

## **Supply Control or Social Control? Coca, Eradication and Development in the Andes**

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**Abstract:** For over two decades the US has funded repressive forced coca eradication in Peru, Colombia and Bolivia to reduce the illegal cocaine trade. These policies have never met their stated goals and have generated violence and poverty. In 2006 Bolivia definitively broke with the US anti-narcotics model, replacing the militarized eradication of coca crops with a community-based coca control strategy. The program substantially reduced the coca crop while providing subsistence and citizenship for farmers and respecting human rights. This article outlines the elements of the Bolivian initiative that ensure its functioning and considers to what extent they can be translated to other contexts. More broadly this paper draws attention to the fundamental inability of supply side control initiatives to slow the illegal drug trade, which is driven by continuing demand and exorbitant profits.

**Key words:** Coca, eradication, development, subsistence, Andes

### **1 Introduction**

Since the launch of the Andean Initiative in 1989<sup>3</sup> the US has channelled billions of dollars to South American military and police forces to enable them to undertake counter-narcotics operations. In the Andean region the US has focused its efforts on the eradication of illicit crops (mostly coca leaf -which is used to produce cocaine - but also opium poppy and marijuana), law enforcement and the interdiction of drugs shipments. The aim of 'supply side enforcement' is to curb the flow of illicit narcotics reaching the United States. The logic underlying the entire operation is that by reducing supply, the cost of illicit drugs will increase, and this in turn will dissuade people in consumer countries from buying them (Youngers, 2006).

Historically, the USA has dictated the terms of the 'war on drugs', and has used its political and economic might to crush any debate on alternatives. However, recently some Latin American leaders have openly discussed the failure of present

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<sup>3</sup> The Andean Initiative was a five-year, US \$2,200m. plan targeting coca and cocaine production in the Andean region; the plan was 'front-loaded' with military and police assistance.

policies to achieve their goals and the high cost of implementing supply reduction efforts (in terms of violence, corruption and institutional instability). Latin American leaders have argued for more effective and humane alternatives, some countries have even made unilateral changes to drugs policy (see Grisaffi, 2014b).<sup>4</sup> This article adds to the debate through a discussion of illicit coca cultivation and the policies to tackle it, in Peru, Colombia and Bolivia. This article represents a timely intervention as, of late, debate challenging mainstream forced eradication as an integral part of counter-drug initiatives, has dropped off the drug policy radar.

This article draws attention to the harms generated by US backed militarized eradication and the aerial fumigation of coca crops, and explains why this policy ultimately fails to stem coca and cocaine production. The second half of the article introduces Bolivia's innovative model for coca control which allows registered farmers to grow a limited amount of coca, while working with coca grower federations and units of the security forces to voluntarily reduce any excess coca production - a process known as 'social control'. It is argued that 'social control' represents a more humane, sustainable and productive alternative to the forced eradication of coca crops. In the final section the authors examine the elements of the Bolivian initiative that permit its continued productive implementation and explore their potential applicability to other Andean contexts.

More broadly this paper draws attention to the fundamental inability of supply side control initiatives to slow the illegal drug trade, which is driven by continuing demand and exorbitant profits. Raw materials and drug production sites are eliminated but are quickly and easily reinitiated elsewhere. Traffickers effortlessly absorb these operating costs, and military and police budgets retain high levels of funding. Yet, impoverished communities growing coca or participating in the lowest levels of the drug trade fare much worse. What supply-side drug control, specifically forced coca eradication, does achieve however, is of even greater concern; namely poverty, human rights violations and the erosion of civilian state legitimacy and control. In sum, supply side control generates unacceptably high human costs with no apparent benefits to any party negatively affected by the drug trade.

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<sup>4</sup> In December 2013 Uruguay became the first country in the world to legalise and regulate the production, marketing and consumption of cannabis.

## **2 Coca Regulation**

Coca is a perennial shrub native to the Andean region; it grows like a weed in tropical areas at elevations of between 200 to 1500 meters. Coca leaf has been used for millennia by indigenous peoples in the Andean countries; it is most commonly chewed but it can also be prepared as a tea. The people who consume coca value its properties as a mild stimulant, but it also serves important social, religious and cultural functions (Allen, 1988, Carter and Mamani, 1986). Academic research confirms that coca use has no harmful impact on the consumer (Burchard, 1992).

