

Alternative Development in Afghanistan: The Failure of Quid Pro Quo

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980's opium poppy has played an increasingly important role in the livelihood strategies of rural communities in Afghanistan. As a non-perishable, low weight-high value product, opium is ideally suited to the war-damaged physical infrastructure of Afghanistan. Moreover, as an annual crop, with a relatively guaranteed market, opium has provided a degree of security that more profitable crops, such as fruits and vegetables, cannot offer.

Most importantly, for the resource poor, opium has often provided the only source of credit for the purchase of basic necessities, including food, clothing and agricultural inputs.¹ The labour intensive nature of opium poppy cultivation has created an important source of off-farm income² for those households with insufficient land to satisfy their basic needs. The by-products of opium poppy have also been found to have a high use-value, in particular opium poppy straw, which has been an important source of fuel in a country where firewood has become increasingly scarce.

The result has been a proliferation of opium poppy cultivation, increasing both in extent and location. For instance, in 1994, the first year in which the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) conducted its Annual Opium Poppy Survey in Afghanistan, opium poppy was found in only 55 districts in 8 provinces. By 2000, opium poppy cultivation had expanded to 123 districts in 22 provinces.

Since 1989, there have been a series of development interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Yet despite these efforts, observers have become accustomed to increasing levels of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan over the last ten years. The recent ban on opium poppy cultivation imposed in Taliban controlled territory has confounded these expectations. In Afghanistan, the Taliban authorities have clearly succeeded where alternative development has failed.

Currently there is some debate over the sustainability of the ban. The hardship endured by many former opium poppy cultivating households certainly raises questions over whether the ban can be sustained without substantial external assistance. The continued conflict and the concomitant need for conscripts and financial resources, factionalism, and the growing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, may all serve to weaken the Taliban's resolve.³

It has been argued that without considerable development inputs and a framework of governance in Afghanistan the current low level of opium poppy cultivation cannot be sustained. Indeed, many of the conditions that have made opium poppy such an attractive crop to households across Afghanistan remain intact.

Whilst clearly an important pre-requisite to effective drug control, the commitment of the relevant authorities to enforce a ban on illicit drug crop cultivation, has not proven sufficient to produce a sustainable reduction in coca, opium poppy or marijuana cultivation in other source countries. Development interventions that address the motivations and circumstances that influence households in their decision to cultivate opium poppy are also required.

This *Paper* seeks to explore the conditions required for a sustainable reduction in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, drawing on the lessons learned from the experience of alternative development in Afghanistan and, where relevant, other source countries.

The first section of the *Paper* documents the cumulative experience of alternative development in Afghanistan over the last decade, drawing on a body of internal and external reviews. It highlights the strategy that alternative development has adopted and the results achieved whilst working in such a difficult environment.

The second section considers the concept of alternative development and the role it plays in influencing households in their decision to cultivate illicit drug crops, referring to the experience in Afghanistan and other countries. It suggests that there is a need to develop a more strategic approach to alternative development based on a clearer understanding of the different variables that influence household drug crop cultivation and what combination of actions might best affect them. It concludes that greater refinement is required if alternative development is to prove an effective instrument for both drug control and conventional development objectives.

The third section of the *Paper* highlights how Afghanistan remains anomalous with reference to other source countries due to the 'failed state' that currently prevails.⁴ The absence of macro socio-economic policies, the necessary human and financial capital, and all but the most basic state administration, clearly has an impact on the sustainability of alternative development efforts that are traditionally implemented through state institutions. The *Paper* argues that within this environment alternative development is inherently constrained and, as such, until such a point when governance is restored, its role is restricted to one of strategic presence and lesson learning.

The *Paper* concludes that whilst short and medium term assistance can address some of the resource gaps that households are experiencing due to the loss of opium, it cannot address the more fundamental structural reasons behind the proliferation of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in the last decade. It suggests that there is a need to recognise that social and political stability, as well as wider economic growth, are essential preconditions for eliminating opium poppy cultivation on a sustainable basis in Afghanistan.

Experience has clearly shown that there are few short-term remedies in the area of illicit drug crop cultivation. It is unlikely that Afghanistan will prove to be the exception. As such, there is a need to develop a longer-term approach for addressing the drugs issue in Afghanistan, an approach that is firmly located within a strategy for restoring governance and civil society to the country.

2. A Decade of Alternative Development in Afghanistan

In the last decade a number of development interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation have been implemented in Afghanistan. Clearly, given its mandate, UNDCP has been the major protagonist in this work. However, other non-

governmental development organisations and United Nations (UN) agencies have also been actively involved in implementing projects that, whilst not primarily drug control projects, have sought to reduce opium poppy cultivation as a positive externality of the development process.

The accumulated experience of these interventions provides an important body of knowledge that can inform future initiatives aimed at producing a sustainable reduction in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. This section synthesises the various reviews of these projects sponsored by both implementing and funding agencies. Given the scale of their involvement and the number of internal and external reviews commissioned, this section focuses on the interventions implemented by UNDCP whilst drawing on other agencies interventions, where possible.

2.1. Afghanistan Drug Control and Rural Rehabilitation Programme, 1989-1996

UNDCP's initial supply reduction initiative in Afghanistan began in June 1989. The Programme, the Afghanistan Drug Control and Rural Rehabilitation Programme (ADCRP), was prompted by concerns that a return of large numbers of refugees might lead to a significant increase in opium poppy cultivation. The Programme consisted of both supply and demand reduction elements and was implemented on a cross-border basis from Peshawar by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

The Programme was part of the international rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and was designed to act as flexible umbrella for the identification, formulation and implementation of drug control activities.⁵ It was revised a number of times and finally extended until March 1996 by which time its cumulative budget was US\$9.2 million.⁶

The programme consisted of over 200 sub-projects scattered across the major opium poppy growing provinces of Badakhshan, Helmand, Kunar, Nangarhar and Qandahar. In each of the provinces a variety of different activities were undertaken across a range of sectors including agriculture, livestock, health, education, income-generation, water and sanitation and infrastructural works.

