

Challenging Alternative Development for India's illicit opium:

Introduction:

Alternative Development (AD) and later Alternative Livelihoods (AL) have been funded for about 30 years by developed nations but with little success. In the World Drug Report (WDR) 2015, UNODC has repeatedly mentioned (Chap II) that India has also opted for Alternative Development. India ought to be cautious about adopting this still unproven policy, for it takes too much time and will open up sensitive areas to foreign consultants.

A poor area requires development. Not just the illicit crop growing areas within it. The very idea of selecting only the latter for the bribe of so called AD is repugnant and unjust.

For the first time ever the WDR2015 has given so much importance to AD that out of two sections in it one is entirely on AD.¹ This paper examines how successful AD has been in poppy growing areas, and whether this as yet experimental idea is a guaranteed panacea for illicit crops.

For three decades an illicit crop containment policy by crop and income substitution, called AD, and now also AL, has been championed internationally. It claims to be a non punitive way of weaning cultivators away from illicit crops. AD however has *followed* eradication of crops. AD's success is judged by the alleged decline in illicit crops in the small illicit drug crop cultivating areas of Thailand and a few areas in Latin America.

AD's proponents have ignored the fact that the trigger for illicit crops is traditional use, which is continuing. It cannot be stopped by development alone. The traditional user has rights that have to be considered sympathetically.

This paper questions AD's applicability in India, after analyzing the implementation of AD in Thailand and Afghanistan. None of the illicit drug crop growing areas in India are remote, and have access to education, technical training and intensive agricultural facilities which have made AL already attainable.

Three themes run in this paper: 1) No matter what crop, fruit or handicraft an AD beneficiary produces, nothing can equal the profit of an illicit crop. 2) AD has ignored traditional use of illicit crops. 3) Enforcement is crucial to contain illicit crops.

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¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf

Introducing Alternative Development and doubts:

UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Drugs (1998) defined Alternative Development (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”.²

AD has been implemented in illicit crop growing areas of Latin America, South and South East Asia for close to three decades. People who grow illicit crops are assumed to be poor and thus in need of this special care. This policy, based more on hope than reality and with little evidence for optimism,³ is being pushed by the UNODC and others, as the only effective practice to contain illicit cultivation.⁴ It has been tried in about 3% of all area covered by illicit crops, not succeeded in thirty years, its gains are minor, slow and infrequent, yet its crusaders want to extend it to all the places where illicit crops flourish. A mammoth task beyond AD’s capability.

Before India accepts AD, it requires an impartial analysis.

First, look at the size of the problem of illicit crops:

Table I:

Year	Illicit Crop	Cultivation in hectares	Eradication in hectares
2013	Coca	120,800	104,534
2013	Opium	310,891	29,563 (in ‘selected’ countries)
2012	Cannabis	63,298	7,317,587 <i>PLANTS</i>

(Annexure I – Tables i, iii & viii of World Drug Report, 2015)

Total: 494,989 hectares

² <http://www.un.org/ga/20special/> & Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development (General Assembly resolution S-20/4 E).

³ Farrel, 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.

⁴ UN News Center, (14th July, 2014) Yury Fedotov’s, Executive Director, UNODC, “Development and alternative crops provide hope in war on illicit drugs” – <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48274#.VS-T4NyUeuV>

The actual extent of illicit crop cultivation in the world is much larger than reported above. India alone has thousands of hectares of illicit opium poppy and of cannabis, which are not included in UNODC data tables. UNODC confidently comments in its World Drug Report (WDR) 2014“...production of cannabis resin is confined to only a few countries in North Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia”.⁵ In India hashish and opium seizures were approximately 4 and 2.3 tons in 2013, indicating a thriving illicit cultivation.⁶ Similar lapses are in WDR, 2015. Despite such glaring omissions, these UNODC figures are the best indicators of the problem of illicit crops.

AD is covering a microscopic part, perhaps only 15000 hectares, of the entire illicit crop (cannabis, coca and opium) area of at least 496,463 hectares in the world. Much of this is grown by poor traditional cultivators, many of whom *consume* a part of what they grow. The number of opiate users remained almost constant at 16.375 mln in 2012 and 2013.⁷ Another 194.87 million are using the other two illicit crops- cannabis and coca. The problem of how to contain drug consumption is thus titanic and will not be solved by glib and glossy justifications of an experiment that over three decades has very little to show. If we continue to rely on AD centuries will be required to release these hectares from illicit crops.

More than 3 million in Afghanistan and countries around it and 3.3 mln in Myanmar and countries around it⁸ depend on opiates produced there. If by some miracle all these fields were to vanish tomorrow, what would happen to the farmers, who rely on income from poppies, and the *users* addicted to it? The sternest of enforcement and years of AD projects will not root out illicit crops if the need of the users is not considered. *Income is not the only concern that requires an alternative.*

AD focuses on only those sectors that cultivate illicit crops, even though adjacent areas that do not grow illicit crops also need development. It's a discriminatory policy. It encourages those not growing illicit crops to cultivate them. Can poverty have borders? Be divided into sectors so that the sector that grows illicit crops gets developed earlier?

AD as an idea to control illicit crops was first articulated by the League of Nations in 1930s to reduce poppy cultivation in Iran.⁹ It was then developed by Thailand where it was generously funded by Germany and USA from 1980s.

