**POLICY COMMENTARY**

# Drugs and Development in the Urban Setting—Expanding Development-Oriented Interventions Beyond Illicit Drug Crop Cultivation

M. L. Dispanadda Diskul[1], John Collins[2] and Daniel Brombacher[3]

[1] Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage, TH

[2] Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, AT

[3] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, DE

Corresponding author: John Collins (john.collins@globalinitiative.net)

This paper highlights the complex and contested relationship between drugs and development policies globally. It uses a recent experience in Thailand to showcase the link between drugs and development policies while highlighting the difficult international terrain for forging a common United Nations (UN) position. It examines the challenging transition underway within Thailand as practitioners of rural development policies in drug crop affected regions seek to translate the lessons of traditional 'alternative development' to urban and borderland areas affected by drug trafficking, arguing that many of the underlying principles are the same. It provides a practitioner-led overview of the recent experiences of Thailand and the global drug debates. It then takes a step into the literature on peacebuilding, examining the possible positioning of drugs and development debates relative to the field of peacebuilding studies. It concludes by highlighting the numerous areas of overlap between the new drugs and development debates and existing peacebuilding discussions.

**Keywords:** Drugs; peacebuilding; urban drug markets; thailand; violence; prohibition; regime; regime complex; international law; development; SDGs; sustainable development

## 1. Introduction

The international drug control system or regime (IDCS) has not always recognized development-led approaches as a legitimate pillar of potential responses to what it calls 'the world drug problem' (Brombacher & David 2020). For decades international efforts focused on drug supply control, repressive interventions and law enforcement indicators (Collins 2014). The visible and widely critiqued failures of the war on drugs has in recent years sparked widespread debate on the future of the IDCS (Collins 2020; Csete et al., 2016; Jelsma & Bewley-Taylor 2016). Further, drug control has witnessed a renewed emphasis on its intersection with related but all-too-often siloed issues, such as human rights, gender, development, public health and now, with this special issue, urban peacebuilding. The link between peacebuilding, urban safety and drugs has received some attention in recent years. As Wennmann writes in 2016, 'the dynamics of conflict and violence are changing … with cities becoming a future flashpoint' (Wennmann 2016: 1). This paper seeks to further the linkage between drugs, sustainable development and urban peacebuilding literatures, policies and practice.

This paper undertakes a broad policy analysis of the issues underpinning drugs and development policies and seeks to link these to peacebuilding debates. The article is underpinned by a case study analysis of the preliminary drivers and outcomes of an urban-focused developed oriented drug policy intervention in Northern Thailand. This is not intended as an exhaustive analysis of this case study, but it is intended to provide a dialectic linking between the global policy context and local interventions on the ground. We believe this policy analysis highlights ample scope for more data driven approaches to analysing the impact of urban drug policies and how these can help shape the continued evolution of international drug control.

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The intersection of drugs and peacebuilding remains a tentative one, loosely engaged in analyses focused on rural peacebuilding in Colombia, Afghanistan and Myanmar. Further, these analyses too often adopt a largely drugs-focused lens, seeing a direct causality between drugs, insecurity and conflict, rather than as part of an ongoing political process for any potential peacebuilding transformation. Drug policy, development and peacebuilding discussions have thereby tended to look at drug supply chains and drug market-related conflict as something external to the political core, something that happens in the rural, often ungoverned, periphery and that acts upon political processes rather than being an embedded part of them in affected areas. This paper seeks to merge some of the lessons from rural development, drugs and peacebuilding debates and thereby suggest possible future directions for drugs and urban peace discussions.

