

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Eliminating illicit crops used in the production of narcotics

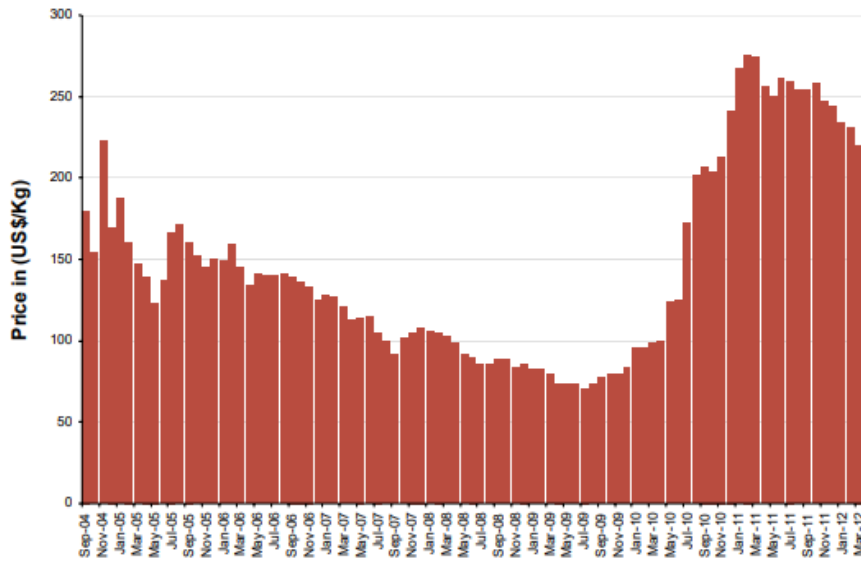


Forum:	Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
Issue:	Eliminating illicit crops used in the production of narcotics
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Introduction

According to the 2017 World Drug Report, more than 29 million people suffer from narcotic use disorders in the world. Opium is the most harmful but also the most consumed narcotic type. It only consists of oil and seeds, yet this drug is the cause of dreadful gang violence and thousands of young people's life at stake in countries such as Columbia, where massive conflicts between guerillas and drug trafficking gangs against the government forces take place. Indeed, in this country, the second biggest factor of death is due to drug-related violence, after cancer.

However, Narcotic drugs are produced by farmers that are often exposed to very low living-conditions due to poverty. According to the 2017 World Drug Report , in Asia and Latin America, around 700,000 families rely on income derived from the cultivation of coca leaf and opium poppy. Most of them live below the poverty line and rely on this activity for 50 percent of their earnings. In Afghanistan, the situation is even worse. Therefore, the strong increase of the price of opium in 2011 in this country (see bar chart below) has made this solution even more profitable, making its production even more attractive to new investors.



Average farm-gate prices for dry opium, September 2004 – March 2012 according to the MCN/UNODC Monthly Opium Price Report for Afghanistan, March 2012

From these results, we can conclude that the main challenge is to compensate in a sustainable way the economic benefits illicit crops can offer to these farmers, instead of only focusing on the dismantlement of anti-governmental organizations and drug traffickers.

Definition of Key Terms

Narcotics

Also referred as opioids, narcotics are drugs that can relieve pain, have influence over behaviors and blunt the senses. Whether it is used therapeutically or illicitly, it can lead to addiction and death if taken excessively. According to UNODC, any substances stated in the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 is defined as narcotic.

Opioids

Opioids are synthetic compounds of the chemicals derived from opium. They are the main actives of narcotics such as codeine or oxycodone. Their major effect is to exert pain relief to the body. However, the human body already has chemicals that naturally relieve pain: the endorphins. Therefore, the problem with these opioids is that they mimic endorphins, take too many, and can overwhelm the system. Subsequently, the body has an excessive 'rush' feeling, which can lead to dependence or abuse. Opioids can also slow down breathing, and the heart rate.



Illicit Crops

Illicit crops are plants that are considered illegal to cultivate by the government. It can be synthetic (produced by organic chemical synthesis), or natural. The three major natural crops are cannabis, opium poppy, and coca bush.

Cannabis

The cannabis crop is a flowering plant originally from South and Central Asia. There are three sub-species of Cannabis: Sativa, Indica (commonly referred to as Marijuana and often for recreational use), which are illegal, and Ruderalis (legal and used for alternative medicine). The Ruderalis specie contains a therapeutic powerhouse: Cannabidiol. This element helps to treat depression, epilepsy, inflammation and cancer.