⁵ World Drug Report, 2014, pg. 39

⁶ http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_id8d09e4b85c783cbc30c9b8ae175f2d33.pdf pgs. 12 & 6

⁷ https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr2015/World_Drug_Report_2015.pdf pg. 1 & WDR, 2014 pg 2

⁸ SE Asia Opium Poppy Survey 2014, Table 1, pg. 5, UNODC,

⁹ Windle J, Suppressing the Poppy: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Drug Control, 2015, IB Taurus & Co. Ltd.,

AD in the 30 or so years that it has been tried, has been unable to dent illicit crop cultivation which has increased beyond control. In Afghanistan AD has failed even after eradication cleared its way. Opium poppy cultivation keeps increasing steadily year by year even in the two provinces where AD had a presence once- Hilmand and Kandahar. In Pakistan’s Dir and Mohmand districts AD gave the illusion of success from 1998 to 2002 following heavy handed eradication.¹⁰ Actually, poppy cultivation merely shifted across the border to Afghanistan, inhabited by the same clans, and where, unlike in Pakistan, eradication had not yet started:

Table II: Afghanistan & Pakistan poppy cultivation in hectares (after eradication)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Afghanistan	10000	25000	32000	34300	41300	50800	49300	58300	71470	53759	56824	58416	63162
Pakistan	6034	5463	6519	7464	7488	7962	9493	7329	5759	5091	873	874	950

From World Drug Report 1999, pgs.23 & 24

Despite lack of evidence, AD has been pushed as the only cure for illicit cultivation of narcotics crops the world over by its staunchest lobbyists, like UNODC, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), Transnational Institute (TNI) the governments of Thailand, Germany, US, and UK. Thailand’s success in increasing incomes and removing illicit cultivation in the small area of Doi Tung is held up as the shining path. However, as will be discussed below, Doi Tung is too microscopic an experience to be a useful example for other illicit crop producing states. Nowhere is the precise figure of the extent of illicit opium cultivation in Thailand benefiting from AD is given. Certainly not in the supervising NGO Mae Fah Luang’s web site.¹¹ TNI admits that the size of its illicit cultivation may be too small to be of significance.¹²

The carrot of AD depends on the stick of eradication to succeed. The Thailand experiment in AD has been wrongly described as “humane”.¹³ AD’s advocates hide its dependence on enforcement, even though the centrality of eradication has been reiterated by several UN resolutions. The very first page of the latest UN Resolution 68/196 that was adopted by the General Assembly on 18th December, 2013 speaks of the need for AD to depend on eradication.¹⁴

¹⁰ Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud, Opium- Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy. IB Taurus & Co., Ltd., pg. 166,

¹¹ <http://www.maefahluang.org/index.php>

¹² *Withdrawal Symptoms in the Golden Triangle*, <http://www.tni.org/report/withdrawal-symptoms-golden-triangle-4> pg.19,

¹³ Windel J, *Drugs and Drug Policy in Thailand*, 2015,

¹⁴ https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Drug_Resolutions/2010-2019/2013/A_RES_68_196.pdf

Reliance on eradication has been briefly- as if uncomfortable with it- mentioned in UNODC's vindication called *Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation, 2005*. This report was financed by the German Government, a staunch AD financier in Thailand and Peru. Nothing but good is said about AD in this self congratulatory report, which gives AD sole credit for reducing coca and opium cultivation in Peru and Thailand. In both countries it had been preceded by heavy handed enforcement, which *continues*. While mentioning "Alternative Development projects led by security and other non-development concerns were typically not sustainable.." it also acknowledges "Law enforcement is vital to successful alternative development.." ¹⁵.

Questioning Thailand's Alternative Development relevance:

AD was first articulated by Thailand's king in 1969 as part of a wider Royal Project. It was based more on practical necessity than on altruism, more to do with counterinsurgency than crop substitution. During the 1960s many opium growing ethnic people of North Thailand had begun to support the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) in response to the years of abuse and violence at the hands of the lowland Thais. They were subjected to sustained bombing and military attacks. Slash and burn farmers were seen as a threat to the teak forests: an economic necessity to the influential Thai timber merchants ¹⁶.

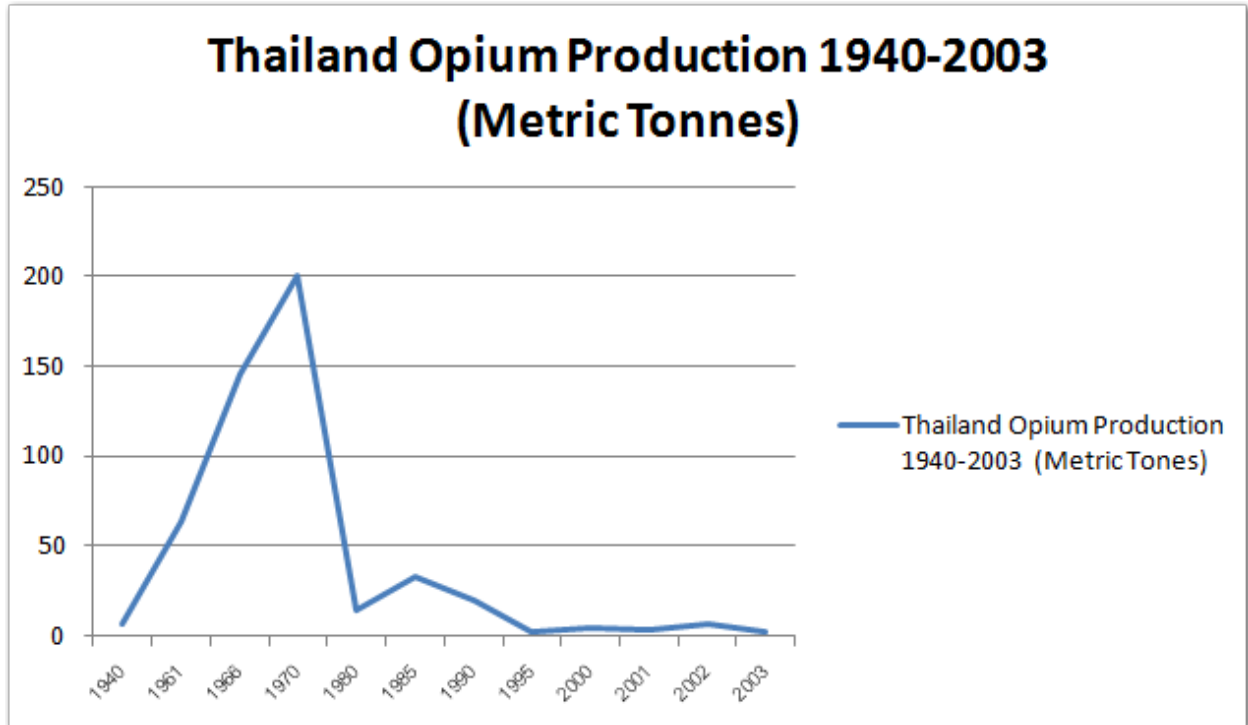
King Bhumibol Adulyadej speaking to students and teachers at the College of Education, Bangkok, on 17th March, 1969 had warned government officials to use more "discretion in carrying out suppression operations." ¹⁷ Military operations against the tribes had tapered off by then.

