

# ***OPIUM IN INDIA: decline of licit and rise of illicit cultivation and CHALLENGING THAI style Alternative Development***

## ***Introduction<sup>1</sup>:***

Alternative Development (AD) has been assumed for the past three decades to be the best policy for reducing the production of illicit crops.

At UNGASS 2016, AD will be an important issue as is indicated by the World Drug Report 2015. It has only two sections and one of them is entirely on AD, an unprecedented step. Though, there is insufficient evidence to justify faith in this strategy to contain illicit crops.

This paper describes India's history and extent of licit and illicit poppy cultivation, its uses, its laws, attempts at reducing illicit poppy cultivation, and development- not AD- in illicit crop areas. It analyzes AD's implementation during Thailand's long tryst with it, and questions its relevance for India, which could be the third largest illicit poppy cultivating country.

In a paper called Drugs and Drug Policy in Thailand published by Brookings<sup>2</sup> James Windle has described how Thailand has peacefully tackled its problem of illicit opium poppy cultivation. This popular view is questioned here.

I shall explain why AD cannot succeed in India. Development in India did not favour only the poor poppy cultivators but the entire impoverished area in which the former were in. Surprisingly, this development resulted in some traditional illicit poppy growing areas in the North East (NE) of India increasing opium production.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Emily Crick of Bristol University and James Windle of the University of East London for their many questions that improved the paper. Emily's help continued with patient and meticulous editing.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/WindleThailand-final.pdf?la=en>

There is illicit opium poppy cultivation in 10 of India's 36 states, and in some it is exclusively commercial. Small tracts in each cultivating district are eradicated, but poppy cultivation continues to stubbornly expand. Some of it is for the cultivator's consumption, but most is for profit.

To describe implementation of development policies in all illicit opium growing areas in India would far too many words. I shall describe my experience with illicit poppy cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh (AP) in the North East of India mainly. It was undeveloped three decades ago. Now it is developing quickly, but some of its traditional opium producers have become commercial ones.

Romesh Bhattacharji  
11<sup>th</sup> of November, 2015

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## *Opium in India- licit to illicit, history and tradition, laws and policies:*

India has at least 25000 hectares of illicit poppy cultivation<sup>3</sup>. In 2014 there were 5893 hectares of legal poppy cultivation<sup>4</sup>. In 2000 there were 35,270 hectares that were licensed, and about 2000 hectares of poppy that were illegal. Estimates of India's illicit poppy cultivation are rough as no results from satellite surveys have been released<sup>5</sup>.

There is usually a 20% to 30% diversion from licit opium for illegal use. In good harvest years, in the past, there would be about 20% diversion. Diversion increases to at least 30% in bad years. After such a mammoth decrease in legal cultivation the users tapped illicit cultivation. This is the main reason for the rapid increase in illicit poppy cultivation in India over the past 15 years. UNODC's estimate in 2009 of 70 tons of opium being abused in India is low<sup>6</sup>.

Till 1961 licit cultivation of opium was confined to Himachal Pradesh (HP), Uttarakhand (UTK), Uttar Pradesh (UP), Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Rajasthan. Illicit production of opium in four of the seven states in the North East (NE) of India had not even been heard of by narcotics officials. In 1962 the headquarters of the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) was shifted from snow bound Shimla (HP) to warmer Gwalior (MP). Hitherto licit poppy cultivation in HP and UTK was made illegal. Officials thought that poppy cultivation would disappear. It did not.

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<sup>3</sup> . <http://www.tni.org/files/download/tni-2014-bouncingback-web-klein.pdf> , pg. 19, Table 3,

<sup>4</sup> <http://cbn.nic.in/html/operationscbn.htm> see the Crop Year table

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/india-s-illicit-opium-farms-six-times-bigger-than-estimated/article1-820798.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Global\\_Afghan\\_Opium\\_Trade\\_2011-web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Global_Afghan_Opium_Trade_2011-web.pdf) pg. 65

In addition Bihar<sup>7</sup>, Maharashtra<sup>8</sup>, Kashmir<sup>9</sup>, Jharkhand<sup>10</sup>, Orissa<sup>11</sup> and West Bengal<sup>12</sup> have begun growing illicit poppy exclusively for commercial purposes. Manipur, a Burma bordering state in NE India had traditional illicit cultivation but from 2008 new areas have started commercial illicit cultivation of poppy. Commercial illicit cultivation is increasing so rapidly that people in some states are demanding legalization<sup>13</sup>!

An All-India Opium Conference in 1949 decided that opium use, medical and scientific purposes excluded, was to be banned within ten years. From 1st April 1959 oral consumption of opium was imagined, by a self congratulatory bureaucracy, to have ended. Files showed that from 150 tons of opium issued for oral consumption in 1950 only 2.5 tons were officially issued in 1963. Registered addicts decreased from 200,000 in 1956 to 124,904 in 1963. The ban succeeded reported the then Narcotics Commissioner of India in 1965<sup>14</sup>. He concluded “What is significant is that the new generation is not taking to opium. It is therefore reasonable to expect that at a not too distant date opium addiction would be a thing of the past.” That didn’t happen.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://rt.com/news/india-poppy-opium-cultivation/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c53Ww-HQ8o>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/state/opium-crop-destroyed-in-rajouri/187255.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.news18.com/news/jharkhand/police-suspect-naxal-link-in-cultivation-of-opium-crop-in-dumka-684117.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.dailypioneer.com/STATE-EDITIONS/bhubaneswar/its-a-profit-of-rs-1-cr-per-acre.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://bardhaman.nic.in/poppy.pdf> pgs. 9-16,

<sup>13</sup> <http://manipuronline.com/look-east-policy/notorious-golden-triangle-indias-golden-opportunity/2011/04/03>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin\\_1966-01-01\\_3\\_page003.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1966-01-01_3_page003.html)

The procedure that enabled registered addicts to get opium from the Government till 1959 was called Opium Registry<sup>15</sup>. After 1959 opium addicts never decreased. They procured it deviously. Today users and illicit crops have increased beyond the wildest fears of Indian authorities and the authors of the UN Single Convention of 1961.

