development programmes have not yet created viable alternative income opportunities, the application of forced eradication might endanger the success of alternative development programmes.”

Ever since UNGASS, the language of policy documents has been filled with phrases describing AD as “one of the components within the comprehensive framework of the global drug control strategy,” and “in support of comprehensive crop control strategies.” References are often made to “a three-pronged strategy of eradication, interdiction, and alternative development.” Among the list of ‘ideal conditions’ for alternative development appears the phrase “consistently applied disincentives through law enforcement and eradication.” The assumption of compatibility between AD and forced eradication is rarely questioned and mixing developmental and repressive instruments in the field is explicitly promoted.

Alternative Development Definition

The UNGASS Action Plan defines 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, recognising the particular socio-cultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs.” Additionally it mentions the aim “to promote lawful and sustainable socio-economic options for these communities and population groups that have resorted to illicit cultivation as their only viable means of obtaining a livelihood, contributing in an integrated way to the eradication of poverty.”

Potential Production of Cocaine, 1991 - 2000



Source: CICAD

ignited a global controversy in which European donors distanced themselves from the US-inspired plan. The complete blurring of the line between AD and eradication, and the overemphasis of the 'stick', made developmental donors highly reluctant to invest in the plan's 'carrot'. Forced eradication went ahead as planned anyway. Massive spraying with herbicides started in December 2000 in Southern Colombia, destroying many AD projects in the process. USAID supports so-called 'social pacts' and 'voluntary' eradication agreements with communities in the Putumayo. The restrictive conditions of those pacts and the fact that they were negotiated under threat of fumigations rolled back two decades of AD history. The pacts merely serve to justify eradication and are doomed to fail.

Escalation in the Andes

National strategies for coca elimination combining as required alternative development, law enforcement and eradication were soon ready for implementation in Bolivia and Colombia. Within these 'balanced and comprehensive' drug control strategies, the function of AD was largely reduced to what the Action Plan had called its intention "to create a supportive environment for the implementation of that strategy." The subtleties of the restrictive criteria mentioned in the Action Plan were left aside and the warning thrown to the wind.

In 2002, President Banzer of Bolivia presented the ambitious *'With Dignity!'* plan which aimed to "come out of the coca-cocaine circuit in the next five years." Crop substitution efforts, compensation schemes and AD in the Chapare region had been underway since 1983 and more than \$180 million had been invested. This had managed to considerably expand areas of licit crops in the region, but without reducing net coca production. Arguing that 'they had their chance', Banzer decided to force a breakthrough, commencing a large-scale eradication of all illegal coca in the Chapare region using military force.

The other master plan in the region, Plan Colombia, aims to achieve a reduction of 50% over six years, supported by the controversial \$1.3 billion –largely military– US aid package of 2000. The international donor conferences

The current picture for Bolivia and Colombia looks very grim, with daily confrontations and mounting social tensions. Without blunt US interference and threat of decertification, negotiated agreements with the *cocaleros* in the Chapare could easily have been achieved, the terms of the social pacts in Colombia would have been more realistic, genuine AD programmes could have flourished and aerial spraying would no longer be taking place. The rest of the international community, however, also has to take responsibility for the crisis. The holy marriage between eradication and AD sealed at UNGASS and in its endorsement of thinking in terms of deadlines, UNDCP's support for the framework of Plan Dignity and Plan Colombia and its initial involvement in the plans to develop mycoherbicides for forced eradication, the propagandistic trumpeting of so-called success stories and the acquiescence to violent eradication measures have all contributed to the escalation of repression and social tension.

The result is an almost complete breach of confidence with communities, a compromised UNDCP, blurred distinctions between development and repression, the sacrifice of most other AD goals for the sake of hopeless hectare counting, and (understandable) donor reluctance to continue with AD investments. The crisis is most visible in Bolivia and Colombia, but the risks of an escalation of eradication measures and de-legitimation of the AD concept are very real elsewhere. The 2008

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deadline, the renewed 'zero option' illusion, the conceptual blur and the supposed effectiveness of the 'balanced approach' in Bolivia lead to mounting pressure to show results elsewhere. Scenarios with a high risk potential for escalation are the current expansion of coca cultivation in Peru (after the abandonment of fields caused by the coca price crash in the first half of the 1990s), the expected resurgence of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan (after the dramatic crash last year under Taleban rule) and the attempts, just underway, to address the extensive production of opium in Burma –now the world's largest producer.