Graph I, from a publication of Highland Research and Development Institute, Chiang Mai, Thailand, shows the sudden rise and meteoric fall of opium production in Thailand from 1940 to 1980. Opium cultivation shot up from almost nil in 1940, to a high of 200 tons in 1970, and then came down to very little in 2003.

¹⁵ UNODC, *Alternative Development: A global thematic evaluation, Final Synthesis Report*, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative_Development_Evaluation_Dec-05.pdf pgs. 4, vii & 14,

¹⁷ Race, Jeffrey, *The War in Northern Thailand*, pg. 105, http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf

Graph I:



The reason for this rapid increase was that opium cultivation and trafficking was encouraged and monopolized by Thai military cliques and senior Government officials after WW II¹⁸. The ethnic people, like the Meos and the Hmongs, living in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai in the Northern Areas of Thailand started cultivating poppy as a cash crop. Earlier they had cultivated it for their own use.

By early 1960s they started to claim rights of citizenship and development. Though the upland peoples had been living there for centuries they were considered illegal squatters on royal lands. A royal guest house in the cooler climate of Doi Tung was soon to be made, and it was embarrassing to have opium fields close by. From 1963 the Thai Border Police Patrol (BPP) increased its presence, making airfields and camps. This started a violent struggle with local communities. There were aerial bombings and even napalming of Meo villages.¹⁹ Jeffrey Race (1974) described in detail the conflict and the refugees that it created. He wrote “Thai military forces were deployed to upland areas against the tribal peoples, frequently using indiscriminate methods of violence.”²⁰

¹⁸ Pg.37 An Atlas of Trafficking in SE Asia by Pierre Arnaud Chouvy (2013).

¹⁹ Thomson, John, (25th April, 1969), The Far Eastern Economic Review, on the Thai bombing of Meo Maw and The Bangkok Post of 5th January, 1969 reporting the use of napalm .

²⁰ Race, Jeffrey, The War in Northern Thailand, pgs. 98-104,
http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/2015_Race%201974%20The%20War%20in%20Northern%20Thailand.pdf

After military operations had subdued the poppy cultivators, these communities in North Thailand were introduced to reforestation and alternative crops from 1969. It was called the Royal Project.²¹ Protecting teak forests was an economic necessity for the influential Thai timber merchants, as the ethnic peoples practiced slash and burn in teak areas.

Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy (2010, 164) writes about the same period “... as early as 1967, the ‘Red Meo’ revolt in Thailand was sparked after Hmong opium farmers from Chiang Rai province were forced to pay excessive bribes to Thai officials in order to avoid their crops being eradicated and after the Thai police burned one village to the ground.”²²

This violent background and official involvement in poppy cultivation before AD started in Thailand has been well hidden. After eliminating the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) forced eradication of opium poppies was resumed from 1985. The German GTZ, one of the supporters of AD in Thailand wrote that “...from 1985 onwards –complementary to development projects- government agencies began to destroy poppy fields.”²³ Eradication first, AD later was the policy then, and still is today in Thailand, where eradication continues:

Table III: Eradication in hectares

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Thailand	1718	592	1740	1834	2395	1200	1580	1706	1313	580	886	1053	770

	1999	200	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
	808	757	832	989	767	122	110	153	220	285201	278	278	208	205	264

Source: UNODC WDR 1999 & 2014

Tables IV, V and VI show that by 1985 Thailand had already become a less than minor opium producing country, *before* their AD project started in Doi Tung in 1988. Despite depending on

²¹ “The Peach and the Poppy” The Story of Thailand’s Royal Project, http://www.hrdi.or.th/en/what_we_do/page/Our-Success

²² Chouvy, P.-A. (2011) *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, Published by Taurus & Co., London & New York, pg. 164,.

²³ 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> .

the military to reduce poppy cultivation Thailand has inexplicably been made a show piece of successful and benevolent implementation of AD.

