

Editorial: the way forward for alternative development

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Introduction

We are pleased to introduce this special issue of the *Bulletin on Narcotics*, which is devoted to the theme of alternative development. In addition to this introduction, it consists of five academic articles that provide important insights and experiences regarding the current state and future directions of this development-driven strategy. The articles were selected following an open call for submission announced in December 2015. Some of the articles offer a programmatic perspective, distilling lessons learned and best practices from projects and programmes implemented in various countries and contexts. Others present a more general analytical perspective, examining some of the principles and conceptual underpinnings of alternative development.

This special issue is part of a broader process that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has undertaken to develop a thematic field of research on alternative development. In its publication *World Drug Report 2015*, UNODC included a thematic chapter on alternative development,¹ the aim of which was to review the evidence accumulated through the implementation of projects and programmes in countries with large amounts of illicit drug cultivation and analyse the application of the alternative development approach in different contexts. The *World Drug Report 2015* demonstrated that alternative development is in a constant state of flux and is now far more than what Alimi's article in this issue describes as projects grounded on "monocausal schemes of context analysis" and "a one-size-fits-all basis".

¹ *World Drug Report 2015* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XI.6), chap. II.

The *World Drug Report 2015* documented how alternative development interventions have evolved over the years, reaching a multidimensional approach beyond the single focus on reducing illicit drug cultivation, while recognizing that adequate funding and political support bring the long-term socioeconomic and environmental development needed to sustain the reduction of income from illicit crops. The success of alternative development is increasingly a result of the piloting of new and often more sophisticated approaches by governments and other actors involved in its implementation.

This special issue of the *Bulletin on Narcotics* intends to elaborate on that thematic chapter of the *World Drug Report 2015* by showing in more detail the evolving debate around alternative development and the new ways in which it is implemented in practice.

Sustained efforts to exchange best practices and lessons learned

Especially in recent years, there has been a sustained effort at both the national and the international level to evaluate programmes and to exchange best practices and lessons learned during international workshops and expert group meetings.² In 2002, the International Conference on the Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation, held in Feldafing, Germany, provided an important impetus to this process. More recently, the International Conferences on Alternative Development, held in 2012 and 2015, have provided a practical technical platform dedicated to discussing different scenarios and resolving some of the conceptual challenges that are addressed in this issue. Even more recently, the discussions taking place at the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem in 2016 resulted in operational recommendations on alternative development.³ The table below summarizes the main alternative development-related events since 2002.

²See UNODC, “Alternative Development Index”, *World Drug Report 2015*. Available at www.unodc.org/wdr2015.

³Outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Our joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem” (General Assembly resolution S-30/1, annex).

Selected international alternative development-related events since 2002		
<i>Event</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Date</i>
International Conference on the Role of Alternative Development in Drug Control and Development Cooperation	Feldafing, Germany	7-12 January 2002
International workshop on development in a drugs environment: beyond alternative development?	Berlin	29 May-1 June 2006
Open-ended intergovernmental expert working group meeting on international cooperation on the eradication of illicit drug crops and on alternative development	Vienna	2-4 July 2008
Global Partnership on Alternative Development regional seminar: Sustaining Opium Reduction in South-East Asia: Sharing Experiences on Alternative Development and Beyond	Chiang Mai, Thailand	15-17 December 2008
International Seminar Workshop on Sustainable Alternative Development	Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, Thailand	6-12 November 2011
High-level International Conference on Alternative Development	Lima	14-16 November 2012
Fourth German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)/Transnational Institute (TNI) South-East Asia Informal Drug Policy Dialogue, on the future of alternative development in South-East Asia	Bangkok	18-19 December 2012
Joint UNODC/BMZ expert group meeting on outreach to new stakeholders in the field of alternative development	Berlin	11-12 November 2013
Second expert meeting in the framework of the Russian Federation presidency of the Group of Eight, on alternative development for drug producing regions	Moscow	25 March 2014
Joint BMZ/Open Society Foundations (OSF) Conference on exploring the land-drugs nexus	New York	19-21 October 2014
Expert group consultation meeting on the alternative development chapter of the <i>World Drug Report</i>	Berlin	18 November 2014
Joint UNODC/BMZ/German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) expert group meeting on alternative development in the framework of the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in 2016 and the post-Millennium Development Goals debate	Berlin	19-20 November 2014
Second high-level International Conference on Alternative Development	Bangkok	19-24 November 2015