## 2. The UNGASS 2016 Context

The UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) in 2016 became a focal point for renewed debates on drug control. Around 2012, world leaders in Latin America began to challenge the orthodoxy of the 'war on drugs' and to advocate alternatives (Santos 2012). Following a vigorous civil society campaign, intense negotiations between governments in Vienna over several months culminated in the UNGASS in New York (Collins 2017). While some civil society organizations initially critized a lack of systemic change (Jelsma & Bewley-Taylor 2016), reformers eventually came to embrace the thematic expansion encapsulated in the Outcome Document (United Nations General Assembly 2016). Drug control had progressed from a standalone issue based on three pillars of demand reduction, supply reduction and international cooperation to a seven chapter framework embracing issues as broad as human rights (Lines & Barrett 2016), gender and development. UNGASS 2016 witnessed development in particular graduating from a subordinate role to become a widely accepted and UN-endorsed pillar of global drug policy (Brombacher & Westerbarkei 2019).

The IDCS is built on three interlocking conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (as amended by the 1972 Protocol), the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (UNODC 2008). From the three UN drug control conventions, only the final 1988 Convention Against Illicit Traffic endorses rural development interventions, but only as a secondary means to 'increase the effectiveness of eradication efforts' (United Nations 1988: Article 14, 3a). However, this seeming textual innovation lagged behind reality on the ground. Countries such as Thailand had already begun to address widespread opium poppy cultivation in the notorious Golden Triangle region with massive and coordinated socio-economic development efforts. Also, Germany had started in the early 1980s to expand its global development cooperation to the field of drugs (Brombacher & Westerbarkei 2019). Over time, this Alternative Development (AD) approach became a central element of domestic drug policies in Southeast Asia and South America and at the same time became a distinctive element of German and European international drug policies (BMZ 2013; Council of the European Union 2018, 2012). It recognizes root causes as key drivers of the illicit drug economy and recognizes that forced eradication or related repressive measures focus on symptoms, but not on the underlying root causes (UNODC 2015). However, despite these changes, the key question remains around implementation. Should member states not expand their programmatic use of these policies, the impact will of course remain more limited.

Nevertheless, the normative recognition of socio-economic root causes—and thereby that drug crop farmers may act out of economic grievance, not criminal greed—at the consensus UN member state levels took more time. The first universally accepted definition of AD was adopted only with the 1998 UNGASS Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development. It defined AD as

> a process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotics and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national growth and sustainable development…within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs (UN General Assembly 1998).

While AD was still the only development-oriented element on the drug supply control side, by 1988 the approach had reached global endorsement and served as political legitimation for the involvement of development actors in global drug policy debates. The political and financial backbone of AD emerged jointly with the 1998 Action Plan through the adoption of the principle of 'shared responsibility'. Western consumer countries of plant-based drugs were politically committed to support the producer countries in their efforts to reduce supply (Brombacher & Westerbarkei 2019). Nevertheless, the concept has remained narrowly focused on the traditional supply countries for opium poppy and coca, with cannabis largely ignored

until very recently. Further, urban and other non-cultivation related drug issues were actively excluded. The milestone *Political Declaration and Plan of Action 2009 to Counter the World Drug Problem* introduced the broader term of 'development-oriented drug control' instead of AD. However, states remained reluctant to broaden the scope of development beyond cultivation of drug crops (UNODC 2015: 77–8). Subsequently, however, AD benefitted from a growing disenchantment with the war on drugs, leading a steadily growing number of UN member states to include AD in their domestic drug policies. Global endorsement reached a peak with the 2013 adoption by the UN General Assembly of the UN Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, the result of a joint endeavor by Thailand and Peru (UN CND 2014).