Despite its many positive benefits (not to mention the coca trade's historic importance to the regional economy), the leaf has always occupied an ambiguous position in Andean society. Since the Spanish conquest activists, law-makers, scholars, and the clergy have debated the legality of coca and its derivative products (Gagliano, 1994, Gootenberg, 2008). In 1961 coca leaf was classified as a restricted narcotic substance (alongside cocaine and heroin) under the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. The convention – which was signed by Peru, Colombia and Bolivia – establishes that 'the parties shall so far as possible enforce the uprooting of all coca bushes which grow wild. They shall destroy the coca bushes if illegally cultivated,' and, 'coca leaf chewing must be abolished within twenty-five years' (Metaal et al., 2006). The 1961 convention thus established the legal framework for future US backed coca eradication efforts.

Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia each have unique histories, cultures and traditions related to coca, and as a result each nation pursues a different approach to enforcement. Colombia penalizes coca most severely; all aspects of production, consumption and commercialization are outlawed. Colombia's harsh stance can be traced to the fact that Colombia has comparatively limited traditional consumption,<sup>5</sup> and so unlike in Peru and Bolivia there is no widespread support for it (Ramirez 211: 55). Furthermore, in Colombia revenues derived from the illegal coca trade have fuelled the country's interminable civil conflict. Successive governments have criminalized coca growers on the basis that they finance terrorism (Rangel, 2000, Peceny and Durnan, 2006, Thoumi, 2002). The Colombian state has long embraced

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<sup>5</sup> In Colombia coca has traditionally been used by some indigenous peoples, however as they represent a very small segment of Colombia's population (around 3%) coca use is very restricted.

U.S. designed and funded anti-drug strategies, although recently its leaders have started to question the sustainability of this approach.

In Peru coca consumption is common in highland areas— particularly amongst rural populations - but it is also consumed by middle class urban professionals and served to tourists in Cusco to help them cope with the altitude. Peru's coca legislation is less rigid than Colombia's, because while the state officially condemns coca chewing and prohibits private coca cultivation, it nevertheless authorizes limited coca production and commercialization for medicinal, scientific and industrial purposes.<sup>6</sup> Peru is a recipient of large amounts of US counter-drug aid, and has ambitious plans to eradicate half the country's coca crop over the coming years (Gootenberg, 2014).

Bolivia has the strongest coca culture of all the Andean countries. A recent EU funded study calculated that about one third of Bolivia's population regularly consumes coca or coca based products, including coca teas, skin creams, and liquor (CONALTID, 2013b). Bolivian President Evo Morales has also led the battle for the decriminalization of coca leaf at the international level, arguing that the ban on traditional use is not only a historic mistake,<sup>7</sup> but also discriminatory towards Andean peoples. In an unprecedented move, in 2011 Bolivia withdrew from the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and re-joined in 2013, with a reservation that permits coca consumption within its territory. Bolivia thus successfully reconciled its international commitments and its 2009 Constitution, which declares that the state has a duty to preserve and protect coca chewing as an ancestral practice.

### **3 Coca Cultivation**

Peru, Colombia and Bolivia are the world's largest producers of coca leaf. The most recent UN coca surveys estimate that Peru has 60,400 hectares of coca (UNODC, 2014c), Colombia 48,000 hectares (UNODC, 2014a), and Bolivia 23,000 hectares (UNODC, 2014b). In each country coca cultivation is concentrated in marginal areas, characterized by minimal civilian state presence, limited infrastructure and high rates of poverty (UNODC, 2005). In this context coca complements subsistence farming and, in the absence of other income generating activities, is one of the few pursuits

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<sup>6</sup> All legal coca in Peru is commercialized through the state run National Coca Company (ENACO by its Spanish acronym).

<sup>7</sup> The justification for classifying coca as an illegal substance has its roots in a UN study published in 1950. This study has since been discredited as inaccurate and racist for its characterization of coca chewing as a disgusting, backward and dangerous habit.

that provides farmers with access to cash. This is well illustrated in the case of Colombia where sixty per cent of coca is grown on plots measuring less than two hectares, and the majority of farmers live below the poverty line (Díaz and Sánchez, 2004).