Joint UNODC/BMZ/GIZ/Mae Fah Luang Foundation expert group meeting on taking development seriously: alternative development in the process of the special session of the General Assembly in 2016	Bangkok	25-27 November 2015
Group of Seven Rome-Lyon group expert meeting on alternative development in the framework of the security-development nexus	Berlin	25 June 2015
High-level panel discussion on alternative development and the Sustainable Development Goals	New York	20 April 2016
Alternative development: new approaches and key elements for the post-special session of the General Assembly framework	New York	20 April 2016
Round table on alternative development; regional, interregional and international cooperation on development-oriented balanced drug control policy; addressing socioeconomic issues	New York	21 April 2016
Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission expert group meeting on comprehensive and sustainable alternative development	Lima	18-19 May 2016
High-level panel discussion at the sixtieth session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs on human security and the rule of law: alternative development's contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Vienna	14 March 2017

One of the most important results of these endeavours has been the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2013 and by the General Assembly in December 2013.⁴ The Guiding Principles represent a step forward, as they are based on a broad participatory process and are grounded in decades of experience and learning. They also represent a more balanced conceptualization of alternative development, synthesizing ideas and working towards a conceptual consensus through expert discussions and assessments. As Alimi points out in this issue, the fact that the Guiding Principles were adopted by the General Assembly is important, as it endows them with greater political legitimacy.

The section on alternative development in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly has further pushed the multidimensional approach of alternative development, recognizing the value of implementing “strategies aimed at alleviating poverty and strengthening the rule of law, accountable, effective and inclusive institutions and public services

⁴United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (General Assembly resolution 68/196, annex).

and institutional frameworks” to address illicit drug cultivation and production.⁵ The Assembly also strengthened an evidence-based approach to alternative development by recognizing the importance of research to “better understand factors contributing to illicit crop cultivation” and to support programmes through impact assessments.⁶

These policy documents set the standards for, and guide broad national policies on, alternative development. A research agenda such as the one produced by the *World Drug Report 2015* can guide operational strategies by identifying successful approaches to, for example, increasing food security, strengthening cooperatives, developing sustainable value chains, promoting agro-industry, marketing alternative products or increasing access to land.

The limited size and scope of alternative development

Despite the evidence demonstrating successes in alternative development,⁷ the combined efforts of alternative development around the world still amount to only a very small percentage of overall development assistance. Between 2002 and 2013, alternative development-related disbursements of countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) accounted for \$245 million per year, the equivalent of just 0.2 per cent of global development assistance. By 2013, alternative development assistance had fallen back to 0.1 per cent of overall development assistance.⁸ Since the adoption of the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem, commitments of OECD countries have declined by 71 per cent.⁹ This seems to suggest that the political impetus behind more technical exchanges of best practices and lessons learned is not matched by a financial stimulus.

While the *World Drug Report 2015* clearly showed the global downward trend in international support, that abstraction becomes a more concrete reality when alternative development projects are implemented in the local contexts of countries and regions. It is useful, therefore, to look more closely at the example of a single country. The two figures below depict the situation for Afghanistan, showing both the global commitments and global disbursements related to alternative development between 2001 and 2015.

⁵General Assembly resolution S-30/1, annex, para. 7 (a).

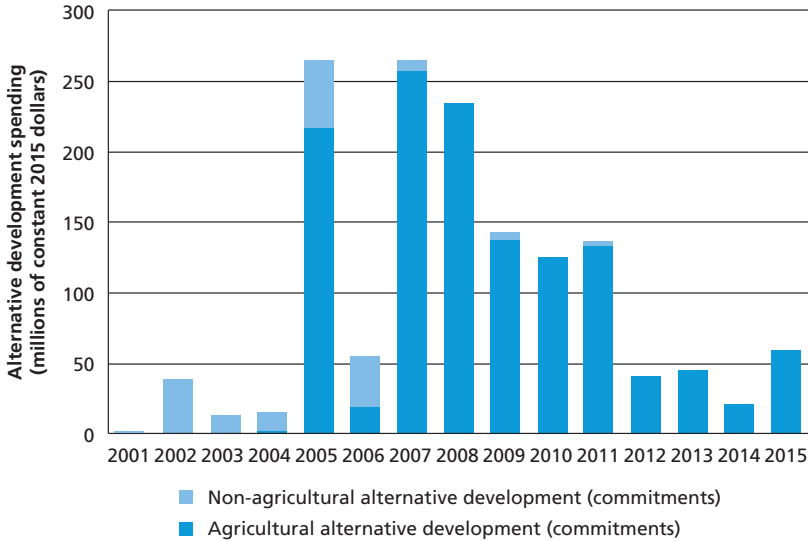
⁶Ibid., para. 7 (g).