The growing criticism of the war on drugs paved the way for UNGASS 2016, after the presidents of Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico called for it to be moved forward from its scheduled year of 2019. UNGASS 2016 also became a turning point for development interventions in global drug control. States moved away from the traditional bifurcation of global drug policy between supply and demand side interventions and established a system of seven pillars, one of which (Chapter VII) was AD. Further, for the first time it went beyond cultivation issues and suggests drug markets and drug trafficking as targets for development interventions (United Nations General Assembly 2016: 7h, j, k). However, UN Member States defined the UN drug control system and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2016 as 'complementary and mutually reinforcing', which in many ways served to maintain 'strict sectoral frontiers' and to preserve the barriers between mandates for UN entities rather than enshrine a coherent system that is oriented towards the SDG framework (Alimi 2019: 47). Nevertheless, UNGASS 2016 has led in many ways to the 'political emancipation of the role of development within the international drug control system' (Brombacher & Westerbarkei 2019: 95). This also appeared to coincide with a significant increase in actual implementation of development-oriented interventions on the ground with 23 countries stating they had implemented AD between 2010 and 2013 (UNODC 2015), far more than the handful of traditional source countries for coca and opium poppy. Moreover, there have been increasing reports about the inclusion of development in various national drug strategies and action plans. This now includes cannabis-producing countries or countries affected by massive drug trafficking or drug-related violence. At the same time, others seek to establish coca or cannabis as cash crops for medical purposes. While there does appear a concomitant small increase in funding for AD at a global level, it remains low with the increase being mostly due to the implementation of the Colombian peace accords (Brombacher & David 2020).

The growing sectoral and geographic diversity of AD approaches has led to a certain confusion within the global expert community on how to operationalize the updated concept for urban settings (Kemp 2020). The current AD definition dates back to 1988 and applies to traditional growing settings. A group of UN Member States jointly with UN Office on Drugs and Crime has hosted a series of Expert Group Meetings to enhance coherence on the role of development within drug control (UN CND 2020). While a new normative definition is outstanding, it is apparent that the subject of development in the international drug control system has become broader and more diverse than ever before. Given the record levels of illicit drug crop cultivation in 2019, AD is more relevant than ever. A broader development approach does not seek to replace AD as a sustainable strategy to address illicit drug crop cultivation but is actually contributing to make the UN drug control system more coherent with the overarching SDG framework, reconciling both strains of targets and policies.

## 3. Case Study Thailand—from Rural to Urban Development

Thailand's experiences on development-oriented drug policy interventions span five decades of long-term projects under the royal initiative, in collaboration with the Thai government and international partners. By including alternative development initiatives in long-term national economic development policies, including improving the lives of marginalised highland ethnic minorities, opium poppy cultivation was successfully eliminated (Diskul et al. 2019).

Amongst Thailand's major alternative development projects is the Mae Fah Luang Foundation's (MFLF) Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP) initiated in 1988 by HRH Princess Srinagarindra, the late Mother of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great. The project was located in the heart of the Golden Triangle along the Thai-Myanmar border where people lived in abject poverty, lacking basic infrastructure and government support. The Doi Tung area was under the control of armed groups involved in drug production, trafficking and other illegal trades. Lack of access to basic support and limited opportunities forced people into illicit crop cultivation, deforestation, drug trafficking, production, drug dependence and human trafficking.

The DTDP recognised that the drug economy and other social problems were only symptoms—with the root causes being poverty and lack of opportunity. Instead of concentrating on eradicating opium, the DTDP focused on providing socio-economic opportunities through addressing three factors of the people's

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well-being: health, livelihood and education. In every part of the development process, the DTDP strived to involve the local community, as its ultimate objective was to 'help the people to help themselves' (Diskul et al. 2019). A 30-year master plan for the development of the area was laid out, broken down into 3 phases, known as the 3S Model: 'survival', 'sufficiency' and 'sustainability'. The DTDP has evolved from addressing immediate daily subsistence needs of the community to earn their trust to their holistic development encompassing diverse job opportunities, health promotion, educational improvement, cultural preservation and environmental restoration. The diverse livelihood opportunities at Doi Tung range from premium coffee, macadamia nuts products and horticulture to high fashion textiles, home décor and tourism, which generate viable licit income greater than those of the drug economy (Diskul et al. 2019). The younger generation of Doi Tung are equipped with educational and entrepreneurial opportunities on par with Thais in major city areas. Per capita income of Doi Tung residents has grown from $121 USD at the start of the project to $3,439 USD in 2019 (Mae Fah Luang Foundation Forthcoming). As such, the DTDP's Sustainable Alternative Livelihood Development (SALD) experience has been recognised by the UN as a model in tackling drug problems through livelihood development as well as sustainable development in precarious areas (ECOSOC 2008).

