

The 10th Asian Informal Drug Policy Dialogue

Inle Lake

November 15 to 18, 2018

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

On behalf of



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development



Key points

- In the past year, some countries in Southeast Asia have adopted drug policy reforms, notably Myanmar with its recently launched National Drug Control Policy, and Malaysia and its shift away from the use of the death penalty for drug crimes.
- Key challenges faced by the region include: limited access to essential medicines, criminalisation of people who use drugs, human rights violations associated with compulsory drug treatment, and extrajudicial killings (Philippines and Indonesia).
- Governments in the region, especially of Malaysia and Thailand, have recently expressed interest in legally regulating the medical uses of psychoactive plants such as cannabis and kratom.
- AD programmes aiming at improving the general framework conditions of smallholder farmers in drug crop cultivation areas still face numerous challenges on the ground. These include dilemmas about how to ensure that such programmes are inclusive, how to achieve a proper balance between development-oriented and supply reduction approaches, as well as how to design programmes that take into account local needs and priorities.
- With regard to drug consumption, methamphetamine continues to be one of the most common substances of choice among people who use drugs in Asia. This trend calls for embracing pragmatic strategies aimed at minimising the risks related to drug use, including the distribution of evidence-based information and exploration of innovative harm reduction approaches such as drug checking and peer support activities.
- The limited availability of funding for harm reduction services remains a problem in Asia, including in Central Asian countries, where notable risks associated with heroin injection prevail. In the meantime, valuable lessons can be drawn from Malaysia, where collaboration between civil society, community organisations, and government agencies have helped expand and sustain harm reduction programmes in the country.
- Due to broader gender inequality issues, women are disproportionately affected by poor socio-economic conditions in the region. Furthermore, there appears to be a missing link between drug policy matters and debates on women's and LGBTQ+ rights, which needs to be addressed alongside other problems such as stigma, human rights violations, and criminalisation.
- Participants at the Dialogue welcome the increasing role of UN bodies such as the OHCHR and the UNHRC, which illustrate the UN's increasing acceptance of a much-needed synergy between human rights principles and drug policy approaches.

Introduction

From 15 to 18 November 2018, the Transnational Institute (TNI) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) jointly organised the **10th Asian Informal Drug Policy Dialogue** (IDPD). It was organised in collaboration with the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) of Myanmar and held at Inle Lake, Southern Shan State, Myanmar. This 10th anniversary coincided with the Government of Myanmar's recent launch of the country's new National Drug Control Policy and amended drug law.

Representatives from government institutions and civil society organisations from Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, India, China, and Tajikistan attended the Dialogue. They represented several international NGOs, intergovernmental organisations and experts, including researchers from Latin America. 45 participants were present at the Dialogue, taking part in interactive discussions on various topics ranging from (rural) development issues to treatment and harm reduction. Focusing largely on subjects relevant to the Asian region, the Dialogue also provided room for participants to share experiences and draw lessons from other regions such as Latin America.

In order to encourage open and lively conversations among participants, the Dialogue was held under the Chatham House Rule. The two-day discussion was followed by a field visit to an Alternative Development project implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Hopong Township in Southern Shan State on the 18th of November. More details on this field visit can be found under the section on *Illicit cultivation and alternative development*.

This report provides a summary of the discussions during the Dialogue under five main themes. Information in this report does not represent a consensus among participants nor the position of the organisers, but rather reflects different inputs, opinions or debates during the Dialogue.

Section 1: Key drug-related trends and policy developments in the region

Myanmar

In February 2018, the Government of Myanmar launched a new National Drug Control Policy. This new policy is based on five key elements: supply reduction and alternative development, demand and harm reduction, international cooperation, research and analysis, as well as compliance with human rights. The new policy was welcomed by the participants as being an important milestone in the country's transition towards a more health and development-oriented drug policy. However, some participants remarked that the implementation of this new policy is hampered by the discrepancy between Myanmar's narcotics law and National Drug Control Policy. While the former still criminalises people who possess small amounts of drugs for personal use, the latter is largely based on the commitment to reduce harm by treating drug use related issues as a (public) health matter as opposed to a criminal matter. Meanwhile, drug related arrests and seizures, including those involving precursor chemicals mainly originating from neighbouring countries, have increased in recent years, and so has the consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS).