Table IV: Thailand

Year	Cultivation of Illicit opium poppy (in hectares)	<i>Eradicated:</i> (in hectares)
1986 –	2408	1718
1988- (The year AD started)	2811	1740
1990	1782	2395

Source: UNODC WDR 1996

Table V: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Hectares (Figures after eradication)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Thailand	2408	3163	2811	2982	1782	3727	3016	998	478	168	368	352	716

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Thailand	702	890	820	750	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: UNODC WDR 1999 & 2014

Table VI: Opium production in tonnes

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Thailand	26	24	17	31	20	23	14	17	3	2	5	4	8

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Thailand	8	6	6	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: UNODC WDR 1999 & 2014

UNODC’s apologia “*Alternative Development: A Global Thematic Evaluation- Final Synthesis report*” echoes Mae Fah Luang’s- the NGO that manages AD in Doi Tung- claims that the average wage increased *seven* times.²⁴ From the Doi Tung table (Table IV) from the 2005 report, it is seen that their professions remained the same, with labour still being the largest composition of wage earners. No detail is given about minimum *per capita* wage in 1988 in Doi Tung when AD started or in other parts of Thailand.

This claim of seven fold increase in wages merely reflected growing prosperity all over Thailand, which is recognized by the World Bank as “..one of the widely cited development success stories, with sustained strong growth and impressive poverty reduction, particularly in the 1980s”.²⁵ *AD had nothing to do with it.* The percentage of people 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.²⁶ According to a World Bank report (2014) in January 2013 a single minimum wage for all of Thailand was fixed at 300 Baht (\$9.5) per day.²⁷ In 1973 the minimum wage in Bangkok was 12 Baht a day (US 60 cents).²⁸ Thus, even if the seven fold increase in income in Doi Tung be correct, it merely reflected the

²⁴ UNODC (2005), *Alternative Development: A global thematic evaluation, Final Synthesis Report*, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/Alternative_Development_Evaluation_Dec-05.pdf

²⁵ World Bank, Thailand Report, 2012, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/thailand/overview> ,

²⁶ <http://eng.nesdb.go.th/>

²⁷ World Bank, 2014, Discussion Paper 7911 by Ximena Del Carpio, Julián Messina and Anna Sanz-de-Galdeano, Minimum Wage: Does it improve welfare in Thailand? <http://ftp.iza.org/dp7911.pdf> .

²⁸ <http://www.bahtrate.com/>

rise of incomes all over Thailand. The important point is that in their flagship AD project in Doi Tung labour remained where they were. No alternative livelihoods for them. Table VII brings this fact clearly. In 1988 when AD started in Doi Tung labour earned 37.1% of all the wages, but in 2003 labour's share of the wages was 76.7%! There was no change in occupation, and an increase in wages that conformed to a similar rise all over the country. No credit to AD.

Table VII: Doi Tung, Sources of Income (in millions of Baht)

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Agriculture	14	13.9	15	11.8	15.6	19.7	17.6	20.6	32.3	32.5	27.1	30.9	35.8	50.1	49.5	43.1
Labour	10.6	33.4	50.4	56.2	85.2	106	118.1	144.3	159.9	173.6	188.1	181.7	185.3	218.8	232.2	252.7
Trade	2.5	2.9	4	3.7	9	8.7	11.3	15.3	14	16.9	18.4	15.5	19.2	21.1	22.9	25.3
Handicraft	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.3	2.5	1.3	3.4	1.7	1.7	1.5	1.5	0.7	1	0.9	2	1.3
Rent & Interest				0.8	0.3	0.3	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.3	0.6	0.8	0.9	1.5	0.7
Other					10.8	5.4	1.9	5.1	4.5	4.7	7.3	3.6	9.5	4.4	6.5	6.2
Total	28.5	51.9	71.1	73.8	123.4	141.4	153.6	188.2	213.9	230.3	243.7	233	252.3	296.2	314.6	329.3

Source: UNODC (2005) AD, A Global Thematic Evaluation

AD seeks to keep people in their rural setting, as is obvious from AD in Thailand's Doi Tung. All round development educates and trains people to be employed in non rural professions all over a country- as has been achieved in India. Denying the history of the enormous help that AD got from eradication, Mae Fah Luang's publications *falsely* claim that "The villagers must be provided with alternative livelihoods *before* opium eradication can take place so that they have a means of survival."²⁹ In the many eulogies written about AD's imagined success in Doi Tung *nowhere* has the precise area of poppy fields benefiting from AD has been disclosed. All of Thailand had only 2811 hectares of illicit poppy in 1988, and less than half was presumably cultivated in Doi Tung.³⁰

In WDR 2014 an explanation states that from 2003 to 2014 "Owing to continuing low cultivation...Thailand 'was' included in the category 'Other Countries'."³¹ Yet, eradication is

²⁹ ONCB, Thailand, 2013, Thailand Country Report, Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand, http://www.na.gov.la/docs/AIPA/aifocom11/Doc_for_AIFOCOM/COUNTRY%20REPORT/%2015%29%20Annex%20Q-%20Country%20Report%20of%20Thailand.pdf pgs. 10 & 18,

³⁰ UNODC, WDR 1996,

³¹ UNODC, WDR 2014, Annexure I, vii,

substantial enough in Thailand even today (264 ha in 2013) to be reported.³² Had AD been successful, there would have been no need for eradication after 27 years of its implementation.

In 1988 when the Thai AD project started in Doi Tung the average opium yield in Thailand was a mere 6 kgs per hectare.³³ In 2012 it has jumped to 15.6 kgs per hectare- an astonishing progress. Today, a hectare produces about 70% more than it did in the '80s when AD started there- meaning that fewer hectares are required to produce higher yields. This jump in yield could have happened only because of improved agricultural innovations, which cannot happen without official help.

