

POLICY COMMENTARY

Development Not Drug Control: The Evolution of Counter Narcotic Efforts in Thailand

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In the 1960s, Thailand was the biggest opium producing country in the world. This article presents Thailand's evolving strategy in solving the problem of illicit poppy cultivation through poverty alleviation and long-term national development. It argues that the root causes of drug crop cultivation and proliferation are poverty, insecurity, and the lack of livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities. Thus, the problem is more a 'development problem' rather than a 'drug problem,' requiring the addressing of multi-dimensional human development facets in response to the geo-socio-economic conditions of the area. The "Thai approach" is focused on improving the overall well-being of communities, before rule of law can be strengthened, and is very importantly part of long-term broader national development plans. A brief close-up is provided of an example of Thailand's long-term development project, the Doi Tung Development Project, to explain more concretely how Thailand's approach to solve drug crop production translated into practice. Some of these lessons learned from Thailand can and have been shared with the international community in shaping attitudes and policies to drugs and development that are more people-centered, balanced, and sustainable.

Keywords: Thailand; counter-narcotic; alternative development; livelihood development; sustainable development goals

Introduction

Half a century ago, the Golden Triangle, comprising the border areas of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand, became infamous for its opium poppy fields and illicit activities. Most of the world's heroin came from this area from the early 1960s when the Chinese Government cracked down on their opium production, creating a gap in global markets and pushing cultivation across borders. Soon, Thailand became one of the largest opium producing countries in the world.

Cultivation was mostly carried out by the ethnic minority communities living in the remote highlands of Akha, Hmong, Lahu, Lisu, Yao, and Karen. The Thai Government saw that the unmonitored populations living along the country's porous borders, without citizenship, engaged in lawlessness, drug production and trafficking, arms trafficking and other illegal activities, posed a potential security threat to the nation (Boonwat, 2001: 130–135). Thus, in an act to stabilize the region, Thailand implemented national economic development programmes that also addressed drug control issues (Sagredo 2018 p. 1).

The efforts to eliminate opium poppy cultivation and bring livelihood development to the ethnic minority populations in order to secure the region evolved over 30 years. Between 1960–1968, the Thai military tried to address the opium problem through oppressive law enforcement measures against poppy producers in areas with high communist insurgent activities. Quickly the government realized that coercion was counter-productive to its objectives (Windle 2016: 8). This gave way to a new approach to addressing illicit cultivation that was largely guided by His Majesty late King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, who prioritized livelihood development for the people, believing that these opportunities should be put in place before conducting any eradication campaign (Narcotics Control Strategy Bureau 2016: 50). Instead of immediately criminalizing the people involved in drug cultivation, trafficking and use, they needed to be given a chance. This

article traces Thailand's experience and lessons, which could offer useful inputs to other countries where illicit economies are found.

It must be understood that Thailand's efforts against illicit cultivation, which is today commonly associated with the term 'Alternative Development' (AD) by the international community, may differ from other countries' approaches to AD. AD was defined by the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) during the World Drug Problem in 1998 as:

'A process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national economic growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognizing the particular socio-cultural characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs' (General Assembly Resolution 1998).

This broad definition is translated into practice differently in each country, and in many contexts AD constitutes one component of drug control strategy, alongside law enforcement and eradication. However, in Thailand, the fight against drug crop production predated AD, and evolved around efforts primarily focused on alternative livelihood creation. Rather than being a subset of drug control measures, the efforts Thailand undertook were part of integrated national development efforts which also reached insecure, illicit cultivation areas.

Counter-Narcotic Efforts in Thailand

Drugs and underdevelopment in 1960s Thailand: the notorious Golden Triangle

Opium poppy cultivation was concentrated in Northern Thailand along the porous borders with Myanmar and Laos. The ethnic minorities residing in the mountainous areas grew opium for medicinal purposes and as a cash crop but it was not until the early 1960s, after the opium ban in China, that opium was sold on an extensive commercial scale in Southeast Asia. Although the opium trade was a profitable business, especially for the middle-men, growers received only a small share and remained poor. The highland ethnic minorities living in the region faced many physical, geographical, linguistic, economic and cultural challenges. Most of the ethnic minorities did not have Thai citizenship and received little attention and protection from the government. Nor did they have legal rights over the land they lived on or cultivated because the area was classified as a national park and was meant to remain uninhabited. They were therefore hesitant to grow high value crops requiring long term investment. Furthermore, they were unable to use the land as collateral when they needed to borrow money, so their sources of loans were restricted to local merchants and warlords, who either charged high interest or demanded repayment in opium. To acquire food and some income, the communities had to engage in unregulated slash and burn agricultural practices, also leading to environmental degradation. This desperate reality of limited choices for survival drove the highlanders to rely on opium production (Hernandez 2012: 7).