⁷See *World Drug Report 2015*, chap. II.

⁸*World Drug Report 2015*, p. 84.

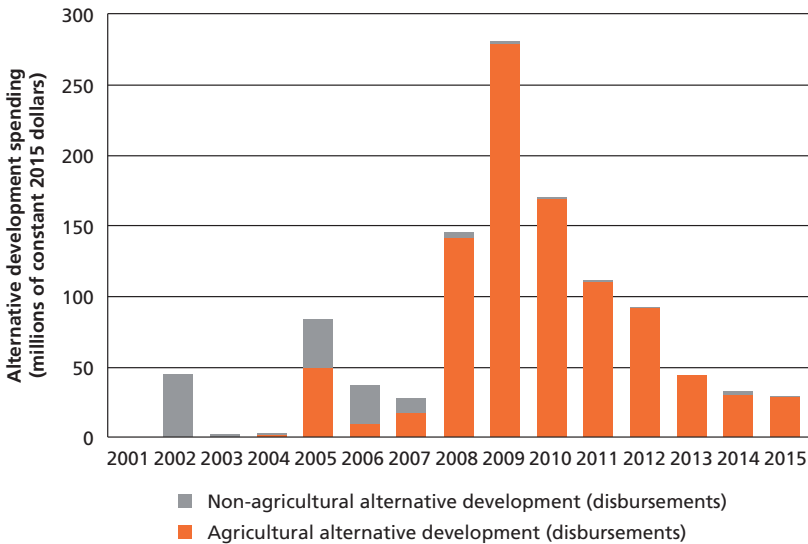
⁹Ibid., p. 118.

Figure I. Global commitments related to alternative development in Afghanistan made by donor countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001-2015



Note: Data extracted on 3 May 2017.

Figure II. Global disbursements related to alternative development in Afghanistan made by donor countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001-2015



Note: Data extracted on 3 May 2017.

Apart from the downward trend after 2007 (for commitments) and 2009 (for disbursements), two other interesting developments can be seen from the figures. Firstly, it took at least until 2005 before the international community started providing substantial funding for alternative development in Afghanistan, four years after the Bonn Conference of 2001, which marked the starting point of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Secondly, there seems to have been a considerable delay between the first serious commitments (2005) and the first substantial increase in disbursements (2008). That delay is even more remarkable when one considers that the Afghan Government had launched its first National Drug Control Strategy in May 2003.

The overall downward trend of assistance for alternative development in recent years runs parallel to a broader pattern of international disengagement from Afghanistan, marked particularly by a security transition process (2011–2014) and the end of the International Security Assistance Force mission in 2014. It is difficult, however, to equate this disengagement with donor fatigue. At the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October 2016, international donors pledged \$15.2 billion to assist Afghanistan until 2020.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is not clear how much of those funds will be spent on alternative development programmes. Some ongoing projects will continue for the next few years, including the alternative development components of the Kandahar Food Zone programme, a five-year, \$45.4 million project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that will continue until the end of August 2018, and the USAID-run Regional Agricultural Development Program, consisting of regional five-year projects with a total budget of more than \$300 million, focusing on increasing the food and economic security of farmers through strengthened value chains.¹¹

While the rapid decrease in financial commitments to alternative development does not bode well for future disbursements, Afghanistan, having received unprecedented levels of international support in a rather short time, has fared relatively well compared with other countries. But even in Afghanistan, support for alternative development has been slight in comparison with other types of counter-narcotics-related assistance. The average funds committed by international donors to agricultural alternative development in Afghanistan was \$64 million per year in the period 1998–2008 and \$85 million per year in the period 2009–2013.¹² Although these amounts may not include a considerable sum of either unregistered spending on alternative development or funding coming from non-OECD

¹⁰BBC News, “Afghanistan aid: donors promise \$15.2bn in Brussels”, 5 October 2016. Available at www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37560704.

¹¹United States, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (30 October 2016), pp. 139–141.