Despite AD, drug use has worsened in Thailand. There are more than 90,000 opium users still.³⁴ Thai authorities had in 2011 seized 49.4 million methamphetamine pills and in 2012 almost twice as much- 95.3 million pills. In 2012 there were 171,272 arrests for methamphetamine (81% of all drugs arrests that year) but interestingly also 557 people were arrested for opium cultivation.³⁵ In the sub para headed "Accomplishments within the local community" as part of AD in Doi Tung the Mae Fah Luang description states "A 1000 day forced Rehabilitation Program was carried out from 1991 to 1994, to assist the nearly 500 residents addicted to opiates. It had a low rate of relapse of about 15%."³⁶ Five hundred people could not have been put away for 1000 days unless they had been jailed. Compulsory treatment for addicts is still the norm in Thailand writes James Windel.³⁷ 408,756 users were registered in 2012, as compared to 175,953 the previous year.³⁸ "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."³⁹ Drug use has increased and diversified, poppy

³² UNODC, WDR 2015, Annexure I, vii,

³³ UNODC, South East Asia Opium Poppy Survey, 2014, <https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/sea/SE-ASIA-opium-popy-2014-web.pdf> pg. 21,

³⁴ Ibid pg. 5,

³⁵ UNODC, WDR 2013, pgs. 130 & 131,

³⁶

http://www.maefahluang.org/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&cid=68&id=105&Itemid=92&lang=en

³⁷ Windel, J, Drugs and Drug Policy in Thailand, 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/04/global-drug-policy/WindleThailand-final.pdf?la=en>

³⁸ ONCB, 2013, http://www.na.gov.la/docs/AIPA/aifocom11/Doc_for_AIFOCOM/COUNTRY%20REPORT/%2815%29%20Annex%20Q-%20Country%20Report%20of%20Thailan.pdf

³⁹ Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, (January, 2009), *Withdrawal Symptoms in the Golden Triangle*, <http://www.tni.org/report/withdrawal-symptoms-golden-triangle-4> , pg. 57,

cultivation continues more efficiently. How has AD been successful then? A combination of policies more effective than AD is required to stop illicit drug crops.

AD has impressed at least one official of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance⁴⁰. This official, who visited Doi Tung, but not any of India's illicit crop areas, was so impressed by a couple of acres of gardens that he thought that this was the answer to India's illicit crops. Thailand's AD is an impossible example for a democratic country like India to follow, where neither bombing of villages, nor incarcerating users for compulsory treatment is ethically or physically possible.

Alternative Development or just Development for India?

In India opium poppy has been traditionally cultivated for centuries for medical, ritual and relaxation purposes.

An idea of the extent of illicit poppy cultivation in India cannot be had from the wildly erratic eradication figures that the WDR's reveal. In 2005 only 12 ha were eradicated, 8000 ha in 2007, in 2011 about 5746 ha but in 2013 a paltry 865. About 7500 hectares of illicit opium poppy cultivation is calculated in a UNODC publication from Indian Government's response to their Annual Report Questionnaire⁴¹.

Twenty one districts in India have illicit opium poppy. They are: Anantnag, Budgam, Pulwama & Rajouri (J & K); Kullu & Mandi (HP); Uttarkashi (Uttarakhand); Anjaw, Lohit, Khonsa, Changlang, Yingkiong & Roing (Arunachal); Mon & Tuensang (Nagaland); Ukhrul, Churachandpur & Chandel (Manipur); and a district each in Bihar, Jaharkand and Maharashtra. India could have about 25000 hectares of illicit opium⁴².

Thailand's example of AD affecting just about 2000 hectares in about thirty years, is too slow and insignificant to be replicated in India. UNODC's WDR of 2015 indicates that India is considering AD, which will be a folly.

There are four reasons that AD will not work in India.

⁴⁰ <http://www.businessworld.in/news/agriculture/the-opium-trail/785206/page-3.html> "The Opium Trail"

⁴¹ pg. 14 of UNODC's The -Global Afghan Opium Trade- A Threat Assessment July 2011-
https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Global_Afghan_Opium_Trade_2011-web.pdf

⁴² <http://www.tni.org/files/download/tni-2014-bouncingback-web-klein.pdf> , pg. 19, Table 3,

First, India's problem is too vast to be handled by an NGO as is the case in Thailand, where the illicit poppy cultivation is pocket size in comparison. *India also cannot have foreigners swarming all over its distant fields as they do in Thailand.*

Second, traditional cultivation of opium poppy has so far been a peaceful activity. No violence in eradication like that employed by Thailand in the 1960s. Even arrests are rare in spite of violent opposition by cultivators.

The third and most important of all- India has not made any distinction between illicit growing areas and adjacent poor ones. All areas that are backward are being developed. AD is thus superfluous. Wide spread development is reaching all, but slowly, as indeed it must be, in this vast developing country. As most poppy cultivating communities are in mountains it takes time for development to succeed- but it will be less than the 30 years or so sought for AD. The benefits of development are usually visible in India within a decade.

Lastly, despite progress, illicit cultivation has increased immensely in several traditionally growing states, and has started in non traditional ones solely for profit. In Lohit and Anjaw, now prolific but hitherto small traditional poppy growing districts in Arunachal Pradesh (AP), people discuss opium's economic advantages openly, in the media, political rallies and even in college magazines.⁴³ Before 2001 educated youth (Digaru and Taraon Mishmis) were against opium use and supported eradication, which had reduced poppy cultivation to less than 1000 hectares in all of AP.