“The overall conclusion is that notwithstanding efforts to reduce crops in producing countries and cocaine seizures, production and availability of this drug for consumption have not been reduced”

A Future for Alternative Development

There is a pressing need to prevent these developments damaging beyond repair the basic concept of Alternative Development. To accept AD as nothing more than a sop after repression would mean sacrificing the concept altogether. In spite of the many failures and the structural deficiency in terms of community empowerment, there are also good examples that deserve a well-funded future. Several projects have contributed to poverty alleviation and improved living conditions in the mostly marginalized areas where illicit crops are concentrated. Furthermore, AD still plays an important role as counterweight to indiscriminately repressive approaches to illicit cultivation. It also offers communities an option to consider in their negotiations with authorities. Given the fact that most illicit crops are grown in a political context of high social tension and armed conflict, AD projects have great potential to contribute to conflict prevention and peace building. Moreover, AD could play an important role –as GTZ put it– as a 'precursor in the drugs debate' by stressing the developmental factors that have to be taken into account in drug policy-making.

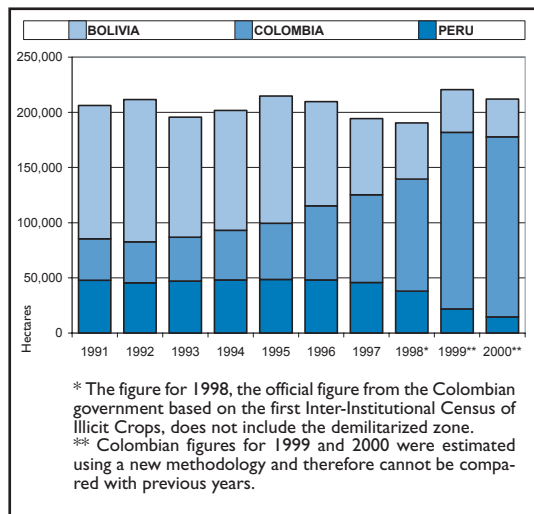
To safeguard best practices and enhance a constructive future role for AD in the international drug policy debate, AD has to be unequivocally de-linked from the current escalation of repression against illicit cultivation. A starting point is to accept the implications of one very basic and undeniable fact. No measurable impact has been achieved either regionally or globally after several decades of supply-side interventions. AD projects, as well as eradication operations and law enforcement

have had an impact on the local and/or national levels, usually resulting in displacements and temporary disruptions. But on a region-wide and global level, the demand-supply balance in the market has always re-established itself. As the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS-CICAD) concludes in its 2001 Statistical Summary on Drugs:

“The area under coca cultivation remained virtually constant, hovering around 200,000 hectares for the last ten years. [...] Interdiction and eradication efforts in two of the countries with the most



Coca Crops (hectares) 1991 - 2000



Source: CICAD

coca crops were successful at the national level, but not at the regional level, since a reduction in crops in some countries is offset by cultivation in new areas of other countries. [...] The overall conclusion is that notwithstanding efforts to reduce crops in producing countries and cocaine seizures, production and availability of this drug for consumption have not been reduced.”

Non-Conditionality

If the international community could finally recognize the narrowness of the margins for policy intervention in terms of global supply reduction and accept the fact that the phenomenon of drug-linked crop cultivation is here to stay as long as demand exists, countries and AD donors could be relieved of the pressure to comply with reduction targets and deadlines. In terms of global drug control, it really makes no difference at all whether coca growers in the Chapare are left with their ‘k’ato’ (0.16 hectares) or agreement on achieving a 50% reduction in five years is reached with respect to the schemes in southern Colombia that were originally proposed for the social pacts.

More realistic and flexible time frames allowing for gradual reduction over a period of several years and greater compatibility with local rural development plans are essential. A ‘participatory approach’ means more than just consulting communities about their wishes. It requires serious dialogues in which these communities are allowed to have substantial leeway for negotiation. Experiments with such gradual scenarios have been impossible in the case of Bolivia and Colombia –in contrast to the situation in, for example, Laos and Vietnam where gradualism is an accepted principle of AD strategy.