Sub-projects were implemented by over 40 different international and national Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and were typically undertaken in partnership with local communities. The Programme stipulated that in each village in which assistance was provided a '*poppy clause*' had to be signed by the local community. This clause committed the community to cease opium poppy cultivation and had to be signed prior to the start of project activities.

Reviews of the programme and its sub-projects by UNDCP and other agencies have suggested that the enforcement of the '*poppy clause*' was inherently problematic and potentially harmed the relationship between local communities and development organisations.⁷ In practice, this meant that non-compliance with the '*poppy clause*' rarely led to the termination of project activities, raising questions over its value-added. Perhaps of greater concern was the claim that the clause was actually counter-productive, leading to a situation where Afghan communities were increasingly using

the threat of opium poppy cultivation as a means of extracting development assistance from the international community.⁸

Concerns were also raised regarding the disparate geographic and strategic nature of the Programme's activities.⁹ In particular, analysts suggested that little consideration was given to how project activities would contribute to a reduction in opium poppy cultivation in a specific area.¹⁰ Indeed, project activities were typically identified on the basis of the clear needs for rehabilitation and reconstruction in areas in which opium poppy was cultivated.

It would seem that the underlying assumption behind these interventions was that a limited restoration of the local socio-economy in return for a commitment from local communities in the form of the '*poppy clause*' would be sufficient to reduce opium poppy cultivation. Unfortunately, little consideration was given to the motivations and factors that influenced household opium poppy cultivation and how interventions might be best placed to address them. The impact of the macro-environment on opium poppy cultivation was viewed purely from the perspective of the role of local commanders in enforcing compliance with the '*poppy clause*'.

ADCRP was also constrained by funding and management problems.¹¹ Moreover, some donors questioned the efficacy of funding UNDCP to undertake what appeared to be conventional rural development projects that did not comply with the specialist nature of the agencies mandate.¹² The monitoring of sub-projects was considered particularly problematic given the geographical coverage and the large number of sub-projects being implemented.

Ultimately, the programme was viewed as playing an important role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan but its impact on opium poppy cultivation was considered marginal.¹³ The Programme was closed earlier than planned due to funding problems.

2.2. The Afghanistan Pilot Programme: The Opium Poppy Reduction Project, 1997-2000

After the closure of ADCRP it was not until March 1997, that UNDCP launched its new Pilot Programme in Afghanistan. This Programme comprised of four interdependent projects: (i) Capacity Building for Drug Control (C26); (ii) the Drug Control Monitoring System (C27); (iii) the Poppy Crop Reduction Project (C28) and; (iv) the Drug Demand Reduction (C29). A fifth element aimed at addressing the law enforcement aspects of drug control was postponed due to the prevailing circumstances in Afghanistan at the time.

The Poppy Reduction Project (C28) represented the largest element of the programme in terms of resources, comprising US\$10.5 million of a total planned programme budget of US\$14.5 million.¹⁴ Recognising the criticism that the activities implemented under ADCRP had been unfocused, C28 was restricted to only four target districts. Three of the districts, Ghorak, Khakrez, and Maiwand, were located in the southern province of Qandahar, whilst the fourth district, Shinwar was located in Nangarhar province in the eastern region. The rationale for selecting target districts in both the south and east of the country, as opposed to just one region, was that such

an approach gave UNDCP a strategic presence in each of the major opium cultivating regions, allowing scaling-up to occur once UNDCP had accumulated sufficient experience of 'best practice'.¹⁵

The project undertook a range of different activities aimed at replacing the income derived from opium poppy with licit alternatives. Whilst C28 included many of the elements common to alternative development projects implemented in other source area, it also included a number of provincial level interventions aimed at broadening the geographic impact of the project, as well as negotiating a provincial level ban on opium poppy cultivation in Qandahar.

Whilst the planned budget for project activities was US\$6.5 million, the actual or committed expenditure over four years up to December 2000 was just under US\$3 million.¹⁶ Typically, these activities were implemented through sub-projects undertaken by both international and national NGOs, as well as para-statal organisations, such as the Drug Control and Coordination Units (DCCUs) and University faculties. In total over 200 sub-projects were implemented in the four target districts covering activities such as community benefit, irrigation rehabilitation, agriculture, and income generation.

The project was based on an approach of conditional development, where a given amount of assistance was provided on the basis that opium poppy would be eliminated from the target districts over a four year time period. This was formalised in the Drug Control Action Plans (DCAPs) that were signed by the local authorities and representatives of the local communities. In an attempt to ensure that the local authorities and communities honoured their commitment, future project assistance was made contingent on phased schedules of reductions in opium poppy cultivation, which were detailed in the DCAPs.

Based on the level of opium poppy cultivation in 1997, the year in which the project began, Shinwar experienced a 12% reduction in opium poppy cultivation between 1997 and 2000, Ghorak a 60% reduction, Maiwand a 22% reduction, and Khakrez an 11% increase in opium poppy cultivation. According to the revised DCAPs, which used 1998 as a base year, all four districts witnessed a reduction in opium poppy cultivation between 1998 and 2000: 5% in Shinwar, 49% in Ghorak, 60% in Maiwand, and 61% in Khakrez. Unfortunately, the final review concluded that the results in the three districts in Qandahar province were attributed to the drought and not to the efforts of C28.¹⁷

From its inception until its early closure in December 2000, C28 underwent four separate reviews. Each of these reviews, whilst focusing on different elements of the project,¹⁸ highlighted a number of common areas of concern. Indeed, it is perhaps surprising that many of the issues of concern raised in the initial UNDCP/Donor Appraisal Mission in November 1997 are not only cited in each of the subsequent reviews but are also referred to in the final Impact Assessment Report in November 2000.¹⁹ These reviews provide an important body of analysis for future supply reduction interventions in Afghanistan.

Of primary concern to each of the reviews was the overall strategy of the project. The lack of detail on the role of opium poppy in livelihood strategies, the uncertain socio-

economic and political environment, as well as good development practice, all dictated that any intervention aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan would need to be flexible and process orientated, allowing lessons learned during implementation to inform project strategy. For this reason the programme in general, and C28 in particular, were designed as a pilot programme. Indeed, the objective of C28 was '*to develop and implement replicable methodologies for achieving progressive reductions in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan through sustainable rural development activities*'.