Realizing the problem was not going away Opium Registry was restarted in 1971 when about 300,000 people were again registered as opium users so that they could be given opium from Government's stocks. By 2014 less than 900 were still alive<sup>16</sup>. This scheme was perhaps the first recorded use of harm reduction.

Opium Registry did not cover the NE India, which had had opium cultivation and use for centuries. In 1939 a state-sponsored medical treatment scheme for thousands of opium addicts was begun in Assam as part of an Opium Prohibition Campaign. The introduction of the scheme was followed by the closure of 61 opium shops<sup>17</sup>. All this valuable experience was ignored in the rest of the country. Half a century later NE of India would become such an immense narcotics nightmare, that it is now impossible to contain, treat and solve<sup>18</sup> by conventional severity.

In order to comply with the UN Single Convention of 1961 India imposed a severe Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985<sup>19</sup>. Penalties against earlier accepted cannabis and opium use were now so harsh that courts in India were reluctant to incarcerate people. In 2001 some penal sections against users were

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/Opium%20Registry%20workshop.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Only-899-legal-opium-addicts-in-India-RTL-reply/articleshow/19137961.cms>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nmji.in/archives/Volume-25/Issue-5/History-of-Medicine.pdf> by Kawaldeep Kour, Assam, 2011

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/INSA%20ghy%20Conference%20Report.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document\\_id08b2dbdc9ca941d237893bd425af8bfa.pdf](http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_id08b2dbdc9ca941d237893bd425af8bfa.pdf)

softened<sup>20</sup>, but it remains dreadful even after another change in 2011<sup>21</sup>. Illicit cultivation can get a farmer up to ten years in jail and a fine of about \$1500<sup>22</sup>.

These new and severe provisions were in direct contrast to the fact that opium had once been openly used in India for relaxation and medicinal purposes since the middle ages<sup>23</sup>. India has been a traditional cultivator of opium for at least a thousand years. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the Mughal rulers of India would distribute opium to their troops<sup>24</sup>. They also were the first to collect revenue from poppy cultivators<sup>25</sup>.

While smuggling opium to China the British tried for a century to reduce its use in India. Nevertheless, they were considerate of non medical<sup>26</sup> use. This tradition of tolerance was ignored by independent India as it changed its law in accordance with the UN Single Convention of 1961. The result was that the jails filled with users. Yet, use did not diminish and illicit cultivation increased. Even after thirty years, the law in India has been powerless to achieve what it had set out to do in 1985.

In 2004 there were at least 2.04 million opiate users<sup>27</sup> in India and since then their numbers have grown. The number of users of opium and its derivatives could now be higher than 5 million in India<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.antidrugs.gov.il/download/files/indian\\_drug-laws.pdf](http://www.antidrugs.gov.il/download/files/indian_drug-laws.pdf) pg. 2 & 3

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015\\_NARCOTICS-NDPS%20Bill%20as%20introduced%20in%20Lok%20Sabha.pdf](http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_NARCOTICS-NDPS%20Bill%20as%20introduced%20in%20Lok%20Sabha.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [http://dor.gov.in/Punishment\\_for\\_Offences](http://dor.gov.in/Punishment_for_Offences)

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.new1.dli.ernet.in/data1/upload/insa/INSA\\_1/20005af3\\_31.pdf](http://www.new1.dli.ernet.in/data1/upload/insa/INSA_1/20005af3_31.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://cbn.nic.in/html/opiumhistory1.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Mughal Rule in India, Stephen Edwardes, pg 262

<sup>26</sup> Drug Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century, W.B. McAllister, Routledge, 2000, pg. 48

<sup>27</sup> UNODC “Legal and Policy Concerns related to IDU harm reduction in SAARC countries” 2007, pg. 51

<sup>28</sup> <http://alcoholrehab.com/drug-addiction/drug-addiction-in-india/>

The UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs was too optimistic in its scope. Article 49, 2 (d) stipulates that “the quasi-medical use of opium must be abolished within 15 years from the coming into force of this Convention...” Thirty seven years later the 1998 UN General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS), ignoring the abysmal failure of the past aspiration, set 2008 as the next impractical deadline by which to eliminate opium and coca. Despite the failure of such deadlines, the international community remains committed to such impossible goals. Undoubtedly UNGASS 2016 will fix more.

The Ministry of Finance in the Government of India has control over licit opium cultivation and formulates an annual opium policy that specifies how much opium is to be legally produced next year. The Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN)<sup>29</sup> is the direct successor of The Opium Department that was established in 1774. As it is a revenue earning department it has been under the Ministry of Finance since 1949. CBN manages licit cultivation and prevents illicit cultivation of poppy along with the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)<sup>30</sup>, which was carved out from the CBN in 1984, and which is under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Despite the attention from these two specialized agencies illicit poppy cultivation thrives in India, making it perhaps the third largest illicit poppy cultivator in the world.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://cbn.nic.in/> & <http://cbn.nic.in/html/aboutcbn.htm>

<sup>30</sup> <http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/>

## *Illicit cultivation in some areas in India thrives despite development-*

The World Drug Report of 2015 in its large Alternative Development section mentions tourism could be a good source of Alternative Livelihoods (AL)<sup>31</sup>. India has many more, and tourism is not one of them.

