From Alternative Development to Development-Oriented Drug Policies

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Abstract

This policy comment aims to trace the evolution of the concept of alternative development (AD)—alongside changes in the global drug control regime during recent decades—from a practitioner's point of view. Since the 1970s, drug supply reduction was primarily concentrated on law enforcement and crop substitution programmes. Following negative experiences, some governments focused on development-led approaches that consider the socio-economic and political conditions of drug crop cultivating areas. Both the 1988 United Nations drug control convention (*Convention Against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*), the first to mention the concept of AD, and the 1998 Political Declaration created the latitude necessary for AD to evolve into a 'third pillar' within the traditional drug supply control system. Another political milestone was the *Outcome Document* of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS), as it was the first to dedicate an entire chapter solely to development-oriented drug control.

In recent years—unexpectedly given the niche that AD had formerly been—a growing number of countries have declared that they either implement domestic AD measures or support them abroad. The observable increase in AD interventions may be due to a growing engagement of governments, but could also be explained by a rebranding of existing measures, given the increased popularity of AD. The funding situation in light of this enhanced political momentum is, however, rather poor. Latest figures, from 2013, show that AD only accounts for 0.1 per cent of global official development assistance. Though there seems to have been a slight increase in funding recently, the authors argue that a real surge in funding is so far not in sight.

1 The Evolution of the Concept of Alternative Development¹

The concept of alternative development (AD) has evolved alongside the changes that the international drug control regime has been experiencing during the past four decades, moving within a field of tensions between national interests and highly diverse approaches to tackling domestic drug problems. Accompanied by emotional debates and often arguments that lack an evidence base, AD has shifted from a merely crop substitution-based approach in the 1970s and 1980s to a development-oriented method that aims to promote sustainable rural development and reducing poverty in drug crop cultivation areas (GIZ, 2016).

Drug crop cultivation, such as coca and opium poppy, had been widespread for centuries before the modern United Nations (UN) drug control system identified it as being problematic in terms of supplying illicit drugs and due to its high visibility as a form of illicit agriculture. The 1961 *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (UN, 1961) was the first to include illicit drug crop cultivation in international narcotics law. As pointed out by Collins (2018, 284), ‘an illicit market accompanied growing international demand for various forms of consumption through the 1960s and beyond [,] meanwhile hubs of global insecurity emerged as key supply hubs’. Historically, state weaknesses and development deficits were often the primary cause of emerging illicit drug producing areas and corridors for drug trafficking. Illicit drug economies depend on enabling settings in order to thrive—weak governance and infrastructure and lack of access to legal markets and opportunities, as well as poverty, being some of the main root causes (Brombacher, 2013). Hence, ‘drug economies flourish because the framework conditions permit them to do so’ (GIZ, 2016, 6). Responding to the growing illicit market, the 1961 *Single Convention* has frequently served as a normative framework used to justify drug crop eradication efforts in drug producing countries by some governments (Jelsma, 2018). While the evident nexus between development and drugs is widely acknowledged today, it has not always been accepted within the global drug control regime.

AD was first mentioned in the 1988 *Convention Against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* (UN, 1988) as an ‘integrated rural development’ measure (§14 (3)) to ‘prevent illicit cultivation’ and ‘eradicate plants containing narcotic or psychotropic substances’ (§14 (2)). Initial experiences of AD were, however, rather disappointing from a supply control point

1 Both authors are employees at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The chapter reflects exclusively the opinions of the authors and not those of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) or GIZ GmbH.

of view. The today widely acknowledged notion of drugs also being a development issue is partly the result of substitution programmes that proved ineffective, only focusing on replacing drug crops like coca and opium poppy with legal alternatives, leaving aside the underlying social and economic root causes of the persistence of illicit drug economies. Some governments in South America and Southeast Asia started to promote sustainable development measures in drug crop cultivating areas that were not exclusively substitution-oriented at an early stage, thereby changing the paradigm in international drug control strategies towards development-oriented drug policies, often with the support of Germany and certain European governments. Over the last 20 years, the approach has evolved into a more integrative approach to development, as reflected in the 2016 *Outcome Document* of the 30th United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) (Council of the European Union, 2018). It includes sustainable rural development measures in drug crop cultivating areas, but as opposed to traditional substitution programmes, also considers enhancing governance and security, respecting human rights, and fostering women's empowerment.