Yet in practice, the project adopted a more output-orientated model of implementation and found it difficult to adapt to a changing body of knowledge based on experience and applied research.²⁰ The DCAPs in particular were seen as a constraint on the pilot nature of the project²¹ and a blunt instrument for the delivery of conditional development.²² The process by which the DCAPs were derived was also seen as incongruous with the pilot nature of the project and its participatory ethos.²³

Perhaps, most importantly, the absence of a clear understanding of the different motivations and factors that influence household opium poppy cultivation, and how these differ by socio-economic group, adversely affected the selection of project activities and, ultimately, their impact on both drug control and development objectives. For instance, the justification of provincial-level interventions, given their budget and distance from target areas, was seen as particularly problematic from a drug control perspective.²⁴ The project was also considered particularly weak in its attempts to address the needs of women²⁵ despite the important role they play in opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.²⁶ Moreover, wealthier households, who are less dependent on opium poppy, were found to have accrued the greater proportion of project inputs, raising questions over the cost-effectiveness of interventions.²⁷

There was also a consensus that the project's time frame was too ambitious for the elimination of opium poppy from the target districts.²⁸ Indeed, the experience of alternative development in other source countries has shown that the elimination of opium poppy cultivation could not be expected, in the four year time frame stipulated by the project without imposing considerable hardship in the target areas. The difficult environment of Afghanistan, with the ongoing conflict, weak state institutions and the absence of civil society, merely served to increase the time that would be required to achieve the intended results. In practice, the short time frame and an over-emphasis on the elimination of opium poppy cultivation as the project's indicator of success, ultimately led to the neglect of the lesson learning objectives of the project.

It would seem that despite its pilot nature and lesson learning objectives the project reverted to an approach not dissimilar to ADCRP. The *quid quo pro* approach of the DCAPs did little to address the different reasons why households cultivated opium poppy.

The absence of a clear understanding of the multi-functional role of opium poppy in livelihood strategies prevented the project developing a clear and coherent strategy with targeted and phased interventions that could influence households in their decision to plant. As such, the DCAPs became a forum for the local authorities, the communities and the project to negotiate the quantum of assistance to be provided in

exchange for reduction targets.²⁹ Ultimately, as with its predecessor, the programme approach was found to differ little from conventional rural development projects in Afghanistan.³⁰ The Programme was closed earlier than planned due to funding problems.

2.3. The Experience of other Agencies

From 1990 to 1991, the Narcotics Awareness and Control Project (NACP) was implemented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on a cross-border basis. This project initially provided assistance to areas under the control of local commanders who were committed to reducing opium cultivation. However, efforts to encourage crop substitution were curtailed in early 1991 for procedural and legislative reasons.³¹ Subsequently the project was cancelled in December 1991.

More recently, Mercy Corp International, a US based NGO, has implemented a number of interventions aimed at reducing opium poppy cultivation in Helmand province. Initially, these interventions were cast in the form of crop substitution. However, with increased USG support in 1998, MCI began a two-year project that combined crop substitution with rehabilitation work on the Boghra Canal. Unfortunately, despite a commitment from the local population to abandon opium poppy, cultivation increased in the target area in 1999. Consequently, the USG ended its support for the project earlier than planned.

In reality, the project's goal of reducing opium poppy cultivation within the target area by 80% within a two-year time frame was somewhat ambitious. Furthermore, given the role opium poppy plays in providing access to credit, particularly for the resource poor, the provision of alternative cash crops and improved irrigation was a necessary but not a sufficient condition to produce a sustainable reduction in opium poppy cultivation. Clearly, the commitment of the authorities to enforce a ban on opium poppy in the target area, in accordance with the agreements reached with the local communities, was also required.

A number of other NGO's and UN agencies, such as Madera, the Agha Khan Foundation and UNDP, have also undertaken more conventional rural development projects in opium poppy producing districts that have sought to reduce opium poppy cultivation as an externality of the development process rather than as a primary goal. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain reviews of this work. It is worth noting that these projects may provide a useful insight to the role conventional development projects can play in reducing drug crop cultivation, as well as a possible basis for a comparative analysis of the efficacy of the different approaches used.

3. Alternative Development: A Blunt Instrument

As the experience in Afghanistan reveals, alternative development interventions have typically sought to reduce illicit drug crop cultivation through a range of different activities, including agricultural extension, agro processing, the construction of social

and physical infrastructure, and in some cases the provision of micro-finance and non-farm income opportunities. The overall emphasis of alternative development interventions has been to replace the income derived from illicit drug crops with licit alternatives.

For many observers from the development assistance community, there has been little discernible difference between the activities implemented under the auspices of alternative development and those undertaken by the typical rural development programme, implemented by a variety of national, multilateral and non-government organisations across the globe. This perception, combined with a tendency for reductions in illicit drug cultivation in one area to be accompanied by increases in opium poppy and coca cultivation in a neighbouring area, has led many observers to question the value-added of alternative development as a concept.

Yet, alternative development projects have been associated with reductions in illicit drug crop cultivation. Thailand and Pakistan, in particular, have highlighted what can be achieved over time. Opium poppy cultivation in Thailand is now at nominal levels after over 30 years of alternative development initiatives. In Pakistan, opium production has fallen from 800 metric tons in 1979 to almost zero in 2000, after the implementation of a series of alternative development projects in the North Western Frontier Province between 1976 and 2001. However, there are questions over whether these results could have been achieved in a more cost-effective manner and in particular with less negative consequences for the more vulnerable and the environment.³²

But it is worth recognising that currently alternative development lacks a clear and coherent strategy. Most notably, alternative development has failed to recognise the different motivations and factors that influence households in their decision to cultivate illicit drug crops and ignored the fact that these motivations and factors differ across households from different socio-economic groups. Indeed, drug crop producers have typically been treated as a homogenous group and little consideration has been given to the multi-functional role that drug crops play in livelihood strategies in source areas, providing access to land, labour and credit, as well as providing an important source of off-farm income opportunities for those with insufficient land to satisfy household basic needs.³³

This lack of analysis at the micro-level has meant that there has been an inadequate understanding of how the particular composition of activities offered by alternative development projects will actually influence households in their decision to cultivate illicit drug crops.³⁴ Generally interventions have not been targeted to address the specific reasons why particular socio-economic groups engage in illicit drug crop cultivation but have taken a more formulaic approach, providing a relatively standard package of activities to what are considered a relatively standard set of beneficiaries.