Participants confirmed the growing interest among government officials, researchers, and civil society to learn more from Thailand regarding the (therapeutic) uses of kratom, a psychoactive plant (tree) which yields stimulating effects at relatively low doses and sedating effects at higher doses.

Thailand and Malaysia

The Thai government recently started examining the medicinal potential of certain plant-based substances such as cannabis and kratom. In this context, a number of participants commented that the current Thai drug law restrains scientific research on controlled substances whose medicinal application is yet to be acknowledged in the narcotics law. Participants also viewed the restrictive drug law as a barrier to improving the proportionality of drug-related sentencing, especially since the (2016-amended) drug law still heavily punishes people who possess relatively small quantities of drugs.¹ Nonetheless, more dialogues regarding drug law reform are taking place in the country.² One participant observed that similar discussions were taking place in Malaysia, where possible legal regulation of medical cannabis has gained support in recent years. In light of a controversial case involving a man who was sentenced to death for producing and distributing cannabis oil that has generated strong criticism against disproportionate sentencing, the Malaysian government is considering to review the country's use of the death penalty.³

India

Meanwhile in India, government agencies have recently conducted research on the prevalence of drug consumption in the country.⁴ From the perspective of law enforcement, cannabis accounts for about 60 to 70 percent of all drug seizures in India, followed by opium and heroin.⁵ While being one of the few countries where a legal regulatory system for opium poppy cultivation is in place, India has been gradually decreasing the number of licenses issued for farmers. As a result, legal cultivation of opium is only allowed in three states.⁶ According to participants, illicit poppy cultivation is widespread and presumably occurs in ten states.⁷ Such illegally cultivated fields of both cannabis and poppy are often

¹ Akbar, P. & Lai, G. (2017). Thailand amends drug law to reduce penalties and ensure more proportionate sentencing. International Drug Policy Consortium. Retrieved from <https://idpc.net/blog/2017/02/thailand-amends-drug-law-to-reduce-penalties-and-ensure-more-proportionate-sentencing>

² On December 25, the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand passed an amendment to the narcotics law, which legalises the production, import, export, possession and use of cannabis and kratom products for medical purposes. Purveyors, producers and researchers will need licenses to handle the drugs, while end-users will need prescriptions. (see link: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/news/general/1600566/medical-cannabis-kratom-bill-passed-by-nla>)

³ Ponniah, K. (2018). Medical cannabis: Death sentence prompts Malaysia to re-think harsh laws. BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46029635>

⁴ National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC), All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Magnitude of Substance Use in India. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Retrieved from http://164.100.117.97/WriteReadData/userfiles/Exec-Sum_For%20Media.pdf

⁵ Narcotics Control Bureau, New Delhi. Drug Situation Report / Significant Events: Report for India for the Month of November 2018. Retrieved from http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_idc8cbd669cfb2f016574e9d147092b5bb.pdf

⁶ Currently, opium cultivation is permitted in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. See <https://dor.gov.in/narcoticdrugpsychotropic/licensed-cultivation-opium>

⁷ See page 39 of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). Analysis of Drug Markets: Opiates, cocaine, cannabis, synthetic drugs. World Drug Report 2018. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/wdr2018/prelaunch/WDR18_Booklet_3_DRUG_MARKETS.pdf

subject to eradication measures.⁸ At the same time, the country is struggling with the limited access to essential medicines among its general population.⁹ In this regard, some comments were made regarding a new policy calling for the auctioning of seized illicit drugs for pharmaceutical companies.¹⁰

Vietnam and China

The Government of Vietnam, on the other hand, decided to decriminalise drug use about ten years ago by the removal of Article 199 in the country's penal code. However, the practice of compulsory treatment, which is resulting in high relapse rates and violating the patients' rights, as pointed out by some participants, remains the main approach in dealing with drug use. Similarly, compulsory "detoxification" and treatment centres are also common in China. As analysed by a number of participants, drug policy approaches at the provincial or local level often differ from or contradict the principles endorsed at the national level. Thus, while the value of community-based voluntary treatment is acknowledged at the national level, criminalisation and arrests prevail at the local level.