Mutual trust should be constructed upon the basis that, if development in the target period cannot guarantee dignified conditions of life, the continued presence of an established maximum of illicit crops per family for subsistence purposes is allowed. This means, in fact, de-linking AD from the conditionality embedded in the ‘balanced approach’. Assistance has been made far too conditional on hectare reductions, and the discourse that ‘if the carrot does not work fast enough, we’ll show them the stick’ has gained ground. In a sense, de-linking AD from this ‘comprehensive policy framework’ means turning the burden of proof

around. Communities would no longer have to ‘prove their willingness to substitute’, but the government and the international community would have to ‘prove the viability of alternatives’ before demanding that peasant and indigenous communities place the fragile foundations of their survival economy at risk.

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The latest GTZ policy document *Drugs and Development in Latin America* also recommends non-conditionality as a guideline for future AD strategy: “Ideally, reduction should be voluntary or, in the second-best case, should be market induced, i.e. a response to falling prices or a change in demand.”

Harm Reduction for the Production Side

The proposed de-linking of AD from the repressive dimensions of drug control can be guided by introducing Harm Reduction concepts into the supply-side drugs policy debate. On the consumption side, the Harm Reduction concept has spread very fast in recent years and has now become the basis for a rational

and pragmatic drug policy in almost every European country and many others. Here, the incompatibility with repressive approaches is obvious and explicit. Forced detoxification, incarceration for individual consumption, denial of access to clean needles and the death penalty are no longer considered to be 'complementary policy instruments of a balanced and comprehensive drug control policy', of which Harm Reduction programmes are 'one of the components.' There are no attempts to deal with the obvious contradictions by trying to 'separate the instruments within the same project area'. They are perceived as incompatible tracks, where Harm Reduction explicitly opposes indiscriminate repression. Harm Reduction has thus not only become an effective instrument for reducing the harm caused by drug misuse to consumers and society at large but, in the drug policy debate, also challenges the War on Drugs mentality and the 'zero option' discourse.

The time has come to apply this more rational and pragmatic approach to the drugs production side, in order to "[make] clear to everyone that alternative development has nothing to do with fumigation or eradication," as GTZ director Wolfgang Schmitt was quoted as saying above. Introducing Harm Reduction concepts to the supply-side, might encompass the following:

- Shifting away from the current obsession with counting and reducing the numbers of hectares, towards prioritising the policy goal of reducing the harm associated with the existence of illicit crops, including measures to reduce the harm done to the environment and attempts to reduce their importance in fuelling armed conflict.
- Opening up spaces for dialogue with involved communities –free of deadline and 'zero option' thinking– about their own problems with drug-linked crops, allowing flexible gradual reduction processes and other ways that might reduce the harm of economic mono-dependence or of problems related to local abuse.
- Defining small growers more as economic victims that have become 'addicted' to illicit crops for survival. Similarly to the Harm Reduction approach to drug addicts, try to provide conditions that allow them to come out of it, but if that doesn't work don't spray, incarcerate or kill them, but rather assist them in a way that reduces the harm to themselves and to society at large.
- Supporting the option of decriminalising small illicit cultivation –a measure currently being debated in Colombia's Congress– similar to the decriminalisation of individual consumption or the possession of small quantities for personal use.
- Exploring options of direct linkages between Harm Reduction interventions on the supply and demand sides in order to stimulate global debate. For example, in the framework of an Alternative Development project, raw opium from an indigenous community in Colombia might be used to supply heroin maintenance programmes in Switzerland and the Netherlands.
- 'De-demonising' certain aspects of illicit drugs, by differentiating more between specific substances and their potential harms and benefits on the basis of scientific studies and thus, for example, allowing exports of coca products to international markets.

An Open Debate

Finally, what we urgently need is the creation of political space to conduct an open and honest debate: a re-assessment of the costs and benefits of the current drug policy framework and a critical examination of other potential market-regulating models, with the freedom to challenge the wisdom of the UN Conventions and to allow experiments, in practice, with other approaches. The mid-term review of the UNGASS outcomes, which is scheduled for 2003, would provide a good opportunity for such a global reflection.



Coca Crops in the Andean Region



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Peru: a success story?