¹²World Drug Report 2015, p. 86.

countries, they are still far less than the total annual spending on counter-narcotics programmes, which, for the United States alone, was roughly \$566 million per year between 2002 and 2016.¹³

Towards realistic expectations

Alternative development project cycles are often short, while the challenges underpinning illicit drug economies require long-term solutions. What single alternative development projects can achieve is contingent on the size and scope of the investment. Most of the evidence collected for the *World Drug Report 2015* documents the benefits of local interventions for rural communities, but it also shows how national large-scale development investments ultimately address illicit cultivation in a more structural way (in Thailand, for example). In looking for ways to make alternative development interventions more effective and more impactful, it is important to consider alternative development as part of a broader package of development and good governance initiatives that can decrease dependence on illicit crop cultivation over time.

When it comes to measuring progress, it is clear from both policy documents and project implementation on the ground that the impact of alternative development is no longer evaluated merely in terms of drug-control indicators.¹⁴ But the inclusion of other important indicators, such as those related to human development or human security, brings new challenges to alternative development, not only in project design and implementation, but also in monitoring and evaluation. As alternative development constitutes only one of the national strategies applied within a broader policy framework, which contains elements ranging from eradication, conflict resolution and strengthening of the rule of law to overall socioeconomic development, it may be very hard to isolate the exact contribution of alternative development to or its direct impact on, for example, the quality of life of rural communities in a certain area.

Linking drugs and development policies

The research undertaken for the *World Drug Report 2016* explored the linkages between the drug problem, drug policies and sustainable development.¹⁵ The conclusion drawn is that a dual track is needed: specialized drug

¹³As of 31 December 2016, the total spending of the United States on counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan was \$8.5 billion since 2002, which amounts to about \$566 million a year. The total figure is taken from Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (30 January 2017), p. 186.

¹⁴*World Drug Report 2015*, chap. II, sect. G, pp. 109-114.

¹⁵*World Drug Report 2016* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.XI.6).

interventions in synergy with general development investments. This dual track has been well embraced in the alternative development approach. Incorporating alternative development into broader development, including in rural areas, has clear benefits, but the more it becomes embedded in wider approaches and strategies, the more it can lose the specificity of development efforts needed in areas with (or at risk of having) illicit drug cultivation. The *World Drug Report 2016* presents examples of drug and development policies that had unforeseen counterproductive effects on each other because they were designed and implemented in isolation.

What alternative development offers to development strategies is a set of specialized thematic and operational development interventions in symbiosis with the aim of addressing multiple challenges not only related to dependence on illicit crops, but also associated with the illicit economy, such as violence, insecurity and the presence of criminal organizations or illegal armed groups. The common denominator of those problems is that building trust with the local communities is often essential before any development-driven intervention can be sustainable.

In her article for this *Bulletin*, Alimi explores the concept of alternative development as a viable policy entry point for bringing sustainable development options to areas affected by illicit drug cultivation. Her article particularly highlights the divide between what she calls drug policy actors and development-policy actors. She points out that while the concept of alternative development intrinsically calls for close cooperation, for various reasons, the gap between those two communities has never been bridged. As a result, there seems to have been no constructive debate on how alternative development can be most successful as a complementary instrument within broader development efforts. The tide may be turning, however, as Alimi also points out that recent developments, particularly the discussions leading to the special session of the General Assembly in 2016 and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, could help to better connect drug and development policies in a common policy setting.

Often criticized, and sometimes even delegitimized, the concept of alternative development is at a crossroads for Alimi. The recent efforts observed may have critical implications that would mean strengthening the evidence base and setting out clearly the ambitions and limitations of alternative development as an element of a broader development approach. Such future directions of alternative development, however, require a global, multi-stakeholder reflection on how a development approach to drugs could be the way forward. That entails a shared understanding of root causes, driving factors and possible solutions to illicit drug cultivation on the part of all agencies working on sustainable development in contexts where illicit drug cultivation, production or trade plays a role. Together, they need to work

towards the same overarching goal, which is to contribute to an enabling environment in which economic and social development can create conditions for decreasing, in the long term, the dependence on illicit drug crops in a sustainable way. According to Alimi, ambitions seem to be renewed to establish a common normative foundation that would allow the better integration of alternative development into a sustainable development approach to solving the world drug problem.

