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Implementation of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem: follow-up to the high-level review by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in view of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem to be held in 2016

Outreach to new Stakeholders in the Field of Alternative Development**

**UNODC-GIZ Expert Group Meeting, 11-12 November 2013,
Berlin, Germany**

I. Background

Alternative Development (AD) continues to be recognized by Member States as a fundamental component of a comprehensive drug control strategy and plays an important role as a development oriented drug policy approach. An increasing number of Member States have set up national policies and programmes on AD for the first time, while a number of other countries, both from the donor community and those addressing illicit crop cultivation in their respective countries, have been looking to support or introduce AD by reviewing existing practices and lessons learned at a global level.

As a guidance to Member States on AD interventions, the international community has adopted several key policy documents. During the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) of 2009, Member States of the 52nd Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) adopted the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an

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Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. The international debate on AD was further invigorated, inter alia, at the International Seminar Workshop on Sustainable Alternative Development (ICAD), held in 2011, in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, Thailand, and at the High-Level Meeting of the International Conference on Alternative Development, held in 2012, in Lima, Peru. These events led to the adoption of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development as endorsed by the 56th CND in 2013 and subsequently adopted by ECOSOC and the United Nations General Assembly.¹

These developments provide an important momentum to the practical implementation of AD programmes by Member States. Therefore, in the preparation of the High-Level Review of the Implementation by Member States of the Political Declaration and its Plan of Action 2009 in the framework of the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), 13-14 March 2014, in Vienna, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of Germany, jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) hosted an Expert Group Meeting “Outreach to new Stakeholders in the Field of Alternative Development” in Berlin from 11-12 November 2013. The Expert Group Meeting convened participants from the People’s Republic of China, Germany, Guatemala, India, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Thailand and the United States of America, from both government agencies and civil society organizations and the European External Action Service, in order to discuss the progress made in the implementation of the provisions on AD of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action in the field of Alternative Development and review achievements and challenges encountered by Member States when implementing the Plan of Action. More specifically, the Expert Group Meeting offered a forum for new stakeholders to learn about a number of experiences and approaches Member States have taken on AD and to define future policies and programmes in this area.

During the meeting, participants elaborated a set of key issues and recommendations which form the basis for this conference room paper, and may help to identify policy priorities for the 2014 High Level Review of the CND and the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Drugs in 2016.

II. Key Issues and Recommendations

Long-term commitment and development orientation

Participants stressed the importance of international cooperation and a long-term commitment from Member States and international donors to support AD interventions. Current support for AD programmes is limited; only a small fraction of rural households engaged in illicit crop cultivation receive support from alternative development interventions, while the demand for technical assistance from affected communities is high.

Interventions should look beyond short-term illicit crop substitution projects and put greater emphasis on broad and long-term rural development programmes and

¹ General Assembly resolution A/RES/68/196.

strategies, which have a much greater potential to achieve sustainable reductions in illicit crop cultivations in the long term. It is important to have a clear understanding of the main drivers of illicit cultivation (which may differ from region to region) such as poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to markets, health and education, lack of private sector involvement at regional level and beyond regions to actively support AD interventions, lack of land tenure, lack of security and the presence of armed conflict, inter alia. Experience of several countries shows that unless the principal drivers are properly addressed, illicit cultivation cannot be reduced in a sustainable manner.

The experts also recognized that AD should not be expected to have significant impact on overall illicit crop cultivation levels in the short-term. Participants agreed that rural and agricultural development requires extended project operational times and continuous human and financial support and that these considerations must be built into the programme at the stage of design. For this reason, indicators for a successful policy should include human development indicators (HDI) and broader rural development outcomes apart from merely focusing on the reduction in the area under illicit crop cultivation.

The need to develop evidence-based responses and context-specific policies was deemed crucial. Livelihood analysis plays an important role in understanding the different motives that farmers may have for growing illicit crops and for effectively adjusting policies to reality on the ground. It is crucial to involve local communities and those who represent them in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of AD programmes to ensure that activities are appropriate for the local conditions and beneficial for local communities. Supportive and capable local political leadership and commitment are key factors in successful AD. Trust building with local communities was also seen as key to success.

Programmatic approach

While in the past AD was sometimes understood as crop reduction projects, experts state that today AD is defined as an integrated and holistic approach to address the drivers of illicit cultivation, and it should therefore be defined as a programmatic approach and part of a national development plan, interlinked at regional and international levels involving all stakeholders, including local communities, civil society organizations, development organizations, donors, and government agencies. This requires coordination among all key stakeholders. It is also important to reach out to the wider development community, and promote strategies to enable conventional rural development programmes to better address the causes of drug crop cultivation.