While Thailand has been successful in applying the SALD model in Doi Tung since 1988 to solve illicit opium poppy cultivation, the problem of drugs has shifted to the manufacturing and trafficking of illicit synthetic drugs in both rural and urban areas, along with commensurate crimes and violence (Windle 2015). The trend is evident for Thailand as well as regionally and globally, and Thailand has continued to witness significant growth in methamphetamine supply and demand (UNODC 2017). The country is also facing an increasing urban population, and the boundary between rural and urban is no longer clear (Nauman et al. 2015). In response, Thailand has expanded its application of principles and best practices from drug crop cultivation in rural areas to illicit synthetic drug problems in urban and rural areas.

Huay San village is located in Mae Ai district, Chiang Mai province. It shares a lengthy border with Myanmar and is known as one of the biggest trading posts of methamphetamine in Thailand. There are many roads leading to different districts, and it is a midway point between Chiang Mai province and Chiang Rai province, making it very easy to distribute methamphetamine shipments. Mr. Lao-Ta Saenlee, a convicted drug kingpin, and his syndicate ran the town. Mr. Lao-Ta Saenlee was a village headperson, but the Chiang Mai governor dismissed him in 1997 for suspected links to drug trade. He was arrested in 2003 and served four years in jail for heroin possession. He was released in 2007. After his release, he continued to suppress local villagers through violence, bribery of local officials and use of the village as a base to expand his network. More and more villagers became drug traders and traffickers. From 2007 onwards, it was believed that every household in Huay San village and the nearby area were involved in either drug trading or trafficking (Brugerforeningen 2011).

In 2017, Mr. Lao-Ta and his two sons were arrested again and his syndicate disbanded. The people of Huay San area continued to be involved in drug trading and trafficking, and it remained notorious for methamphetamine. HRH Princess Bajrakitiyabha Narendiradebyavati realised the opportunity to transform the area much like her great grandmother, HRH Princess Srinagarindra, and her grandfather, HM King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the Great, did. She recommended that the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Office of Narcotic Control Board (ONCB) implement an area-based development programme to provide people with licit livelihood opportunities and to promote peace and rid the area of crime and violence.

The MoJ and the ONCB requested the MFLF to implement this development programme in Huay San. Thus, the 'Roi Jai Rak' Development Project was initiated in November 2018. The Project grounds in the principle that the problem is not about drugs, but about people. Whether in rural or urban areas, the fundamentals of the human-centric development approaches are equally applicable when the issues of poverty, lack of opportunities, marginalisation, crime, violence and insecurities prevail. However, the implementation needed to be adjusted to suit the differing socioeconomic contexts and realities.

For drug crop cultivation in rural areas, alternative development is emphasised with a 'proper sequencing' approach where viable livelihood alternatives must be put in place before eradication. With synthetic drugs, the approach is different. Due to the nature of these drugs being easy to produce, they require no cultivation land and can be quickly transported; it is clear that development must co-exist hand-in-hand with strategic law enforcement measures. One of the key factors for success is to win over the trust of the people. Many rounds of discussions were held in large groups comprised of people from different villages and in smaller groups within the village in order to gain insight into their needs and wants. Livelihood activities quickly followed, broken down into on-farm and off-farm activities.

Following the lessons from rural areas, the MFLF also partnered with private sector groups from the outset to bring knowledge, technical expertise, funding and marketing to the community. The collaboration makes

the development curve steeper and increases the chance of success. Private sector involvement allowed for product improvement. Some of the agro products were able to be exported in year one.

During the implementation of the program, the MFLF found that many families were struggling with their members using and/or being dependent on drugs, with a majority consuming methamphetamine and a smaller number consuming opioid. The MFLF worked with the Thai Ministry of Public Health and local authorities to start a community-based treatment program for people who use drugs. The program is called 'Volunteers to Do Good', where clients attend the program voluntarily. In the program, volunteers undergo detoxification and medical treatment as well as physical and mental health monitoring. When healthy enough, volunteers are provided with skills training and earn minimum daily wage income for their work to be paid after they have graduated from the center.

