



INTERNATIONAL DRUG POLICY CONSORTIUM

**THE WORLD DRUG REPORT 2007
STILL WINNING THE WAR ON DRUGS?**

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STILL WINNING THE WAR ON DRUGS?

The International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) is a global network of NGOs and professional networks that specialise in issues related to illegal drug use. The Consortium aims to promote objective and open debate on the effectiveness, direction and content of drug policies at national and international level, and supports evidence-based policies that are effective in reducing drug-related harm. It produces its own briefing and position papers, disseminates the reports of its member organizations about particular drug-related matters, and offers expert consultancy services to policymakers and officials around the world.

SUMMARY

On the publication of the World Drug Report in 2006, the IDPC cast doubt on the claim that the global drug problem was being brought under control. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) makes the claim in even stronger terms in its latest report on the state of the global drug market, the 2007 World Drug Report. This report was published on June 26th, the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. In keeping with previous World Drug Reports, it contains much useful data and analysis, but its credibility is undermined by the selective use of the available evidence to support questionable claims for the success of the UN track record in tackling illegal drug markets. Such confident assertions of support for traditional law enforcement models of drug policy are particularly surprising as many Member States are moving away from this position, and the UN itself is due to embark on what is meant to be an objective review of progress and achievement in global drug control with the 10-year evaluation of the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs. The increasingly simplistic, and seemingly conclusive, view emanating from the responsible UN agency must call into question its ability to act as an honest facilitator of what will be a crucial review of policies that affect hundreds of millions of people around the world. While it is already obvious that the international community will not reach the targets it set at the 1998 UNGASS – to significantly reduce supply and demand of drugs over a ten year period – the UNODC is under tremendous pressure to show significant progress. However, it will be difficult to argue that the world is on the right track on the basis of consumption and production figures since the 1998 UNGASS, or even since the entry into force of the 1961 Single Convention. The preface to the report makes an attempt to show significant results, despite the fact that its own data show the opposite. This reflects UNODC's ambiguous position as both a political agent and a supposedly objective centre of expertise.

In this briefing paper, we attempt to focus on what can be understood from the available data, what dilemmas it raises for policymakers, and the key issues to be resolved in the forthcoming review.

WHAT IS THE DATA TELLING US?

The first thing to understand is that the data available globally on illegal drug production, distribution and use, is notoriously difficult to gather with any accuracy or consistency. The UNODC reports themselves acknowledge this reality, and we presented a summary of methodological problems in our review of the 2006 World Drug Report [IDPC briefing paper 2: "The 2006 World Drug Report. Winning the War on Drugs?"]. Secondly, the good quality data that is available comes almost exclusively from the rich westernised nations that have the capacity and resources to conduct complex studies and surveys. Estimates of the extent of production, trafficking and prevalence of use in large parts of the world are therefore extremely unreliable. Thirdly, the amount of truly new information that has become available in the last 12 months is limited. For example most of the data on prevalence comes from national surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005. Within the body of the 2007 World Drug Report, there are repeated warnings that the data should be treated with caution (for example, see pp 60 or 270). It is therefore remarkable that the preface to the report contains such confident claims for the success of the UN programme, with no reference to the limitations of the evidence, and therefore the caution that should be exercised in drawing policy conclusions. There are 3 particular areas where a close analysis of the data would seem to undermine these conclusions:

