The Role of Alternative Development in the “War on Drugs”: The Case of Bolivia

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This paper covers alternative development (AD) programs in Bolivia from the mid-1980s to the present day. Though the War on Drugs is highly complex, this paper argues that in certain situations alternative development programs, despite their imperfections, offer a longer-term solution that should be emphasized and coupled with eradication. The major programs implemented by the U.S., the UN and the EU and their impacts are explained in detail. Recommendations for improvement of alternative development programs include: making programs more participatory, having less stringent conditionality requirements, improving upfront planning about crops and markets, and increasing the number of cooperatives that are able to offer loans to farmers to improve long-term sustainability of programs. The need for government control of an area before AD programs can be effectively implemented and the need to work with the local populations are two of the lessons that can be derived from the Bolivian experience and applied to other locations.

Alternative Development in Bolivia

“Those of us who defend our coca…have grown it for 3,000 years. It’s never harmed us, nobody gets hooked on drugs. We totally reject drug trafficking. But drug trafficking exists because of the demand for drugs. We agree to help fight drug trafficking, but help us to find markets for alternative products”.

-Farmer Leader, Yungas, Bolivia

Introduction

Since 1971, the United States government has conducted a War on Drugs with limited success (International Crisis Group, 2008). The U.S. has primarily focused on controlling the supply of drugs coming from other countries, rather than containing demand at home, despite being the world’s largest consumer of illegal narcotics (ICG, 2008). Measures used to control the supply usually involve a combination of interdiction, eradication, and alternative development. However, until recently, U.S. funds were heavily concentrated on interdiction and eradication efforts.

Yet, in 2004, John Walters, head of the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), estimated that 85% of sprayed coca crops are rapidly replanted (Congressional Research Services, 2005). Many critics have argued that eradication and interdiction only have short-term impacts on the price of drugs, and that these activities are often politically unpopular. This paper will argue that U.S. needs to alter its funding priorities in the War on Drugs. It is time for the U.S. to adopt a new strategy, one that emphasizes alternative development programs as the primary activity when appropriate, while still engaging in eradication and interdiction on a more limited basis.

The Andean countries of Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru have been the chief recipients of counter-drug funding because they are the largest producers of coca and cocaine in the world (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). This paper will assess alternative development programs in Bolivia, implemented by the main donors, the U.S., the EU, and the UN in conjunction with the government of Bolivia.

The first part of the paper sets the context by examining the political and social environment in Bolivia. Next, the paper highlights the major AD initiatives that have been undertaken since the 1980s. Then, it assesses the impact of these programs, in terms of their ability to generate sustainable alternative livelihoods and reduce the cultivation of coca. Problems and potential areas for improvement are consequently addressed, and finally, Bolivia’s experience is used to provide lessons for programs in other Andean and drug producing countries.
Alternative development programs have been implemented in Bolivia for almost thirty years. The scale and scope of these programs has changed dramatically over time, leading to more integrated approaches in recent years. Most activities have taken place in the Yungas and Chapare regions of Bolivia, where the majority of coca is grown. Yungas has a long tradition of growing coca, whereas coca growth in Chapare has developed more recently because the area was relatively unpopulated until about fifty years ago when migrants began to move into the region. In Chapare, 85% of the migrant population lives in poverty and 30% lives in extreme poverty (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2005).

Unlike Colombia, where all coca production is illegal and aerial eradication is allowed, Bolivia’s historical and traditional uses of coca have created a legal environment for the cultivation of the coca leaf and have ensured that only manual eradication is permitted (CRS, 2005). Act 1008 on the Regulation of Coca and Controlled Substances, passed in 1988, allowed 12,000 hectares of coca to be legally grown, almost all in the Yungas region of the country (Lupu, 2004). After the election of former cocaleros union leader, Evo Morales, to the presidency in 2005, the legal limit was raised to 20,000 hectares and Morales adopted the position of “zero cocaine, not zero coca” (ICG, 2008, p. 7). These changes in government policy have led to a contentious relationship with the United States. The Morales administration asked the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to leave and also expelled the U.S. Ambassador in September 2008, after United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had already been asked to leave Chapare a few months earlier (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009).