Opium Poppy

The Opium Poppy is an annual plant originally from Turkey. The latex extracted from the poppy contains substances such as morphine, codeine and noscapine, which can be used for various purposes: recreational (illegally), as well as therapeutically to treat diarrhea, spasms, reduce pain etc.

Coca bush

The Coca Bush is a south American plant. It is the main active ingredient in Cocaine, an addictive and lethal substance if used excessively and in non-medical conditions (used for its anesthetic virtues).

General Overview

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs

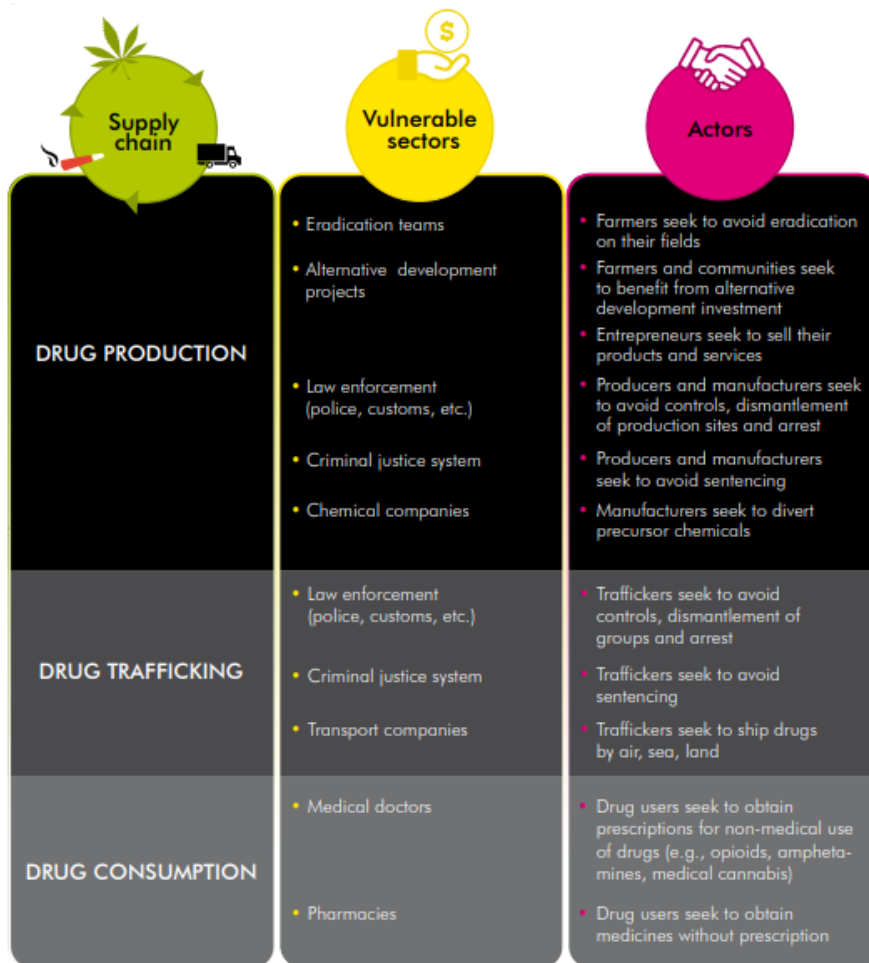
In 1961, in order to replace all different existing treaties, the ECOSOC decided to forge a single convention: The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Its objective is to ban any drug production if not destined to medical treatment or scientific research purposes. What really made this convention special is its different approach to the matter, by giving more importance to the rigorous supervision the production of raw materials rather than focusing on making it completely disappear.

Indeed, the article 28 requests for all states who allow cannabis cultivation to establish a governmental organization in position to supervise the activity. The agency would designate specific areas where farmers can grow this crop, the farmers would need a license on which the area is specified, and their products could be acquired only if it responded to these criteria. There are similar articles for the regulation of opium poppy as well as coca bush.

Moreover, the article 24 puts limitations to the production of opium poppy in order to ensure that its quantity is not excessive enough to make its way through illicit trade, but just sufficient to respond to the medical needs, that are to be carefully and regularly analysed on a global scale.

The vicious cycle of corruption and narcotic marketing

At each level of the drug supply chain, corruption finds its way (see figure below). At the phase of production, the monitoring teams, judges or police officers could be bribed by farmers; workers in chemical companies could be exploited by the manufacturers in order to collect precursor chemicals. At the consumer level, consumers can acquire drugs through corrupt pharmacists and doctors. Moreover, according to World Bank research, corruption strengthens poverty by disfavoring foreign investment. Indeed, foreign firms, witnesses of the corrupted justice scheme and extensive money-laundering that are specific to the narcotic business system, are unlikely to make or increase investments. Furthermore, according to the International Monetary Fund research, this type of corruption boosts the income inequalities. However, higher levels of income inequality are known to encourage drug trafficking and corruption: it is a vicious cycle.