India's East Arunachal Pradesh (AP), once a backwater producing opium for personal consumption, now has young people who are working in diverse professions such as academics, architects, aviation, businessmen, bureaucracy, contractors, curators, medical, media, merchants, politics, scientists and traders etc. No one could have foreseen that the families of some of these fortunate people would continue cultivating poppy and on a commercial scale.

In a news report in The Business Week called "The Opium Trail" an Indian Finance Ministry official is quoted as describing "how Thailand's Doi Tung region, once notorious for its opium fields, has been transformed into a floral mountain, thanks to the DTDP initiated by their queen. Today, coffee plantations and botanical gardens have replaced the opium fields."<sup>32</sup> Such ill informed awe has led the Finance Ministry in India to accept the possibility of introducing Alternative Livelihoods<sup>33</sup>.

A traditional poppy cultivating family in the NE of India for example usually has a steep field of half a hectare at most to grow poppy. A garden is a preposterous thought, for flowers can't be eaten nor can they be sold when it takes 3-4 days to truck them to the market. Coffee or tea plantations too are a fanciful idea, as both take years to mature and require a large area to be profitable.

Indian cultivators need faster material progress, and as land can support only a limited number, other means of income have to be found. Education has unleashed

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<sup>31</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, pg. 102

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.businessworld.in/news/agriculture/the-opium-trail/785206/page-3.html> "The Opium Trail"

<sup>33</sup> WDR 2015, pg. 89, Table 13

a slew of careers all over the country and this has drawn many away from agricultural livelihoods.

The Ministry of Finance official quoted above had visited Doi Tung, but not India's illicit poppy growing areas, especially the super abundant ones in the North East. Had he been there, he would have noticed that they are not at all as under developed as had been reported in Government files of 1986 and 1987.

The destitution and misery in the illicit cultivating lands of the NE had stunned eradication officials in the late 80s and early 90s. At that time cultivators in four districts of E. AP were living a worse than subsistence level life. Their flimsy huts were no protection from the wind, rain and cold. If they had two daily meals, one was of herbs gathered from forests, and the other was of Government subsidized rations. They would rise at dawn and sleep at dusk as they had no artificial light.

Arunachal Pradesh government started developing its remotest areas in the late 1980s. By 2000 all districts had banks which gave subsidies readily. Interest free loans for agriculture, higher education, businesses and contracts were just as easy. Agricultural scientists helped with cash crops and fruits. Some beneficiaries have become large exporters of ginger, cardamom, apples and oranges, and consequently very rich. There are dams, solar electricity, all weather roads, schools, colleges, technical training, agro institutes, hospitals, primary health centers and numerous employment opportunities. Investment in the region increased, and so did non agricultural employment. The Government helped young people (the first generation to be educated) to earn more.

Wide spread development that made no distinction between illicit crop cultivators and others, improved life for many. Some villages have become towns. Literacy for both genders was about 56% in 2001. In 2011 it was about 70%<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> North East Resources Data Bank, North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd., Government of India, Guwahati, Assam, <http://databank.nedfi.com/>.

Eradication of illicit crops began in India in 1986, after the tough new narcotics law – NDPS 1985<sup>35</sup>- had banned illicit drug crops. Poppy cultivation was uprooted in mountains of the NW (Uttarakhand) and NE (AP, Manipur and Mizoram) of India. No one was arrested, even though agitated cultivators were violent. Some plants were even left standing so that the cultivators who were users would have some relief.

Despite development illicit poppy cultivation has increased in India.

### *Alternative Development- Reality or a misnomer:*

In a large area, in which most are poor, is it right to develop only that part that has illicit crops? Can poverty have borders? AD and AL are policies that create this distinction without being troubled by the moral dilemma that this bias poses.

AD was first suggested for Iran in the 1930s by the League of Nations<sup>36</sup>. It took several decades to crystallize it into a working option.

UNGASS 1998 defined AD as “A process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures”<sup>37</sup>. It decreed that AD was to be the main method to curtail illicit drug crops, but it was to work in combination with eradication and law enforcement. The dependence on eradication has been stressed in all subsequent UN resolutions<sup>38</sup>.

Let us first see how enormous the task is. In 2013 there were at least 496,463 hectares of illicit cannabis, coca and opium poppy crops<sup>39</sup>, and in 2014 it had

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<sup>35</sup> [http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document\\_id08b2dbdc9ca941d237893bd425af8bfa.pdf](http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_id08b2dbdc9ca941d237893bd425af8bfa.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Windle J, Suppressing the Poppy: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Drug Control, 2015, IB Taurus

<sup>37</sup> <http://unterm.un.org/dgaacs/unterm.nsf/8fa942046ff7601c85256983007ca4d8/609cb6f97e23c42585256a010052e0ef?OpenDocument>

<sup>38</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 68/196, 18<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2013  
[http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug\\_Resolutions/2010-2019/2013/A\\_RES\\_68\\_196.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2010-2019/2013/A_RES_68_196.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> World Drug Report, 2014, pgs. 21 and Annexure I – Table i,

slightly fallen to 494,989 only because of an apparent reduction in cannabis<sup>40</sup>. Illicit poppy cultivation covered 310,891 hectares (ha). These estimates are not at all as precise as they seem. Thousands of hectares of cannabis and poppy cultivation statistics from India alone are missing.