- There is no doubt that cultivation of opium has become concentrated in fewer countries in recent years, and that coca production has not expanded beyond the Andean region. However, the claim that this represents a downward trend in the global production of either heroin or cocaine is not supported by the evidence. As the WDR charts themselves show, annual illicit global production of opium is broadly stable over the last 15 years, with the only significant trend being a worrying increase in production over the last two years, driven by massive increases in cultivation in Afghanistan. The WDR also states that most of the heroin supplied to the US market is produced in Latin America, but the official figures show a level of opium production in Latin America that would only be sufficient to supply a fraction of US demand. So is the US market being supplied from elsewhere, or are the Latin American production figures severely underestimated? In terms of coca production, the UNODC claim is that ‘supply stability has been achieved only through intensive eradication efforts, especially in Colombia’. This is a remarkably disingenuous statement considering that the same paragraph reports an 8% increase in global production in the last year, and the promoted tactic of ‘intensive eradication’ in Colombia has been conspicuously ineffective in reducing cocaine production, with a more than 20% increase in cocaine production in Colombia since the eradication programme was commenced in 2000, according to official UN figures. Adding to the confusion regarding the real position are the significant variations on the figures and trends on opium and coca cultivation between the two main data sources – the United Nations and the US government. They both attempt to track trends on the same basis – the number of hectares cultivated – but come up with entirely different figures and trends. For example, the UN estimate for Colombian coca cultivation in 2006 is 78,000 ha., while the US estimate is 157,200 ha, twice as much and more than the total of the area the UNODC claims for the whole Andean region.¹ As both cannot be correct, it follows that any estimation has to be treated with caution.
- The WDR claims ‘another source of good news is that law enforcement has improved’ – ie that a greater proportion of cocaine and heroin is being intercepted before it reaches consumers. It is welcome that the UNODC and national governments are attempting to assess interdiction efforts in terms of their impact on consumer markets, rather than simply measuring success in terms of numbers of seizures, but once again these figures must

be treated with caution. In the preface to the WDR, for example, Antonio Costa (Executive Director of the UNODC), claims that ‘almost half’ of global cocaine production is being intercepted by law enforcement agencies [WDR 07 p2]. Within the text of the Report, however, while figures are produced to the effect that cocaine seizures have risen from 34% in 2004 to 42% of estimated total production in 2005, considerable qualification is placed upon these figures, and rightly so: their provisional nature must be acknowledged. These percentages are calculated by subtracting total cocaine seizures, as reported by member states, from the estimated figure of global cocaine production, which is given as 980 metric tonnes. Without entering into the complex methodological issues the construction of such figures entails, they include a great many assumptions about unknown quantities. They also fail to take into account the increased technical know-how underlying expanded cocaine production—which has taken place despite decreases in hectares cultivated. The Report acknowledges these considerations, and explicitly states that “The result” of such omissions “could be an overestimated global cocaine interception rate.” [WDR 07 p.70]. If the production estimate is faulty, then any calculation based upon it is misleading. Of most concern is the lack of a link between the claimed improvements in interception rates, and the indicators of availability in consumer markets. Measures of price, purity or ease of consumer access in the major markets for heroin and cocaine indicate an increase in the availability of these substances – the trend is of prices falling and purity increasing, when one would expect the opposite if the significantly increased seizure rates were having any effect. This paradox is recognised in the latest National Drug Threat Assessment published by the US government: “Despite the fact that the highest recorded level of cocaine interdiction and seizure was recorded in 2005—the fifth consecutive record-setting increase—there have been no sustained cocaine shortages or indications of stretched supplies in domestic drug markets. These seemingly inconsistent trends suggest greater source country supply than was previously estimated...” [National Drug Intelligence Centre, US Dept. of Justice. National Drug Threat Assessment 2007. p.3]. Similarly, according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the predominant 5-year trend in Europe has been a decline in street price for cannabis, heroin, amphetamine, ecstasy and cocaine: ‘Information available from some of the high-prevalence countries suggests that cocaine and ecstasy were considerably

¹ See: Colombia coca cultivation survey results: A question of methods, TNI Drug Policy Briefing No 22, June 2007.

more expensive in the late 1980s and early 1990s than they are today. Drug use in Europe is cheaper than ever before.’ the EMCDDA concludes.²