The Bolivian political context has been important to the success or failure of eradication programs. Bolivia has alternated between voluntary and forced eradication programs throughout the past thirty years. The most successful forced eradication program was Plan Dignidad instituted by President Banzer in 1998. In the mid-1990s, there were approximately 118,000 acres of coca being cultivated in Bolivia, but by 2000 that figure had dropped to 36,000 acres because of forced eradication (CRS, 2005). However, forced eradication was stopped because of protests by well-organized coca unions against forced eradication, along with the deaths of 33 farmers and 27 police and military personnel between 1998 and 2003 (Thoumi and Navarrete, 2006). Between 2003 and 2007 cultivation steadily increased again from 23,200 to 29,500 hectares (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009).

**Alternative Development in Action**

Alternative development programs are multi-faceted and adapted for rural, poor, and marginalized areas where the governing capacity is often low and small farmers generally rely on coca as their primary source of income (United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2001). The overarching objective of these programs is to reduce the amount of coca being cultivated and help communities and individuals become part of the legal economy once again (UNODCP, 2001). Programs are usually implemented in conjunction with eradication, both forced and voluntary. A wide variety of activities are used in AD projects including: income substitution measures, creating peace and rule of law, improving the capabilities of municipalities and producer and community organizations, increasing marketing and production capacity, and helping communities develop in a sustainable manner (UNODCP, 2001).

The U.S., the UN, and the EU have been the most active in funding and implementing AD programs in Bolivia. However, the nature of the funding, the philosophy regarding AD, and the way programs are implemented differ significantly among the donors. One of the main differences is the way AD programs are viewed. The UN and the EU perceive AD and drug control programs as development activities aimed at reducing poverty and improving public health (ICG, 2008). The U.S., on the other hand, views AD programs as security measures designed to reduce the coca crop, or as the International Crisis Group states, “in the U.S. drugs are basically still seen and treated as a law enforcement issue” (ICG, 2008, p.40). This perception has only grown since 9/11, and the U.S. now includes a narco-terrorism evaluation in its National Security assessments (ICG, 2008).

This difference in philosophy is also evident in conditionality requirements placed on individuals and communities involved with AD programs. Conditionality refers to the policy a country or organization has regarding when eradication has to occur before funds are provided (UNODCP, 2001). The U.S. does not fund projects without signing agreements for total eradication and eradication must be completed before funds become available (CRS, 2005). The UN and the EU, on the other hand, are more flexible with conditionality requirements and do not insist upon eradication before assistance (Farthing and Kohl, 2005).
**The Programs**

**United States**
The United States has funded and implemented alternative development programs in Bolivia since the early 1980s. The U.S. spent $117 million on AD programs between 1983 and 1998 (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). Most funding has gone towards eradication and interdiction, but funding priorities were slightly altered in 2007 when the Democratic controlled Congress included a 50% increase in AD programs beyond the Bush administration request (ICG, 2008).

The first program the U.S. undertook was the Chapare Regional Development Project (CRDP), implemented between 1983 and 1992. The program cost $22.5 million in total (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). Goals of the program included: promoting economic growth, improving living standards, diversifying the economic base and promoting public and private participation (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). One of the first projects focused on improving infrastructure by building roads to help get products to markets (Lupu, 2004). An alternative crop program was also implemented to induce farmers to switch from coca. Infrastructure projects were supposed to accompany alternative crop programs to improve the production capacity, but many of these projects were never implemented or completed.

The major problem with this project is that the Government of Bolivia lost control of the area to narcotraffickers, so USAID limited its activities to coca substitution. The U.S. General Accounting Office concluded that alternative development assistance was provided for over twenty years, but “little progress was made until the host government gained control of drug-growing areas and project sites” (United States General Accounting Office, 2002, p. 16). It is very difficult to implement programs or organize communities in areas where illegal armed groups exist and are able to threaten citizens (ICG, 2008).