2 From the 20th to the 30th UNGASS—Milestones that Paved the Way

The first internationally agreed definition of AD was set out in the 1998 UN-GASS *Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development*.² Furthermore, the principles of a *balanced approach and shared responsibility* were first introduced in the 1998 *Political Declaration* (PD) (UN General Assembly, 1998a, §2, 2). The universal recognition that both consumer and drug producing countries share the same amount of responsibility has since then been confirmed by countless resolutions, action plans and policy framework documents of the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (UN CND). The co-responsibility of both ends of the supply chain turned into the 'life insurance' of AD (Brombacher and Westerbarkei, 2019, 90), in many cases funded by donors from the northern

2 AD was defined 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, recognizing the particular sociocultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs' (UN General Assembly, 1998b, 1).

hemisphere in the decades that followed. This created the latitude necessary for AD to become a sort of third pillar within the traditional drug supply control system, establishing the normative basis for development-oriented drug policies as part of international cooperation on drugs. Quite notably, AD was for decades the only socio-economic development element within the global drug control system that was considered legitimate and had even passed the test of being included in a UN drug control convention.

As the 20th UNGASS set out the political framework for the next decade, UN member states agreed to review implementation progress ten years after the 1998 PD. Without having reached significant progress towards the goal of '[...] eliminating or reducing significantly the illicit cultivation of the coca bush, the cannabis plant and the opium poppy' (UN General Assembly, 1998a, §19, 4), a new *Political Declaration and Action Plan* (UN CND, 2009) were adopted in 2009, after months of difficult debates. AD took on a prominent role within the 2009 PD. Germany and the European Union (EU) pushed for the inclusion of two fundamental principles, *proper sequencing* and *non-conditionality*, which had already been pillars of the *EU Drugs Action Plan* (2009–12) and the Approach of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to Alternative Development (GIZ, 2012; GIZ, 2016). The concept of *proper sequencing* was included in the 2009 *Action Plan* (UN CND, 2009, §47(f), 45), despite its controversial character. It refers to the establishment of alternative sources of income before any eradication measures take place. Despite the agreement in 2009, only the 2013 *UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development* (UN General Assembly, 2013) reflect this approach, while no other forthcoming UN framework drug policy document ever explicitly stated the principle of proper sequencing again. The 2009 PD and *Action Plan* partly represent the minimal consensus among states whose approaches and fundamental views differ considerably. Although it 'adopted the broader term of "development-oriented drug control" to describe socio-economic interventions addressing a wide range of drug-related problems beyond the mere drug crops, this term could not sustainably replace the term AD—and by that narrow down the concept' (Brombacher and Westerbarkei, 2019, 90).

The following years were marked by a continued effort at 'both the national and the international level to evaluate programmes and to exchange best practices and lessons learned during international workshops and expert group meetings' (Me and Kamminga, 2018, 2), which resulted in the adoption of the milestone of the *UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development* (UN General Assembly, 2013) by the General Assembly in October 2013. Facing the consequences and high costs of repressive means, the widely criticised 'war on drugs' served as an incentive for reformist actors and some of the most

