Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente
Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES IN COLOMBIA: THE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND ILLICIT CROP SPRAYING

Executive Summary

In rural Colombia, campesinos, indigenous groups and Afro-Colombians rely heavily on farming as the main source of income and food. However, such legal food crops and the environment that sustains agriculture in the region are being harmed by the US-funded Program for Eradication of Illicit Crops with Glyphosate (PECIG), which targets illegal coca and poppy plants crops with aerial spraying of pesticides. The harm suffered by these communities as a result of the aerial spraying highlights the urgent need to reevaluate the program. It is high time to focus on alternative development programs that more effectively address the cultivation of illicit crops in Colombia.

An indigenous woman in Chocó works on a seed-bed as part of an alternative development project. *Ecofondo, 2006.*

Examples of individuals and community groups affected by these sprayings abound. When María Chirimía, Pedro Quintero and César Vargas,[1] three Eperara Siapidaara indigenous children all under the age of ten, died in April 2004, their community in Nariño claimed that the deaths were the result of aerial spraying in the region that made the children sick and caused illnesses in at least 15 other people. Because the complaint was not investigated in a timely manner, it was impossible to verify the community's claims. Additionally, spraying in the area continued without consultation with the community. Similarly, early in 2005, crop dusters blanketed part of the Kogui Malayo Arhuaco indigenous reserve located in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in the North without previous consultation with the community. That spraying campaign destroyed food crops and contaminated water resources that were vital to the community. These damages have not been compensated. Finally, in May and June of 2005, many farms in Cauca in the Southeast, most of which had support from the US Agency for International Development and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, were sprayed. Subsequent inspections by local officials found that 90 percent of the sprayed farms grew only legal crops. The majority raised fruits, vegetables and export crops like organic, fair-trade coffee, and many had attained expensive organic certifications to sell their harvest on the international market. These stories are just a few examples of harmful effects that have occurred during the past six years of aerial spraying. In addition, the glyphosate mixture being sprayed harms the environment by destroying natural forests and food crops.[2]

These types of problems, along with the clearly demonstrated lack of results of the spraying program, make it time to re-evaluate the current effort and consider providing greater support for alternatives that could more effectively address the problem of illicit crop cultivation. Alternative development programs are a compelling option for eradicating illicit crops because such efforts tend to be less expensive, produce results that benefit communities, and prevent coca and poppy plant cultivation in the long-term. These programs can

[1] The names of the people mentioned in these stories were changed for security reasons.

[2] MESSINA, J.P. and DELAMATER, P.L. Department of Geography, Center for Global Change and Earth Observations, Michigan State University, Defoliation and the War on Drugs in Putumayo, Colombia, August 2005, in International Journal of Remote Sensing. Vol. 27, No. 1, January 10, 2006, p. 121–128.

provide comprehensive solutions to the problem by addressing the root-causes of illicit crop cultivation, including the lack of economic opportunities, high rates of poverty and violence, unmet basic needs, a weak state presence, the agricultural crisis, disrespect for human rights, and pressure by the guerrillas and paramilitary groups to plant illicit crops.

Ineffectiveness of the spraying program

Beyond causing adverse impacts in local communities and posing unknown environmental risk, the Plan Colombia spraying has clearly been ineffective[3]. Having yielded only a limited reduction in coca cultivation, the program has by no means met the objective of destroying 50% of the coca and poppy crops in Colombia. In fact, not only have the crops not been eradicated as hoped, but the spraying has caused the relocation and replanting of crops. This has spread the cultivation of illegal crops and the associated violence and environmental problems to new regions of Colombia.

Given the lack of results, the spraying program is not cost-effective. In spite of US and Colombian government expenditures of approximately US$1.2 billion (US$200 million each year),[4] the spraying program has only reduced the 163,289 hectares of Colombian coca reported in 2000[5] to 144,000 hectares reported in 2006.[6] This is an abysmal return on investment. The United Nations and the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) both stated that the crop-coverage remained the same between 2003 and 2004,[7] and actually increased in 2005.[8] By comparison, the total area of coca sprayed via the program is 690,729 hectares - more than four times the area of coca initially reported.[9]

A simple cost-benefit analysis demonstrates the extremely high comparative cost of the spraying program. Between 2000 and 2005, about US$1.2 billion[10] was invested to spray 713,301 hectares of coca and poppy plants,[11] in the end reducing the crop coverage by only 23,550 hectares. During the same period, approximately US$213 million was invested in alternative development programs to successfully protect or eradicate illicit crops from 1,600,000 hectares.[12] The table below compares the amount invested in the spraying program to amounts spent on various alternative programs.[13] The difference is striking.