The practical implementation of the principle of shared responsibility

At the heart of the broad patterns of collaboration needed for alternative development to contribute effectively to this enabling environment lies the principle of shared responsibility to help address some of the driving factors of illicit economies, including lack of production-related infrastructure, basic social services, agricultural expertise and markets.

In this *Bulletin*, Kamminga and Zorro-Sánchez approach the principle of shared responsibility from two perspectives: firstly, as an ethical approach to challenges related to the world drug problem; and secondly, as a more practical commitment that a large variety of actors need to display as part of their social responsibility. While the former perspective explains why shared responsibility is so important, the latter creates more understanding about what it actually means in practice. The article analyses what the principle of shared responsibility could look like in terms of practical forms of collaboration that could help to create the above-mentioned enabling environment for reducing dependence on illicit drug crops.

Kamminga and Zorro-Sánchez particularly stress the need for specific commitments from a large number of partnerships between different actors and at different levels. It is especially in such partnerships—for example, between producer organizations and the private sector—that shared responsibility becomes embodied in practical and meaningful arrangements such as those linking local farmers' associations with international companies and markets. If this practical translation of the principle of shared responsibility does not occur, the gap between the international level, where, at forums such as the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the General Assembly, the principle is continuously stressed as the basis of all international cooperation, and the national level, where alternative development interventions take place, will not be narrowed.

For the moment, however, the embodiment of shared responsibility in practical arrangements remains very limited. A clear example is access to national and international markets. As Kamminga and Zorro-Sánchez explain, neither free trade nor preferential trade has so far succeeded in

strengthening the marketing of alternative development products. They argue that a broad-based dialogue should be started with the private sector, with governments and with international institutions such as the World Trade Organization that have influence on access to markets and the regulation of international trading schemes. As long as alternative development products are rarely marketed at the international level, it will remain difficult to establish an international movement around alternative development similar to those for fair trade and organic production.

Linking alternative development and land

The *Bulletin* article by Grimmelmann, Espinoza, Arnold and Arning subsequently addresses the link between illicit drug-crop cultivation and land rights. Building in part on a previous desk study¹⁶ with case studies from Afghanistan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Myanmar and Peru, the article further explores access to and ownership of land as key determining factors when it comes to small-scale farmers' livelihoods and their decisions to grow certain crops or to invest in their lands. It shows how the successful contribution of alternative development interventions may not only depend on the project-related components, but rather also on more structural enabling conditions.

While further research is required, the authors argue that, to be successful and sustainable, alternative development programmes need to adequately address land issues and integrate or connect to land policies and the promotion of access to land via land-use planning, land registration and a functioning cadastral system. This is also in line with the Guiding Principles on Alternative Development, which recommend that countries “take into account land rights and other related land management resources when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating alternative development programmes, including those of indigenous peoples and local communities, in accordance with national legal frameworks.”¹⁷ The authors conclude that alternative development could benefit from existing guidelines related to land governance and titling of land, such as the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* of the Food and Agriculture Organization.¹⁸

¹⁶Nike Affeld, “The nexus between drug crop cultivation and access to land: insights from case studies from Afghanistan, Bolivia, Colombia, Myanmar and Peru” (Eschborn, German Agency for International Cooperation, September 2014).

¹⁷General Assembly resolution 68/196, annex, appendix, para. 18 (*kk*).

¹⁸Food and Agriculture Organization and Committee on World Food Security, *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (Rome, 2012).

Country case studies: Afghanistan and Bolivia (Plurinational State of)

After those three thematic articles, the *Bulletin* concludes with two country-specific articles. Firstly, García-Yi explores the case of Afghanistan. On the basis of field research, she evaluates farmer and community characteristics that promote resilience to opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. A particularly noteworthy aspect of that research is that it evaluates large-scale field survey data from different regions of Afghanistan using quantitative techniques. The analytical results of the article provide additional evidence that mostly supports previous qualitative and narrative findings on the determinants of illicit crop cultivation, many of which have been criticized for having a limited scope (e.g., because of the small number of interviews and the focus on only a few regions).

In this regard, the results constitute an important addition to the body of independent evidence needed for sound decision-making. García-Yi's article explores the tensions between the often short-term investments associated with alternative development and the necessary long-term support that is required for the permanent transition from illicit drug cultivation to more diverse livelihoods. In that light, true resilience to opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan can occur only if farmers are able to withstand strains and shocks without recurring to illicit cultivation. For the moment, many farming communities involved in alternative development projects are still "living on the edge", which means a relatively small push can send them back to illicit crop cultivation.