Small-scale farmers grow coca because it has several comparative advantages as a cash crop. Coca can be harvested once every three to four months, it is light and easy to transport and almost all of the investment corresponds to labour costs and not to tools or other inputs, which leads to elevated levels of employment. Coca leaf generates far higher returns per hectare than any other crop, but most importantly there is always a guaranteed market for it (Spedding, 2004). Given the lack of legal alternatives and the high prices, much of the coca crop is sold to traffickers who process it into cocaine paste (the first step towards refining pure cocaine). The people who process cocaine paste are generally young men with no land or hope of decent jobs. They set up artisanal laboratories in isolated areas, where they macerate shredded coca leaves in a range of chemicals including sulfuric acid and gasoline to extract the cocaine alkaloid. The drug workers earn low wages for work that is dangerous, illegal and harmful to their health (Grisaffi, 2014a).

While coca cultivation has provided small farmers with economic opportunities, its cultivation is also associated with a range of negative environmental and social impacts. Environmentalists argue that as coca is grown in isolated areas it expands the agricultural frontier and contributes to significant deforestation. For example it is calculated that in Peru, 2.5 million hectares of forest have been destroyed as a result of coca cultivation (Briones et al., 2013: 33). Furthermore the chemicals used to process cocaine paste, including gasoline and sulphuric acid, are often released into streams and rivers, and in the process damage delicate aquatic ecosystems (Young, 2004, Alvarez, 2001, Salisbury and Fagan, 2013). These impacts are real, but they are not restricted to coca farming, we might expect similar results if colonization was provoked by gold mining, logging or ranching. Indeed, several studies have found that if farmers were to plant lower value legal crops then they would have to clear even larger areas of forest in order to maintain household incomes (Henkel, 1995, Bradley and Millington, 2008). Meanwhile, the methods to reduce coca plantations, including the aerial spraying of herbicides in Colombia, may

prove to be even more destructive to ecologically sensitive environments than drug processing (O'Shaughnessy and Branford, 2005).

Researchers also point to the negative social impacts of spontaneous colonization. Highland migrants to tropical areas, are portrayed in some of the literature as invading indigenous territories and establishing boom towns plagued by lawlessness and violence (Salisbury and Fagan, 2013). The most serious social harm related to coca cultivation can be observed in Colombia, where the major guerrilla groups, including the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC by its Spanish acronym) and right wing paramilitaries, finance their activities by taxing coca production and trafficking. Farmers have been caught in the crossfire as illegal armed groups struggle for control over this lucrative trade (Angrist and Kugler, 2008, Ibáñez and Eduardo Vélez, 2008). The intense violence, has forced tens of thousands of people off their land to join the ranks of Colombia's estimated 4.9 to 5.5 million internally displaced people (IDMC, 2013). Research on Peru's Shining Path Maoist guerrilla movement, also shows that access to the coca economy was a key determinant allowing it to expand (Kernaghan, 2009, Felbab-Brown, 2005)

#### **4 Forced eradication**

A cornerstone of US strategy in the Andean region has been the eradication of coca crops. Eradication is often carried out manually, teams of eradicators (often military conscripts) accompanied by heavily armed members of the police enter small farmsteads to uproot illicit crops. Chemical eradication has also been used; typically herbicides are sprayed from small aircraft so that larger areas of coca can be destroyed. Colombia is currently the only Andean country to allow aerial fumigation (Mansfield, 2011). Crop eradication counts on strong support among US policymakers who claim that it is the most sure-fire way to cut drug production; from their perspective, crop destruction at the source prevents them from being processed into drugs and subsequently traded on the international market (Dion and Russler, 2008: 402). However, there is a growing body of research, which indicates that supply side enforcement – in particular crop eradication - does not meet its targets and generates wide ranging harmful impacts (see Reuter, 2001).