Consequently, as the Afghanistan experience highlights,³⁵ it has typically been the wealthier members of communities, who are less dependent on opium as a means of accessing resources, which have benefited disproportionately from alternative development projects. This has had an impact on the achievement of both drug control objectives, due to the relocation of more marginal drug crop producers to neighbouring areas,³⁶ and the broader development goals, such as equity.³⁷

Moreover, in the 1990's alternative development came to borrow elements of *best practice* from conventional development initiatives, such as *gender*, *poverty* and *community development*, without explaining why these issues are relevant to the overall drug control objectives of the intervention. Consequently, despite the strategic importance of addressing the needs of both women and men from both drug control and conventional development perspectives, an issue such as gender has remained largely marginal, limited to mere components of interventions rather than an integral part of the underlying strategy of alternative development interventions.³⁸

Similarly, whilst project documents often refer to the *poor* or the *poorest*, these groups are rarely defined and the political and economic structures that create and maintain poverty are generally not addressed in project design and implementation. Without this analysis the most vulnerable are typically neglected during project implementation to the detriment of both development and alternative development objectives. The failure to explain the significance of these more conventional development issues from a drug control perspective has led many donors and drug control analysts to question the efficacy of their inclusion in drug control projects at all, despite their strategic importance.

The most intractable problem for the implementation of alternative development, however, continues to be its relationship with eradication and law enforcement. It is this area, more than any other, which has made many from the development assistance community decidedly nervous. In particular, there is no real sense of the timing and interface between alternative development and eradication efforts. Indeed, whilst there is a general agreement amongst analysts that eradication has a role to play in raising the risks associated with illicit drug crop cultivation, there is considerable debate, and very little clarity, over the conditions that determine when eradication is necessary.

Consequently, in some countries, such as Bolivia and Peru eradication has been a prerequisite for development assistance during the early 1990's.³⁹ In others, such as Laos, eradication is only just being considered after some areas have received almost ten years of assistance. In Pakistan, eradication has been scheduled on a valley basis, taking little account of the benefits households have received from alternative development interventions and how these differ by socio-economic group, gender, and location.

Indeed, whilst the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem indicated that eradication is not appropriate until '*alternative income opportunities [have been created]*',⁴⁰ the level and type of income remains undefined. Despite this definition eradication has been conducted prior to these conditions being met. Furthermore, applied work has raised questions over whether '*an income approach*' is appropriate given the integral role that illicit drug crops play improving access to natural, social, human, physical, and financial assets.

Again, the lack of clarity over this important aspect of alternative development would seem to lie with a poor understanding of the different variables that influence household drug crop cultivation and what combination of actions might best affect them. The result is neither law enforcement or development interventions have been

timed or targeted so as to increase the risks households associate with illicit drug crop cultivation and reduce the risks of pursuing licit livelihoods.

Ultimately, alternative development projects have proven structurally weak. An over emphasis on aggregate reductions in drug crop cultivation as the indicator of project success has led to the neglect of the processes by which households move from illicit to licit based livelihood strategies. Consequently, the causal relationship between the development outputs of these projects and their drug control goals, the *change model*, has remained loose and undefined.⁴¹ Whilst alternative development has achieved some success it remains a blunt instrument. Greater refinement is required if it is to prove an effective instrument for both drug control and conventional development objectives.

4. Alternative Development: A Strategic Role in Afghanistan

It should be of little surprise that alternative development interventions have proven unsuccessful in Afghanistan over the last decade. Quite apart from the blunt nature of the tool, it is important to remember that Afghanistan is the anomaly with regard to illicit drug crop cultivation.⁴² In other source countries, opium poppy and coca are cultivated in areas that are isolated from the state and its functions. Typically, these areas are characterised by their proximity to international borders, difficult terrain, and poor physical infrastructure, as well as, ethnic and, sometimes, military conflict.

Government presence in these areas, in the form of civic administration, the provision of social services, such as education, health and welfare, and initiatives aimed at promoting economic and social development, is largely nominal. Whilst there may be a limited military or police presence in source areas it is generally insufficient to enforce the rule of law given the degree of antipathy towards the state amongst the local population.

Furthermore, these areas are typically isolated from the wider national economy; the state's economic policies fail to penetrate, markets are fragmented, and the price of food items, basic commodities and agricultural inputs are considerably higher than in neighbouring regions. The absence of the rule of law and the potential for violence mitigates long-term investment by either the public or private sector.

The cumulative impact of this socio-economic, political, and administrative isolation is that many households in these areas pursue livelihood strategies that are largely independent of both the nation state and the wider national economy. Opium and coca, given their illicit nature, their high weight to volume ratio, and their non-perishable products, are some of the few commodities whose markets flourish in such an environment.

Alternative development projects have served to increase the livelihood options of households by absorbing these marginal areas into the wider nation state, not just physically through the provision of roads, but culturally and linguistically through the provision of education and the application of civil law. And it is important to recognise that this is not just law with respect to illicit drug crop cultivation but the protection of life and property – fundamental conditions for promoting economic

growth and improving licit livelihood opportunities. As such, alternative development projects have facilitated the penetration of source areas by both the public and private sector.⁴³

Yet, in Afghanistan there is no state to create the environment required for economic growth and the promotion of civil society. The absence of macro socio-economic policies, the necessary human and financial capital, and all but the most basic state administration, has constrained the impact of alternative development efforts. Implementation has been particularly problematic due to the shortage of viable state institutions, which ultimately has impacted on the sustainability of project benefits.⁴⁴

Attempts to increase the livelihood options of households cultivating opium poppy in Afghanistan have been hampered by the lack of a supportive policy and institutional framework, including insufficient public investment in major infrastructure, the absence of formal credit institutions, restrictive border controls, and an unfavourable climate for private investment. The international development community, for all its efforts, cannot, and should not, be a substitute for a functioning public administration with coherent policies.