Philippines

In the Philippines, the latest reforms relating to the Dangerous Drugs Act 2002 were carried out in 2013, although these reforms were mainly procedural in nature (focusing only on the handling of arrests and seizures of evidence). Participants shared criticisms on the continuing practice of punitive drug policies, which has resulted in extra-judicial killings of suspected drug users/traffickers, as well as overcrowded prisons. The number of extra-judicial killings cases, alongside arrests and other law enforcement measures was said to have increased due to the adoption of the "Project Double Barrel" calling on villagers to report on others suspected of drug use.

Indonesia

According to participants, the prevalence of extra-judicial killings cases in Indonesia is also on the rise, and is currently being documented by civil society organisations. At the same time, participants drew attention to the fact that policymakers are considering the possible inclusion of drug-related offenses in the Criminal Code – a potentially regressive policy change that raises concerns among experts and civil society actors alike. Nevertheless, certain policymakers have shown interest in embracing a less punitive approach by removing criminal penalties for people who possess small amounts of drugs for personal use. In this context, participants noted that in Indonesia, a number of regulatory documents already define legal thresholds for personal use, but they still have to be codified into law.

⁸ Narcotics Control Bureau, New Delhi. Drug Situation Report / Significant Events: Report for India for the Month of November 2018. Retrieved from http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_idc8cbd669cfb2f016574e9d147092b5bb.pdf

⁹ Tripti, T. (2019). Drug policy in India: Key developments since the UNGASS 2016. International Drug Policy Consortium. Retrieved from <https://idpc.net/publications/2019/02/drug-policy-in-india-key-developments-since-the-ungass-2016>

¹⁰ According to a Notification released on 16th January 2015 by the Ministry of Finance of India (Department of Revenue). The document can be made available upon request.

Section 2: Illicit cultivation and alternative development

With regard to illicit cultivation, participants discussed the continued prevalence of illicit poppy cultivation in Myanmar, covering up to an estimated 41.000 hectares and involving around 190.000 households, mainly in Shan State. It is estimated that one household cultivates an average area of 0,5 acre. The illicit production of opium in Myanmar in 2017 was reported to be approximately 550 tons.¹¹

A number of participants commented on the role of conflict and instability in driving illicit cultivation especially among impoverished rural communities in Myanmar. These communities often face limited access to (agricultural) markets, sustainable livelihoods, as well as essential public services and infrastructures. In light of these circumstances opium serves as a source of income that has certain advantages compared to other agricultural products in these marginalised regions, especially due to its compact and non-perishable nature. Relatively little is known, however, regarding the underlying causes of the recent increase in illicit poppy cultivation in the southern provinces of Vietnam, as reported by some attendees.

Alternative development (AD) programmes¹² are being implemented in Myanmar and Thailand. In this regard, several participants remarked that previous experiences in Northern Thailand have shown that AD programmes yield more meaningful results¹³ when carried out based on active community involvement, the principle of environmental and economic sustainability and proper sequencing. This model has proven to be much more effective than AD programmes that include eradication measures, which push farmers and their families further into poverty and often result in a displacement of crops (the so called "balloon effect"). In Northern Thailand, comprehensive livelihood development programmes were launched in the early 1970s that prioritised development over eradication campaigns. Eradication measures were only introduced when alternative agricultural products were able to substitute the income from illicit crops.¹⁴