While clients progress, it is crucial for their families and community to understand that drug dependence is not a crime but a health issue. Their families and the community are encouraged to provide support and to welcome them back with open arms. This is to provide clients with a new opportunity and to remove the stigmatisation surrounding drug dependence.

It is critical for alternative development approaches in urban settings to have a strong linkage with health and rehabilitation support. It also highlighted that swift law enforcement actions would be taken if villagers choose to engage in illicit activities. One of the former drug sellers in the Project area admitted that

> I came into the amphetamine business since I started my own family. If I hadn't done drug dealing, I might have ended up being a prostitute. To get out of drug trafficking is very difficult. I watched the news and saw many people got arrested. I wanted to quit but I couldn't because I had done this for so long and there were no other jobs available. When the Project came into the area, I felt like seeing a clear sky for the first time. So, I stopped dealing drugs and decided to turn my life around. (Anonymous Interview, 6 April 2018)

While the Roi Jai Rak Project is still in an early stage, the people-centred development approach seems to have laid a foundation for cooperation amongst the community and for further development progress. It is seen as an important step towards ensuring that the community can obtain licit livelihoods with dignity while enhancing rule of law and community resilience. The Project provides a case study of how to expand development-oriented interventions beyond drug crop cultivation settings. Through a holistic and people-centred approach, community members become the main mechanisms of their own development process, fostering a sense of social responsibility, control and governance within their community, which contributes to strengthening peace and security in a sustainable manner.

## 4. Bringing in the Peacebuilding Paradigm

As with the drugs and development debate, the link between drug economies and peacebuilding is too frequently ignored, viewed in siloed or vague terms, or misunderstood as a monocausal barrier to the achievement of each paradigm's goals. Drug control views insecurity as a barrier to supply reduction. In the 1990s the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as the effort 'to identify and support structures that will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (quoted in Paris 2010: 337). Peacebuilding and state-building works tend to view illicit drug economies as a barrier to conflict transformation. The Colombian peace process is often highlighted as an example of a more comprehensive approach to illicit drug economies and peacebuilding (Meger & Sachseder 2020). Even then, however, the practical and conceptual development has been limited to an ultimate focus on short-term transitions beyond illicit crops. Drug economies are correctly recognised as a symptom of instability and conflict, but a deep political economy analysis of drug markets is rarely examined as a functional end towards sustaining local peacebuilding efforts. This section aims to further the conceptual link by examining the evolution of peacebuilding as a concept and suggesting linkages with the drugs and sustainable urban development paradigm.

Few scholars believe that the eradication of an illicit drug market under prohibition is possible, and indeed the pursuit can often prove counterproductive (Pollack & Reuter 2014). However, some prohibition-oriented scholars argue that a plausible and indeed desirable strategy is to utilise prohibition to shrink the aggregate scale of drug markets and subsequently utilise strategic enforcement to manage the policy externalities (Caulkins 2014). Others argue for a more comprehensive application of 'harm reduction', viewing enforcement in terms of societal harms rather than an unachievable goal of supply reduction (Shaw 2019, 2016).

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Drug markets can take many forms, from an archetype anarchical environment, where rivals contest territory on a near daily basis, to more stable, monopolistic or oligopolistic criminal markets. Moreover, markets can change fundamentally over time. While Colombia in the 2000s witnessed a steady decline in drug market violence, Mexico witnessed a steady, at times exponential, rise (Castillo et al. 2014). Meanwhile, markets in relatively close proximity can witness radically different structural dynamics, for example the wide differences between Brazil's largest cities. Moreover, these cases highlight that the distinctions between licit and illicit, in conceptual, governance and economic terms are far from precise. As Paiva et al. write, in Urban drug economies

> there are intrinsic connections not only between legality and illegality, but also between crime and justice and between illicit markets and the means of social control, including law enforcement policies. Connection, however, does not imply the lack of a distinction. On the contrary, there is a vast difference between being considered an actor of order or of crime, being part of the official economy, protected by laws and rights, or an illicit economy, the object of dispute between armed groups (Paiva et al. 2019: 1).