Without the necessary policy and institutional environment for governance, alternative development interventions in Afghanistan have typically sought to reach agreements with local and regional power brokers. The result has been opium poppy cultivation has become a commodity to be traded, not just as a source of illicit opiates, but as a source of development assistance and kudos for those acting as interlocutors with the international community. The results have proven unsustainable.

Indeed, some might argue that the recent ban on opium poppy cultivation is not an indication of improved governance in Afghanistan but of a more comprehensive and organised attempt to obtain assistance from the international community. There is certainly little sense that the Taliban have considered the full implications of the ban and what is required to address the resource gap that the rural population is currently enduring due to the loss of opium.

The absence of governance in Afghanistan in comparison to other source countries is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that opium poppy has typically been cultivated on prime agricultural land in some of the most accessible areas in the country. Whilst there is currently a ban in force on opium poppy cultivation, there is little evidence to suggest that the policy framework and functioning civil administration required for alternative, or indeed conventional, development, exist. In these conditions, alternative development can only serve a strategic role, ensuring a continued presence in the country, and cannot deliver sustainable reductions in opium poppy cultivation.

5. Conclusion

Alternative development has had a limited impact on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Problems of project design and implementation have been compounded by the absence of the necessary institutional and policy framework required to promote licit livelihoods opportunities. In this environment even if reductions in

opium poppy had been achieved they would have proven relatively limited in scope and largely unsustainable.

Clearly, the elimination of opium poppy cultivation in Taliban controlled territories in the 2000/01 growing season represents an unprecedented achievement from a drug control perspective. However, it remains to be seen whether the current ban on opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan will remain in force. Whilst short and medium term assistance can address some of the resource gaps that households are experiencing due to the loss of opium, it cannot address the more fundamental structural reasons behind the proliferation of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan in the last decade.

Within the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions in Afghanistan, attempts to eliminate opium poppy cultivation will be constrained by the short term, low risk, coping strategies that households adopt to deal with growing uncertainty, and vulnerability to stresses and shocks. Despite the ban many of the conditions that have made opium poppy such an attractive crop to households across Afghanistan remain intact.

There is a need to recognise that social and political stability, as well as wider economic growth, are essential preconditions for eliminating opium poppy cultivation on a sustainable basis in Afghanistan. The elimination of opium poppy cultivation will require an *'enabling environment'* that can establish the institutions required for formal governance and civil society, as well as promote licit on-farm, off-farm and non-farm income opportunities. Consequently, it is impossible to isolate illicit drugs from the wider issue of governance in Afghanistan; the two are intrinsically linked and, as such, will require a clear and coherent strategy to address them.

¹ See Strategic Study 3: The Role of Opium as a Source of Informal Credit. (Islamabad, UNDCP, 1999).

² *'Off-farm income typically refers to wage or exchange labour on other farms (ie within agriculture) ... whilst non-farm income refers to non-agricultural income sources'* See Ellis *'Livelihood Diversification and Sustainable Livelihoods'* in Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: What Contribution can we make?, (London, DFID, 1989).

³ See The Impact of the Taliban Prohibition on Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan, 28 May 2001. Unpublished Report by Donor Mission.

⁴ UNDCP, Illicit Opium Production in Afghanistan and its Wider Regional Implications, February 2001, p. 1.

⁵ UNDCP, Afghanistan 1996-1998. Programme Concept Note, 1996, p. 4.

⁶ UNDCP, Drug Control Monitoring System (AFG/96/C27). Project Document, 1997, p. 13.

- ⁷ 'It is important that contracts, whether with individuals, commanders or shuras, should set realistic terms of compliance. Eradication of opium cultivation is obviously the objective but if this is not a realistic short-term expectation then contracts must not require it. If unrealistic targets are set then they will inevitably not be achieved and the agency is placed in the position of either having to halt the programme or of having to ignore the requirements of its own contracts; with all the detrimental consequences this entails.' See Afghanaid, Opium Crop Substitution Programme, Achin District, Nangarhar: Evaluation Report, 1989, p. 22-24
- ⁸ 'It would appear that in the absence of law enforcement, placing "conditions" on "development" issues can in fact be counter-productive and lead to what has come to be termed "reverse conditionality", whereby the Afghan community starts to make its own demands, which if not met will lead then to grow poppy. There is a danger that the whole question of relationships between the UN and the Afghan communities concerned being reduced to a fruitless round of demand being countered by demand. Sufficient evidence exists of this occurring, to warrant a complete review of the whole issue.' See UNDCP, Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May-July 1995, p. 24.
- ⁹ 'It is a disturbing fact that as yet there is insufficient evidence to state positively that the programme of alternative development had made any reduction to opium production ... Projects undertaken in the provinces have been scattered and cannot be linked to any specific reduction.' UNDCP, Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May-July 1995, p. 23-24.
- ¹⁰ 'The mission believes that the present strategy of UNDCP funding a mix of small sub-projects, which are similar to the inputs of other agencies, is counterproductive. It is impossible to identify the impact of these sub-projects on drug control' UNDCP, Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May-July 1995, p. 28.
- ¹¹ 'A small budget and a lack of consistency in strategy and backup from Vienna Headquarters have not helped UNDCP's credibility on the ground. There have been several changes in policy and funding has been received erratically in the field which has made planning difficult.' See Review of British Aid to Afghanistan by Mukesh Kapila, Guy Templar and Elizabeth Winter. Emergency Aid Department/ Western Asia Department, Overseas Development Administration, June 1995, p.1.
- ¹² 'UNDCP's development projects appear no different from the numerous other small-scale inputs (schools, irrigation, health centres etc) being made by the NGO's and other development orientated UN agencies. The latter agencies at least have experience in and some comparative advantage in development. It would not appear to be cost effective to fund UNDCP as an intermediary to build schools etc. when they simply contract out to others to do the work. We are also concerned that excessive UNDCP attention to a myriad of projects distracts attention away from the area of comparative advantage which relate to their mandate as a specialist drugs agency. In contrast we were impressed by UNDCP's work in information on and advocacy for drugs problems and their support for drugs detoxification programmes, This reflect their specialist knowledge and unique role in these areas which are worthy of future targeted UK support'. Ibid, p. 52.
- ¹³ 'The ADCRP programme has had little impact on reducing the production of opium and its derivatives. It has however assisted overall rehabilitation'. UNDCP, Assessment Strategy and Programming Mission to Afghanistan, May-July 1995, p. 25.
- ¹⁴ The original budget for C28 was US\$10.5 million. Following the UNDCP/Donor Mission the project was revised in 1998 with a budget of US\$13.5 million. Whilst this revision became the working document for the project, it was never formally approved.
- ¹⁵ See Options for Alternative Development Methodologies in Moving from a Pilot Project To a Wider Programme of Alternative Development in Afghanistan by Angus Geddes July 1999, p. 2.
- ¹⁶ See Project Impact Report: Impact Assessment of Project C28, November 2000 by Peter Sloane, p. 10.
- ¹⁷ 'Opium poppy reduction was significantly reduced in all project target districts in the 1999-2000 winter season, particularly in Qandahar. However, it is the severe drought in these areas which has been the major influence on the fall in planted area and yield.' Sloane, 2000, p.3.
- ¹⁸ UNDCP Afghanistan Programme Appraisal Mission - Aide Memoire, November 1997; A Review of Strategy in Shinwar District UNDCP Afghanistan Programme, September 1999 by