- Finally, the WDR claims that global demand for drugs such as heroin, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamines has stabilised. This may be true, and indeed most of the large-scale surveys conducted recently in developed countries have shown an overall picture of a levelling off of prevalence after decades of consistent increases. However, there are two reasons why the authorities should not be complacent about these figures. Firstly, overall prevalence rates mask specific trends in the use of different drugs – for example, the increase in cocaine use in parts of Europe, or in illicit prescription drug use in the USA. Secondly, the evidence of stabilisation seems most visible in well-established consumer markets in Europe, North America and Australasia, while increases are continuing in emerging economies and developing countries, where the mechanisms for measuring these trends are weakest. It may be that significant increases in prevalence are being experienced in Africa, Asia or Latin America, but are not yet showing up in UNODC prevalence reporting mechanisms. Indeed, some proxy indicators of a growing problem, such as increasing cocaine seizures in Africa or treatment demand in China, would suggest that this is the case. If the true prevalence of illegal drug use in these continents was known, it would most likely dwarf the current estimated figure of 200 million users worldwide. The report also seems to misrepresent some of the data that is available – a decline in demand for cocaine in the USA is prominently and confidently stated, whereas that country’s own National Drug Threat Assessment for 2007 states: *“Cocaine demand is stable: Indicators of domestic cocaine demand show that the demand for cocaine in the United States is relatively stable. According to National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data, past year cocaine use (in any form) by individuals 12 and older has not increased or decreased significantly since 2002. NSDUH and Monitoring the Future (MTF) data indicate that past year cocaine use among adolescents has also remained stable during this same period.”*

SELECTIVE CONCLUSIONS

In the face of a complex mass of data of varying reliability, significant data gaps, and a wide range of views amongst member states, one would expect the responsible UN agency to be

very cautious in its policy conclusions, and to concentrate on providing a platform for reasoned consideration of the challenges for future policy. Instead, the UNODC continues to play the role of a champion of its existing set of policies and programmes declaring, in advance of the planned review of progress since the 1998 UNGASS, the successful ‘containment’ of the world drug problem, and stating (with no attempt to analyse the evidence on causality) that this success is due to strong law enforcement practice, and clear anti-drug messages. We have shown above how the claims of containment have been based on a questionable analysis of available data. Indeed, at one point in his preface to the WDR, Mr Costa, seems to be claiming even greater success by referring to ‘a clear correlation between UN-led drug control efforts and the current recession in the drug economy’ – by any standard, a recession refers to a significant reduction in activity, but nowhere in the report is there any indication of such a global reduction of supply or demand, and the regular statements attributing encouraging trends to UN-supported programmes are not backed up by any analysis of causality. We have already talked about the lack of a link between forced eradication programmes in Colombia and reduced production and use of cocaine, but give two more examples here of the tendency of the UNODC to draw selective conclusions:

- In the preface to the report, Mr Costa states (in the context of a claimed stabilisation of global cannabis use) that ‘the health warnings on higher potency cannabis, delivered in past World Drug Reports, appear to be getting through.’ Notwithstanding the doubts about whether the perceived stabilisation is real, the assumption that any global trend in the behaviour of hundreds of millions of cannabis users can be attributed to the statements in the World Drug Report is clearly absurd. As mentioned above, the surveys indicating some stability have been conducted primarily in rich western countries with well established high rates of cannabis use amongst young people. It may be that these groups are heeding the health warnings on cannabis that have been disseminated in these countries, or other factors – such as better education and prevention, changes in law enforcement, wider socio-economic changes, or changes in fashion and culture – may be more influential. It is also possible that the cannabis market in these countries has reached a natural levelling point – with a limit on the proportion of young people interested in being casual or regular users. Local or national analyses of the correlation between these factors and rates of cannabis use have tended to emphasise the importance of socio-economic and cultural factors, rather than the impact of government

² European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Annual report 2006: the state of the drugs problem in Europe, p. 14

programmes [Parker, H., Aldridge, J. and Measham F. *Illegal leisure: The normalization of adolescent recreational drug use.* London: Routledge. Blackman, S. *Chilling out: The cultural politics of substance consumption, youth and drug policy.* Maidenhead: Open University Press]. Indeed, strong law enforcement against cannabis users (often promoted within the UN System for its deterrent impact) has not been shown to correlate with reduced prevalence [Reinerman, C., Cohen, P.D.A. and Kaal, H.L. (2004) "The limited relevance of drug policy: Cannabis in Amsterdam and San Francisco" *American Journal of Public Health*, 94, 836-842. MacCoun, R. and Reuter, P. (2001) "Evaluating alternative cannabis regimes." *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 178, 123-128, Lenton S (2005) "Deterrence theory and the limitations of criminal penalties for cannabis use". In, T. Stockwell, P. Gruenewald, J. Toumbourou & W. Loxley (Eds.), *Preventing harmful substance use: The evidence base for policy and practice.* Chichester: John Wiley & Sons]. The complex challenge of responding to widespread cannabis use, and minimising the harms associated with it, can not be resolved simply through the issuing of statements, however tough, from policymakers and UN agencies.