Evolution of the counter-narcotic efforts in Thailand

In the 1950s, the state became concerned about the possible threat to national security following ethnic minority communities' expansion of opium cultivation throughout the hill areas along the Thai-Myanmar border. Thus, the Thai government brought in various agencies related to law enforcement, natural resource management, as well as community development to work in the hill areas, including the Border Patrol Police, Public Welfare Department, Royal Forestry Department, and National Tribal Welfare Committee chaired by the Minister of Interior, among others. In 1960, Thailand launched the First Five-Year National Master Plan for Economic Development to guide development for the entire country, including the highland areas. In order to solve problems in the highlands more effectively, Thailand requested technical assistance from international agencies to gather sufficient information and baseline data for planning. From 1965–1967, surveys were conducted to understand the socio-economic conditions of the highlands, as well as the needs of opium cultivation communities, funded by the UN Commission on Narcotics Drugs (CND). The study estimated opium cultivation at around 18,500 hectares, with a yield of 145 tons between 1965–1966. This led the government to accept the UN-supported survey team's advice on the importance of large-scale efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of the highlands in order to tackle the escalating opium poppy production.

The evolution of Thailand's approach to drugs and development can be traced through three different periods, starting with initiatives involving 'crop replacement,' which made way for more 'integrated rural development projects,' and eventually led to a 'balanced, participatory' development approach, which we commonly associate with Thailand's contemporary AD approach (Jinawat 2001: 67–68).

1970s: Crop Replacement

In 1969, Thailand's late King Bhumibol Adulyadej established the Royal Project Foundation to begin implementing the first crop substitution programme in Thailand, conducting research on viable crops to replace opium production. This would eventually expand to integrated livelihood development activities (Narcotics Control Strategy Bureau 2016: 43–44). The Royal Project was significant in imparting knowledge and experience to government and relevant agencies that could be used in formulating strategies to work in the hill areas, in a time when government officials lacked access to and familiarity with the hill regions.

In 1971, the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC) initiated the Crop Reduction and Community Development Project (CRCDP), the first internationally funded crop replacement project in the world, working closely with and extending lessons learned from the Royal Project. Through these and many other UN and donor-sponsored programmes, dozens of cash crops were given trials. However, it was found that no single cash crop could viably compete with opium, due to many variables such as fluctuating markets, transportation difficulties, and limited technical expertise (Renard 200: 80–89). While there were many programmes in this phase, they were mainly donor-driven, aimed at replacing opium with another cash crop, without people's active participation or coordinated efforts from multiple government agencies, which limited long-term success.

The Office of National Control Board (ONCB) was established in 1976. As the nation's administrative agency on narcotics control, ONCB coordinated efforts between law enforcement and development agencies (Narcotics Control Strategy Bureau 2016: 44). Unlike some other countries where the counter-narcotics agency takes the lead in conducting alternative development programmes, in Thailand, the ONCB was created mainly as a coordination body with a drug control mandate. The fact that ONCB came to life after development efforts had already been taking place in opium production areas shows that Thailand has always prioritized development over drug control.

1980s: Integrated rural development projects

Following the experiences of the crop replacement projects in the 1970s, a more holistic development approach began to take shape by the 1980s, placing more emphasis on comprehensive rural development efforts to improve the overall standard of living of communities, rather than just crop substitution. Many longer-term highland development projects were initiated in this period, including those funded by foreign governments such as Germany, USA, Australia, and Norway, as well as UN and other international development agencies. Such programmes began to target the overall well-being of communities such as health and education services, road access, and infrastructure development, as well as environmental management as it became apparent that illicit cultivation had resulted in much watershed forest destruction.