Douglas Mackrell; *An Assessment of Social Impact and Community Development*, October 2000 by Rita Gebert; and *Project Impact Report: Impact Assessment of Project C28*, November 2000 by Peter Sloane.

¹⁹ *'In November 1997, within four months of project commencement a Programme Appraisal Mission was fielded by UNDCP. The Mission team included six representatives of donors and nine UNDCP staff members. In respect of Project C28, the mission Aide Memoire made four recommendations, being to: (i) ensure that activities reflected the complexity of the livelihood stems, rather than purely technical interventions (ii) view the project as an opportunity to experiment and learn lessons (iii) revise the time frame and phasing to take account of the long-term nature of the desired changes; and (iv) produce realistic, phased district work planes which include targets, indicators and monitoring methods for establishing viable and sustainable alternatives to poppy. These were sound recommendations which remain entirely valid with the benefit of hindsight. Unfortunately none of them were ever followed'*. Sloane, 2000, p. 27.

²⁰ In 1997, the UNDCP/Donor Appraisal Mission recommended that *'UNDCP and the programme management should establish mechanism to ensure that approaches, methods and lessons learned by UNDCP funded projects and other aid agencies on the ground are fed back into policy and strategy planning by UNDCP'* (p.5). By 1999, Mackrell commented that *'As matters stand, however it is clear that there are obstacles to effective project cycle management in the UNDCP Afghanistan programme, severely limiting the processes of learning coming up and strategy recommendations going down. These obstacles severely limit the achievement of one of the projects most important objectives (or outputs), namely the development of "replicable methodologies to eliminate poppy cultivation" which is a fundamental strategy issue'* (p. 24). In her review, Gebert (2000) indicated that *'Learning, aimed at adaptation should have been at the top of the project agenda. Instead the project focused most of its staff's time and energy in the technical surveying and administration of a myriad of sub-projects, primarily aimed at infrastructure rehabilitation. By the end of over three years of implementation there seems to be few clear lessons at village level regarding viable alternative development strategies.'* (p. i). Whilst Sloane (2000) concluded that *'Implementation has been much more subjective than should have been the case because the Programme has not used its own information to better understand what it is doing'* (p. 27).

²¹ Mackrell (1999) recommended that *'UNDCP should identify and pursue options which avoid a blueprint top-down approach and create better conditions for strategy evolution in a timely response to lessons learned during implementation. The current format of the DCAP is more or less a blueprint. UNDCP should consider reforming its institutional culture in order to allow such a strategy evolution in response to lessons learned during implementation, rather than through other means'* (p. 7). Gebert (2000) concluded that *'The result is a one size fits all approach by which the differences among the districts and villages have not been adequately considered'* (p. 6). Sloane (2000) reported that *'There is little sign of genuine experimentation with different approaches, or the documentation of lessons learned'* (p. 28).

²² Gebert (2000) concluded that *'Poppy conditionality clauses which are not based on livelihood analyses and which are not based on the reality of the most opium dependent socio-economic groups, cause more harm than good. They are observed in breach'* (p. 27). Sloane (2000) suggested that *'The reduction in area set out in the DCAPs were highly arbitrary. A time limit of four years was adopted with zero production as the end result. A series of steps were written in the document with no consideration given to what might be needed to enable farmers to meet these goals. No such goals will be achieved unless they represent a practical possibility to the households who must reduce their poppy area. How the project actions will impact on the economy of the various poppy producing household groups should be thought-through so that project activities support the ways in which these households can respond positively to any poppy reduction goal'* (p. 30).

²³ Mackrell (1999) commented that *'The participatory planning element of the strategy was flawed. The time allocated to the process was far too short and the resources limited to achieve the necessary quality of outputs, and it was considered a one off exercise rather than a sustained participatory approach. The shuras and focus groups established were not sufficiently representative of the communities involved in poppy cultivation, and the process of selection and prioritisation of sub-projects become confused. In particular villagers apparently gained the*

impression that all of their identified needs would be met by the project. Some villagers referred to the "UNDCP shura" in discussions with the consultant' (p. 12). Gebert (2000) concluded that 'Further more with unrealistic eliminations schedules, superficially conducted needs assessments and instant and unaccountable shuras, the Action Plans themselves were based on a foundation of "quicksand". Despite some revisions, this is essentially where they have remained' (p. 16). Whilst Sloane (2000) reported that 'Considerable effort with a wide range of stakeholders was put into fine-tuning project objectives and activities through the planning workshop. A similar effort was made in preparing the DCAPs. However, at no stage did anyone consult the farmers whose actions in reducing the area planted to poppy were supposed to bring about the ultimate outcome of project activity' (p. 28).