affected countries—including Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico—en route to UNGASS 2016, leading to calls for a re-evaluation of international drug policy (Fordham and Haase, 2019). While expectations were high, for many drug policy players the 2016 UNGASS *Outcome Document* was initially perceived as a disappointment (Collins, 2018; Klein and Stothard, 2019). This notion changed rapidly, however, due to some of the groundbreaking elements in global drug policy that the *Outcome Document* provided. The Document has been a significant door opener for development within UN drug control. The involvement of civil society, especially through the creation and strategic representation of the Civil Society Task Force—en route for and during UNGASS 2016—had a significant impact on strengthening development in the *Outcome Document* of UNGASS 2016 (Fordham and Haase, 2019). Major changes between the 2009 PD and the 2016 UNGASS *Outcome Document* can be found in their structure and in how the latter addresses socio-economic issues as a main driver for illicit drug crop cultivation. The 2016 UNGASS *Outcome Document* was the first UN drug policy document to dedicate individual chapters to human rights and development-oriented measures, thereby highlighting both issues in the global debate. A stronger focus on women, farmers and communities as well as the need to consider measures for rural and urban areas alike are just some examples of the progressive language and aspects introduced (Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations, 2018). By referring to certain aspects of the drugs value chain, including ‘cultivation, manufacture, production of and trafficking in drugs’ (UN General Assembly, 2016, §7(h), 25), the *Document* reflects the development-driven positions not only of producer, but also of transit countries. Remarkably, AD is no longer directly dependent on the illicit cultivation of drug crops, nor does it constitute a measure aiming at a complete elimination of drug consumption (Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations, 2018). The *Document* further links AD to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting that drug policy is indeed a development issue. Furthermore, it suggests the use of human development indicators in order to properly reflect AD as a development and not as a crop substitution concept. It also refers to ‘environmental sustainability and other measurements in line with’ the SDGs (UN General Assembly, 2016, §7(g), 25), thus broadening the scope of AD to reach beyond the realm of drugs.

By ‘strengthening a development perspective as part of comprehensive, integrated and balanced national drug policies and programmes [...], addressing risk factors affecting individuals, communities and society, which may include a lack of services, infrastructure needs, drugrelated [sic] violence, exclusion, marginalization and social disintegration, [AD] contribute[s] to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies’ (UN General Assembly, 2016, §7(h), 25). As

Brombacher and Westerbarkei (2019) point out, the application and definition of AD has broadened to an unexpected scale. UN member states have expanded AD from traditional rural settings to take in interventions aimed at fostering socio-economic development in urban areas, traditionally non-growing countries pushing for AD, and generally countries adapting AD to their own circumstances and necessities, thereby meeting one of the fundamental criteria for the success of AD. Meanwhile, issues such as the ‘conflicting targets’ of AD (GIZ, 2012, 8), proper sequencing, and gender mainstreaming in project design (GIZ, 2019), as well as long-term financial and political commitment, among others, remain a challenge for affected countries and implementation organisations alike.

3 The Post-UNGASS Scenario—Are We There Yet?

As the 2009 PD set 2019 as the target date for the review of the commitments made, the UN CND adopted a Ministerial Declaration in March 2019 that reaffirmed the 2009, 2014 and 2016 documents (UN CND, 2009; 2014; UN General Assembly, 2016) as ‘the commitments made by the international community over the preceding decade to counter the world drug problem’ (UN CND, 2019, 2), avoiding prioritising any one of them. Since the UNGASS 2016 process, development-oriented drug policies have played a more significant role within the international drug control regime than even before. Meanwhile, reforms in other areas of drug policy seem to have come to something of a halt, the Ministerial Declaration 2019 being proof of this stagnating debate. There also seems, however, to be a widespread understanding that the implementation of the UNGASS *Outcome Document’s* chapters is as vital as ever.

With the 1998 PD, the phrase ‘with full respect for [...] all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (UN General Assembly, 1998a, §2, 2) was introduced as an underlying condition for drug policy. Additionally, there are several international guidelines on specific human rights issues that are applicable to drug policy, but until recently there have not been any explicit international standards existent, ‘let alone in the specific case of illicit cultivation’ (Jelsma, 2018, 10). In order to fill that gap, a coalition of UN organisations and UN member states³ joined forces to develop the *International Guidelines on*

3 The Guidelines were initiated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy at the University of Essex, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Human Rights and Drug Policy, which were presented to the UN CND in 2019. The Guidelines constitute a further step towards expanding drug multilateralism by establishing long-known linkages between development deficits and the rights of people who cultivate illicit crops and are 'dependent on illicit drug economies' (UNDP, 2019, §3, 10), thereby reminding states of their human rights obligations. Drug policies can be counter-effective to development if they are not evidence- and human rights-based (UN System Coordination Task Team, 2019).