During a field visit to a UNODC project site in Myanmar's Southern Shan State, which took place on 18 November 2018, a wide array of topics were discussed. The Alternative Development project which is being implemented by UNODC (Phase I: 2016-2018, Phase II: 2019-2022) covers five Pa-O villages in Hopong Township. Coffee was introduced as the primary licit crop as an alternative to opium poppy within the project, next to avocado and tea. In order to be eligible to participate in the project, farmers

¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2017). Myanmar Opium Survey 2017: Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2017/Myanmar OPS 2017 Fact Sheet web.pdf> and https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2017/2016_Myanmar_Shan_Opium_Poppy_web.pdf

¹² Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Rethinking the Approach of Alternative Development: Principles and Standards of Rural Development in Drug Producing Areas. Retrieved from <https://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/giz2013-en-alternative-development.pdf>

¹³ These include: increased diversity of livelihoods, improved welfare and socioeconomic security, and less dependence on illicit poppy cultivation.

¹⁴ Diskul, M. L. D. Ninnad, R., Skinner, A., & Rajatanarvin, V. (2019). Development Not Drug Control: The Evolution of Counter Narcotic Efforts in Thailand. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*. Retrieved from <https://jied.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/jied.16/>

had to dedicate a minimum of 1,5 hectares of their land to cultivate coffee.¹⁵ The Green Gold Cooperative, which was established within the framework of the project, was able to sign a 5-year partnership agreement with the French coffee company MALONGO for the high quality coffee which is being produced in the area.¹⁶

While offering a promising future for farmers who wish to become less dependent on poppy cultivation, the project was not able to accommodate all farmers who wished to join. In addition, as extensively discussed among villagers and Dialogue participants during the field visit, several challenges had to be faced in the process of switching to other crops. Whereas harvest can be yielded from opium poppy in a relatively short period, coffee plants take up to three to four year before they can be harvested for the first time. During these years, many farmers face an income gap, which is often filled with illicit poppy cultivation. The cultivation of licit cash crops such as corn, garlic, and cherooot, on the other hand, cannot generate sufficient income for farmers and their families, especially given the recent increase in costs to produce, transport, and sell these crops. In the meantime, as stated by some farmers, the practice of forced eradication during this transitional period remained common, contrary to the principle of proper sequencing, which is vital in advancing such AD programmes.

With regard to crop substitution programmes implemented in other parts of Myanmar, and to a certain extent also Laos, a number of participants made reference to a Chinese approach to encourage private investments in drug cultivating areas (facilitated by state and military actors). These investments predominantly focus on large-scale agricultural projects that promote mono-plantations (mainly of rubber and sugarcane) as an alternative to poppy cultivation, but rarely involve local communities in decision-making processes.¹⁷ Participants favoured a sustainable, multi-sectoral, development-oriented, and participatory approach.

Another challenge mentioned by participants relates to balancing between development-oriented and supply-reduction measures. This matter is also relevant for a new Thai initiative, which attempts to incorporate AD principles and practices (i.e. the provision of alternative livelihoods for individuals involved in the illicit drugs market) into drug-related policies in urban contexts, which is now being implemented in Chiang Mai Province.

Regarding AD programmes in fragile contexts where the issues of conflict and illicit cultivation are intertwined, participants reflected on experiences from Colombia, where an AD scheme targeting illicit coca cultivation has been part of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). AD programmes in Colombia appear to have relied on a largely top-down approach, thereby failing to include all the grievances of the affected communities. In this regard, some participants referred to the lack of participation of ethnic minority groups in political and policymaking platforms, while others

¹⁵ A memorandum of understanding was signed between a coffee growers cooperative and French roasting company Malongo Coffee Co., who has pledged to purchase coffee from more than 60 villages in Southern Shan State at higher prices <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/french-firm-helps-shan-farmers-turn-poppy-coffee.html>

¹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2018). From opium to coffee: Green Gold cooperative exports its first container of coffee to the European market. Retrieved from <https://www.unodc.org/southeastasiaandpacific/en/myanmar/2018/10/from-opium-to-coffee/story.html>

¹⁷ Transnational Institute. (2010). Alternative Development or Business as Usual?: China's Opium Substitution Policy in Burma and Laos. Drug Policy Briefing No. 33. Retrieved from <https://www.tni.org/files/download/brief33.pdf>

pointed at the notable communication gap between the government and the communities as a result of lack of trust, as well as the importance of understanding the root causes of the conflict(s).

