



"The Royal project which ended illicit drug cultivation is being keenly studied by the cocaine-hit South American country"

The haunting sound of a Colombian flute hovered in the morning mist covering the hills of Nan. Walker Emelec Hoyos Giraldo was in his element, standing among seedlings at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation's training centre for its reforestation project high in the remote mountains.

He is half-way around the world from his natural habitat in Colombia. Mr Giraldo is chief of Medicinal Plants at Orito Ingi-Ande Flora Sanctuary Park, run by the Colombian National Park Administration under the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, and he is here with some colleagues for a purpose.

Invited by GIZ -- a German government unit responsible for international cooperation for sustainable development in partnership with the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF) under Royal Patronage -- they were on a mission to learn more about Thailand's successful alternative development (AD) programmes that have helped villagers in remote areas, particularly ethnic minorities, reduce or quit their dependence on illicit crops and turn toward sustainable farming, while maintaining, or even improving, their income, and helping to reforest denuded mountainsides from their slash and burn cultivation.

The group is diverse, with a total of 18 representatives from local governments, national park officials and non-government farmers' organisations. Yet they had all seen the same problems, and experienced the same story.

The regions where Mr Giraldo and his colleagues come from have for at least half a century been beset with problems of illicit drug crops, failed attempts at eradication, denuded mountains as farmers expand their livestock farming, coca cultivation, drug trafficking under the protection of armed militia, and unrelenting poverty.





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