Coca production in Peru declined drastically, dropping from a high of 129,100 hectares in 1992 to 34,200 in 2000. The decline was accredited to the 'Air Bridge Denial' strategy of disrupting the aerial transport of coca paste from Peru to processing facilities in Colombia. The shoot-down policy against trafficking aircraft led to a surplus of coca paste in Peru, which supposedly brought about a price crash. UNDCP then incorporated Peru into its list of 'success stories', attributing success to the 'balanced approach' of combining Alternative Development (AD) with law enforcement.

Peru never legally banned –only tried to regulate– coca cultivation, protecting substantial traditional and harmless coca consumption. Forced manual eradication was undertaken only between 1983 and 1989, at an average of 2,600 hectares per year. The tensions this created resulted in a strengthening of guerrilla forces, which forced the government to reconsider the policy. Since then, only sporadic eradication has occurred –primarily to soothe the US annual certification process– triggering fierce protests from peasant unions. Overall, Peruvian efforts were largely focused on AD 'without a stick'. In 1981, USAID initiated a first crop substitution project in the Alto Huallaga Valley, where most coca was grown. In 1985 the UN became involved in AD programmes, and other donors joined the effort later. Some \$190 million were invested between 1987 and 1996 failing, however, to disturb cultivation nationwide.

Neither AD, eradication, nor the Air Bridge interdiction convincingly explain the Peruvian coca-crash. It was caused by structural changes in regional drug trafficking patterns in response to law enforcement pressure in Colombia, combined with intensification of armed conflicts in Peru and Colombia, and reinforced by a natural disaster. First there was the crackdown of the Medellín Cartel, which had an immediate impact on coca prices due to Peru's dependence on Colombian buyers. Coca prices in the Alto Huallaga plummeted from the record high in 1987 of \$4.52 per kg coca leaf and \$2,000 per kg coca paste, to \$0.76 and \$390 by 1990. Intensification of the war against the Shining Path and an outbreak of the *Fusarium Oxysporum* fungus in 1992-1993 halved coca harvest in the Alto Huallaga from 61,000 ha in 1992 to 28,900 in 1994.

Prices slowly recovered by the end of 1994. Then,

towards September 1995 coca leaf prices in the Hualaga fell again from \$3 per kg to \$0.40, and coca paste from \$850 per kg to \$100. This second crash coincided with the dismantling of the Cali Cartel into many smaller local groups and the intensification of the armed conflict in Colombia, causing a coca boom there. Both price crashes increased the odds for successful implementation of AD projects. AD offered farmers an alternative livelihood strategy at a time when they were having to abandon coca plots anyway due to the price crash. Interdiction strengthened the downward trend, prompting emerging trafficking groups in Colombia to secure their supply closer to home.

Peru is often referred to as proof of how law enforcement contributes to improved conditions for AD, arguing the need for a 'balanced approach'. Law enforcement operations were indeed among the factors that caused the price crash, but these were the interventions directed at specific drug cartels in Colombia and not the Peruvian interdiction programme. Law enforcement at other levels has opposite effects. For example, increased interception of the refined end products increases the demand for raw materials and increases prices. The main impact of the current high cocaine seizures, estimated at 30-40% of cocaine production, should have been a decrease in availability on the consumption market but instead resulted in an increase in production. Like seizures, eradication increases the price of raw materials and therefore in economic terms impacts negatively on conditions for AD projects.

The new government wants to avoid eradication, restore social stability and good relations with peasant unions, and increase AD investments, while hoping to bolster price-induced voluntary abandonment of coca fields by weakening trafficking groups through focused law enforcement. Latest trends in Peru, however, indicate a recovery of prices (3,50 p/kg. coca), an increase of coca cultivation (50,000 has.), emerging opium poppy cultivation (1,000 has.) and the consolidation of independent Peruvian processing and trafficking groups with their own international routes. The upsurge of fumigations in Southern Colombia and the suppression of illegal coca by military force in Bolivia may result in a balloon effect, moving coca production back to Peru. The question is how long Peru will be considered a success story of international drug control.



Instigated by peasants and indigenous peoples from the Lower Putumayo and local authorities, the municipalities in the Amazon region bordering Ecuador proposed to Colombia's central government the suspension of aerial fumigation in exchange for commitments to manually eradicate coca crops. This initiative, led by the municipality of Puerto Asís, came after many protests against fumigation, including the *cocalero* marches of 1996.