In 2013 eradication got rid of 20,297 hectares of opium poppy<sup>41</sup> and 29,563 in 2014<sup>42</sup>. Most of the eradication was in Myanmar.

By design or neglect precise figures about how many hectares of poppy cultivation made poppy free by AD are not available, but it could not have been more than 20,000 hectares in the *past thirty years*. This figure includes the 6000 hectares or so that were claimed to have been converted to other crops by a successful AD project in the Dir district of NW Pakistan, and a couple of a thousand hectares in Thailand. An analysis of the World Drug Report of 1999 suggests that as illicit cultivation in Pakistan decreased that in the contiguous areas of Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar in Afghanistan increased in the 1990s<sup>43</sup> as people on both sides of the border have filial and linguistic links.

At this rate it will take AD and eradication hundreds of years to contain illicit crops provided the cultivation is considerate enough to remain at today's levels.

Alternative Development is a misnomer. Is it an alternative to development for every one? Reducing illicit crops is too big a task for one or two strategies.

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<sup>40</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, pgs. 57, Annexure I, I,iii & v,

<sup>41</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2014, Annexure I, pg. viii

<sup>42</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2015, Annex 1, pg. vii

<sup>43</sup> UNODC, WDR 1999 Pg. 23, Table 3

## *Why Thailand's Alternative Development cannot be an example?*

From 1852 Thailand, under British pressure, allowed import of Indian opium and continued to do so till the Government licensed drug trade was abolished in 1959<sup>44</sup>. Little opium was produced in Thailand till the 1940s. In “The Peach and the Poppy- The Story of Thailand’s Royal Project Foundation” a graph shows the sudden rise and meteoric fall of opium production in Thailand from 1940 to 1980<sup>45</sup>. From almost nil in 1940 it rose to about 200 tons of opium in 1970 and then dropped to 9 tons in 2000<sup>46</sup>.

Much before AD started in 1988, Thailand’s opium production had come down from a high of 200 tons in 1973<sup>47</sup> to 17 tons in 1988<sup>48</sup> because of military action.

Mae Fah Luang is the administering NGO of the Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP). It’s web site<sup>49</sup> shows that DTDP started in 1988 and covered 29 villages that had a population of 11,000 and spread over 15,000 hectares. Many presentations repeatedly stress that it is a peaceful project. Thailand is a “model of humane drug crop suppression” wrote James Windle<sup>50</sup>. It was not. Jeffrey Race’s

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<sup>44</sup> “Merchants of Madness” by Bertil Lintner & Michael Black, Silkworm Books (2009), pgs 37-38

<sup>45</sup> The Peach and the Poppy- The Story of Thailand’s Royal Project Foundation, Chiang Mai (2007), [http://www.hrdi.or.th/en/what\\_we\\_do/page/Our-Success](http://www.hrdi.or.th/en/what_we_do/page/Our-Success)

<sup>46</sup> UNODC, WDR 2011, pg. 138

<sup>47</sup> The Peach and the Poppy- The Story of Thailand’s Royal Project Foundation, Chiang Mai, [http://www.hrdi.or.th/en/what\\_we\\_do/page/Our-Success](http://www.hrdi.or.th/en/what_we_do/page/Our-Success) (2007)

<sup>48</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report, 1999, Pg. 23

<sup>49</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mae\\_Fah\\_Luang\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mae_Fah_Luang_Foundation) & [http://www.maefahluang.org/index.php?option=com\\_flexicontent&view=items&cid=68&id=105&Itemid=92&lang=en](http://www.maefahluang.org/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&cid=68&id=105&Itemid=92&lang=en)

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/WindleThailand-final.pdf?la=en> Windle, James, “Drugs and Drug Policy in Thailand”, Brookings, 2015

paper on *The War in Thailand* (1974) debunks this myth and details the violence in the late 1960s<sup>51</sup>. Jeffrey Race wrote “partly through deliberate provocations and partly through the fortuitous occurrence of the Opium War, Thai military forces were deployed to upland areas against the tribal peoples, frequently using indiscriminate methods of violence.” Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy also wrote of the violence and of burning villages in Chiang Rai.<sup>52</sup>”

These communities were attacked for being “communists”. This violent background before AD started in Thailand is scarcely mentioned. The German Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), an avid supporter of AD in Thailand, admitted “...from 1985 onwards –complementary to development projects- government agencies began to destroy poppy fields<sup>53</sup>”. Eradication first, AD later was the policy then, and still is, as it should be.

It was not benevolence but political expediency that convinced the Government of Thailand to adopt a scheme that would suppress left leaning insurgency and reduce opium production. From 1963 the Thai army and police had brutally tried to suppress both. There were aerial bombings and napalming of Meo villages<sup>54</sup>.

Thailand’s king Bhumibol Adulyadej said on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1969: “There are very few Meos<sup>55</sup> who are really reds. If we make mistakes the whole Meo tribe will turn red

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<sup>51</sup> “The War in Thailand”, Jeffrey Race,  
[http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015\\_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf](http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf)  
pgs. 96-102

<sup>52</sup> Chouvy, P.-A. (2011) *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, Published by Tauris & Co., London & New York, pg. 164.