The Cochabamba Regional Development Project, implemented between 1991 and 1997, expanded the focus from crop substitution to “economy substitution” (United States General Accounting Office, 2002, p. 22). The program cost $79.5 million and aimed to increase productivity and employment opportunities (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). This project used incentives to encourage export growth. It also increased production capacity, instituted alternative crop programs, and “facilitated market identification and penetration” (United States General Accounting Office, 2002, p. 23).

The U.S. was also involved with the Bolivian government’s National Directorate for Agricultural Reconversion Cash Compensation Program. This program tried to increase eradication through income substitution measures. Farmers who agreed not to grow coca were given cash payments. The U.S. gave $100 million between 1987 and 1998 to the Bolivian government to implement the program, which many believed failed because the program lacked the capacity to monitor and verify eradication (United States General Accounting Office, 2002).

The fourth major effort the U.S. undertook was the Counternarcotics Consolidation of Alternative Development Efforts Project (CONCADE) between 1998 and 2005 (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). CONCADE was first implemented in the Chapare region and later expanded to Yungas. It was a more integrated program than past efforts and had marketing support, alternative crop programs, agricultural processing, and community development components (Development Associates Inc., 2004). The five overarching goals of the program were to create a “sustainable farm-level production capacity for licit crops”, generate “commercially sustainable market linkages” for licit products, increase the capacity of alternative development organizations, increase private sector investment, especially in agricultural industries, and facilitate “emergency stabilization support” (Development Associates Inc., 2004, p. 8).

CONCADE promoted alternative crops and crop diversification and, unlike in past programs, potential markets for crops were assessed before crops were introduced. The program also worked to establish links with packing and processing plants, along with supermarkets, and wholesalers so that farmers were able to sell their crops at a reasonable price (Development Associates Inc., 2004). Another element of the program was that USAID built its own producer associations, which went outside of traditional social structures.

**United Nations**
The United Nations has had two major projects in Bolivia. The first, Agroyungas, began in 1985 in the Yungas region. The goal of the project was to decrease the 8,000 hectares of coca under cultivation (Lupu, 2004). The program tried to reach this goal by signing agreements with 56 communities, even though these communities were slightly better off and tended not to rely on coca as their sole source of income (Lupu, 2004). Under these agreements, communities would promise not to plant more coca, and in return, they received infrastructure projects, agricultural credits, and inputs to...
grow a coffee variety new to the region.

The UN’s other major program was the Jatun Sach’a Project, which focused on forestry management in the Cochabamba Tropics beginning in 1994 and was later expanded to Yungas in 2000 (United Nations Office of Drug Control. (2005). Many migrants had moved to Chapare over the past 40 to 50 years, and the rapid increase in the population was having adverse effects on the environment. The goal of the program was to teach the local population how to maintain the fragile ecosystem. The project modeled techniques for using forest resources and the soil in a sustainable manner. Environmental education programs were introduced in educational institutions to make the population more aware of their impact on the environment.

New crops were introduced to persuade farmers to shift away from coca and farmers were encouraged to sell their products in bulk to receive better prices (UNODC, 2005). Producer organizations were trained so they could offer technical assistance to members and many producers went through the Integrated Farm Management training. Connections were forged with local wood companies so communities could sell the wood they harvested. The project introduced portable sawmills so that participants could turn logs into beams, windows, and a variety of other products and receive better compensation for their work (UNODC, 2005). The program also helped participants form groups to aid one another in continuing the practices after the project was complete.

**European Union**

Bolivia’s Law of Popular Participation requires that 20% of federal revenue go to municipal governments (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). Indigenous and neighborhood organizations were suddenly responsible for fiscal management and for participatory planning after this law passed in 1994 (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). Municipalities were in charge of developing Annual Operating Plans and 5-year Municipal Development Plans (Farthing and Kohl, 2005).