The central government accepted this demand towards mid-2001, but limited it to Puerto Asís. Meanwhile, intensive fumigation continued throughout the rest of the Lower Putumayo, as did the dirty war in which many people died violently in selective massacres at the hands of paramilitary forces. Months earlier, the guerrilla had responded to paramilitary advances with an armed sealing of the area, paralysing the whole region. The siege, which had harsh socio-economic consequences for the inhabitants and created massive resentment in the region, ended in failure.

The manual eradication proposal of Puerto Asís made its way to Bogotá stressing the need to implement a gradual process of crop substitution, strengthen medium and long-term productive projects, and provide technical assistance and training for the peasants. In Bogotá, the proposal was approved under new conditions reflecting the previous failed policy of measuring results by the number of hectares eradicated and the speed with which this took place.

The government imposed two conditions on the cultivators: a deadline of one year to eradicate all the coca contemplated under the various pacts or face the threat of renewed fumigation; and implementation of the various pacts under conditions which subverted the notion of sustainable development originally advocated by the communities.

Near-Sighted Goals

The government focused on meeting the immediate food sufficiency needs of the families signing the pacts, offering to allocate 2 million pesos (US\$ 900) of livestock to each family. Delivery

of the farm goods was subcontracted to NGOs, including private enterprises masquerading as NGOs.¹ This is where the first set of problems with the pact originates.

1. The proposal to carry out a disciplined and in-depth study of the region's biophysical potential and the quality of its soil, also making a technical appraisal of the agricultural and environmental potential of each sub-region, was disregarded. Likewise, estimating the capacity of the area contemplated in the programme to support the current population (a capacity previously distorted by the coca economy), in order to allocate the resources available more efficiently, was also ignored. In short, the whole effort of identifying zones in which investment at a social and economic level could be maximised was abandoned.

2. Granting top priority to coca eradication in the shortest time possible, the urge has been simply to define the date by which manual eradication would begin and thus safeguard the application of the chief indicator in the current anti-drugs policy. This has hindered the creation of a socio-cultural identity and the building of trust between state and communities, aggravated by the lack of state commitment to longer-term processes of sustainable, integral development.

3. The original idea of the communities and the local authorities was a *gradual* substitution process, prioritising the development of medium and long-term productive projects; attaining immediate food security was a secondary goal. With the central government's focus on short-term eradication, meeting the immediate food sufficiency needs of peasants was considered more important than creating conditions for sustainable long-term agricultural alternatives, so that no immediate excuse for halting coca production existed. The interpretation of 'food security' applied by the national institutions responsible for drafting regional development policies has led to food security being viewed as a simple 'delivery service'.²

This short-term approach and the lack of an integral, sustainable development perspective personalises the relationship between state and family, fostering conflicts on that level and



encouraging a culture of patronage. It also increases the risk of using the benefits of such pacts non-productively, such as converting state granted farm goods into cash or consumer goods, instead of into productive investments.³ This is why the communities had proposed the need to tackle food self-sufficiency as part of communal approaches.

4. Not even delivery, however, was successful. By February 2002, 37,000 families had signed agreements in the Putumayo Department, 6,000 of them from the municipality of Puerto Asís. Only 1,800 of the latter had received the food security package by this date, that is, 4.86% of the total number of families involved and only 30% of the chosen pilot municipality (Puerto Asís). The first agreements were signed in December 2000, which means that the delivery of the farm goods even to this tiny minority took 14 months.

5. The state's food policy is rendered all the more inconsistent through the lack of security that the permanent threat of fumigation causes, and through the severe effects of aerial spraying by anti-narcotics authorities. They often also spray pastures where the cattle to be delivered by the state grazes.⁴ Obviously this sends conflicting signals to the communities.

A Non-Viable Strategy

The government has implemented no significant economic and social reforms favouring the poorest rural sector and also has done little to build the capacity of state institutions in regions such as the Putumayo. Herein lies the main frustration of the communities and this constitutes the greatest factor of distrust in central government.

Productive projects have not been part of the 'alternative development' process, beyond some isolated instances, such as the completion of a palm heart processing plant, a white elephant of the former Samper administration, built at a much higher cost than originally envisaged. With its capacity to process 1300 hectares, it might benefit 650 families, estimating an average of two hectares per family. This is 1.75% of the total number of families entering into the agreements.