²⁴ 'The dilemma for the project is that while regional-level investments may produce sound long term benefits, it may be hard to convince shuras or farmers in Ghorak, Khakrez and Maiwand that investments in far-away Qandahar provide any reasons for them to give up poppy production. Such regional level investments significantly benefit the presumptive authorities. In the case of Qandahar, they receive the revenue from the sale of electricity..... The restoration of the Qandahar power supply used nearly 14% of the project funds spent in the province but had little impact on the farmers of Ghorak, Khakrez and Maiwand. Restoring the Nangarhar canal was essential to enabling farmers in Shinwar to contemplate alternatives to poppy production. However this absorbed more than 20% of the project budget for Nangarhar and benefited many more non-target households than target ones. The selection criteria for target districts need to consider the implications of any possible provincial or regional level activities and how these might be linked to poppy production responses in these districts. Demanding responses from target area farmers, when others get the same benefit for no commitment will not be successful.' See Sloane, 2000, p. 29.

²⁵ In 1997, the UNDCP/Donor Appraisal reported that 'It is unclear if women have been consulted about need and or priorities or been informed about results' (p. 12). In 1999, Mackrell commented that 'Women are considered only as a special add on WID component which itself is conditional on demand. This approach effectively excludes 50% of the direct beneficiaries from consideration in the majority of project activities..... Women have strong and various opinions on drug issues, and some influence in decisions about opium production. It is likely that gender considerations in project strategy would have improved project impact' (p. 15). Gebert (2000) concluded that 'Moreover, no attempts were made to discuss the problems and needs with women, thus sidelining their concerns at the very beginning of the programme' (p. 14).

²⁶ This was formalised in Strategic Study 6: The Role of Women in Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan, (Islamabad, UNDCP, June 2000).

²⁷ Gebert (2000) commented that 'Poorer owner cultivators and sharecroppers have benefited from the project to a far lesser extent than the richer, even absentee landlords, with the former having no prospect of being able to substitute any other mix of crops and activities for opium poppy' (p. 5). Sloane (2000) suggested that 'While orchard development can make a genuine contribution to the reduction of land committed to opium, it has little or no real impact on the households which produce more than half the opium' (p. 17).

²⁸ The UNDCP/Donor Appraisal recommended in 1997 that UNDCP should 'Revise the time frame and phasing to take account of the long term nature of the desired changes' (p. iii). In 1999, Geddes suggested that 'Overall a major socio-economic change with the replacement of poppy cultivation as the centre piece of the livelihood strategy must be achieved. The time required will vary with the local circumstances but an eight year programme with target of poppy elimination after six years is expected to be realistic' (p. 16). Later in 1999, Mackrell concluded that 'Even the reviewed poppy ban schedule, intending elimination of poppy in four years by incremental reductions, appears to be very optimistic' (p. 12). In 2000, Gebert stated that 'It is a clear conclusion from this and other alternative development projects that a time frame of under seven of eight years are too short to achieve lasting effects '(p.5), whilst Sloane indicated that 'The core issue in the alternative development approach is the time allowed to change people's attitudes and behaviour. This process is neither simple nor quick. Any project must have sufficient financial resources and the will to stick it out for some years' (p. 3).

²⁹ Gebert (2000) reported that 'It seems that NGOs never tried (were never instructed) to make explicit the links between problems (causes) and potential activities, and how activities could

represent "viable and alternative" means of livelihood for different socio-economic groups in the villages. At present, the villagers do not mention that the activities being implemented are leading to reduced poppy cultivation; they have only stressed how important opium poppy is to them as a cash crop. The villagers generally mention that because they have an agreement with UNDCP, they should reduce opium poppy cultivation.' (p. 15) Whilst Sloane concluded that 'In pursuit of the conditional development approach, the project drew up DCAPs with specific area reduction targets and clauses to the effect that assistance would be withdrawn if the targets were not met. These plans were endorsed by the presumptive authorities. However, despite evidence that the area reduction targets have been clearly breached in every year, no assistance has ever been withdrawn. There is no evidence that the project has rigorously or consistently linked its development inputs to farmers individually or collectively reducing poppy plantings. Neither is there any evidence to suggest that had the project withdrawn its assistance that communities would have responded positively in poppy reduction terms' (p. 27).

³⁰ Sloane (2000) concluded that '...the project has largely become a district wide, village level agricultural development project with little to distinguish it from the many other such projects implemented by international agencies and NGOs' (p. 27).

³¹ 'The efforts to encourage opium crop substitution were discontinued in early 1991 because of differing interpretations of foreign assistance legislation and absence of congressional approval. The entire project was cancelled in December 1991 for similar reasons.' Cited in Opium Subsector Survey submitted to the Office of the A.I.D. Representative for Afghanistan Affairs, under contract No. 306-0205-C-00-9385-00, Delivery Order No. 23, by Nathan Associates Inc. and Louis Berger International Inc. p. 10.

³² A fact finding mission to Dir District Development Project (DDDP), Pakistan in December 2000 reported that 'The elimination of opium poppy has left the poor with a considerable resource gap. With improved infrastructure and linkages to markets in other parts of the country, traders are now offering advances on other crops, in particular onion. However, onion requires irrigation and, given the bulky nature of the final crop, improved roads and transportation links. For those households on more marginal land in the higher valleys onion is not an alternative source of credit. The impact of the elimination of opium poppy on the poor has been aggravated by the reduction of off-farm income opportunities within the district. As a labour intensive crop, particularly during the harvest period, opium poppy provided an important source of income for agricultural labourers within the area and in neighbouring districts. The shift to less labour intensive crops and the absence of non-farm income opportunities within the district would appear to have increased the rate of seasonal migration, particularly amongst poorer households who would not seem to have access to more permanent and remunerative opportunities in the Gulf states. Much of the seasonal work obtained by the poor is reported to be insecure and low waged, such as labouring in the construction, sugar cane and timber industries in other parts of Pakistan. Migration would also seem to have increased the burden of women both in agricultural production and within the household.' Department for International Development (DFID). Unpublished Report.