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[3] DNE, MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR AND JUSTICE, Report Study of Evaluation of Efficiency of Application of Glyphosate and the Residuality of Glyphosate and its AMPA Metabolism in Soils. Case No. 793, Bogota, D.C., July 15, 2004, p. 15.

[4] ISACSON, Adam, "Manual Eradication in Parks: Set Up to Fail?" February 14, 2006 http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/blog/archives/000215.htm#more.

[5] Dirección de Antinarcóticos Policía Nacional; Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes [Anti-Narcotics Directorate of the National Police; National Narcotics Directorate]; Integrated System for Illegal Crop Monitoring (SIMCI), "Annual Cultivation Survey 2001," March, 2002.

[6] United States Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Press Release, April 14, 2006.

[7] Press Release, United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, March 25, 2005

[8] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Colombia Census of Coca Crops, June 2005, Pg. 3.

[9] Colombian Drugs Observatory, DNE, Statistics at: http://odc.dne.gov.co/sidco/publicaciones.do?accion=verEstadisticas (last visited, August 18, 2006), UNODC World Drug Report 2006. Vol. 2 p. 232, 239.

[10] ISACSON, *op. cit.*, February 2006.

[11] National Narcotics Directorate (DNE) Statistics, *op. cit.*, UNODC, 2006, *op. cit.*, p. 232, 239.

[12] ONDCP, *op. cit.*, UNODC, 2006, *op. cit.*, 232.

[13] The total amount of investment in each program and annual amounts are determined. No numbers of beneficiaries for the PECIG or for involuntary manual eradication are included because no number applies to these programs. No data is included for cooperative voluntary manual eradication because we only have partial data which do not enable us to make this comparison.

Program	Annual Investment (US$)	Hectares Affected by Program	Cost per Hectare Affected (US$)	Hectares Eradicated or Protected from Illicit Crops	Cost Per Hectare Protected (US$)	Number of Beneficiary Families
PECIG (Spraying)	200,000,000	713,301 (over 6 years)	1,682	23,550 (over 6 years)[14]	50,955	Not Applicable
Manual Forced Eradication	31,000,000[15]	31,285 (in one year)	991	Not known.	Not known.	Not Applicable
Forest Rangers Families	58,550,000	1,249,960 (over 3 years)	141	Not known.	Not known.	37,123
SSC (Parks Unit)	1,371,000	73,649 (over 3.5 years)	55	73,649 (over 3.5 years)	55	11,581
ECOFONDO - ACDI	752,000	313,544 (over 3 years)	7	313,544 (over 3 years)	7	6,500

Sources: Presidential Program Against Illicit Crops, Colombia, Colombian Natural National Parks Unit, ECOFONDO and Center for International Policy.

Additionally, the spraying program has been linked to legal violations. For example, the Colombian Comptroller General has stated that the manner in which the program has been implemented violates the Environmental Management Plan.[16] Legal requirements for prior consultation with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have also been ignored, even though the right to such consultation has been upheld by the Colombian Constitutional Court.[17]

Alternative Development as a Solution

Alternative development programs are key to solving the problem of illicit crop cultivation. Such initiatives, though not always a tool for eradicating crops directly, provide ways to improve the overall wellbeing of citizens and communities, thus reducing the dependence on illicit crop cultivation for survival. Many successful alternative development projects are being carried out in Colombia despite existing social and political challenges. Not all have been resounding successes, but each contains important elements and provides lessons for shaping future programs.

This document describes a number of programs that are being implemented, and ways these could be improved to become even more effective. Programs discussed include the Sustainable Conservation System; the Participatory Environmental Management for Peace and Sustainable Development Initiative; manual eradication efforts (voluntary, and forced); and the Forest Ranger Families program.[18] It should be noted that other programs that merit support are also being carried out, with and without government backing, but are not discussed due to space limitations.

[14] In 2000, there were 169,500 hectares of illegal crops in Colombia, and in 2005 there were 145,950 hectares. ONDCP, *op. cit.*, UNODC, 2006, *op. cit.*

[15] Estimated total for the last year, therefore, we are using the figure for hectares eradicated for 2005.

[16] Comptroller General of the Republic Plan Colombia: Quinto Informe de Evaluación [Fifth Evaluation Report] Bogota D.C. December 2004, p. 37.

[17] CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF COLOMBIA. Judgment SU 383 of 2003, May 13, 2003, Reporting Magistrate Judge Dr. Alvaro Tafur Galvis.