Sectors vulnerable to corruption in relation to drugs according to the UNODC 2017 world drug report. Source: 2017 UNODC world drug report

Illicit Crops Monitoring methods

Monitoring illicit crop presents constant difficulties. Indeed, monitoring methods need flexibility, fine-tuning and perpetual adjustment. For example, Coca bush disclosure is complicated because the plant can grow any time of the year; it can mix with other crops, hide under plantations and shift into new areas. An eventual attack from the ground owners can also be a major threat.

The most important organization helping in monitoring growth of illicit crops is UNODC. They use different methods, including :

- Village assessments,
- Fly-over evidence,
- Interviews,
- Statistical and socio-economic analysis,

- Satellite imagery and geographic spatial data.

The organization focuses on the main opium poppy producing areas: Afghanistan, Myanmar and Laos, the main coca producing areas: Bolivia, Colombia, Peru and one of the main cannabis producing countries: Morocco.

The UNODC often chooses inspectors from local villages, such as in southern Afghanistan. By doing so, it decreases the risk of direct attacks seeing as they have a better knowledge of the terrain, are more likely to be accepted by the communities in order to get the most truthful conclusions.

Major Parties Involved

Afghanistan

The illicit crop cultivation is very prominent in Afghanistan, ever since the Soviet occupation. Today, this activity is a financial necessity, as around a million Afghans participate directly or indirectly in poppy farming. Moreover, a large part of the illicit opium cultivation is controlled by the Taliban, the Islamic nationalist group that now controls most of the country. Therefore, it is a challenge to switch this activity to licit crop cultivation and keep the financial income as high.

Myanmar

Myanmar is one the largest opium producer and heroin manufacturer in the entire world. However, a big part of its production is illicit, and controlled by criminal rackets. This activity tends to accentuate the gap between the poor and the rich. Indeed, the prominence of only a few drug traffickers have allowed them to penetrate other sectors of the Myanmar's economy, such as banks, airline, hotel and industries' infrastructures. They exploit farmers, make more profits, facilitate drug trafficking and money laundering at the expense of democracy.

USA

The United States of America doesn't produce raw materials of narcotics; however, it is the destination to a large amount of it. Indeed, Columbia is the main source of the problem as large amounts of its heroin always find their way through the borders. Therefore, the government decides to target the problem at its source by giving financial foreign aid packages that can go up to 1 billion dollars to Columbia's government in order to eradicate cultivation of illicit crops. But on the other hand, the state of Colorado legalizes the possession and recreational use of marijuana (with certain limits). Since it is legal, they are able to monitor trades, quantity, quality etc., which would not be possible if it wasn't allowed.

UNODC

The United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime is a UN office that has for mission to assist all Member States in reinforcing security and justice towards drug, crime and terrorism. Each year, it publishes a report that presents the drug situation in the world, with detailed information on drug dependency and an emphasis put on the illicit crops cultivation. It is currently focused on studying and investigating on the culture of illicit crops in seven countries: Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, Columbia, Peru, Morocco and Bolivia, in which they get a privileged access to inspect.

Portugal

Portugal is an excellent example of narcotic use transition. Indeed, in the 90s, one percent of the population was hooked by heroin. In 2001, the government takes the very controversial decision to decriminalize all narcotics. This drug epidemic was then treated as a health issue rather than a crime one. The government decided to spend more money on treatment (90 % of the budget item) and less on punishment (10 %), focusing on the reintegration of drug addicts in the society. Since then, drug-induced deaths have dropped from 80 % to 16 % in 2012 (The Economist – 2012 Portugal Drug Report). Portugal's experiment defied the fears of opponents and broke a global policy taboo. However, some drug dealers remain prominent in the country and it still is challenging to defeat them.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
30. March. 1961	The United Nation's Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs is ratified
1973-1975	The brain effects that narcotics cause, as well as its addictive power is discovered and finds an explanation by the Eric J. Simon laboratory.
January. 1997	Establishment of the United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna
24. July. 2008	ECOSOC passes resolution on promoting sustainability and integrality in alternative development as an important part of drug control strategy in States where illicit crops are grown to produce drugs. E/RES/2008/26