In December 2018, the Council of the EU adopted the *Council Conclusions on Alternative Development*, which replace the *EU Approach to Alternative Development* of 2006 (Council of the European Union, 2006). This political commitment highlights the direct link between the implementation of the UN-GASS 2016 *Outcome Document* (UN General Assembly, 2016), the '2030 Agenda and the principle of "ensuring that no one is left behind" at the global level [...]. AD programmes aim to improve livelihood opportunities and alleviate poverty, and thus contribute to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals' (Council of the European Union, 2018, §9, 5). Perceived as a 'soft reformer' on the international spectrum, the EU has been pushing evidence-based approaches in compliance with human rights for the last decade and 'backs these calls with extensive international cooperation projects in third countries' (Klein and Stothard, 2019, 10). While the political will to implement development-oriented drug policies has broadened, actual application needs to be scaled up.

4 The Reality of AD—a Niche Becomes a Pillar

With the 'political emancipation of the role of development within the international drug control system' (Brombacher and Westerbarkei, 2019, 95) in the course of the UNGASS 2016 process, international recognition of AD and related interventions has reached unprecedented levels. In 2014, 23 UN member states reported to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) that they had implemented AD interventions between 2010 and 2013 (UNODC, 2015a, 81). While this included the traditional source countries for coca and opium poppy, such as Afghanistan, Bolivia, Colombia, Myanmar and Peru, countries such as Egypt, Pakistan and Vietnam also declared they had implemented AD projects (UNODC, 2015a). In recent years, several governments in South Asia, West Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean have embraced AD in their domestic drug strategies or action plans. These include non-traditional source countries, cannabis-producing countries, and countries that are predominantly affected

by drug trafficking, but not by drug crop cultivation. Almost 30 countries declared either that they had run domestic AD interventions or that they were supporting them abroad (UNODC, 2015b, 10). These numbers are rather unexpected given the niche AD had formerly constituted within the UN drug control system.

At the same time, this push for development has become quite visible through the increased political attention given to the issue within the framework of the UN CND and related international fora, including UN CND-mandated expert group meetings (GIZ and UNODC, 2014; Governments of Germany, Peru, Thailand and UNODC, 2019). In the course of the past five sessions of the UN CND, around 40 member states from all world regions consistently co-sponsored the respective annual resolutions on AD. There also seems to be widespread recognition within expert and practitioner networks that AD is an effective tool for addressing illicit drug crop cultivation, as an expert survey by UNODC shows (UNODC, 2015b, 8). This growing recognition of AD is happening at a moment when the global community is facing record highs in illicit drug crop cultivation. The two main suppliers of opium/heroin and cocaine/crack, Afghanistan and Colombia, report record levels of opium poppy and coca cultivation (UNODC, 2019a).

With UNGASS 2016 as a 'turning point' (Alimi, 2019, 38) the role of development within UN drug control was enhanced. It seems quite reasonable to assume that the growing international disenchantment with the external consequences of a belligerent strategy with regard to drugs has led to a revalorisation of development-driven approaches on the supply-control side. Forced eradication is not widely considered by experts to be an effective option for addressing illicit drug crop cultivation and there is evidence that its human and environmental costs are high (Garzón, 2019). The increase in reported AD interventions may well be due to the growing engagement of governments, but it could equally be explained by a rebranding of existing drug policy interventions, given the increased popularity of development-led versus repression-oriented approaches.

At the same time, many clichés persist with regard to AD. There is still frequent mistrust within academia and civil society spheres toward the potential hidden interests behind AD, labelling it as a disguised form of forced eradication or accusing it of being a securitised development intervention driven by counter-insurgency intentions (Buxton, 2015). Despite a lack of clear evidence, there is widespread belief that AD is economically unattractive for farmers or that farmers exclusively focus on income and not on a broader notion of secure livelihoods (Brombacher and Westerbarkei, 2019). Those assumptions are yet to be studied and properly analysed. While a

militarisation of AD has happened and is happening in some cases, its securitisation is not inherent to the concept. Neither the 1998 definition of AD nor the subsequent 2009 *Action Plan*, UNGASS 2016, or any of the annual UN CND resolutions on the issue link it explicitly to counter-insurgency objectives. On the contrary, a majority of the key proponents and donors of AD promote an approach that relies on development objectives and indicators, seeking a close alignment to the SDG s. This is, for example, the case for Thailand and Germany (Brombacher and Westerbarkei, 2019; Diskul et al., 2019). The broad array of different interpretations of the concept of AD is enhanced by the outdated nature of its definition from 1998, giving scope for militarised, development-led, or in some cases even legalisation-oriented approaches.