They continue

> that difference gives rise to coexisting systems of urban order. There are some places and situations in which the state governs, but side by side with either criminal groups, the 'factions', or rogue police officers, the 'militias', which also fight to govern urban order. In addition to them, there are religious and market actors. Those coexisting ruling systems are now obviously supported by thriving economies—drug trafficking, smuggling, vehicle thefts, bribery, extortion, and so on. A great deal of money circulates between legal and illegal markets, although legality and illegality are separate regimes (Paiva et al. 2019: 1).

Understanding these distinctions, the borderlines between licit and illicit, and the governance mechanisms mediating the two is the subject of extensive research in Brazilian cities (Feltran 2019; Paiva et al. 2019; Paiva & Carlos 2019). More broadly, however, the link between drug policy and urban peacebuilding discussions remains underdeveloped and is only a relatively recent topic of nuanced academic and policy analysis (Wennmann 2016).

The concept and literature on peacebuilding is often traced to the mid-1970s. It became mainstreamed in the early 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the pursuit of a new unified international mission for the UN under its *Agenda for Peace* (UN 1992). This enshrined a 'problem solving' orientation to liberal peacebuilding at the international level. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the development of a practical theoretical framework termed 'conflict transformation' (CT) (Lederach 1997; Paffenholz 2014). The CT term soon shifted toward 'peacebuilding' while the fundamentals remained the same, namely a focus on transforming conflict behaviour into peaceful behaviour combining 'a multi-actor and multi-track approach with short-, medium and long-term perspectives', rather than simply seeking to manage or resolve conflict (Paffenholz 2014: 14). Further, the changed focus from international to local actors is highlighted by one scholar as the key contribution of the CT approach, namely that the role of international actors becomes one of facilitating the practical interventions of internal actors. These included 'rebuilding destroyed relationships within societies and establishing infrastructure and processes, and through the training of people (human capital building) within a generation-long timeframe' (Paffenholz 2015: 859).

In this 'peace from below' process, outside actors could provide support but were ultimately relegated to a secondary role in a local process of transformation (Leonardsson & Rudd 2015). The UN had explicitly moved in the early 2000s away from a perceived focus on 'overseeing ceasefires' and instead placing a greater emphasis on this local capacity building, conflict resolution and local reforms (Leonardsson & Rudd 2015: 827). Many of these premises are strongly echoed in the drugs and development, and indeed urban drug market, literature. Paiva et al. write that understandings of the issues of development, security and peace within contexts of urban drug markets must 'start from the premise that it is crucial to go from the bottom up, that is, empirically describe the operations, actors, and official and unofficial regulatory instruments of those economies and finally proceed to a larger scale and seek to understand the power struggles that shape them' (Paiva et al. 2019: 1).

Critics, particularly critical theorists, have argued that '[t]he problem-solving camp … tended to focus on "solving" immediate problems but was generally incurious about the wider structural factors that led to those problems' (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013: 766–7). Nevertheless, policy practitioners and liberal academics

have tended to adopt an a-la-carte approach to these criticisms, focusing on 'building stronger market democracies albeit with sequencing adjustments, longer-term assistance and different kinds of external resources' (Heathershaw 2013: 275–6). As such, much like drug policy debates, peacebuilding has advanced under a problem-solving liberal-internationalist paradigm. It has developed alongside, and in debate with, stark critiques that it served to impose the interests of external dominant actors on unwilling communities and empower local actors that facilitated the interests of dominant states. In the case of drug markets we can think of this as empowering actors that promote law enforcement and anti-drug policies at the seeming expense of more comprehensive local development interventions (Buxton 2015).