12. March. 2010 The Commission on Narcotic Drugs passes resolution; Strengthening systems for the control of the movement of poppy seeds obtained from illicitly grown opium poppy crops. Resolution 53/12

14. March. 2018 The Commission passes a resolution on promoting the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development and related commitments on alternative development and regional, interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented, balanced drug control policy addressing socioeconomic issues. E/CN.7/2018/L.9/Rev.1

UN involvement, Relevant Treaties, Resolutions and Events

The United Nations has been concerned by the issue of narcotic trafficking throughout history but specifically became implicated by illicit crops in the narcotic trade when the Single Convention was ratified, in 1961. In this convention, two main organs were created: the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board. These organs, as well as the Economic and Social Council, were given responsibilities defined by the convention. Along with the UNODC, they are the major actors involved in the illicit crops cultivation within the United Nations.

- Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961
- International cooperation on the elimination of illicit drug crops and on alternative development, 29 March 2001, ECO/RES.44/11
- Promoting sustainability and integrality in alternative development as an important part of drug control strategy in States where illicit crops are grown to produce drugs, 2008, E/RES/2008/26
- Strengthening systems for the control of the movement of poppy seeds obtained from illicitly grown opium poppy crops, 12 March 2010, Resolution 53/12 (Commission on Narcotic Drugs)
- Promoting the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development and related commitments on alternative development and regional,



interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented, balanced drug control policy addressing socioeconomic issues, 2017, E/RES/2017/20

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Many initiatives to eradicate illicit crops have been put in place by governments, such as Plan Colombia. The United States' government sent people to fly over the crops and spray poisonous chemicals that would kill the coca crops. Unfortunately, it also killed most of the other plants in the area, which significantly hurt the local economy. The objective of Plan Colombia was to decrease by half Colombia's coca production, by 2005. The US congress has spent over half a billion dollars fumigating some 1.1 million hectares of Colombian land. Nevertheless, the State Department estimates that coca cultivation increased by 6.4 percent from 2006 to 2007 and an overall increase of 22.6 percent since Plan Colombia began in 2000. Therefore, from a security perspective, forcible eradication through aerial spraying or manual eradication, may appear legitimate, but from a development perspective, its effects are catastrophic. According to the UNODC, around 1.2 million people suffered from starvation and death from treatable disease, all of this because of the opium cultivation bans and eradication exercises in Myanmar.

Furthermore, in Afghanistan, efforts to curb opium production had the opposite effect from what was expected. Eradication campaigns focused on smaller, vulnerable farmers without any political weight or financial power to protect themselves. Once they were removed, it only consolidated the large traffickers with considerable political authority their domination of the drug industry. Eradication plans are partly responsible for conflict, the stimulation of corruption, and target the poorest of the poor. Furthermore, these eradication plans have led to the disruption of the relationships between the state and the population.

In January 2016, a global meeting inviting many small-scale farmers took place in Heemskerk (the Netherlands), in order to discuss their concerns and their recommendation for changes and reforms of narcotic drug policies. This event allowed them to have their voices heard and taken into account, with the hope of changing the drastic eradication methods used, that challenge their human rights.

Possible Solutions

We previously saw that only focusing on the eradication of illicit crops is not a viable solution. A more sustainable way to curtail poverty and reduce harm from narcotic drugs could be based on the promotion and protection of the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and

rural workers, and secured access to and control over land. Therefore, a more holistic approach to narcotic drugs is required in order to effectively seize the matter. Instead of prosecuting the farmers, it could be an option to help them in the transition of illicit to licit crops, or any other viable agricultural activity.

Moreover, transparency between nations and organizations attempting to eradicate illicit crops should be prioritized to effectively break the corruption chain within the narco-economy. They can then share the newest information about how the farmers are progressing in order to understand how to evolve their counter measures adequately. The UNODC has already established an extensive base of information concerning the eradication of illicit crops and other methods attempted to stop their cultivation. The creation of a comparable base of information for the illicit cultivation of crops that would go even further in investigating and developing a data base about the trafficking of drugs would allow governments to develop astute strategies to fight this issue. Furthermore, to strengthen this system, a complete monitoring system such as the one used by the UNODC should be established in these transition zones, in order to keep track of this activity and have as most direction and authority as possible.

Appendices

Appendix A: Market analysis of plant-based drugs: Opiates, cocaine, cannabis, made by UNODC

http://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_3_Plantbased.pdf

Appendix B: The case of Portugal and how the consumption of narcotics drastically decreased

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbWpXYOg4OQ>

Appendix C: The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/convention_1961_en.pdf

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