<sup>53</sup> GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Technische Zusammenarbeit), *Drugs and Development in Asia*, A background and discussion paper, April, 1998, <http://www2.gtz.de/dokumente/bib/99-0026.pdf> Pg 40

<sup>54</sup> Thomson, John, (25<sup>th</sup> April, 1969), *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, on the Thai bombing of Meo Maw & The Bangkok Post of 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1969 reported the use of napalm

<sup>55</sup> an ethnic group in South East Asia

and cause incessant trouble for us later.<sup>56</sup>” The king echoed the growing concern among the Bangkok elite that the government's ferocious response was causing the insurgency to increase. The king's plan had more to do with counterinsurgency than crop substitution. It focused on communities that were cultivating opium poppy in North Thailand and stressed protecting forests, reforestation and alternative crops for poppy.

Whilst the DTDP had some success domestically, its scale is too small to be relevant elsewhere. By 1988 when DTDP started, Thailand was a minor opium producing country. Poppy cultivation had already been reduced by the army and the police when they smashed the indigenous communities into submission. In 1988 *all* of Thailand had just 2811 hectares of poppy cultivation<sup>57</sup>. Doi Tung had probably just about 1500 hectares of illicit poppies but the precise figure is nowhere given in all the accounts glorifying its success. Neither is the precise cost.

UNODC's apologia “Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation-Final Synthesis report” (2005) un-analytically accepts all claims made by Mae Fah Luang.

One claim in the report is that the average wage increased seven times in Doi Tung<sup>58</sup>. This increase should not be seen in isolation. It reflected growing prosperity all over Thailand, which has been recognized by the World Bank<sup>59</sup> as “..one of the widely cited development success stories, with sustained strong growth and impressive poverty reduction, particularly in the 1980s”. The percentage of people

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<sup>56</sup> Race, Jeffrey, (1974), *The War in Northern Thailand*, Modern Asian Studies, Vol 8, No. 1, (1974), pg. 105, Published by Cambridge University Press,  
[http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015\\_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf](http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report, 1999, pg. 23

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative\\_Development\\_Evaluation\\_Dec-05.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative_Development_Evaluation_Dec-05.pdf), Figure III, Sources of Income (2005)

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/overview> pg. 1

below the national poverty line decreased from 65.26% in 1988 to 13.15% in 2011, according to Thailand's National Economic and Social Development Board<sup>60</sup>. Between 1973 when the wage was 12 Baht (60 US Cents) to 2013, when the minimum labour wage was fixed at 300 Baht (US \$ 9.5) a day the daily wage rose 25 times<sup>61</sup>.

Seen in this perspective the seven fold increase of income amongst the residents of Doi Tung merely reflected the rise of incomes all over Thailand.

This report also shows that labor (it is not clear whether it is manual or agricultural or both) from 1988 to 2003 remained the largest composition of wage earners. This would not have happened had DTDP helped people progress materially. Employment opportunities would have diversified. In 1988 labour in DTDP earned 10.7 million Baht (about 37 % of all the wages earned in Doi Tung) and in 2003 it was 252.7 million Baht (about 77% of all the wages earned)<sup>62</sup>.

Thailand's opium production is too low to be shown, but eradication (264 ha in 2013) is substantial enough to be mentioned separately<sup>63</sup>. Had AD been successful, there would have been no need for eradication after twenty seven years of its implementation.

Area under poppy cultivation has decreased in Thailand, but yield per hectare has increased. In 1988 when DTDP began, the average opium yield in Thailand was a

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<sup>60</sup> <http://eng.nesdb.go.th/>

<sup>61</sup> <http://ftp.iza.org/dp7911.pdf> pgs. 4-6, 2014

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative\\_Development\\_Evaluation\\_Dec05.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative_Development_Evaluation_Dec05.pdf), Figure III, Sources of Income (2005)

<sup>63</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, Annexure Table viii

mere 6 kgs per hectare<sup>64</sup>. In 2012 it had jumped to an astonishing 15.6 kgs per hectare<sup>65</sup>. This improvement in yield is likely to have been facilitated by Government sponsored agricultural innovations.

Another proud claim of Mae Fah Luang is their compulsory treatment program. About 500 addicts were sent for a 1000 days treatment and they boast that the success rate was 85%<sup>66</sup>. However, studies have shown that relapse rates are high. James Windle recognizes that “compulsory treatment centres are often run by the military” and that this kind of treatment for addicts is still the norm in Thailand<sup>67</sup>. Such treatment is inhumane and cannot be a model for success.

AD may have reduced opium use, but there are still more than 90,000 opium addicts in Thailand<sup>68</sup> and addiction to far more lethal substances has increased enormously. “During the 1980s and...1990s, cannabis and heroin were the main drugs of use in Thailand...Between 1993 and 2001 a 1000% increase in *yaba* consumption was registered<sup>69</sup>”. Synthetic drug abuse continues to worsen. Thai authorities had in 2011 seized 49.4 million methamphetamine pills and in 2012 almost twice as much- 95.3 million<sup>70</sup>. In 2012 there were 171,272 arrests for methamphetamine (81% of all drugs arrests that year) but interestingly 557 people were arrested for opium<sup>71</sup>. Even very young children are taking to drugs.