Another important aspect of García-Yi's analysis is that she frames alternative development activities as resilience-based interventions that are suitable for contexts of protracted crisis. This entails integrating farmer livelihood strategies, vulnerabilities and uncertainty with broad-based rural development to obtain sustainable reductions of opium poppy cultivation. The key element of these strategies is building confidence and ensuring farmers that they can sustain themselves even despite the recurrence of external shocks. But it is equally clear from her analysis that alternative development alone cannot create this enabling environment in which farmers become resilient. The evidence of her research also suggests that improvements in public services and governability are needed to turn poppy communities, over time, into non-poppy communities, and to keep communities poppy-free for longer periods of time.

Grisaffi, Farthing and Ledebur explore the case of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. They argue that the country's "coca yes, cocaine no" policy provides valuable insight into the benefits of a sustainable livelihoods approach to supply reduction without prior forced eradication of drug crops. While acknowledging that the policy has inevitable limitations, its focus on

the social welfare, human rights and economic stability of coca-farming families has proved effective and sustainable in diversifying the economy and fostering political and economic stability. In this case, key success factors have been strong social organizations and the direct, meaningful participation of communities and grass-roots organizations such as the coca growers' unions in finding more effective and sustainable approaches to drug control.

The community coca-control strategy builds on factors that are unique to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, including the strong agricultural unions present in coca-growing regions and the nation's long history of traditional coca use. Still, key elements of the programme, such as grass-roots control, lack of conditionalities for assistance and a focus on human development, provide valuable lessons that could be implemented elsewhere. More broadly, the authors argue that farmers can reduce their reliance on planting coca and other crops used for illicit purposes only if their economic security is treated as a priority.

What both country cases have in common is that they confirm that there is still only limited knowledge about the key drivers of illicit drug cultivation within the broader context of socioeconomic development, governance and conflict. Much more research, project evaluation and learning is needed, not only to find ways to improve the effectiveness of alternative development projects but also to make sure that such interventions do no harm. As García-Yi explains in her article, the latter aspect has been mostly overlooked so far but is related to an imperfect understanding of causalities. If alternative development interventions wrongly attribute causes and motivations to the growing of coca or opium poppy, they might even contribute to more illicit cultivation. Similarly, short-term or quick-fix solutions might ultimately increase farmers' vulnerabilities and might also result in prolonging or even expanding illicit cultivation. Lastly, while alternative development interventions need to be designed with a solid understanding of local conditions, they also need to be flexible so that they can adapt easily to changing contexts.

Conclusion

The country case studies presented in this special issue show that there are opportunities to improve alternative development and come up with more impactful and sustainable solutions, but they also highlight how complex the local contexts can be in areas where alternative development is implemented. That demanding reality means that there can be no single blueprint for successful and sustainable alternative development interventions. Nevertheless, there may be common elements that can be found in many alternative development projects, including, for example, community participation, producer associations or cooperatives, value-chain development

and agro-industry. The *World Drug Report 2015* grouped such common strategic elements into six categories: (a) economic and infrastructural components; (b) political components; (c) organizational components; (d) social components; (e) environmental components; and (f) a focus on women.¹⁹

But the way these common elements come together to produce successful and sustainable outcomes will often differ from community to community, from region to region, and from country to country. This calls for targeted, in-depth research in areas where alternative development is planned, but it also emphasizes the value of exchanging best practices and lessons learned. A “technical research agenda” for alternative development requires much more research to be carried out and much more interaction among practitioners and experts from diverse backgrounds, including development, drug policy, governance, human rights, security, trade and the environment. This is the only way to bridge both the knowledge gap and the conceptual divide that continue to prevent alternative development interventions from realizing their full potential.

This thematic *Bulletin on Narcotics* aims to provide a small but substantial contribution to the evolving debate on alternative development and related discussions such as those focused on shared responsibility, land governance or the Sustainable Development Goals. Within the broader framework of the international workshops and expert group meetings taking place on alternative development, it intends to stimulate further academic research and informed discussions on how alternative development can be most effective, how it can be better integrated within broader development and governance efforts, and how it can be linked more strongly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹⁹ *World Drug Report 2015*, chapt. II, sect. F, pp. 97-109.