Participants stressed that poverty is one of the main driving factors of illicit crop cultivation. Small-scale subsistence farmers in South America and Asia grow coca bush and opium poppy frequently as a cash crop to address food shortages. Therefore, a key challenge for AD consists in implementing community development programmes with the right balance of activities and social support mechanisms to reduce poverty and improve food security.

Access to land

Participants highlighted the importance of land tenure and access to land for small-scale farmers. Most alternative cash crops require long-term engagement of farmers, since they require several years to produce yields. Without access to land, farmers are not willing to engage in cultivating long-term cash crops. The empirical insights of several participating experts show that there is clearly a higher prevalence of illicit cultivation by farmers without access to land. Therefore, participants accentuated that land tenure and land property rights are a fundamental principle for the long-term commitment of the community and the success of AD programmes, especially in areas where small-scale agriculture is prevailing.

In addition, secure land tenure rights create a sense of ownership and an incentive for investment for farmers. It was therefore underlined that AD interventions should include proper land tenure rights and operate within a clear legal framework that benefits and protects the rights of smallholder farmers. Decisions on the allocation, use and management of land must have the participation and consent of local communities.

Some participants stressed the negative social and economic impacts of promoting monoculture as an approach within AD, as this often leads to the dispossession of farm and grazing lands for local communities, limits access to communal spaces, such as community forests, negatively impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, including water quality and availability, and makes farming communities vulnerable to price fluctuations and plant diseases.

Access to markets

Participants highlighted the need to focus on the access to licit markets for AD products. AD interventions should be built upon a demand-driven approach, envisioning high-quality products for a competitive market that are integrated into a well-defined value-chain. Furthermore, AD should be based on local knowledge and skills. Products from AD should benefit from existing skillsets and experiences of the local population. Products which are bought out of pity or sympathy tend not to provide a sustainable income for the community.

The focus on market mechanisms, however, does not relieve the state from its duties, as mentioned by some experts. AD has to be seen as a continuous process leading from subsistence to commercial use and the steps of connecting AD to sustainable value chains have to be taken gradually. A demand-driven approach requires market research as well as adequate policies, institutional frameworks and financial support. Participants highlighted the importance of providing resources and technical assistance to identify market niches, establish new markets, facilitate financial support and marketing, and encourage participation of the private sector and civil society.

In addition, the position of farmers should be strengthened by stimulating local ownership and responsibility through associations and cooperatives and by promoting the entrepreneurial abilities of farmers. Participants considered these important steps in regards to the question of how to measure the success of AD.

Alternative Development, conditionality, and law enforcement

Participants discussed the proper sequencing of drug control interventions as well as who would qualify for AD assistance and who should be sanctioned when growing illicit crops.

Experts proposed to offer AD programmes to all farmers in target areas to improve human development indicators at the community level (thereby also avoiding an incentive to grow illicit crop in order to qualify as a beneficiary of assistance), while some participants proposed a different set of requirements under which AD assistance would be granted, e.g., only for those under certain income levels or size of land cultivated with illicit crops or only for those farmers whose livelihood is exclusively based on illicit drug crop growing, lacking any other source of income. Participants felt that the distinction between approaches was sometimes delicate. A number of experts stressed that sustainable crop reductions can only be achieved by focusing on a broader rural development approach which targets communities as a whole rather than individual households.

Some participants expressed concern that, if not properly sequenced, eradication measures will reinforce illicit growing activities since eradication often targets the poorest and most marginalized segments of society, creating food insecurity, triggering migration and displacement of illicit crops, eliminating rural employment, increasing the gap between communities and the government, particularly, in comparatively unstable countries, leading to corruption and a further breakdown in state-society relations in conflict affected areas. However, some participants felt that eradication should be applied, consistent with the domestic legislation, and as a deterrent for farmers to engage in illicit crop cultivation. Most participants felt that eradication should only take place if households have sustainable alternative livelihoods in place. Participants also stressed that law enforcement should be considered in a broader sense and not be limited to crop eradication, but rather with more focus on targeting drug traffickers.

Legal challenges

Some participants raised the concern that there is growing tension between national legislation of Member States and the international drug control system and that this affects the situation of illicit crop cultivation in third countries. While in some Member States the cultivation of certain crops is illicit under the international drug control system, in others the consumption of the products of some of these crops has been declared legal or is decriminalized. Moreover, processes of legal regulation and adjustment of law enforcement towards drug users are taking place in several other Member States. Some participants felt that while these new policies may be rational from national perspectives, they might trigger illicit crop cultivation in other countries and undermine efforts in the field of AD. Therefore, some participants stressed the importance of a balanced approach between supply and demand reduction. Some experts felt that this raised several questions for AD approaches, including whether areas under illicit cultivation by small holder farmers would end up supplying regulated markets in other countries.