Globally, an increasing number of countries have become more engaged in debates surrounding AD. A total of 116 attendees from 32 UN member states were present at the latest Expert Group Meeting on Alternative Development, involving not only policymakers but also representatives of communities, civil society organisations, academia, and regional organisations. The purpose of the meeting was to enrich discussions on AD by taking into account international guidelines such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human development indicators. At the same time, the importance of opting for a long-term and sustainable approach was highlighted, especially given the unique characteristics of each of the many communities affected by poverty, conflict, and disproportionate levels of dependence on illicit cultivation.

Section 3: Harm reduction and treatment

As noted by a number of participants, the Southeast Asia region has witnessed a notable increase in the production, sale, and consumption of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) over the past decade, especially with regard to methamphetamine. Crystal methamphetamine, which was previously used mainly in Indonesia, has recently also more and more popular in Thailand and Myanmar, alongside methamphetamine pills whose prices have either decreased or remained stable. According to a report on methamphetamine use and harm reduction presented at the Dialogue, these pills are for example commonly used by jade mine workers in Kachin State, Myanmar, to be able to cope with the harsh working conditions.¹⁸ Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, and China have also seen a noticeable growth in the consumption of ATS – a trend that has been relatively less visible in Malaysia and Central Asian countries, where heroin and NPS use appears more prevalent. Often left unaddressed in debates surrounding harm reduction and treatment provision, participants also raised the issue of heroin use among people who use methamphetamine – a phenomenon which ought to be taken into account when formulating policies and delivering health services, especially in Myanmar.

Certain participants underlined the value of harm reduction in promoting a wide array of pragmatic strategies and concrete actions aimed at minimising the risks related to drug use. In this regard, much can be learned from the knowledge and first-hand experience of people who use drugs and who engage in safe(r) practices themselves in order to reduce the health and social consequences of drug consumption, for instance by self-regulating the frequency of drug use or by simply embracing healthy eating and sleeping habits. Such examples can be found in Myanmar, Northern Thailand,¹⁹ and Indonesia, where the work of peer support groups has helped to spread information and expand access to harm reduction (i.e. safe smoking equipment) and treatment services among people who use methamphetamine.²⁰ In addition, some participants also referred to the potential of new harm reduction programmes such as drug testing services, which have yielded positive results in European countries.

¹⁸ Cachia, R. & Lwin, T. M. (2019). Methamphetamine use in Myanmar, Thailand, and Southern China: assessing practices, reducing harms. Drug Policy Briefings 50. Transnational Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.tni.org/en/ats-harmreduction>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rigoni, R., Breeksema, J. & Woods, S. (2018). Speed Limits: Harm Reduction for People Who Use Stimulants. Mainline. Retrieved from <https://english.mainline.nl/posts/show/11196/harm-reduction-for-stimulant-users>

Furthermore, participants pointed out that local experiences are essential in pushing for wider policy reform in the field of harm reduction and treatment. Policy and more specifically legislative reform is necessary in order to ensure the sustainability of essential services of harm reduction and evidence-based treatment. In Malaysia, for example, harm reduction services are relatively well funded and organised in comparison to other countries in the region, but Malaysia's narcotics law still calls for penalties for people who use drugs.²¹

Harm reduction programmes, though limited to HIV prevention strategies, are also available in a number of Central Asian countries, yet their operation is undermined by the lack of policy and legislative foundation thereof, and is primarily dependent on funding from external donors. Related to this, concerns were shared surrounding the relatively low level of (practical) knowledge among law enforcement actors with regard to harm reduction in Vietnam, and the challenges resulting from the limited availability of Russian-language resources on harm reduction for countries in Central Asia.