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<sup>64</sup> UNODC, WDR 1999. Pg. 21

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/sea/SE-ASIA-opium-poppy-2014-web.pdf> pg. 11

<sup>66</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mae\\_Fah\\_Luang\\_Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mae_Fah_Luang_Foundation) “Accomplishments “

<sup>67</sup> Windle, J, “Drugs and Policy in Thailand”, pg. 7, Brookings Institution (2015)  
<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/WindleThailand-final.pdf?la=en>

<sup>68</sup> UNODC, SE Asia Opium Poppy Survey 2014, pg. 5

<sup>69</sup> Withdrawal Symptoms in the Golden Triangle, Transnational Institute, 2009, pg. 57

<sup>70</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2013, pg. 131

<sup>71</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report, 2013, pg. 130

A Ministry of Health Report of 2011 stated that in Thailand 6700 children between 7 to 17 years old had been sent for treatment<sup>72</sup>. ONCB Thailand wrote that 408,756 users were registered in 2012, as compared to 175,953 the previous year<sup>73</sup>. Drug use has increased and diversified, poppy cultivation continues more efficiently. Thailand is not a transit country, as much as a country where drugs are being abused alarmingly. This state of affairs doesn't suggest AD has been successful.

Amidst all the flashy presentations about fashions, cafes and gardens it is difficult to realise that Doi Tung is a minor project run by an NGO, which because of royal patronage, got unstinted Government support and generous financial aid from other countries and the UN. The strict military-led enforcement that preceded it, have been glossed over. Its minor achievements cannot be duplicated in areas which have larger areas of illicit crops<sup>74</sup>, have no peace and not enough resources.

The larger opium growing areas in Burma and Afghanistan are much less economically developed than Thailand and are crippled by violent protracted conflicts. They have problems that cannot be settled as easily and they do not have the luxury of even one month of peace, let alone thirty years to reduce illicit poppy crops. Afghanistan has had prolonged exposures to AD and AL, with predictable results - failure. One attempt to create food zones in Hilmand it seriously proposed that wheat would be a better alternative to opium<sup>75</sup>. This project failed and has largely attracted scorn<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xjhhgg\\_drug-abuse-growing-among-thai-children\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xjhhgg_drug-abuse-growing-among-thai-children_news)

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.na.gov.la/docs/AIPA/aifocom11/Doc\\_for\\_AIFOCOM/COUNTRY%20REPORT/%2815%29%20Annex%20Q-%20Country%20Report%20of%20Thailan.pdf](http://www.na.gov.la/docs/AIPA/aifocom11/Doc_for_AIFOCOM/COUNTRY%20REPORT/%2815%29%20Annex%20Q-%20Country%20Report%20of%20Thailan.pdf) 2012, pgs. 2 -4,

<sup>74</sup> "Withdrawal Symptoms in The Golden Triangle" TNI, 2009 pg. 19

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.areu.org.af/EditionDetails.aspx?EditionId=320&ContentId=7&ParentId=7&Lang=en-US> David Mansfield, May 2010,

<sup>76</sup> [http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Inge\\_Fryklund](http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Inge_Fryklund). pg. 2

More practical arguments are being made to justify opium production in Afghanistan as a reasonable employment measure<sup>77</sup>. In north Afghanistan there was a decline, but not because of AD. “..... The decline in opium cultivation in the Northern region began as a result of *strict law enforcement* and counter-narcotics initiatives, and by 2008 poppy cultivation was already negligible.<sup>78</sup>” In Burma too AD’s repeated efforts (dependent on eradication) have failed. Peaceful Thailand, with a pocket size area under illicit poppy cultivation cannot be an example of successful implementation of AD for large complex cultivating belts. The DTDP project is an attractive bubble created by elegant propaganda.

### ***Why Thailand’s Alternative Development cannot be a model for India:***

India has 640 districts, of which around 300 have illicit cannabis. Illicit poppy cultivation is spread over 24 districts in the North East, North West and Central India. The total area would be several hundreds of square kilometers. Entire Thailand had less than 3 sq. kms when their DTDP started in 1988. From such a handkerchief sized tract a large diverse country has nothing to learn.

A detailed survey was done in 2010 in just two districts of the six in AP that cultivate illicit poppy. This is the only survey of an illicit crop done in India. The districts of Anjaw and Lohit, with a combined population of less than 170,000<sup>79</sup>, had more than 16,000 hectares of poppy fields, and 20,000 opium users<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Speri, Alice, 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2014, “Afghanistan’s opium economy is doing better than ever” <https://news.vice.com/article/afghanistans-opium-economy-is-doing-better-than-ever>

<sup>78</sup> UNODC, World Drug Report 2013, pg. 25

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/district/479-lohit.html>

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/aranachal-opium-survey-lohit-anjaw-report%202010.pdf> pgs. 9 & 86

Treating the users compulsorily will require a town sized jail. Unlike Thailand, India does not have compulsory treatment laws. Unless there is harm reduction there can be no permanent solution.

Considering the large scale of illicit poppy in India, only the Government can best plan to contain the spread of illicit crops and their use, not a voluntary organization. There are three reasons why Thailand's experience of AD cannot work in India.

- First, India has more than 25,000 hectares of illicit opium poppy alone. The problem is too vast for Thailand's type AD.
- Second, illicit poppy growing areas in India are already developed or developing fast. DTDP has taken at least two decades to show improvement. The benefits of development are usually experienced in India within a decade.
- Lastly, despite enormous material progress illicit cultivation has *increased* immensely in several states in North East of India.

In Tezu the largest town in Lohit district of East AP, fields flaunt poppies a few hundred meters from its roads. Here opium's economic advantages are discussed openly, in the media, political rallies and even in college magazines<sup>81</sup>. Before 2001 educated youth were against opium use and even supported eradication, because of which, and in parallel with development, poppy cultivation was down to 4 - 500 hectares in AP. However, from 2001 support for poppy cultivation started to grow in East AP. Cultivation increased so fast that it covered much more than 17,000 hectares in four districts within a decade. People began using it themselves and marketing it aggressively to neighbouring districts and states.