Analysts point out that eradicating coca crops is grossly inefficient. Eradication generates incentives for poor farmers to replant as it forces the price of coca up, while simultaneously denying them their only source of income. Thus when crops are reduced in one area, production inevitably expands in other geographic locations; a phenomenon analysts refer to as the 'balloon effect' (Rouse and Arce, 2006). For example as a result of forced eradication in Peru and Bolivia in the early 1990s production shifted to Colombia, which in 2009 became the world's foremost producer of raw coca leaf. Consequently, although the amount of land under coca cultivation in each country fluctuated between 1987 and 2008, the total coca acreage in the Andean region as a whole remained remarkably stable, at around 190,000 hectares (Youngers and Walsh, 2010: 3).

Since 2009 UNODC data shows that overall coca crop acreage has decreased (mostly driven down by efforts in Colombia), but this has had no obvious effect on drug production nor has it had a discernable impact on the supply of drugs reaching consumer markets. The problem stems from the flexibility at the supply side. Farmers have found ways to protect their crops from herbicides, and to generate higher yields per hectare by increasing the density of coca plants and using new combinations of fertilizer and pesticides. Meanwhile cocaine paste manufacturers have employed new technologies and processes to extract more cocaine from lower volumes of coca leaf. As a result, in spite of eradication efforts, potential cocaine production in the Andes has remained virtually unchanged (Mejia, 2010, Mejia and Posada, 2008).

Aside from being inefficient, eradication puts the burden of the war on drugs onto small farmers (who gain the least from the trade) and generates multiple harms. Forced eradication (when no alternative livelihood strategies are in place), immediately wipes out the family's main source of income, leaving them destitute and struggling to survive. Eradication also imperils targeted growers and their communities by orientating the military towards internal enemies, often leading to the violation of human rights. In all three countries the security forces tasked with carrying out eradication missions have killed, abused and seriously wounded scores of coca farmers, torched homesteads and incarcerated and tortured hundreds of people. Institutional damage has been compounded by the impunity that the security forces frequently enjoy (Youngers and Rosin, 2005).

The aerial fumigation of coca crops in Colombia brings with it a specific set of problems. Since the inauguration of Plan Colombia in 2000,<sup>8</sup> the government has sprayed more than half a million hectares with herbicide (Ramirez and Youngers, 2011). The government has always argued that the chemicals used to spray coca are benign, however Anthropologist, Maria Clemencia Ramirez (2011) records how people who live in spray zones suffer from a variety of ailments including skin, respiratory and gastrointestinal problems. They also complain that spraying is indiscriminate and carried out without warning. The herbicides have caused environmental damage (including water contamination and land degradation) and have affected food and cash crops, which in turn has undermined food security. Given that most farmers have no other way to survive they often end up replanting coca deeper in the jungle, thus all that spraying achieves is to displace coca cultivation and with it spread the civil conflict to new areas (Rincon-Ruiz and Kallis, 2013, Walsh et al., 2008, Dion and Russler, 2008). The Colombian Government acknowledges the poor results of fumigation, in 2007 it downscaled crop spraying and stepped up manual eradication missions, which contributed to driving down coca cultivation (Isacson, 2010).

Eradicating crops is not only inefficient and dangerous but it is also counterproductive. Forced coca eradication sows distrust amongst coca grower communities and thus undermines the functioning of alternative development programs (Melis and Nougier, 2010). What is more, the eradication of crops has provoked political instability in the Andean countries. In Peru and Colombia peasants have held national level protests to campaign against coca eradication and in both countries illegal armed actors (Sendero Luminoso in Peru and the FARC in Colombia) have, on occasion, sided with coca growers to resist government eradication efforts (Ramirez, 2011, Kernaghan, 2009, Felbab-Brown, 2005). Meanwhile in Bolivia, US backed coca eradication was a catalyst for mass discontent and demonstrations that toppled two presidents, in 2003 and again in 2005 (Grisaffi, 2010, Durand Ochoa, 2014).

## **5 The myth of “alternative” development**

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<sup>8</sup> In 2000 the US and Colombia jointly launched Plan Colombia, an eight-billion dollar 'aid' package (80% of which is destined for the police and military) with the stated aim to reduce narcotics production by half within six years and to regain security in the country.