From 2001 support for poppy cultivation started to grow in East Arunachal Pradesh. Young people began using it themselves and marketing it aggressively to neighbouring districts and states. Many Idu Mishmis, who had never taken opium, began doing so about five years ago. Idu Mishmis are from Roing district that is adjacent to Lohit. Cultivation increased so fast that it probably now covers more than 20,000 hectares in five Arunachal districts alone.

The reason for this turn around *could* have been demand for opium from adjacent NW Burma, where severe oppression had reduced cultivation, but not eliminated demand. The other reason could perhaps be that legal cultivation in India decreased from 35,270 ha in 2000 to just 5893 in 2014.⁴⁴ Diversion from licit cultivation has always been there. With this decrease in licit opium fields India's about 3 mln opiate users had to find other supplies, and what better way than to increase illicit cultivation.

Illicit poppy cultivation has been traditional in fourteen of the present twenty one illicit opium cultivating districts for centuries. Soon after India's NDPS Act of 1985 was implemented, traditional poppy cultivators in Arunachal, Manipur, Mizoram, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand bore the brunt of eradication.

⁴³ HORIZON, 2011-2012, Annual Magazine of Indira Gandhi Government College, Tezu, Lohit District, AP, http://www.narcoinsa.org/news/tezu_opium.html

⁴⁴ <http://cbn.nic.in/html/operationscbn.htm> in Table showing number of cultivators and hectares cultivated

In 1980s poppy cultivators in Yingkiong, Lohit, Anjaw and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh were living a worse than subsistence level life. They were so poor that they would live on two meals a day, one meal being of herbs gathered from forests, and the other on subsidised rations from the Government. They had no artificial light, so would rise at dawn and sleep at dusk. Opium was used as medicine, for rituals and for relaxation.

The Government of Arunachal Pradesh gave priority to roads and rural development. That is how illicit poppy cultivation was first noticed in 1987. By 2010 nearly all districts had roads, helipads, dams, electricity, schools, colleges, technical training and agro institutes, hospitals, primary health centres and numerous employment opportunities, banks offering interest free loans, Intensive Agricultural Development Programmes that gave subsidies and sent in agricultural scientists to help with money making crops and fruits. Some beneficiaries have become large exporters of ginger, cardamom, apples and oranges, and consequently prosperous. This area has rich alluvial soil, and success was quick. Investment in the region increased, and so did non agricultural employment. The Government succeeded in making the young people (first generation to be educated) improve their earning capacities within the state, and also be capable to do well anywhere in India. Many now have a better life symbolised by all its trappings- smart phones, flat TVs, designer clothes, jewellery, motor cycles and cars etc.

AD cannot match this.

Wide spread development, that made no distinction between illicit crop cultivators and other residents, has improved life for many people. Some villages have become towns. Literacy for both genders was about 56% according to the 2001 Census. By 2011 Census, literacy is about 70%.⁴⁵ Young men and women are now employed in all kinds of professions all over India: aviation, academics, bureaucratic, business, engineering, entrepreneurs, armed forces, medical, politics, scientists and trade.

Despite development and prosperity for some, illicit poppy suddenly began to soar from 2001. Some of the people who profited most from subsidized higher education or technical training and progress became the most brazen and biggest commercial level cultivators. *As increase in incomes and modern facilities have failed to reduce illicit poppy cultivation, AD is irrelevant here.* It cannot achieve more than this development.

Then eradication, that was consistent and widespread till 2000 and had reduced illicit cultivation, is now symbolic and is no threat. In March 2015 about 203 ha were eradicated in AP.⁴⁶ A very small fraction of the 16,441 ha that were tape measured by the Institute of Narcotics Studies and Analyses in 2010.⁴⁷ This area of illicit poppy in only two districts of Lohit and Anjaw exceeds the total size of the 29 villages in the Doi Tung AD Project area of 15000 hectares, in which poppy was cultivated in less than 1000 hectares. Poppy cultivation in

⁴⁵ North East Resources Data Bank, North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd., Government of India, Guwahati, Assam, <http://databank.nedfi.com/>

⁴⁶ http://narcoticsindia.nic.in/upload/download/document_id9559fc73b13fa721a816958488a5b449.pdf pg. 12,

⁴⁷ <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/arunachal-opium-survey-lohit-anjaw-report%202010.pdf> pg.9, para 13,

Arunachal, especially the commercial kind, increases annually. Elected representatives here do not favour eradication, and this inhibits enforcement.

Many cultivators are still poor but better off than they had ever been. Yet, they cultivate poppy- for their own needs first and *barter* or sell the surplus. The commercial sized poppy farmers are maybe 10-15% of the cultivators, but produce most of the opium. AD is superfluous and will not work here, as wide spread education and development has already increased incomes and alternative livelihoods.

A possible solution for India's illicit poppy crop:

A considerable proportion of illicit opium produced in India is for habitual users. If their traditional sources are threatened they will cultivate elsewhere. They will not give up consumption, and treating millions forcefully is impossible.

The only possible way out is for the Government is to register the traditional users and give them opium that they regularly consume from Government stocks. This was done in India from 1971, and that scheme was called Opium Registry.⁴⁸ If this is done opium poppy cultivators in Arunachal, for example, will decrease by at least 80%. All small cultivators are also users, and if they get their daily needs they will not cultivate. Unless, the needs of users is taken into account illicit crop cultivation will continue. It is true for India, for Afghanistan, for Colombia, for Myanmar, and anywhere else that has illicit crops.