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<sup>81</sup> HORIZON, 2011-2012, Annual Magazine of Indira Gandhi Government College, Tezu, Lohit District, AP, [http://www.narcoinsa.org/news/tezu\\_opium.html](http://www.narcoinsa.org/news/tezu_opium.html).

One reason for this surprising increase was demand for opium from adjacent Burma, where in 2001 severe oppression had reduced cultivation, but not eliminated use. The WDR 2015 admits that in Burma poppy cultivation doubled between 2002 and 2013<sup>82</sup>. Much of the opium is consumed by the cultivators in this region. Strangely, this basic reason is not recognized by UNODC, which gives income generation as the main reason for illicit cultivation<sup>83</sup>.

A rise in incomes and increased employment opportunities is the desired end of AD and AL projects. This happened in India, yet illicit poppy cultivation did not lessen. The few people who benefited most from progress became the biggest commercial level cultivators.

Democracy sometimes lives with difficulties that cannot be imagined. India elects a new government every five years. Elected representatives have to reflect the views of the voters of their constituencies. If a majority of voters want to produce opium their elected representatives will not oppose it. In East AP some elected representatives are against eradication. The present symbolic annual eradication is a minor threat, and thus poppy cultivation thrives behind forests.

Land Titling and ownership has been an ideal of AD for long. The WDR 2015 writes about it as if it is an uncommon idea<sup>84</sup>. In India this was made law eight years ago<sup>85</sup>. It is called the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. It gave land and forest produce gathering rights to the people who lived there, but its implementation is slow<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, pg. 91

<sup>83</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, pg. 94

<sup>84</sup> UNODC, WDR 2015, pg. 106

<sup>85</sup> <http://forestrights.nic.in/> & <http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201211290401163173828File1036.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> <http://bameduniya.blogspot.in/2013/03/alternative-development-for-opium.html>

## *A solution for India's illicit poppy crop:*

A considerable proportion of illicit opium produced in India is for habitual users. They will not give up the habit, and treating 5 million is impossible<sup>87</sup>.

One possible way of reducing illicit poppy cultivation in India would be to revive the Opium Registry system<sup>88</sup>. By registering traditional users and giving them opium from Government's licit stocks, cultivation in Arunachal would likely decrease by about half. Almost all small cultivators are also users, and if they get their daily needs they will not cultivate. Unless, the needs of users is considered illicit crop cultivation will continue. It is true for India, for Afghanistan, for Colombia, for Mexico, and anywhere else that has illicit crops.

If Opium Registry was revived along with eradicating the fields of rich cultivators the problem of illicit cultivation could be dramatically reduced. Opium Registry's revival is also recommended by Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy in a recent investigative paper on opium production in AP<sup>89</sup>. Perhaps, this is what Transnational Institute meant when it argued in 2003 for the "application of Harm Reduction as the basis for a rational and pragmatic drug policy<sup>90</sup>". TNI had also urged " ....Harm Reduction be applied to the production side of the equation."<sup>91</sup>

This is the balance that India's Opium Registry had once sought to address. During its initial years in the 70s diversion from licit cultivation and areas under illicit

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<sup>87</sup> <http://alcoholrehab.com/drug-addiction/drug-addiction-in-india/>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/Opium%20Registry%20workshop.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud, (Autumn-Winter, 2014), *Illegal Opium Production in the Mishmi Hills of AP*, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, Published by University of Cambridge, UK. Pg. 29 <http://geopium.org/?p=793>

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.undrugcontrol.info/en/issues/alternative-development/item/2165-alternative-development-an-introduction> March 2003

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.undrugcontrol.info/en/issues/alternative-development/item/2165-alternative-development-an-introduction>

poppy cultivation were considerably less than they were in subsequent decades. Without Opium Registry, neither the toughest laws nor eradication will be able to reduce illicit poppy cultivation in India.

### *Eradication- yes or no?*

In some illicit poppy growing areas in AP women are leading cultivators, while in adjoining districts women are spearheading campaigns against opium production and use. They urge authorities to eradicate<sup>92</sup>. This movement is four years old but growing rapidly, for instance in Hapoli and Lower Dibang Valley<sup>93</sup>. Such activism is bound to degenerate into avoidable vigilantism, if the Government does not restrict illicit crops in this corner of India, and harm reduction does not reduce users.

UNDP circulated an unusual paper at the 2015 CND. It was critical of UNODC's reliance on force, which was commendable. However, the fears expressed by it on eradication are excessive. The paper says "Anti-drug operations, including crop eradication campaigns, and drug related armed conflict fuel displacement, with disproportionate impacts on less developed communities, including indigenous communities and ethnic minorities."<sup>94</sup>

There is no displacement in India by eradication. Much of India's illicit poppy is cultivated by its indigenous people. These communities have fixed lands of their own, and no matter how severe the eradication, they will not shift. Till 2000 there was annual wide spread eradication in East AP. No one was displaced, and illicit poppy cultivation came down to less than 500 ha. Communities in India would

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.arunachaltimes.in/wordpress/2015/05/12/abk-women-wing-denounce-opium-cultivation/>

<sup>93</sup> [http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015\\_Women%20against%20Drugs%20Arunachal.pdf](http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_Women%20against%20Drugs%20Arunachal.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016//Contributions/UN/UNDP/UNDP\\_paper\\_for\\_CND\\_March\\_2015.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016//Contributions/UN/UNDP/UNDP_paper_for_CND_March_2015.pdf) pg. 4,

rather fight than switch lands. Attacking eradication teams, which do not retaliate, has been common in AP since 1987, and it still continues<sup>95</sup>.