Like peacebuilding debates, the drug policy literature and the global intergovernmental decision-making system on drugs is increasingly divided between several schools. The first is the paleo-'war on drugs' advocates. The second is the asymmetric enforcement advocates. The third is those who favour regulation of all drugs (The Global Commission on Drug Policy 2014). A fourth school, the new drugs and development approach, seeks to eschew these camps and place drug policy within a more comprehensive cross-sectoral and cross disciplinary perspective. It begins with a rejection of the absolute binary between licit and illicit markets (Paiva et al. 2019). It then proceeds to challenge the dichotomy and lack of agency ascribed to illicit market actors and in so doing enact its own 'local turn'. Many speak of the paradox of illicit markets whereby those punished under prohibition are also those who are enabled to benefit. Marginalised communities that lack adequate livelihoods and would likely be forced out of their rural areas are provided an economic opportunity through the supernormal profits of prohibition (Alimi 2019; Felbab-Brown 2014). The removal of illicit opportunities in the absence of licit ones, either through legalisation or successful law enforcement, is not seen as a viable long-term development strategy under this perspective. Finally, the new development school adopts a fundamental bridge building and problem-solving approach, while recognising the centrality of local conditions, the complex structures created by prohibition and the systemic barriers illicit drug economies pose to linear development and peace building.

## 5. Key Lessons for Urban Development, Peacebuilding and Drug Markets

A fundamental lesson for drug markets, urban development and peacebuilding is a repatriation of international agendas to local needs. The 'local turn' in peacebuilding can find clear echoes within debates on drug control, albeit less advanced and more politicised. As shown, over time the recognition of the economic, structural and social exigencies of drug affected communities has come to inform drugs and development policies. Slowly, painfully slowly, the definition of drugs and development has expanded, encapsulating issues of sustainable livelihoods, more recently cannabis and now urban development. Many institutional barriers, however, remain. Still the principles of 'localism' that have driven and reformed the liberal peace agenda of the UN, even if still the subject of strong challenges from critical scholars, are resonant. A successful urban peacebuilding and development agenda in drugs is inevitably to be built on a 'problem solving approach', one that retains a negotiated set of principles with the national and local governance needs of the countries in question.

Successful drug policies cannot be determined purely by the demands of drug control metrics and agendas. Any lasting urban peace will require community legitimacy, economic livelihoods and a respect for local circumstances and structures as communities work to extricate themselves from the often violent realities of illicit drug markets. Perhaps the key issue to promote acceptance of urban drug markets as a subject of development is the recognition of socio-economic root causes as the driving factor for thriving drug markets. The recognition that drugs, development, peacebuilding and now urban peace debates are inextricably linked can begin a more coherent process of local institution building grounded in a more realistic awareness of possibilities and barriers for reform.

Development-oriented drug policies, meanwhile, is a rather misleading term, because quite often the key proponents of such an approach are development agencies, civil society organisations and foundations. Actually, from the perspective of some of those (BMZ 2013), drugs-oriented development policies would be the more accurate term to describe the set of interventions summarized by the term AD. The key narrative of the role of development within drug control is the recognition that the emergence and persistence of drug economies are to be explained by a set of underlying root causes. The key question is why does massive illicit drug crop cultivation emerge in some countries but not in others. A number of scholars have made key contributions to this debate, discussing the potential competitive advantages some countries have as compared to others that support the creation of massive drug economies (Gaviria & Mejia 2017; Thoumi 2003). Those factors are less related to suitable agricultural conditions for certain drug crops, but rather refer to socio-economic and political conditions. They include deficient state capacity, cheap labor and proximity to consumer markets, the existence of armed non-state actors that benefit from illicit economies, easy-to-bribe

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authorities or tradition or other kind of expertise for growing illicit drug crops. Those factors can perhaps mostly explain the outcomes. From a development perspective, some other comparative elements can be added to the list of root causes. Poverty, lack of access to licit markets and lack of access to land have proven to be key push factors across different source countries for illicit drugs. Development-oriented drug policies or vice versa seek to address those root causes. Indicators of success are therefore human development indicators (i.e., poverty reduction) and only in a secondary fashion the immediate reduction of illicit drug crops.