[18] Forest Rangers Families, or *Familias Guardabosques*, is a state-run program that supports rural, indigenous or Afro-Colombian families who are involved or in danger of becoming involved in planting crops considered illegal in important ecosystems.

1. Sustainable Systems for Conservation – the SSC Strategy[19]

The Sustainable Systems for Conservation or SSC Strategy, a program of the Colombian National Parks Unit, began in 2001. The program aims to protect natural park areas and buffer zones through sustainable development projects for communities in surrounding areas. Between 2001 and 2003, the SSC Strategy was put into practice in 15 national parks and three wildlife sanctuaries. Via activities such as reforestation projects, promotion of natural forest regeneration and food crop cultivation**,** the SSC program protected 73,649 hectares from illicit crop cultivation and other adverse ecosystem impacts. SSC projects are implemented with the active participation of communities, and are designed around simple, long-term solutions. The projects require support from local, regional and national authorities working to improve agricultural and land use practices and land distribution processes.

2. Participatory Environmental Management for Peace and Sustainable Development

Projects in this program have been implemented by ECOFONDO (a Colombian, environmental non-profit organization), with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Project implementation began in 2004 and will continue through 2009 with a total financial commitment of US$3,760,000.[20] The objective is to promote environmentally sustainable resource exploitation through projects that focus on biodiversity conservation along with agro-ecological production to guarantee food security. Projects also aim to empower participating communities by promoting local control of territories, alliances among local organizations, and increased public participation, as well as by influencing public policies.[21] So far, the programs have prevented the cultivation of illicit crops on 313,544 hectares in areas ranging from southern Bolívar, Sucre, and Catatumbo, to the Colombian Amazon.[22] These projects have enabled people to leave their work as "raspachines" (people who harvest coca leaves) to work legally. Program beneficiaries need not migrate to follow the coca crops and associated violence, but rather can remain in their native regions.

Growing beans and the uchuva fruit (Cape Gooseberry) in Boyacá, as part of an alternative development project. *Ecofondo, 2006*

The ECOFONDO initiative covers 17 states and directly benefits 6,500 families. With a high level of community participation, a demonstrated level of success, and a self-sustaining nature, these projects provide excellent examples of the type of alternative development that should be promoted.

3. Voluntary Manual Eradication

Voluntary manual eradication is undertaken by communities and state personnel working jointly and through a participatory process. Because the plants are forcibly uprooted and cannot recover, this type of eradication is more permanent. (Sprayed plants are often pruned and nursed back to health.) Voluntary manual eradication has been carried out in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Park and on various indigenous reservations. In February 2006, for example, one hundred indigenous persons in the Kogui,

[19] SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT OF THE NATURAL NATIONAL PARKS OF COLOMBIA (UAESPNN) Ecoandino Sustainable Development Project, Volume II Results, Bogota D.C. 2005, p. 4-8.
[20] ECOFONDO - ACDI Participatory Environmental Management for Peace and Sustainable Development in Colombia, Project Implementation Plan, Bogota D.C. September 14, 2004.
[21] *Id.*
[22] ECOFONDO Directions for Nation-Building, Process for Creating a System for Project Results and Impacts Co-financed by ECOFONDO with Funds from the Special Canada Office of Development Assistance (ODA) Account (1994-2004), 2005 Final Report, ECOFONDO Corporation, Bogota, 2005.

Malayo and Arhuaco reserve eradicated 500 hectares, with support from the National Parks Unit, the UNODC and the Office of the President of the Republic.[23]

4. Forest Ranger Families

The Forest Ranger Families initiative is a state-run program for rural, indigenous or Afro-Colombian families that are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in illicit crop cultivation within strategic ecosystems.[24] Currently, 37,123 families are paid US$1,600 per year for three years to refrain from growing illicit crops.[25] With an investment of US$175,645,000 between 2003 and 2005, 1,249,960 at-risk hectares have been kept free of illicit crops. The cost for this program is an average of US$141 per year and hectare protected, compared to US$1,682 per year and hectare sprayed via the spraying program.[26]

This program could be greatly improved if changed to promote long-term, sustainable results rather than simply supplying direct aid (payments) to families. The program should also refocus on the original goal of protecting privately-held *forested* areas, since much of the land the program now covers has been converted to agriculture. Additionally, expanded access to information, stream-lined processes for obtaining land titles, and enhanced monitoring and management of the social impacts that arise when direct payments lure individuals away from agricultural work[27] would also enhance the success of the program.