From 1998 through 2005, the EU implemented the Plan de Apoyo a la Estrategia de Desarrollo Alternativo en el Chapare (PRAEDAC) (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). The objectives of this program were to decrease the amount of illicit crops produced by providing other opportunities, building social infrastructure and institutional capacity, increasing environmental awareness, and facilitating the process of land titling. Approximately 30% of program funds or $5.86 million went towards increasing municipal capacity by training municipalities in public administration so that communities could do a better job of planning and managing their resources. Unlike USAID programs, PRAEDAC did not mandate eradication before funding and worked with municipal governments to plan projects, rather than around them. The EU is also funding studies to determine what the legal limit of coca cultivation should be in Bolivia and a study to find other potential legal uses of the coca leaf.

**Impact**

The impact of alternative development programs has varied program to program. More recent programs seem to have had greater success as donors have adopted a more integrated approach, but the sustainability of many of these gains is questionable without continued government support or alternative financing mechanisms. However, measuring success among programs can be difficult because of the different indicators used to evaluate by each donor. Some programs, particularly U.S. funded programs, have focused more heavily on the eradication component, whereas evaluations of UN and EU projects concentrate on development indicators. Since the mid-1990s, alternative development programs have made some significant gains in terms of land titling, licit crop cultivation, producer organization formation, increasing municipality capabilities, increased production and marketing capabilities, and creating new jobs, even as eradication efforts have been mixed.

One of the main gains from these programs has been the increase in the hectares of licit crops under cultivation. Virtually all of the AD programs in Bolivia have had some alternative crop component. The UN’s Jatun Sach’a project generated 4,048 hectares of new crops and CONCADE helped create 110,000 hectares of new licit plantings (UNODC, 2005; Development Associates Inc., 2004). However, CONCADE’s success depended on the type of crops. Banana and pineapple growers were satisfied with prices and wanted to increase their production, whereas the palm hearts and citrus producers were highly dissatisfied with prices and openly discussed giving up on these crops (Development Associates Inc., 2004).

Another gain has taken place in land titling. Four hundred sixty-six thousand hectares of land have been registered in the Tropics of Cochabamba, largely from increased land titling efforts by the government of Bolivia, partly funded through USAID and PRAEDAC. Registration is the first step for farmers to gain formal title to their land, which will encourage them to invest in their land and allow them to have a greater sense of security about their livelihood (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009). PRAEDAC also reported that 11,607 families have already received titles to their lands.
The number of families receiving alternative development assistance has been steadily increasing. The U.S. aided 2,554 families in 1997, but expanded assistance to a reported 25,290 families in 2004 (United States General Accounting Office, 2002; CRS, 2005).

However, Farthing and Kohl (2005) question these figures and argue that the wide range of figures produced by USAID, the State Department and the Bolivian government make it almost impossible to know the true number of people assisted. Jatun Sach’a project assisted 8,767 families in the Cochabamba Tropics and 1,275 in Yungas (UNODC, 2005). The UN estimates that alternative development projects have only worked with 23% of families in illicit crop areas in the Andean region, so there is clearly room for these programs to expand (UNODC, 2005).

Another positive development as a result of alternative development programs has been strengthening and building the capacity of producer organizations and municipal governments. For example, the Jatun Sach’a project reported that one of the qualitative gains was that “agroforestry producers’ organizations increased their capacities for their own capital investment, commercializing their product and supplying technical assistance to its associates” (UNODC, 2005, p. 39). The Jatun Sach’a program helped organize 155 Producer Associations in the Cochabamba Tropics, 43 Farmer Economic Organizations in Yungas. In addition the program ensured that 64 communities became owners of their forests and had developed Forest Management Plans (UNODC, 2005). It is likely that these organizations would not have formed without the support of the project.

Alternative development programs have also been successful in raising the capacity of municipalities. PRAEDAC offered training to municipalities to help them improve their public administrative capacity (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). However, not all of the gains municipalities and community organizations have made can be attributed to the PRAEDAC program. Bolivia has a long history of community organization, especially among coca growers. PRAEDAC, along with a number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the municipalities themselves played a role in building capacity. On the other hand, in some instances, USAID has had a negative effect on municipalities. It refused to work with many of the municipalities in Chapare and it formed its own producer associations. Development Associates Inc. noted in their evaluation report that this “works against developing strong, sustainable producer associations, and hence against the ultimate impact of AD activities” (Development Associates Inc., 2004, p. 49).