In the Thai case, laws prohibiting opium and law enforcement were only enforced after 1983 when alternative livelihood options were introduced. Plans for eradication of opium poppies often began with surveys on the extent of cultivation, followed by negotiations with the communities at the beginning of development projects on the timeline in which the eradication would take place, offering the communities several years to prepare themselves for eradication. At the time of eradication, the Army also provided emergency relief supplies to assist the farmers (Windle 2016: p. 9). This underscores the emphasis that the Thai Government gave attention to putting in place viable livelihood alternatives prior to carrying out law enforcement measures.

1990s: Balanced, participatory alternative development

By the 1990s, it became increasingly apparent that area-bound project interventions under the banner of drug control or alternative development had its limits. There was a need for the integration of projects into sector wide policies and programmes if the Thai Government were to achieve the scale it needed and address the wider problems these highland communities faced, including environmental degradation, land rights, and security. Subsequently, project interventions were strengthened by official government policies consistent throughout the 1990s. The series of National Economic and Social Development Plans and Master Plans

on Community Development, Environment and Narcotic Crop Control in Highland Areas in that decade contained clear objectives to integrate the highland ethnic minority communities into the national mainstream. Provisions included promoting their inclusion in the national administration system, preparation for their permanent settlement and livelihood creation, as well as measures on environmental protection and addressing narcotic crop cultivation in the highland communities.

Government officials and implementers of the various projects over the previous two decades also recognized that without the public's active participation, lasting development and drug control outcomes could not be expected. A more participatory and inclusive working approach was widely adopted, with donor agencies, government authorities, the private sector, community-based organizations, and community members working more closely together. Many programmes were devoted to strengthening community-led organizations, such as credit groups, rice banks and the sub-district administration organization.

The outcomes of Thailand's 30-year journey to ensure national development and security, improve the well-being of ethnic minorities, and solve opium production

Thailand's approach was carried out over 30 years to eliminate opium poppy cultivation and uplift the living standards of its marginalized highland ethnic minority communities and contained elements of alternative development, demand reduction, and law enforcement. Thailand's national development policies emphasized development for the entire country, placing certain priorities on its most destitute highland communities, while incorporating counter-narcotic elements. The Thai government, international donors and organizations, NGOs, and the private sector provided over hundreds of millions of dollars, through more than a hundred projects which eventually established close working relationships with the grassroots communities, in highland development leading to opium replacement. The result was confirmed in 2003 when the UNODC removed Thailand from the list of significant opium producing countries (Narcotics Control Strategy Bureau 2016: 41).

The opium reduction statistics were directly related to evidence of overall economic growth in the country. During the period 1965–2013, the Thai economy grew rapidly, with an average annual growth of GDP of 6 percent per year, compared with a global average of 3.3 percent (UNODC WDR 2015: 112). In the 1960s, Thailand implemented a national development policy designed to promote free enterprise systems, and lead to growth opportunities (Renard 2001: 45). In the 1970s, the presence and cooperation of the United States military further helped to develop national infrastructure. At this point in the 70s, Thailand's GDP was roughly \$7 billion. By 2012, the GDP had increased to \$136 billion (World Bank Overview 2018.). Since the 1980s, Thailand's Human Development Index score has risen very steadily, and progress has been impressive in all key areas— income, health, sanitation, social security, education, mobility, and connectivity (UNDP Human Development Report, 2014: v). This national economic growth allowed the Thai government to direct development programmes to the remote highland areas of the country in order to contribute to national security. At the same time, the economic growth provided additional dispensable income to the Thai population to support the consumption of goods and services produced by the highland communities, including fruits, vegetables and cut flowers, as well as travel for tourism (Peach 2007: 272).

Thailand successfully transitioned its highland ethnic minority population out of poppy production primarily through a long-term process involving investments in roads, communications, health, education, and improvement of social services, much of which was funded and supported by national public policies. This ultimately made the ethnic minority population an integral part of Thai society and able to take advantage of the larger economic and market opportunities available (Felbab-Brown et al. 2009: vii). The various income generating activities and infrastructures implemented made it possible for the opium growers to make a living without poppy. The infrastructures also brought the government and rule of law closer to the communities. Access to health services, including drug prevention education, treatment, and rehabilitation, were also seen as important to the well-being of the community. Measures to address citizens' drug demand were coupled with supply-side efforts as part of a comprehensive solution. The long-term development programmes provided opportunity to the communities and provided a sense of dignity and belonging, in turn enhancing their respect for the rule of law.