5. Forced Manual Eradication

Between 2000 and 2005, 69,742 hectares of coca were manually eradicated by the Colombian military and police without the consent or participation of local communities.[28] Most of these crops, (31,285 hectares) were eradicated during 2005.[29] Despite the apparent success, this program has several problems. First, forced manual eradication has not been undertaken in coordination with other initiatives, such as voluntary eradication programs. Second, the lack of participation by affected communities has led to tensions and rejection of the initiatives by local communities. For example, since the forced eradication program began in the Sierra La Macarena, 19 eradicators and several soldiers that were protecting them have been killed by guerrilla attacks and land mines planted in the roots of coca plants.[30] Many participants quit the program because of these types of dangers, the poor conditions, and poor pay. So far, the program has failed to yield the expected results.[31]

Moreover, in recent years, the Colombian government has employed demobilized paramilitaries for these efforts.[32] The presence of these groups in communities has led to an increase in violence, and poses great risks for both those involved in the eradication as well as community members.[33]

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[23] UNODC - COLOMBIAN NATURAL NATIONAL PARKS UNIT, Press Release No. 3, February 3, 2006.
[24] OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA, Council for Social Action, Alternative Development Program, *Familias Guardabosques*, Bogota D.C., August 2004. See also, Document CONPES 3218, March 2003.
[25] Corresponding to US$130 monthly for one family's subsistence.
[26] RESTREPO U., Victoria Eugenia Director, Presidential Program Against Illegal Crops, Official Letter PCI-AFA No. 111812-4-227, Bogota D.C., February 2, 2006.
[27] According to information from a personal interview with peasants at the Nation Association of Peasants Unity and Reconstruction, social impacts include increased alcohol consumption and prostitution. (Bogotá D.C. April 20, 2006).
[28] UNODC 2006. p. 245.
[29] NATIONAL DEFENSE MINISTRY, 2006 *Op. Cit.*
[30] Semana. "Golpe a erradicadores en La Macarena" August 2, 2006. In: http://portal2.semana.com/wf_InfoArticuloNormal.aspx?IdArt=96234
[31] Personal interview with officials of the Colombian Natural National Parks Unit, April 2006.
[32] El Tiempo. "Government announced that 2,000 demobilized from auto-defense groups will eradicate illicit crops". April 3, 2006.
[33] Inter-American Commission On Human Rights (IACHR). "Report on the demobilization process in Colombia", OEA/Serv.L/V/II.120, Doc. 60, December 13, 2004, in: http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/ Colombia04sp/informe5.htm.

If forced manual eradication initiatives continue, significant changes must be made to address these problems. For example, more state support is needed so that local communities will be empowered to resist the increased violence that has accompanied these programs. In addition, for all manual eradication efforts, there is a need to take into account the local conditions, and efforts should be made to involve and consult any communities living in the area, to make the results more sustainable.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is vital to support sustainable development alternatives that produce real results and that are not characterized by the type of destruction and environmental risk associated with the spraying program. Integrated and more sustained solutions to the problem of illicit crop cultivation must be urgently sought, and these programs should be favored over the ineffective, inefficient and harmful aerial spraying efforts. Solutions must address each region's particular needs, and the underlying complex social, political, and economic problems. To be effective, programs must provide viable and sustainable economic options for the many who depend on illicit crops for their livelihood.

Beekeepers at work as part of an alternative development project in Boyacá. *Ecofondo, 2006.*

Additionally, new indicators of program effectiveness should be considered, including the degree and quality of governance, the level of human rights protection and violence, and quality of life in the region. When considered, such indicators demonstrate the advantages of and the need for a sustainable development approach, especially in light of the negative impacts of the spraying program.

There is still room for improvement in existing alternative development programs. Additional state support, adequate planning, and better coordination among entities implementing the projects are key. Pure aid programs should be avoided, with an emphasis instead on finding sustained solutions that improve all aspects of quality of life for those formerly dependent on illicit crop cultivation.

Projects such as the SSC Strategy, voluntary manual eradication initiatives, and the programs conducted by ECOFONDO are the types of activities that should be promoted to achieve concrete results in Colombia. Active participation by affected communities in all of these programs has helped prevent the credibility and support problems faced by initiatives that do not incorporate community participation. Moreover, these successful programs address not only the problem of illicit crops, but also the underlying social and economic problems of the community.

Less expensive, alternative initiatives like the ones described above are better options for solving the problem of illicit cultivation of coca and poppy in the long term than aerial spraying. The Governments of Colombia and the United States, as well as international aid organizations and civil society, should prioritize increased support for such alternative projects as a means to reduce illicit crop cultivation, protect the environment, promote peace, and benefit communities in Colombia.

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