Eradication is almost always linked to alternative development programs, but eradication efforts have had mixed results over the past decade. From a high of 11,839 hectares eradicated in 2002, eradication has leveled off to approximately 5,000 to 6,000 hectares a year from 2005 to the present (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009). However, these figures do not differentiate between forced eradication and voluntary eradication that was followed by AD assistance. The net cultivation of coca has been more or less steadily increasing since 2002 from 24,400 hectares to its estimated level of 29,500 hectares in 2008 (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 2009). It is difficult to assess the true impact of AD programs on eradication and reducing the cultivation of coca because these are strongly tied to the price of coca, the social relationship of the community, the ability of farmers to transfer coca planting away from their private land into national parks, and the government presence in the region (UNODCP, 2001).

**Areas for Improvement**

Despite developing better integrated programs that have achieved some significant gains, alternative development (AD) programs have substantial room for improvement. In an evaluation of AD programs, including their own, Development Associates Inc. found the three factors that made the shift to licit crops successful were “a profitable alternative, acceptance of AD, and being able to ‘depend’ on AD” (Development Associates Inc., 2004, p. 38). Areas for improvement or change include: conditionality, participation, planning, financing, and sustainability. By making alterations, AD programs have the potential to create sustainable and long lasting improvements in families’ livelihoods and can be a crucial component in the War on Drugs.

The U.S. can greatly improve AD programs by imposing less stringent conditionality requirements. Farmers know how much coca they can produce and how much money they will get for their crop, which is often more than for licit crops (Lupu, 2004). For them, adopting a new crop is a risk (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). Having more flexible conditionality requirements will not only mean that more communities are likely to participate, but it also addresses the reality that farmers are likely to keep some coca as a security measure, in case the new crop fails (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). Plans need to be developed for farmers to transition out of growing coca with enough time for the new crops to develop into a profitable alternative. However, follow-up is essential to make sure that farmers are not cultivating coca past the permitted time.
If eradication is a requirement, coordination needs to be strong between agencies to ensure that alternative development funding is available immediately. In the past, gaps between eradication and providing alternative development funding has been a problem, leaving farmers without a source of income and creating distrust.

Studies have shown that farmers are willing to accept a less profitable alternative, if the change is accompanied by increased security and technical assistance (Lupu, 2004). Donors can encourage and provide assistance to governments to help fight narcotraffickers and remove them from drug-growing regions of the country. Farmers will feel more secure transitioning to the licit economy because they will no longer be under the threat of violence. This is less of a problem in Bolivia, but is a more complicated situation in Colombia and Peru where drug traffickers are also often part of armed insurgency groups.

Running pilot projects is another way to demonstrate to farmers that alternative crops can work. It can enable them to see the project so they feel more secure about giving up coca. Programs also need to provide technical assistance. This will allow farmers to feel comfortable with growing new crops and have greater success with those crops, which means they will be less likely to return to growing coca.

The second factor which has helped make AD programs successful is acceptance of AD activities. Acceptance is gained by giving the local population a voice in the process. Development Associates Inc. reported that “attitudes toward AD activities are clearly influenced by the degree and types of participation and the participatory mechanisms used” (Development Associates Inc., 2004, p. 50). Thus far, the UN and the EU have been much better at including participative measures than the United States.

Currently, most participation by the local population is limited to identifying problems. Beneficiaries are not given a say in which problems should be made a priority or how problems should be solved (Development Associates Inc., 2004). Local populations often do not trust AD activities because of their top-down nature, especially in Chapare, where participatory mechanisms for USAID programs are not well developed. Another problem is that U.S. sponsored producer associations function separately and outside of traditional social structures. This “weakens social legitimacy by isolating association members from the general community context” (Development Associates Inc., 2004, p. 50). The U.S. needs to find ways to incorporate these associations back into the social fabric of the community.