Section 4: Community involvement and gender aspects

With regard to community involvement in drug policy, participants shared concerns regarding the relatively limited opportunity for civil society organisations in taking part in policymaking processes in the region. Some non-governmental organisations who are active in providing input for government-led policy reform also see little to no result of their work. Nonetheless, an interesting lesson could be drawn from Malaysia, where civil society engagement with the Islamic Council has contributed to an increase in (political and financial) support for harm reduction among Islamic authorities. Progress can additionally be found in the increasingly creative ways in which civil society organisations communicate and share evidence-based information with the general public, thereby enhancing the likelihood of shifting public opinion for the sake of policy reform. In this regard, participants also commented on useful advocacy tools such as strategic litigation in pushing for gradual changes in drug policy practices.²²

Participants felt that much improvement is needed in the field of legal support for people prosecuted for drug-related offenses, as well as the fulfilment of human rights of affected populations such as subsistence farmers, people who use drugs, and LGBTQ+ communities – who frequently face obstacles in accessing basic services in many countries. In this regard, participants mentioned instances from the Philippines, where lawyers are reluctant to assist individuals tangled in drug-related cases.

Various remarks were also shared regarding the impact of criminalisation and repressive policies on women, especially given the fact that in many countries the incarceration of women is drug related in more than 50% of the cases, according to a study conducted among female inmates in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.²³ Basic services in- and outside prisons are generally limited, let alone

²¹ See Article 10 and 15 of Malaysia's Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (incorporating amendments up to 1 January 2006). However, the Malaysian Minister, Liew Vui Keong, recently released a statement in favour of treating drug use related issues as a health matter and no longer as a criminal justice matter <https://idpc.net/alerts/2019/01/enforcement-should-be-focused-on-drug-smuggling-not-punishing-consumers-malaysian-law-minister>

²² Open Society Foundations. (2017). Q&A: Lawyers on the Margins Find Creative Ways to Help Their Clients—and Each Other. Retrieved from <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/qa-lawyers-margins-find-creative-ways-help-their-clients-and-each-other>

²³ Alvarez, M. C. (2018). Drugs, crime and punishment: Women and the need for access to justice. International Drug Policy Consortium. Retrieved from <https://idpc.net/blog/2018/10/drugs-crime-and-punishment-women-and-the-need-for-access-to-justice>

services that address the specific needs of women. Such findings triggered concerns among advocates considering the role of stigma in further marginalising women who use drugs.

Women who are involved in the illicit cultivation of opium, coca, and cannabis in rural areas also face numerous gender-based difficulties in their daily lives. These include having more restricted access to land titles, earning less income, or having less decision-making power in comparison to men– all in spite of being responsible for a relatively greater number of tasks, either at home, in the fields, or in the communities they live in. In sum, as mentioned by some participants, there appears to be a missing link between drug policy matters and debates on women’s rights, which needs to be addressed alongside other problems such as stigma, human rights violations, and criminalisation.

Globally speaking, farmers involved in the illicit cultivation of coca, cannabis, and opium poppy have gained more space to provide input to drug policy discussions at the UN level. This topic was raised by participants in light of a video statement by a female member of the Myanmar Opium Farmers’ Forum, which was presented at the fourth intersessional meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), specifically during a session on Alternative Development and Crop Control Strategy on 24 October 2018.²⁴

Section 5: Regional and international cooperation

At the regional level, ASEAN member states continue to work together on drug policy issues in accordance with the ten-year ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025.²⁵ Cooperation among ASEAN member states is carried out along the common aim to achieve a drug-free region, which was viewed by some participants as being too ambitious. Other participants also made remarks about the need for more room for civil society participation at the ASEAN level. Notwithstanding the perceived importance of national sovereignty among its member states, ASEAN will deliver a joint statement at the upcoming High-Level Meeting of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2019. It was also remarked that Thailand, who acts as Chair of ASEAN throughout 2019, welcomes input from other member states to improve the association’s regional cooperation.