The rich cultivator's fields should be eradicated, and the cultivators charged under the NDPS Act. Opium Registry is almost over as most of the 300,000 beneficiaries have died. Such a policy is also recommended by Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy in a recent paper of his on opium production in Arunachal Pradesh.⁴⁹

The commercial illicit crop farmers in the North East of India may soon be a security risk too. Increasing poppy cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh has been attracting national and international media's attention for the past four years. Fearing an increase in enforcement the rich cultivators have begun hiring gunmen (ex-insurgents from Nagaland) to protect their illicit crops, and soon there could be conflict and criminalisation.

AD in Afghanistan- doomed before its start:

Had AD been a good policy, it would have succeeded in Afghanistan, which is the graveyard of the plans and hopes of the Global North- especially drug related. Opium production keeps increasing, eradication has failed, and so has AD. Had AD succeeded here, its supporters could have preached its wonders to the world.

⁴⁸ <http://www.narcoinsa.org/downloads/OPIUM%20REGISTRY-Minutes%20of%20a%20meeting%20held%20on%20the%2031st%20of%20August,%202004.pdf>

⁴⁹ Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud, (Autumn-Winter, 2014), *Illegal Opium Production in the Mishmi Hills of Arunachal Pradesh*, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, Published by University of Cambridge, UK. <http://geopium.org/?p=793>

Hilmand and Kandahar, which produce 67% of all opium in Afghanistan, showed a steady increase of 6% over opium produced in 2013. In 2014 about 224,000 hectares of poppy were cultivated in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ In north Afghanistan there was a decline, but not because of AD, which was tried and failed. “..... 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.”⁵¹

In Kandahar and Hilmand the UK’s Department For International Development (DFID) and USAID, started AD projects called “Food Zones” in troublesome poppy growing areas. In Hilmand the Food Zone was strategically placed in its most fertile area. This was the area watered by the Kajaki Dam on the Hilmand River. Wheat and other food and horticultural crops were grown here so that the farmer could eliminate his dependence on only one crop—opium poppy. It is the most populated area in an otherwise parched Hilmand. DFID called it Alternative Livelihood (AL). Change in nomenclature did not mean changed tactics. AL too was preceded and accompanied by eradication. Most of the poppy production was militarily forced out of the Food Zone area and into the desert. USAID’s agricultural project also focussed on wheat as part of their AL programme. Nothing worked. In the water rich Food Zone of Hilmand, where AL was implemented, opium production *increased* by 13% and outside the Food Zone it fell by 4%.⁵²

For AD to put so much faith in such a fanciful idea, like Food Zones, exposes the lack of logic in its planning. Incomprehensibly, AD is still being touted as the only workable alternative to contain illicit crops in UNGASS 2016.

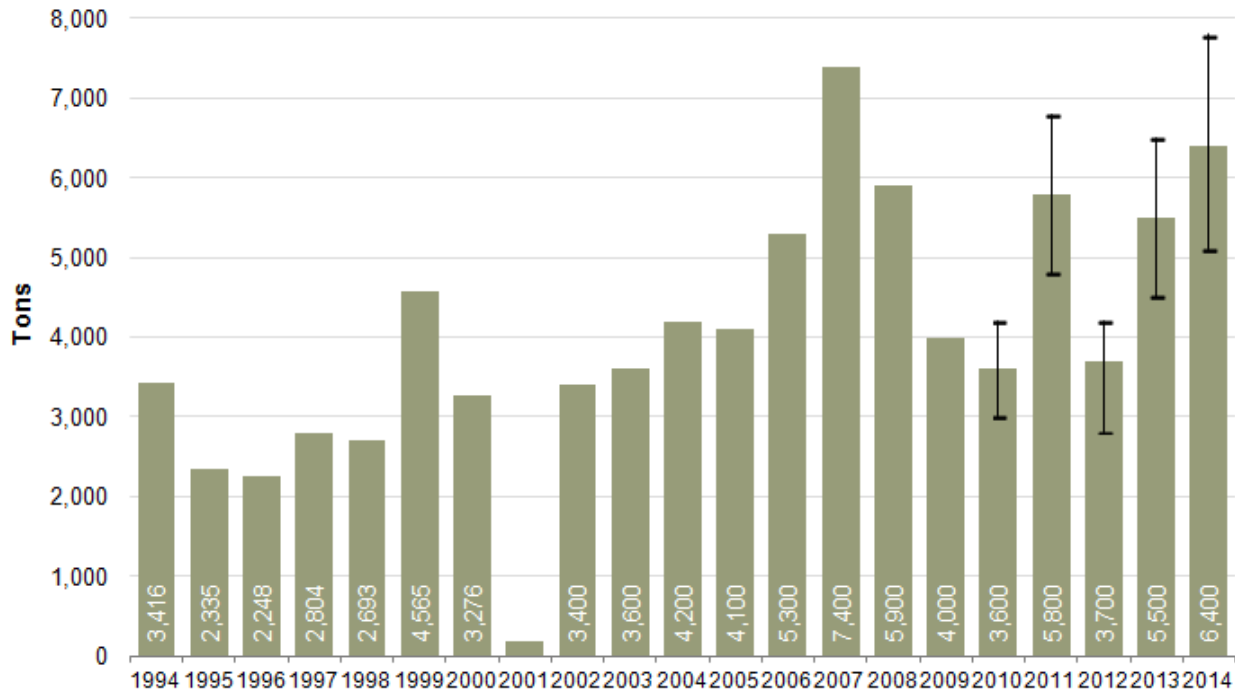
The Afghan opium production chart below shows how big and unmanageable the problem is.