- Also in the preface, the report claims that the 'recession in the drug economy...' (see above) is due to the fact that 'the world seems to be taking seriously the commitment made at a UN General Assembly Special Session in 1998 to take enhanced action to reduce both the illicit supply of, and the demand for drugs by 2008.' However, the WDR fails to document a recession. On the contrary, market indicators like declining price and rising purity of cocaine and heroin indicate abundant availability, which in terms of drugs markets means that they are thriving. But even if it were true, this statement makes the assumption that any containment of the world drug problem is the result of governments pursuing the UNODC's preferred drug policies and programmes. Furthermore, the interpretation of many countries of the concept of taking their commitments seriously, all too often means the implementation of law enforcement crackdowns on drug users. Most of the countries that have reported stabilisation or reductions in prevalence in recent years have actually reduced their reliance on harsh law enforcement during this period, suggesting that this is not a key factor in predicting prevalence trends. While it is tempting to think that government action is paramount, we have to

consider the possibility that any encouraging trends in production, trafficking or use are primarily the result of external factors in the operation of the market, or in wider society. For example, reductions in cannabis cultivation in Morocco (heralded as a significant policy success in the WDR) may be the result of the much wider cultivation of the drug by users and small-scale dealers closer to consumer markets. Reductions in opium cultivation in the golden triangle may have been the result of decisions by the major traffickers to switch production to more profitable synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine. Increases in cocaine use in some European countries seem to be associated with the increasing fashion for this drug in party and club cultures, as the use of ecstasy declines. The interaction between these different factors – some open to influence by governments, some not – are poorly understood.

As we approach a strategic review of the learning and achievements over the last 10 years, it would be preferable to see the UNODC making a serious effort to analyse these complex issues and help member states to understand the implications for their domestic policy, rather than presenting simplistic conclusions on trends and causality as if they are research and evidence based. The UNODC claims to implement the policies the international community has formulated, and not to make these policies itself. However, it constantly attempts to shape these policies by taking the lead in formulating and promoting particular approaches to international drug control. The WDR is one of the instruments the UNODC uses to impose its views. The UNODC's ambiguous position as, on the one hand, a political agent and, on the other, a centre of expertise should be put to an end. The UN could move towards the arrangement in the European Union, where the member states make the policies and its centre of expertise, the EMCDDA, provides the data on the basis of which they are debated and reviewed. As part of the wider process of structural reform, the UN should re-assess the role of the UNODC, providing it with a less ambiguous role, and more clearly defining its relationship with member states.

LIVING WITH A 'CONTAINED' MARKET

One of the most intriguing concepts, first introduced during the 2003 UNGASS mid-term review and expanded upon in the 2006 and 2007 WDRs, is the idea that global action against illegal drug production, trafficking and use, has achieved a 'containment' of the situation. Since the 2003 UNGASS mid-term review - when it was already abundantly clear that the

original 1998 UNGASS target to significantly reduce supply and demand would not be met - the Executive Director of the UNODC has tried to change the discourse to 'containment' of the global drug situation. This is a very different objective than the 'significant progress' towards a drug free society that was heralded in 1998, and may provide a more reasonable articulation of what is possible through government action, and international agreements. Notwithstanding the doubts we have regarding the data currently presented, it may be that we are witnessing a period of stabilisation in the scale of illegal drug markets in some parts of the world. If such stabilisation is achieved at a level of use that is significantly lower than that of similar legally available drugs, then this could provide a basis for the formation of more balanced policies that support activities aimed at reducing the harmful consequences arising from drug distribution and use. At the moment, the UN system, and many national governments, are hesitant (or downright hostile) towards some programmes aimed at reducing harmful consequences, for fear that they undermine work to reduce the overall scale of the market, or 'send the wrong message' to drug users. This unease arises from the policy view that considers eradication or disruption of the illegal market as the only worthwhile goal of drug policy. In reality, and many governments have long ago reached this conclusion, drug policy should consist of the appropriate balance between actions that seek to minimise the scale of the market, and those that seek to minimise the consequential harms.