The Doi Tung Development Project: A Closer Look Through A Practical Example

A long-term development project, broken down into different phases

The Doi Tung Development Project is an example of a long-term development project to improve the overall well-being of the entire community, a majority of whom were involved in opium production or other illicit activities, so that they could instead turn to legal ways of life. It is worth noticing that the project was named

a “development” rather than “alternative development” project which reflects its overall objective of comprehensive livelihood developments for the whole community, beyond an anti-drug focus. Other projects with similar objectives have also been implemented in Thailand for example, a highland development project in Chiang Mai by the Royal Project Foundation. Many of these projects share the same principles but are applied in different geographical areas and carry out different income generation activities suited to each context and target population.

Doi Tung was once a secluded area amid a mountain range along the Thai-Myanmar border, right at the heart of the notorious Golden Triangle, in Chiang Rai province, Northern Thailand. The area covers about 150 square kilometers encompassing 29 villages with approximately 11,000 residents from six ethnic minority groups. Seventy percent of the population did not have Thai citizenship. Its citizens lived in abject poverty, lacking basic infrastructure and government support.

Her Royal Highness Late Princess Srinagarindra, mother of His Majesty King Bhumibol of Thailand, came to Doi Tung in 1987 and recognized these problems were only symptoms of the larger root causes of the interrelated problems of poverty and lack of opportunity. The Doi Tung Development Project (DTDP) was thus initiated in 1988 under the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF)'s management to implement The Princess's vision for livelihood opportunities for marginalized communities by allowing people to live a life of choices, self-reliance and dignity while fostering harmonious coexistence between people and nature (Mae Fah Luang Foundation 2015: 8–9). The Foundation's ultimate objective is to ‘help the people to help themselves.’ The MFLF assumed the key coordinator role in working with the Government – 35 departments from six ministries, private sector, and the community. A 30-year master plan for the development of the area was established and organized into three phases: ‘survival,’ ‘sufficiency,’ and ‘sustainability’ (Mae Fah Luang Foundation 2015; 8–9).

The first phase, ‘Survival,’ began (1988–1993), began with a comprehensive baseline survey of every household as well as ground surveys to understand the geo-socio-economic reality and to identify the real problems and needs of the community. MFLF provided Doi Tung residents with project-issued land use certificates and identity cards to create a sense of belonging and security. Although neither document held any legal status under Thai law, local authorities accepted them as reference documents, thus recognizing that the people were not new immigrants, and allowing them to remain in the area and be included in future citizenship application processes. Programmes were then designed to address health issues through mobile medical units, health education and disease prevention. A 1,000-day drug rehabilitation center was established to treat drug addiction, provide vocational training and prepare the community to welcome the rehabilitated community members once they return home. Basic life necessities (for example, water systems, roads and electricity, and opportunities for skills training and jobs) were provided to the community. An intensive reforestation programme was also introduced to hire local people to reforest the area and provide them with immediate daily cash wages to allow them to support their families and ensure food security, without relying on opium.

The second phase ‘*Sufficiency*’ (1994–2002), focused on long-term, higher and more stable, income generation. High value arabica coffee and macadamia were introduced as an economic forestry initiative to eventually generate long-term viable income for the community. Natural resource management committees were set up by the community to manage the use of water and forest resources sustainably.

The Doi Tung Development Project added the value-chain concept to rural development efforts, moving beyond the cultivation of agricultural commodities to processing, branding, and marketing. The people were provided on-the-job training and necessary skills to move up the value chain and were given opportunities to learn from professionals and experts to create a range of market-driven and high-quality products. To minimize business risks while simultaneously offering diverse capacity building and occupation options to the people, jobs were created in on-farm as well as off-farm sectors. MFLF established five business units: Foods, Handicrafts, Horticulture, Cafe and Tourism, combining local wisdom, skills and experiences with business professionalism to generate enough income to compete with opium production in a sustainable manner (Chulalongkorn 2014: 14).