Rural AD implies the acceptance that criminal phenomena are a product of underlying root causes and that small-scale involvement in illicit drug economies—small scale farmers, harvesters, traffickers, messengers, retailers and so forth—is driven by economic grievance, not (necessarily) criminal greed. However, while there is a widespread recognition of small-scale farmers as not being punishable criminal offenders, there is little acceptance of treating urban drug retailers as subjects of development assistance instead of criminal law, despite the apparent similarities between both groups. Accepting grievance as a leitmotif of the involvement in urban drug markets does not necessarily change societal assessments of drug-related crimes. There is a long value chain between an opium poppy farmer in Afghanistan and a heroin consumer in London; stigmatization does not necessarily climb down this long chain. Quite the opposite, small scale drug dealing is widely associated with feeding stigmatized phenomena, such as public drug use, deteriorating security, violence and the spread of blood-borne diseases. The recent Thai efforts show nevertheless that a non-stigmatized recognition of drug traffickers as beneficiaries of development measures makes a strong contribution to address both drug economies in a more sustainable fashion and to contribute to violence-reduction and urban peace.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper provides an optimistic assessment for the further development of drug control as a complex regime and one which increasingly recognises and benefits from the overlap with peacebuilding discussions. The narrative offered is one of progress (albeit often glacial). The global drug control system has evolved over the past several decades from a vision of development as secondary to drug control, to a position where development represents a key thematic pillar of the system. This suggests the continued possibility, and we believe likelihood, that the issue of drugs will become much more sophisticated in the future. As borderlines between countries, cities, urban and rural becomes smaller, we will be faced with increasing challenges to address the issue of drugs. Further, as the commonalities between different UN debates—not just public health, development and human rights, but peacebuilding and other previously siloed approaches—becomes more overt and clear the opportunities to integrate and synergise policy responses will only grow.

As this article and decades of experience highlight, law enforcement alone will not suffice as it is a post-hoc process. A crime is committed and an individual is brought to justice after the fact. The global community needs to look at how to address the issue from root causes and from a systemic 'prevention' perspective. Alternative development has proven to be a very useful tool in addressing illicit crop cultivation in the Thai setting as it deals directly with people from a systemic livelihood perspective. Meanwhile, the peacebuilding literature highlights a number of hard and soft implications of prolonged conflict. If we assume the drug wars are an example of these prolonged conflicts, then we are looking at many overlapping problems. In physical terms, damage to urban infrastructure is the most apparent. The pock marks of drug markets are visible on the buildings in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The disinvestment and business flight in communities across the US attest to the long-term economic damage, while broad inequalities in transport infrastructure and service provision are heavily exacerbated by conflict. Both infrastructure and institutions suffer. Rebuilding these basic services and infrastructure, such as water (Pinera & Reed 2011), roads, communications, policing, health and other factors are all key determinants of a successful urban peace outcome.

Within an evolving regime complex of drug control, the link between drugs, urban development and urban peacebuilding can and should be better explored. The preliminary assessment of the Roi Jai Rak Project experience highlighted in this article offers a vision for making urban development a useful mechanism in addressing synthetic drugs in more developed villages, towns and cities. The article highlights a pragmatic, incrementalistic and problem-solving approach. Learning the lessons from the failures of repressive, war on drugs policies is a key starting point. So too are the successes of development interventions pursued over a long time horizon. The aim of an alternative development program is to provide people with livelihood options and through livelihood options transform people's behavior. The case of Thailand highlights numerous lessons and potential applications of development oriented drug policies to urban settings. The recent Thai experience also highlights important distinctions and adaptations that are required. While it is too early to pronounce on the outcomes of these urban development interventions in a systematic manner, policy is

clearly moving towards a newer, post-drug war, development and peacebuilding orientation. This article has sought to buttress the literature in this field to reflect this change.

## Competing Interests

The paper reflects exclusively the opinions of the author and not those of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) or the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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