While there is no doubt that the UNODC has softened its resistance to, and increased its programme support for, activities that address the harmful consequences of drug use in recent years, we consider that it is still some way short of what could be considered an appropriate balance on these issues. In a recent position paper, [IDPC Position Paper 2 - "Drug Policy Objectives Should Increasingly Focus On The Consequences Of Drug Use"], the IDPC laid out our proposals for a balanced set of objectives for drug policy, encompassing both the scale of the market, and its consequences. Many governments now have a set of policy objectives that approximate to this ideal, but the UN system still lags some way behind. The objectives set in 1998 relate only to efforts to reduce the scale of the market and, since that time, the UNODC (and its linked quasi-judicial agency, the International Narcotics Control Board) have resisted any rebalancing of focus. Before we discuss how such a rebalancing may be achieved in the forthcoming policy review, we will highlight three areas where the obsession with market scale undermines other objectives:

- Studies in many countries [For example, Godfrey, C., Eaton, G., McDougall, C. and Culyer, A. "The economic and social costs of Class A drug use in

INADEQUATE LEADERSHIP ON HIV PREVENTION

In all of our reports on the work of the UNODC and INCB, we have highlighted the inadequacy of their commitment to addressing the most pressing global challenge arising from drug use – the transmission of HIV and Hepatitis infections through needle sharing – and this paper is no different. An estimated 10% of all new HIV infections worldwide occur through injecting drug use, there are an estimated 13 million current injectors worldwide, and several countries and regions are reporting new outbreaks, or the emerging conditions in which outbreaks could occur. The UNODC remains the lead agency in the UN system for responding to the threat of HIV infection through injecting drug use and, shamefully, resisted for many years the scaling-up of some of the most effective preventative measures such as needle exchange. Some of the more fundamental objections to effective prevention have now been removed, and the HIV prevention programme within UNODC has been significantly expanded in the last year, but the current leadership provided by the agency remains insufficient in the face of the scale of the challenge. It is particularly frustrating that experts in this field have developed a reasonably accurate picture of where new drug-related epidemics are happening (and can be predicted in the near future), and have developed packages of prevention activities that have been proven to avert epidemics if implemented with adequate speed and scale, but the international community, and some of the national governments affected, have been unwilling or unable to mobilise the political will or resources to respond adequately. In this context, it is astounding that another UNODC World Drug Report is published with hardly a mention of the nature of the challenge, where scaled up prevention resources are required, or a call to donor and affected governments to urgent action.

³In fact this is a remarkable change of discourse, since this distinction is relatively new for the UNODC, which previously considered all drug use problematic, and by definition 'misuse' or 'abuse'.

England and Wales, 2000.” *Home Office Research Study 249*. London, Home Office] have shown that the harm to individuals and society that arises from drug use is heavily concentrated amongst a small proportion of users – variously described as ‘problem’ or ‘hardcore’ users – whose patterns of use are more extensive, chaotic, and risky. The WDR estimates that this group constitutes only a small proportion of all users of illegal drug users worldwide [UNODC, *World Drug Report 2007* Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, p.5, p.9 & p.30]³. However, many countries still pursue policies that promote widespread arrest and harsh punishment of all drug users, with long prison sentences not uncommon even for those caught in possession of small amounts, and the death penalty available in over 30 countries for drug law infractions. In addition to the clear inconsistency with UN human rights norms, these policies are expensive, and seem to have little impact on overall rates of consumption. At the same time, through adding to the social exclusion and criminalisation of large numbers of citizens, they also have significant negative consequences in terms of family and community cohesion, the engagement of users in health and social programmes, and economic activity. Looked at from the perspective of reducing harmful consequences, therefore, repressive and badly targeted enforcement policies can actually increase drug problems. Despite this, the UNODC and INCB have been slow to criticise the enactment of inappropriate and unsophisticated drug laws, or the pursuit of repressive enforcement tactics. A balanced approach to drug policy would target law enforcement and punishment on those users and dealers who were causing the most harm to fellow citizens, or where real impact on the market was possible. In the preface or the body of the 2007 WDR, there is no discussion on the appropriate targeting of law enforcement action in order to minimise harmful consequences, and the impression remains that the UNODC believes that any drug law enforcement is inherently good simply because it pursues the honourable objective of reducing the market. A more sophisticated message is necessary.