Carlos Hoffman, the Director of Municipal Programming stated that USAID almost never informs municipalities about what projects it is implementing, which makes planning difficult (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). PRAEDAC, on the other hand, contracts with municipalities to implement projects and trains them in public administration. These efforts have resulted in a more positive reception of AD (Farthing and Kohl, 2005). The U.S. needs to build into its plans requirements for meaningful participation at all stages of the process and especially focus on finding ways to incorporate women. Working with the municipality will encourage greater responsibility by the municipality and will ensure that projects are integrated into the municipal development plans (MDPs) that municipalities develop. It will also create a more positive reception of AD and might help decrease some of the political opposition to these programs.

Donors need to be able to convince AD participants that they will be able to count on AD support while they make this transition back to the legal economy. For example, when the UN-sponsored Agroyungas project finished, development centers and infrastructure projects were abandoned and many government technicians left the area (Lupu, 2004). Funders must find a balance between simply abandoning projects when they end, which may cause families to return to growing coca, and creating permanent dependency on projects. This is another reason that funders need to work with local governments and organizations to build their capacities and develop alternative forms of financing.

Currently, many farmers are classified as “small producers”, which disqualifies them from using their land as collateral for a loan, and most have few other means of acquiring a loan (Development Associates Inc., 2004). A number of small cooperatives have formed in Chapare and have had high loan repayment rates. All funders should encourage the formation of these types of organizations and help producer organizations develop that capability. These cooperatives will give farmers access to credit and have the additional benefits of improving the long-term sustainability and potential success of projects. If farmers are aware they can get loans, they may feel more secure about taking the risk to engage in the project.

Donors need to do a better job planning for projects. In many programs, crops were suggested without doing background research on their ability to grow in certain climates or consider if there was a viable market for the crop. Nor did donors conduct assessments to determine whether the infrastructure existed to get crops to market or if the necessary infrastructure could be built in a timely manner.
manner. Project planners need to research the markets for crops and ensure that the crops are appropriate for the area. A positive development in the CONCADE program was the links that were established with processors, wholesalers and supermarkets so farmers had reliable places to sell their crops. Those efforts should be continued and expanded.

Projects need to conduct smaller pilot projects with new crops. Pilot projects allow problems to surface which can then be resolved before asking farmers to give up their livelihoods for a project that could fail. Donors must also develop back-up plans so that if a project does fail, farmers have another option without having to revert back to growing coca, which was an issue in some of the early programs. Another part of the process is working to collect better data and conducting evaluations on the long-term impact of these programs to discern if gains from AD programs are sustainable and significant.

Finally, the U.S. needs to change is its attitude towards alternative development and change its funding priorities. Currently, it views AD as a security program used to eradicate and prevent the cultivation of coca. This is a short-term view that ignores the complexity surrounding the cultivation of coca. Many small farmers grow coca because it is the best option they have, not because they want to be involved with drug trafficking. The U.S. has started and needs to continue to stress alternative development as a priority in the War on Drugs.

The mechanisms that were emphasized in the War on Drugs until 2007, interdiction and eradication, are largely short-term responses that do not address many of the underlying development problems. It is also questionable whether either of them is effective. It is estimated that only 10% of the cocaine that arrived at U.S. transit points was intercepted and traffickers are able to quickly change their methods of transport in response to where the U.S. is putting interdiction resources (ICG, 2008). Many critics argue that eradication has no long-term impact on the price of cocaine and may stimulate production in other parts of the country or in other countries- the “balloon effect” (Thoumi and Navarrete, 2006). However, eradication may prove beneficial in some contexts. The UNODC found that manual eradication was more effective than aerial spraying and only had a 15% replanting rate on average (ICG, 2008). Manual eradication coupled with comprehensive AD programs could prove to be an effective method of getting people to stop growing coca.

In Bolivia, the government has control over the country, forced eradication is politically unpopular, and the long-term impact of voluntary eradication is questionable. Considering these conditions, the U.S. needs to continue to increase funding for AD activities and make it the primary focus on the War on Drugs within the country. The U.S. should work with the Government of Bolivia and with local communities to develop voluntary eradication plans that will be followed by AD projects that the community has helped select. Funding will still go to eradication, but only if AD funding is provided as well, unless eradication is taking place in a national park.