The state has forced signatories to the pacts to go through the whole rigmarole of accepting the delivery of the ill-defined food self-sufficiency components, without accepting any responsibility regarding the more substantial problems hindering development. The poultry and two cows per family were received as intended for immediate consumption, rather than being seen as part of any integral development vision. Meanwhile, requests for technical assistance and training for the peasants, part of the original conditions, remain unanswered.

Within the framework of the various pacts, land entitlement can be regarded as the only condition that the central government has fully honoured. Complementary projects in the areas of infrastructure and services were partially completed, with special attention being paid to road construction. Efforts in the areas of social health and education, however, are notably weak. Such an absence of full productive alternatives to planting coca does not make its eradication viable. To imagine that peasants would eradicate their main source of livelihood in exchange for the one-time delivery of 900 dollars in kind is absurd.

In the absence of any viable government strategy and, indeed, local capacity to address the need for rural reforms within a war context and a renewed crisis in the peace process (to which the guerrilla has contributed by redoubling attacks against the economic and services infrastructure), the US government is stepping into the vacuum.

US Pressure

High US State Department officials and the US Embassy in Bogota are calling for an intensification of aerial spraying to render impossible the replanting of the 150,000 hectares of illicit crops targeted. There is a vast expanse of 400,000 square kilometres in the Amazon-Orinoco Basin where new coca plantations might be installed to make up for the losses caused by cocaine seizures and forced eradication. The environmental damage that both fumigation and replanting would unleash could not be worse for Colombia. Meanwhile, USAID, through the Chemonics firm, has demanded that the pro-



ductive projects the community wants to negotiate be tied to the total and immediate eradication of the illicit crops –that is, without any extension of deadlines or any other conditions outside the ‘zero coca’ scenario.

These two demands from the US are beginning to sketch a dramatic future for the region. They come at a time when the Colombian state finds itself bankrupt as far as alternative development policy is concerned. Policy guidelines are in short supply and new entities have been created, parallel to the discredited governmental Plante Programme, that often act as conveyor belts for the transmission of patronage relations and political favours for private gain. They also take place at a time that the peace process has collapsed bolstered by a swing in public opinion towards finding a solution through the use of force. This is articulated in relation to the ‘war on terrorism’ currently being promoted by Washington.

In this panorama of confusion and desolation for the inhabitants of lower Putumayo, the Town Hall of Puerto Asís is convinced of the need to send Washington a clear signal, accepting to eradicate coca without delay, so that it can show a substantial area free of illicit crops. This is a desperate measure taken in response to the impending threat of aerial fumigation bound to destroy anything green in its path, except the armed groups in green uniforms bent on waging their war without any regard for the civil population.

The central government continues to distance itself from determining the region’s future, allowing the pilot pact process to crumble to pieces, its victims being the local communities and the local authorities. Even the mediocre administration in the Governor’s Office, entrenched in Mocoa, capital of the Putumayo,

and characterised by patronage relations and petty politics during this electoral year, shows no sign of involvement in the unfolding drama endured by the population dependent on illicit crops. In spite of many mistakes, Puerto Asís has a striking achievement to show for its troubles: the truth is that it managed to put a halt to aerial spraying for 15 months. Now it is demanding international monitoring from European countries, to verify who is accountable for not fulfilling the pacts: a centralist government that disempowers rather than strengthens local dynamics, or a community that has proven to possess more ingenious strategies for handling the problem than they were given credit for.

Between the two sides, the hawks of the US State and Defence Departments hover, intent on doing the only thing they know how to do: fumigate, militarize the coca regions and fumigate again, now under the guise of combating terrorist finances. In this manner, they deny the peasants’ social and economic rights and dismiss as ungrounded the claims that aerial spraying has negative impacts on health and the environment. In the meantime, Colombia’s drug traffickers, grouped into hundreds of organisations, continue to enjoy a period of peace and illegal prosperity in the cities. Thanks to Plan Colombia, the problem is with the ‘terrorists’ and not with these ‘respectable’ men, their legalised coverage and their tremendous political clout.