In India's experience its token eradication is the only reason why illicit poppy cultivation has not exceeded Burma's production levels. Without the modest threat of eradication, large illicit poppy fields would be along the road, and not miles away hidden in forests where they are now.

These days there is a voluntary displacement however. Commercial level cultivators are displacing themselves. They are shifting their cultivation from difficult mountain terrain to the fertile plains where they are buying large tracts.

For a decade international organizations have been demanding that eradication be removed from AD<sup>96</sup>. Were that to happen AD would not be accepted in most places. In Thailand AD projects were *preceded* by eradication, which still continues<sup>97</sup>.

Transnational Institute had in *A Failed Balance* (2002) promoted a compromise where eradication would be used only for commercial activity. They add that reduction in illicit cultivation "should not be enforced until licit components of livelihood strategies have been sufficiently strengthened<sup>98</sup>." This is a utopian idea. It would be better to negotiate a short time settlement that will reduce cultivation under threat of eradication in tandem with the Government providing alternate employment and opium for the addicts.

Many life times will pass without reduction in illicit crops if the Rule of Law, albeit sympathetically applied, is not made an essential adjunct to AD and AL.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/arunachal-pradesh-emerges-as-largest-opium-producer-in-country-raises-security-concerns/> para 8,

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.undrugcontrol.info/en/issues/alternative-development/item/2165-alternative-development-an-introduction>

<sup>97</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016//Contributions/UN/UNDP/UNDP\\_paper\\_for\\_CND\\_March\\_2015.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/ungass2016//Contributions/UN/UNDP/UNDP_paper_for_CND_March_2015.pdf) pgs. 10

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/debate4.pdf>

## *UNGASS 2016:*

As UNGASS 2016 prepares to discuss ways to improve Global Drug Policy they will hopefully analyze what went wrong with the past policies stretching from 1961. Before sanctifying AD and AL, UNGASS should hear the many voices that have started questioning these strategies.

Funding organizations like Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) realizing that AD has not been successful, are now trying to delink reduction in crop cultivation as the sole yardstick of success<sup>99</sup>. However in the 80s they used precisely this metric to claim success.

Julia Buxton in “The Great Disconnect” questions AD as a panacea for illicit crops and hopes<sup>100</sup> “ UNGASS 2016 provides an opportunity for critical scrutiny of AD and the constraints imposed by the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs on innovative, rights based and nationally owned supply responses.”

In a 2008 CND Conference paper prepared by GTZ , EC, FAO & UNODC a rare frankness and helplessness was expressed “The scale of illicit opium poppy cultivation in Asia as well as the generally stable coca cultivation level and the shift in the nature of donor funding towards budget support and sector strategies means Alternative Development projects are not – and cannot be – of sufficient scale to address the extent of illicit cultivation across the region<sup>101</sup>.” Concerns about AD have been partially addressed by a refreshing paper published by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development called Rethinking the Approach of Alternative Development, 2011<sup>102</sup> in which they ask all the right questions but the answers are not frank.

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<sup>99</sup> <http://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/giz2013-en-alternative-development.pdf> pg. 4,

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/The%20Great%20Disconnect.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/The%20Great%20Disconnect.pdf> pg 41 (2015)

<sup>102</sup> <http://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/giz2013-en-alternative-development.pdf>

And yet implicit trust in AD continues. This contradiction has to be resolved in UNGASS 2016.

### *The Way Ahead:*

In India, which has licit cultivation, opium legally procured could be given to the numerous traditional cultivators and users. In Afghanistan and Burma too this could work- giving opium to the users after *legalizing* some cultivation for legitimate use. The global medical need of opium based medicines is never met and is seven times the INCB calculated one according to a WHO report <sup>103</sup>.

A tradition, especially a profitable one, will not go away just because of a few alternatives. There has to be a legal threat of force. James Windle dwells on this human failing while describing how Vietnam ruthlessly suppressed opium cultivation and then developed the growing areas. His comment “...This would suggest that rural development, be it alternative development or crop substitution, was insufficient motivation for the cessation of opium production.<sup>104</sup>” deserves to be thought about. Such drastic force cannot work in every country but laws restraining illicit cultivation have to be applied.

In 1998 G. Farrel had observed “...alternative development, and its previous manifestations, have had little if any significant impact upon illicit cultivation at the national and regional levels and less at the global level.<sup>105</sup>” This is valid in 2015 too.

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<sup>103</sup> <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/ScholtenW%40who.int/1308cd46cf8f8387?projector=1> A First Comparison Between the Consumption of and the Need for Opioid Analgesics at Country, Regional, and Global Levels

<sup>104</sup> Windle, J, 2014, “A Slow March from Social Evil to Harm Reduction: Drugs and Drug Policy in Vietnam,” <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/WindleVietnam-final.pdf?la=en>

<sup>105</sup> Farrell, G. (1998) ‘A global empirical view of drug crop eradication and United Nations crop substitution and alternative development strategies’ *Journal of Drug Issues* 28(2): 395-436.

A frank discussion on AD and AL is now imperative before UNGASS 2016 again supports it as the only alternative for illicit crops. Alternative Development is a carrot that has not worked on a large scale anywhere in the world.

Countries with illicit crops are from the Global South. They ought to decide for themselves, without interference from Global North's experts, who abrogate to themselves the fountain of knowledge just because they are a font of funding.

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