Lessons for other countries

Both the successes and failures of AD programs in Bolivia can be instructive for other countries that are large drug producers - namely, other Andean countries and Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that countries like Colombia and Afghanistan are more challenging environments in which to implement alternative development programs.

Perhaps the most important lesson that can be drawn from the Bolivian experience is the failure of AD programs and eradication activities in areas the government did not control because it was overrun with narcotraffickers. AD programs were not successful in the 1980s until the government gained back control of certain drug-producing regions from drug traffickers (United States General Accounting Office, 2002). This experience is highly relevant in both Colombia and Afghanistan, where the governments do not control large areas of the country. Aerial eradication is used in Colombia, particularly in regions the government does not have control over. But remembering that the head of the ONDCP’s assessment that 85% of sprayed crops are rapidly replanted (CRS, 2005), we see that aerial eradication is largely ineffective because people either replant or shift to even more remote areas. The Bolivian experience also suggests that it is virtually impossible to implement effective AD programs when the local population lives in fear from narcotraffickers. In Colombia, the threat is even higher since many of these traffickers are also part of armed insurgency groups.

The same goes for Afghanistan where an estimated 52% of the country’s economy is in some way tied to the illegal opium trade (Thoumi and Navarrete, 2006). Eradicating without providing viable alternatives could, in fact, devastate the Afghan economy even more than it is now and create “a major source of social tension” (p. 21) as farmers are left without a livelihood. Because opium is such a substantial part of the economy, it would behoove donors to conduct studies to find other legal uses for opium. In the limited areas the government does control, AD programs should be
implemented, but past experience suggests that AD programs will have limited success in areas the government does not govern because farmers will not feel secure.

More recent program experience suggests that donors will have more success if they work with local organizations and within community structures (the EU and the UN) than if they try to build their own structures (the U.S.). Communities are more likely to accept and buy into AD when they have a voice in the process and involve local leadership. Attempts to build separate structures can result in negative consequences like being forced out of the area, as USAID experienced in Chapare. This may be a lesson for donors in Afghanistan and Peru, where there are strongly established community and social networks. AD programs need to include the participative mechanisms discussed in previous sections and work with local governments to integrate planning.

The final lesson that can be drawn from the Bolivian experience is the importance of understanding the political context. The U.S. pushed the Bolivian government to forcibly eradicate coca in the late 1990s. Although the program greatly decreased the number of hectares under cultivation, this program caused great political and social instability and helped lead to the ouster of a number of Presidents. It is important to consider the political realities that leaders in other countries are facing and to understand the historical and traditional uses of these crops because that could have a substantial impact on a population’s willingness to eradicate and receive AD funding. Peru has had a tradition of growing and using coca, making eradication difficult. In Colombia and Afghanistan, the leaders might be constrained from taking more vigorous action by their political circumstances. The situation in these countries is also more complex because of the government has to deal with armed insurgency groups that often have ties to the drug trade, which Bolivia did not have to experience.

**Conclusion**

“Despite these sizable efforts, there has been virtually no change in the quantity of cocaine flowing into the country” (ICG, 2008, p. 2). This comment by the International Crisis Group suggests that 30 years of prioritizing eradication and interdiction is not working. This paper is not suggesting that alternative development is the sole answer to the War on Drugs or that it will solve all problems, but alternative development programs, particularly ones that have taken a more integrated approach, have had a number of successes that could be expanded. The U.S. needs to continue the current trend and place a greater emphasis on AD in funding the War on Drugs. The U.S. also needs to start viewing alternative development as a development activity, rather than as a security exercise, and examine the underlying causes of the cultivation of coca. AD has a greater chance of success if the U.S. works with the Government of Bolivia and local municipalities and includes them in a participatory process.

Eradication and interdiction activities should continue to be pursued, but a much greater emphasis needs to be placed on alternative development activities in the Bolivian context. It is important to acknowledge that past experience has shown that AD will not be effective in certain situations and that understanding the context will dictate which combination of activities should be used for each country, region, and at the transnational level as well.

**References**