³³ For more details of the motivations and factors that influence household opium poppy cultivation, and how these differ by socio-economic group see UNDCP's Afghanistan Strategic Studies Series.

³⁴ The Report of the First Phase Evaluation of the Drug Control and Development Project, Wa Region of the Shan State, Myanmar (AD/RAS/96/C25), April 2000 reports that 'It appears that there is not yet a complete understanding of the economic survival strategies employed by the various socio-economic groups which grown opium poppy, which knowledge should be fed back into the project's implementation strategy. Further analysis of this issue is needed'. p. 12.

³⁵ A fact finding mission to Dir District Development Project, Pakistan in December 2000 reported that '...despite the important role that opium poppy plays in providing access to credit and off-farm income opportunities to the poor, the priorities of both phases of DDDP have been with improving on-farm income opportunities. Indeed, there is no provision for credit in the DDDP project and less than 1% of the total budget was allocated to vocational training for the poor. As such, it would seem that as with the cultivation of opium poppy, poorer households have derived fewer benefits from the interventions of DDDP and have in fact been further marginalised by the elimination of opium poppy.' DFID Unpublished Report.

³⁶ See 'Alternative Development: The Modern Thrust of Supply Side Policy' by David Mansfield in the United Nations Bulletin on Narcotics, Vol. LI, Nos. 1 and 2, 1999. Footnote 35 and 36.

³⁷ In Myanmar, a UN mission to the eastern Shan state in 1991 stated that 'in the visited villages under the poppy eradication programme the mission got the impression that most households were facing extreme poverty and starvation. In the first year of the programme, they were able to survive with the relief grain distribution and by selling their livestock. In the second year they do not know how they will survive. This situation affects all households but especially the lower stratum of families. One of the consequences of the lack of income is that it makes more difficult the purchase of fertiliser for the rainy seasons food crops, accelerating the downward spiral of impoverishment'. Cited in Gtz (1998) Drugs and Development in Asia: A background and discussion paper. Gtz:Eschborn.

³⁸ For instance, The Report on Guidelines for Best Practice on Gender Mainstreaming in Alternative Development by Evelyn Bazalgette et al (2000) states that 'Since the early 1990s, most of UNDCP Alternative Development Projects have included a gender component or women-related activities. In most projects gender aspects were mentioned under 'Special Considerations' and projects included special outputs and activities for women, such as income generation, health care and drug prevention activities.While the current policy environment advocates "involving women", it does not necessarily promote gender mainstreaming in policy development or programme and project planning and implementation' (p. 7). See also Interim Reports on Bolivia (p. 7); Peru (p. 7 & 22); Pakistan (p. 17-18); and Laos (p. 21).

³⁹ The initial design of the Poppy Reduction Project (C28) in Afghanistan also required opium poppy to be eradicated prior to the provision of development assistance. However, this was subsequently changed due to the concerns of some of the donors.

⁴⁰ Resolutions Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem, New York 8-10 June 1998. Measures to Enhance International Cooperation to Counter the World Drug Problem, (E) Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and Alternative Development, para. 31.

⁴¹ For instance, the Report of the First Phase Evaluation of the Drug Control and Development Project, Wa Region of the Shan State, Myanmar (AD/RAS/96/C25), April 2000 reported that 'However, it must be stated that at the moment the Project is at a critical point in terms of its future direction and the achievement of the overall objectives expected in the original project formulation. This critical juncture has been brought about by the inherent flaws in its design; a lack of guidance and direction at a level above the CTA; a propensity to do whatever appears contingent to assuage and cultivate the Wa authorities; and a deviation away from the original project phasing and workplan which looked upon the first year of the project as a planning, establishment and assessment period' (p. 14). The Evaluation of the UNDP/UNDCP programme in Baalbeck-el Hermel in Lebanon, March/April 2000, stated that 'The initial conception of the programme was vague and overly ambitious and lacked a single programme document for all activities. The lack of annual workplans has not facilitated a clear understanding of the programme goals and achievements'. p. 6.

⁴² The only other alternative development intervention that could be seen as comparable with that of those implemented in Afghanistan is the current initiative in the Wa Region of the Shan State, Myanmar. This project is located in an area that is run on a semi-autonomous basis since the cessation of hostilities between the Wa United State Army (WUSA) and the Government of the Union of Myanmar (GOUM). The result is the area is administered by the WUSA with little relationship to the national institutional structure. See Report of the First Phase Evaluation of the Drug Control and Development Project, Wa Region of the Shan State, Myanmar (AD/RAS/96/C25), April 2000, p. 5.

⁴³ 'When looking at the potential of alternative enterprises to opium poppy cultivation, it is important to bear in mind that the development of cash-crop farming and other income generating activities in the highlands have benefited greatly from the rapidly expanding agro-based economy in northern Thailand. Without a striving private sector, which offers new technologies and inputs for diversified production systems as well as markets, this fast expansion of alternative highland development would not have been possible.' Hagan Dirksen (2001) 'Considerations and Lesson from Implementing the Thai-German Highland Development Program (TG-HDP) in Northern

Thailand'. Unpublished Paper presented at the Regional Seminar on Alternative Development for Illicit Crop Eradication. p. 9.

⁴⁴ Similarly the evaluation of the alternative development project in the Wa Region, Myanmar, reported that '*A second shortcoming is that the project design did not adequately reflect the political and institutional situation in the project area. In reality the GOUM has only limited presence and institutional structure in the Wa areas, while the Wa Authority itself has only rudimentary civilian institution, and is almost devoid of a cadre of trained, professional individuals who can act in the capacity of a civil administration, or provide the specialised expertise in health, education, agriculture or infrastructure maintenance needed to both implement the project and ensure a sustainable post-project impact. This is especially true for the public health, education and livelihood components for which the trained personnel, local funding base and institutional structure for project implementation, not even to mention post-project sustainability, barely exist.*' See Report of the First Phase Evaluation of the Drug Control and Development Project, Wa Region of the Shan State, Myanmar (AD/RAS/96/C25), April 2000, p. 6.