No matter if the peasants are fumigated while the drug traffickers finance the successful model of Colombia’s dirty war and do all in their power to control the outcome of the 2002 parliamentary elections. No matter if coca is eradicated but the drug barons legitimate their capital, safely stashed abroad until the whole problem of ‘internal security’ is resolved. Let them fumigate, like they are already doing over the rest of the Putumayo, including its population.

¹ There is strong suspicion that some contracts with these so-called NGOs are political paybacks to those who financed President Pastrana’s successful 1998 campaign.

² This term was coined by workshop participants evaluating the Puerto Asís pacts on February 8 and 9 2002, which was attended by local authorities and community representatives. The responsibility for the policy falls, in the first place, upon the Plante Programme and, in the second place, upon the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment.

³ Examples of non-productive use of food self-sufficiency provisions include exchange for alcoholic beverages, sales at half the market price or simple disappearance, as in the case of chickens.

⁴ Due to the overall fumigation of these pastures, cattle owners are forced to take their animals elsewhere, thus augmenting the economic chaos and social uncertainty, both factors serving to destroy what the state is purportedly constructing, that is, a licit alternative economy.

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USEFUL WEBSITES

www.cepes.org.pe/alternativo/proyecto.htm

Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES). Excellent site on Alternative Development with regular updates on cultivation, statistics, bibliography on the issue, online documents, Peruvian legislation and links (in Spanish).

www.cicad.oas.org/en/Alternativedevelopment/main.htm

Special section of the OAS’s Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) on alternative development.

www.undcp.org/alternative_development.html

UNDCP website on alternative development, with a database including all past and ongoing UNDCP alternative development projects and a list of publications and links to other websites.

www.alternative-development.net

Official Website of the International Conference on The Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation, 7-12 January 2002, Feldafing / Munich, Germany. Information on the conference, the official conference documents – The Feldafing Declaration and the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Conference – keynote speeches and papers presented at the regional Asia and Andean Region workshops and at the plenary sessions of the conference –we recommend the papers from Martin Jelsma, David Mansfield, Francisco Thoumi and Rita Gebert– and the conclusions of the working groups. Also available are an online forum and a list of non-official documents by some participants to feed the discussion.

Alternative Development programmes, aimed at encouraging peasants to switch from growing illicit drugs-related crops, are a good idea. The record of success, however, is a sorry one. Decades of efforts to reduce global drug supply using a mix of developmental and repressive means, have failed.

This *Drugs & Conflict* debate paper elucidates the analysis TNI contributed to a high-level international policy conference to evaluate 25 years of Alternative Development, convened by the German government and the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) in January 2002.

TNI argues for a reconceptualisation of the strategy – delinking alternative development from the threat of forced eradication and law enforcement, and guaranteeing peasants the support required for a sustainable alternative future. Furthermore, our experts urge the application of the concept of Harm Reduction as the basis for a rational and pragmatic drug policy. This concept has been applied successfully in many countries, especially in Europe, but till now only on the consumption side of the story. The authors of this booklet argue it is high time that Harm Reduction principles be applied to the production side of the equation.

A significant breakthrough was achieved at the German conference, with the final declaration stating, “*Alternative Development should neither be made conditional on prior elimination of drug crop cultivation nor should a reduction be enforced until licit components of livelihood strategies have been sufficiently strengthened.*” While there is still a long way to go in achieving just and effective drugs policies, this does represent an important shift away from the crude ‘carrot and stick’ approach to peasant producers, which has so undermined alternative development efforts to date.

The Transnational Institute (TNI) is a decentralized fellowship of scholars, researchers and writers from the South, Europe and the U.S. committed to create and promote international co-operation in analysing and finding possible solutions to such global problems as militarism and conflict, poverty and marginalisation, social injustice and environmental degradation.

Since 1996, the TNI Drugs & Democracy programme has been analysing trends in the illegal drugs economy and in drug policies globally, their causes and their effects on economy, peace and democracy.

The Drugs & Democracy programme conducts field investigations, engages policy debates, briefs journalists and officials, coordinates international campaigns and conferences, produces articles, publications and briefing documents, and maintains a daily electronic news service on drugs-related issues.

The aim of the project and of the *Drugs and Conflict* series is to stimulate a re-assessment of conventional prohibitive and repressive policy approaches and to argue for policies based on principles consistent with a commitment to harm reduction, fair trade, development, democracy, human rights, environmental and health protection, and conflict prevention.