The third phase ‘*Sustainability*,’ (2003-present), focuses on enhancing capacity building, empowerment, and education to ensure that the people are equipped to take over the development process and manage their own lives without the Project's interventions. To prepare the next generation of leaders, the Project, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, introduced the student-centered Montessori learning approach, which focuses on constructive learning that adjusts to bring out the most potential from each student. The Doi Tung schools adjusted the curriculum to fit the geo-social reality of the area as well as providing scholarships to Doi Tung residents for further education. In addition, advanced skills training to pursue value-added

livelihood activities and the fostering of local leaders and entrepreneurs within the community were emphasized. Many of the second generation Doi Tung residents have assumed managerial roles and have gone on to become part of the local government administration. The Project, whose responsibility is to connect the people with the technical assistance, financing, and other resources necessary to build potential, will be able to wind down its role once the government agencies and community members incur the day-to-day development and governance functions of the programme (Diskul 2017).

If we compare Doi Tung to other development projects in Thailand, the principles are the same, but all programmes are adjusted depending on where the work takes place. For example, another project in Thailand, the Royal Initiative Project, champions fresh produce and post-harvesting production. The Royal Project Foundation project operates in villages all around Thailand and focuses on produce such as vegetables, flowers and fruit which is sold in shops throughout Thailand. Preceding Doi Tung but still relevant in examination, The Crop Replacement and Community Development Project was initiated out of the United Nations Development Programme in partnership with the Royal Project.

Outcomes from the Doi Tung Development Project

After 30 years of continuous development efforts, the Doi Tung community is now on par with other mainstream communities in Thailand. The Doi Tung Development Project measures achievements across economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions, linked to a fundamental people-centered indicator: 'What benefits do the people get?' Some outcomes include the following:

- Opium is no longer grown.
- Economically, income per household in Doi Tung has risen 20-fold, from 802 USD in 1988 to 16,026 USD in 2016 (Mae Fah Luang Foundation. Social Development 2017).
- The five social businesses under the Doi Tung brand generate approximately 533 million baht or 16,259,170 million USD per year, enabling the project to be self-sustainable since 2000 (Mae Fah Luang Foundation Social Development 2017).
- Socially, starting from a largely illiterate population, many members of the younger generation have completed higher education. The number of people with a bachelor's degree and above is 12.6%. Many of them are working at supervisory levels and can go on and lead their communities (Mae Fah Luang Foundation Social Development; 2017).
- The 1,000-day drug rehabilitation programme assisted the nearly 500 residents addicted to opiates, with a low relapse rate of about 15%. (Mae Fah Luang Foundation. Social Development 2017)
- Environmentally, the forest area has been revived, from only 28% of forest area remaining, before the DTDP started, to 86.8% of the area today being habitable (Mae Fah Luang Foundation Social Development 2017).
- Culturally, the six ethnic minority groups in Doi Tung are able to continue their customs and traditions, live harmoniously with each other, while adapting to a globalized world.
- The Project transformed local people of Doi Tung from illegal opium growers to legitimate self-reliant business professionals (Hitosubashi University 2010: 36).
- In 2003, the project was recognized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime as one of the world's best examples of Alternative Development (Apolitical: 2017).

Sharing Alternative Development Lessons with the International Community

Thailand used its experiences to advise policy making and assist with implementation of programmes to address the drug and development problems at the international level.

In November 2011, Thailand, together with the government of Peru and UNODC, hosted the International Workshop and Conference on Alternative Development (ICAD) which contributed to the formation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (UNGPs on AD) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in New York in 2013 (ICAD2 Background Paper 2015: 3).

According to the 2015 UN World Drug Report, the UN Guiding Principles on AD 'have pushed the international agenda further, emphasizing a multidimensional approach ... promoting human development and protecting the environment' (UNODC World Drug Report 2015: 118).

Thailand has contributed to those principles by encouraging the emphasis on incorporating alternative development as part of long-term, comprehensive national development strategies. Furthermore, Thailand has also called for efforts 'to integrate those communities which are in marginalized regions into the

economic and political mainstream,' including supporting access to roads, schools, primary health-care services, electricity and other services and infrastructure (UNGPs, 2013: 8). Instead of outright eradication, the Principles guide that small-farmer households should have opportunities for viable and sustainable licit livelihoods, and that drug control measures should be 'properly sequenced in a sustainable fashion and appropriately coordinated' (UNGPs 2013: 8).