Shifting their attention to the UN, participants shared observations regarding the international body’s increasing acceptance of a much-needed synergy between human rights principles and drug policy approaches. This has been demonstrated by the increasing involvement of other UN agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), as well as United National Development Programme (UNDP), within drug policy debates at the UN level. More importantly, in late September 2018, UN member states adopted a resolution on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas,²⁶ promoting the human rights of farming communities including those involved in illicit cultivation.

²⁴ Myanmar Opium Farmers Forum. (2018). Myanmar Opium Farmers Forum at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in October 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.tni.org/en/article/myanmar-opium-farmers-forum-at-the-commission-on-narcotic-drugs-in-october-2018>

²⁵ Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2016). The ASEAN Work Plan on Securing Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025. Retrieved from https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-work-plan-securing-communities-illicit-drugs-2016-2025

²⁶ United Nations Human Rights (Office of the High Commissioner). (2018). Human Rights Council adopts five resolutions, including on Burundi, Syria, and on the Rights of Peasants. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23660&LangID=E>

In preparation for the upcoming High Level Meeting at the CND in March 2019, the International Drug Policy Consortium compiled a civil society shadow report²⁷ shedding light on a number of themes and recommendations, which were also raised, albeit in different terms, by several participants throughout the two-day Dialogue. The report calls for: 1) the adoption of more meaningful targets (such as the SDGs) beyond the “significant reduction of drug use and production”, 2) further promotion of human rights, health, development, peace and security, 3) reflection on realities on the ground and their impact on increasing tensions within the drug control system, and 4) the elimination of punitive approaches in order to put people and communities first. In line with one of the report’s concluding points, a number of participants spoke in favour of dedicating more attention to measurable targets and indicators.

Section 6: Feedback

At the end of the two-day Dialogue, a session was organised to gather feedback and input from participants, as well as to reflect on the outcomes of the last ten years of the Asian Informal Drug Policy Dialogue initiative. Participants shared their views on matters such as 1) the extent to which the Dialogue has brought benefits to their work or that of others, 2) the extent to which the Dialogue has influenced policy development in the region, and 3) which themes and/or follow-up activities should be (further) incorporated in and/or implemented after the Dialogue.

A large number of participants indicated that the Dialogues had been useful in their work, predominantly in expanding their network and knowledge on experiences and perspectives of other work fields and countries. In the case of Myanmar, positive feedback was repeatedly given regarding the role of the Dialogues in advancing policy reform, especially considering the recent adoption of the National Drug Control Policy as mentioned in previous sections. Furthermore, participants shared remarks regarding the role of these Dialogues in advancing discussions on AD and adding nuance to various political discussions as well as in connecting local or national developments with trends at the regional and global level.

Some participants noted the need to involve more government actors in the future while others were generally satisfied with the current format of the Dialogue. In terms of thematic topics, several participants appreciated the Dialogue’s inclusion of issues such as harm reduction and treatment, gender aspects in drug policy reform, as well as regional aspect of drug policies. On the other hand, a number of participants suggested for the coverage of other issues such as legalisation and decriminalisation models of plant-based drugs like as cannabis, social movements, the role of media, AD survey techniques and information systems, access to controlled medicines, human rights issues, and many others.

²⁷ International Drug Policy Consortium. (2018). Taking stock: A decade of drug policy – A civil society shadow report. Retrieved from <https://idpc.net/publications/2018/10/taking-stock-a-decade-of-drug-policy-a-civil-society-shadow-report>

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TNI's Informal Drug Policy Dialogues (IDPD) are guided by 'Chatham House Rule' to encourage a free exchange of thoughts and confidentiality. This report provides a summary of the discussions during the 10th IDPD under five main themes. Information in this report does not represent a consensus among participants nor the position of the organisers, but rather reflects different inputs, opinions or debates during the Dialogue.

The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For more than 40 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers.

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