5 Talk Is Cheap—the Funding Situation for Alternative Development

Considering the indisputably growing political support for development in global drug control, the key question that arises is that of implementation. How does the funding situation evolve in light of the enhanced political momentum? A comprehensive, cross-cutting comparison of the funding situation for AD is available in the UN *World Drug Report 2015* (UNODC, 2015a). However, the aforementioned conceptual heterogeneity of AD and the potential rebranding of interventions make the classification of allocated budgets difficult. Some governments label respective projects as rural development interventions, others as law enforcement or as private sector investment, or even as part of their military budget. At the same time, non-OECD countries may not report potential budgets for AD or may use different markers. As Alimi (2016, 8) states, ‘to date, available data do not allow charting with exactitude a clear global AD portfolio. Some trends may however be noted and provide at best, an impressionist quantitative picture of total AD budget’.

This rough overall picture is rather underwhelming. From 1998 to 2013, an average of USD 219 million per year was spent on AD by OECD countries (UNODC, 2015a). In 1998, when the concept of AD was defined by the UNGASS, AD accounted for 0.11 per cent of global official development assistance (Alimi, 2016). This share had almost tripled by 2008, but gradually decreased again, reaching 0.1 per cent in 2013. While in 2007 roughly USD 470 million were invested in AD, by 2013 this amount had fallen to USD 185 million (Alimi, 2016). Between 2005 and 2013, the major international donors for AD has been, in sum, the EU and its member states, followed by the United States

FIGURE 4.1 Total annual budget of AD projects per country and year (2013–17, annual budget, in million USD)

SOURCE: UNODC (2019B, 17)

government. AD was therefore described as a ‘poor cousin of international cooperation’ (Alimi, 2016, 8). Considering the political role the approach has gained in recent years, it may be more like a poor but popular cousin: ‘Despite the amount of attention given to alternative development at the international level, and its crucial role in realising SDG 8, there is a disconnect between international rhetoric and funding’ (UN System Coordination Task Team, 2019, 36).

Taking into consideration the preliminary results of a new UNODC study, there seems to have been a slight increase in funding from 2013 to 2017 (Figure 4.1). The 53 alternative development projects identified in the three main coca bush (Colombia, Peru and Bolivia) and two opium poppy (Afghanistan and Myanmar) cultivating countries had a total annual budget of between USD 190 and USD 275 million (UNODC, 2019b).

The clear rise in funding for AD in Colombia is, however, based on the 2016 peace agreement of La Habana and the subsequent crop substitution programme (Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito, PNIS), the biggest domestic AD programme so far. According to the aforementioned study, the United States and Germany are still the largest donors of AD among 14 countries, together with the EU (Figure 4.2).⁴

4 The 53 projects that were analysed for this study have received funds from one or more donors. Double counting might, therefore, occur.

FIGURE 4.2 Percentage of AD projects per international donor (2013–17)
SOURCE: UNODC (2019B)

In addition to the current slight increase in funding of AD in rural settings, there is anecdotic evidence on actual AD projects in urban settings as endorsed by the 2016 UNGASS *Outcome Document*, usually described as urban development initiatives (UD as opposed to AD), though little is known about most of those interventions (Governments of Germany, Peru, Thailand and UNODC, 2019).

6 Conclusion

Despite the partial information on enhanced investment in AD, there is clearly a gap between the overall political support for AD within the UN CND and other relevant international or regional bodies and the actual availability of funds. For many of the countries who do report to the UNODC that they are implementing AD, there is no evidence regarding the scope, volume and objectives of those interventions. While the political endorsement of development-led responses to drug economies does trickle down to domestic levels—as indicated by the growing number of governments including AD in their national or international drug strategies—a real surge in funding is not in sight so far. Repressive measures on the supply side may be less popular these days, but they do receive more financial support by far. The good news is that there is growing recognition of development as a pillar of an integral drug policy. The concept of development-oriented drug policy has spread out to countries and world regions where repression used to be the one and only element of drug supply control.

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