Other progressive elements of the UNGPs include active participation from stakeholders at all levels, especially the grassroots community, throughout the development process; long-term cooperation and flexible funding from multi-sectoral partners and a market-driven approach with attention to value-addition, marketing and entrepreneurship. The Thai case provides proof that these people-centric principles coupled with a long-term perspective are important for the success of alternative development programs. Thailand has partnered with Germany on the 'Global Partnership on Drug Policies and Development' (GPPD) to assist countries with applying the UN guiding principles on alternative development to national policymaking and project implementation. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ. 2013.

After the launch of the UNGPs on alternative development, several milestones followed augur well for the alternative development agenda. In 2015, the world adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompassing comprehensive development dimensions including but not limited to, poverty alleviation, health, education, economic development, equality, environmental preservation, governance, peace, justice, and security, among others. As the UNODC World Drug Report suggests, the SDGs provides new incentives for alternative development and offers a valuable framework to help guide alternative development initiatives (UNODC World Drug Report 2015: 118). Furthermore, in April 2016, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) conducted a review of global drug policies which resulted in a document containing a section related to alternative development and addressing socio-economic issues related to drug crop cultivation, consequently evoking more nuanced conversations about the issue (UNGASS 2016: 21–23).

In June 2018, Thailand, along with Japan, submitted a resolution backed by the UN Crime Commission that connects crime prevention, rule of law and the sustainable development goals. The resolution stressed that 'people tend to commit crimes when they do not have any viable options.' This focus on crime prevention underscores the close relationship between drugs and development and necessary linkage to the SDGs (CCPCJ L.7 Resolution 2018).

Despite the significant achievements made towards a more balanced, integrated, and sustainable alternative development approach in the international policy arena, a disconnect between rhetoric and reality remains. Often, the implementation of alternative development programmes on the ground, including ensuring consent and inclusion of grassroots communities in the process, are far from the principles contained in the UNGPs. Funding support for alternative development programmes is also limited (ICAD2 background 2015: 17). In 2015, it was reported that a mere 0.2% of global overall development commitments were devoted to alternative development support (UNODC WDR 2015: 84.). Although, according to the UNDP, the links between drug use, drug control policy, and development, and the impact of drug markets have been recognized and documented for more than a decade. Drug control and development institutions have typically operated in isolation and in some cases, with competing purposes (UNDP 2015: 3). Therefore, more serious efforts are necessary to shift from discourse to practice; align drug and development objectives; provides evidence of the interconnectedness between drug and development problems; and integrate cooperation amongst drug and development agencies at local, national, and international levels.

Conclusion

Thailand's path against opium poppy cultivation spanned three decades, involved long-term planning and large-scale investments in development of the highland areas, required strong commitment of government agencies, international donors, and the private sector, and benefited from the strong leadership of the royal family. Crucial to the success of the efforts was the recognition that the drug problem was very much a human development problem, leading to a people-centered solution which involved the local communities in the development process and empowering them to continue evolve the program. Thailand's approach to these principles though the implementation of sustainable alternative livelihood development projects to alleviate poverty and provide solutions to drug crop cultivation in other countries including Myanmar, Afghanistan and Indonesia proves the replicability of the approach. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution and the approach must be adapted to suit the specific geo-socio-economic conditions on the ground.

Furthermore, as the realities of the drug phenomenon have shifted from illicit crop production in rural areas to manufactured drugs in urban settings and expanding trafficking networks, it is worth exploring

whether some of these lessons learned can be applied in response to addressing the new realities. In its firm belief that the root causes of drug crimes in urban settings are also poverty, lack of opportunity, social marginalization, and other vulnerabilities, Thailand has begun to translate some of its rural-based experiences to suburban and urban initiatives to remove people from the cycle of crime and foster a licit economy.

The experiences of Thailand can hopefully invoke thought regarding the importance of integrating drug and development objectives to not only eliminate drug crops but uplift the overall well-being of communities in a sustainable manner. We have arrived at a critical juncture with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals and increasing evidence of the linkages between poverty, lack of development and insecurity, weak governance, drug production, crime and violence.

Competing Interests

M. L. Dispanadda Diskul, Ramrada Ninnad, Andrea Skinner and Visit-orn Rajatanarvin declare employment by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage. The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation under Royal Patronage.

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