⁵⁰ UNODC, WDR 2015, Annex I, v,

⁵¹ UNODC, WDR 2013, pg. 25

⁵² UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014, pg. 6,

Potential opium production in Afghanistan, 1997-2014 (Tons)



Sources: UNODC and UNODC/MCN opium surveys, 1994-2014. The high-low lines represent the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval of the estimates. Figures refer to oven-dry opium. Production figures for 2006 to 2009 have been revised; see UNODC/MCN Afghanistan opium survey 2012.

And yet the UNODC and some countries are pushing for AD/AL! Poppy cultivation employs about 4 million people a year. AD cannot cover so many people in a strife torn country.

To reduce the embarrassment of high opium production in Afghanistan a not too subtle fiddle with the statistics was done by UNODC. Till 2000 when conditions were most unstable for agriculture, because of the Taleban, opium yield per hectare had reached 50 kgs. In 2009 it was 56 kgs.

- 1998- yield per hectare was - 42 kgs
- 1999- “ “ “ “ - 50 kgs
- 2000- “ “ “ “ - 40 kgs
- 2006- - - 37 kgs
- 2007- " " " " - 42.5 kgs
- 2008- " " " " - 48.8 kgs

2009-	"	-	56.1 kgs
2010-	"	-	29.2 kgs- Disease accdg to WDR 2011
2011-	"	-	44.5 kgs
2012-	"	-	23.7 kgs- Disease accdg to WDR 2012
2013-	"	-	26.3 kgs- Disease accdg to WDR 2013
2014-	"	-	28.7 kgs- Bad weather accdg to Afg Opm Srvy 2014

In 2010 opium production was genuinely low because of disease. Subsequently, disease or bad weather is the excuse that has been given to explain away continued lower yields. Improved agricultural inputs and good weather have increased production of cereals in Afghanistan⁵³. Why should opium lag behind, when its farmers benefit equally from improved agricultural inputs?

Another interesting fact to emerge from a series of WDRs and Afghan Opium surveys is that eradication was never successful in Afghanistan. In the best years it covered just about 16% and in 2014 only 1.2% of the total poppy cultivated area. In 2014 eradication fell by 63% to just 2692 hectares from 7348 in 2013. With little eradication, AD had no chance even in the small areas it was being experimented with.

Myanmar's brief tryst with AD too had similarly flopped.

Conclusion:

The world over there may be at least 8 million people dependent on illicit crops for their livelihood. Each country must evolve its own answers. No borrowed experts can bring about a change.

In a map on pg. xviii of WDR 2015 a wrong impression is created that AD covers or will cover all the illicit crop growing areas. At present it is being implemented in handkerchief sized plots in the shaded areas. In Myanmar it never succeeded. In Afghanistan it has almost been wound up.

Many questions about AD projects need to be answered. Such as, how many hectares have benefited from AD? In how many years? Has AD got rid of all illicit crops in the targeted areas? Has addiction gone or been replaced by synthetic substances? Such concerns have been partially addressed by a refreshing paper published by the German Federal Ministry for

⁵³ Afghanistan Economic Update, pgs 4 & 5, World Bank 2014,

Economic Cooperation and Development called Rethinking the Approach of Alternative Development⁵⁴, but AD was nevertheless recommended.

In the box (pg. 102) on Alternative Livelihoods in WDR 2015 the authors suggest “ecotourism” as an alternative livelihood. Is that the best that they can do? It merely shows the lack of alternatives that are available under AL. In India’s Arunachal Pradesh, the most distant place from Delhi, people have a variety of careers to choose from, much more than are even thought of as AL in Chap. II of WDR 2015.

James Windle in *The suppression of opium production in Vietnam (Crime, Law and Social Change Vol 57, No. 4, 2012)* describes the horrific punishments inflicted by the Vietnamese Government to reduce opium production along with the Ky Son development initiatives. He comments “...This would suggest that rural development, be it alternative development or crop substitution, was insufficient motivation for the cessation of opium production. It appears more likely that reductions from 1993 onwards were centered upon coercive negotiations in which ‘stern threats’ of violence or administrative sanctions coupled with promises of rural development motivated farmers to cease production.” (pg 434).⁵⁵ Brute force cannot work in every country, but small doses or just the threat of its use is necessary in convincing recalcitrants in all the countries that have illicit crops.

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.”⁵⁶ Nothing has changed. This is valid in 2015 too. AD cannot work unless backed up by force. Thailand is not a model as excessive force was used and it is too small to be replicated in bigger countries that have cultural and ethnic diversity. AD has failed in Afghanistan and Myanmar. AD’s supporters have not yet engaged in a debate about its efficacy. Such a discussion is now imperative before India accepts it as the only alternative for illicit crops. Alternative Development ignores traditional use, while prosperity and diverse occupations itself cannot stop illicit cultivation.

⁵⁴ GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH, (December, 2011) Rethinking the Approach of Alternative Development, <http://www.giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/giz2013-en-alternative-development.pdf> .

⁵⁵ Windle, J. (2012). The suppression of illicit opium production in Viet Nam: an introductory narrative. *Crime, law and social change*, 57(4), 425-439, <http://roar.uel.ac.uk/4339/1/2012%20Windle%20-%20opium%20in%20Viet%20Nam%20-%20pre-print%20copy.pdf>

⁵⁶ 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.

The concepts of Alternative Development and Alternate Livelihood look good from afar, but have to be examined thoroughly before investing in them.

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