- The most direct dilemma between the focus on the scale or consequences of the market exists in the analysis of drug related crime. The nature and scale of drug related crime, and how it affects individuals and communities, has not been closely analysed or

monitored in the UNODC so far. The assumption has been that the simple objective of reducing the scale of the market is best achieved through direct action against growers, traffickers and users. If the reduction of the consequences of drug related crime was given greater prominence in objective setting, the tensions between efforts to reduce the scale of the market, and minimising the harmful consequences, would become more apparent, and balanced policies and programmes developed. The main harmful consequences arising from the criminal activities associated with the drug market are the power and wealth of the criminal organisations that profit from the market, the violence and intimidation perpetrated by these organisations, and the corruption of legitimate authority that can result. Of course, successful law enforcement operations directed against the organised crime groups involved – intercepting the drugs, arresting traffickers, and seizing their assets – serve to limit the influence of particular groups. But a wider perspective is also needed, driven by the objective of minimising violence, intimidation and corruption. This objective may be best achieved through traditional law enforcement operations, but the common experience has been of the ‘balloon effect’ – successful action against one group only leads to the emergence of others, often accompanied by an increase in violence and corruption as new groups battle for control. A more effective long term strategy may be for law enforcement to explicitly manage the market in a way that the power of, and harm to society caused by, organised crime is minimised. Take the cannabis market, for example, where the majority of global demand is now supplied from small-scale cultivation operations close to the point of consumption. This has meant that the power and reach of large scale cannabis trafficking organisations is diminished and, while problems associated with cannabis markets remain, they are of a much lower order than those associated with heroin or cocaine trafficking.

In many countries, the form of drug related crime that causes most harm to individuals and communities is the perpetration of high levels of property crimes by problem drug users to fund their habit. This negative consequence of drug use is not affected by action against drug supply, but requires different strategies – for example many countries have produced encouraging crime reduction results through programmes that identify and refer criminally active drug users into treatment programmes.

APPROACHING THE POLICY REVIEW

While much progress in data collection, programme implementation, and international co-operation has been achieved since the 1998 UNGASS on Drugs, it is clear that the international community cannot claim that the global drug market is under control – despite billions of dollars of investment, the overall scale of the illegal market for all of the main drug types would seem to have increased over the last 10 years, and the profits from these markets continue to flow into the hands of a wide range of organised crime groups. In his preface to the 2007 World Drug Report, Mr Costa calls for a ‘paradigm shift’ as we approach the review of progress since the UNGASS in 1998, but does not articulate what such a shift would consist of. The IDPC would therefore like to suggest that we enter the next ten years of global drug control on the basis of a paradigm shift towards the following principles, if we are to avoid a continuation of the need to present failure as success:

- That the concept of ‘zero tolerance’ or a ‘drug free world’ be replaced by more realistic policy objectives focussing on the reduction of the harmful consequences of drug production and use.
- That programmes and activities that focus on reducing these harmful consequences should therefore be given priority, in terms of resources and political support, within the UN programme.
- That containment of the scale of the illegal drug market is a more realistic objective for global law enforcement and demand reduction efforts.
- That the over-riding objective of law enforcement programmes against drug production and trafficking should be the minimisation of criminal activity, and its impact on citizens and communities, rather than the eradication of drug markets.
- That there is an explicit recognition of the fact that the millions of people involved in the cultivation of plants used in drug manufacture, and the hundreds of millions of users, should not all be automatically assumed to be criminal or deviant.
- That the UNODC should be refocussed as a true centre of expertise to assist the international community with transparent and objective information that supports member states in formulating balanced and evidence based policies.

Such a paradigm shift would resolve the current impasse in policy debate at the UN, (where any acknowledgment of the complexities of the reality on the ground is seen as a betrayal of the certainties behind the Conventions), and would provide a basis for much more effective and targeted co-ordinated action in the future. Our vision is that, in 10 years time, the international community can genuinely claim success in containing the scale of the illegal market, marginalising the power of organised crime, and reducing the harmful health and social consequences of drug production and use. Positive achievements of this type are possible, but only if we set realistic and balanced objectives, and re-focus our programmes accordingly.