While funding crop eradication campaigns, the US has also provided coca farmers with development assistance with the aim to convince them to switch to legal crops. Anthropological research suggests that coca farmers would like to reduce their dependence on coca (Ramirez, 2011), however, with few exceptions such projects have failed to offer them realistic economic alternatives. An examination of US Agency for International Development (USAID) designed and funded programs in the Chapare, one of Bolivia's principal coca growing regions, between 1997 and 2003, illuminates some of the limitations of 'alternative development'.

USAID promoted export crops, such as bananas, coffee, cacao, palm heart, and timber, none of which are suitable for the small peasant producer. Crops such as bananas and palm heart require a large initial investment, a sizeable workforce and large tracts of land in order to be profitable. Meanwhile coffee and cocoa beans take a long time to mature so dividends only appear after several years (thus many farmers went bust in the intervening period). USAID did not carry out viability studies to see if there were markets for these products, and made little effort to open out new markets. Thus most farmers found that they could not sell their 'alternative' crops and they were pushed into debt as they had to repay loans they had been encouraged to take out in order to plant the crops in the first place. The failure of such projects meant that many farmers were forced to replant coca (Farthing and Kohl, 2005, Lupu, 2004).

US Development budgets for the Chapare were high, with estimates ranging from US\$229 to \$310 million spent between the beginning of the 1980s until 2004 (Farthing and Kohl, 2005: 186). However, most of the money went to USAID contractors (to be spent on wages, hotels, cars and offices), rather than to the intended beneficiaries, a situation which generated resentment amongst coca farmers. Further, USAID refused to work with the existing agricultural unions (henceforth referred to as the Coca Federations), or even the municipal governments (which since 1995 had been under the control of the Coca Federations)<sup>9</sup>. From 1998 farmers who wanted to acquire development assistance first had to cut their ties with the Coca Federations and join one of the USAID backed producers associations. *Associacionistas*, as they came to be known, had to commit that they would no longer grow coca and denounce

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<sup>9</sup> After 2004 USAID began to work with municipal governments in the Chapare.

neighbours who continued to do so. Many coca growers saw this as an attempt by USAID to break the coca federations through a process of divide and rule, as one Federation leader put it 'we realized that the Yankees were trying to make us fight between comrades.' Others said 'the NGOs came here to destroy the unions'. In 2008 the Coca Federations refused to permit any further USAID alternative development projects in the Chapare.

In Peru and Colombia the government, donor agencies, and development contractors have replicated failed initiatives in Bolivia with little variation. In both countries there has been a lack of meaningful consultation with peasants' organizations, poor sequencing of development assistance (i.e. making it dependent on the prior eradication of coca), short-term planning, and the promotion of crops aimed at the export market, which have proved to be unsuitable as there were often no markets for them (UNODC 2005). USAID's emphasis on promoting private agribusiness has had a range of harmful impacts including generating few jobs at low wages, damaging ecologically sensitive environments and encouraging the concentration of land ownership, thus contributing to rising levels of inequality (Cabieses, 2010, Vargas, 2011, Youngers and Walsh, 2010, Mansfield, 2011). In Colombia this development model has exacerbated processes of accumulation by dispossession; with paramilitaries forcing peasants from their land to allow for the expansion of agro-industry (Hristov, 2009, Ballvé, 2013, Escobar, 2003).

As coca growers have long known, no sole source of income will replace coca, especially in fragile tropical environments with poor infrastructure and minimum state presence. As a result, crop "substitution" and "alternative" constitute two of the fundamental myths presented as justification for forced eradication, and their inevitable failure guarantees endless cycles of repression, poverty, and replanting the coca leaf. It is essential that policymakers move beyond this spurious, yet pernicious, precept.

## **6 Bolivian community coca control**

The negative impacts of inefficient and ultimately, counter-productive, US-promoted forced coca eradication have been thoroughly documented. This begs the question, what would a different approach look like? This section outlines Bolivia's radical

new strategy to coca control, which coordinated integrated development and limited coca cultivation, with the aim to reduce harms to coca growing communities.

The death of two coca growers at the hands of government eradication forces in October 2004 (just weeks after a negative evaluation of Bolivian eradication efforts by the US government) sparked massive social unrest in the Chapare region of Bolivia. To calm the growing tension the Mesa administration (2003-2005) accepted a longstanding demand of Chapare coca growers, the right for each family to cultivate a small plot of coca, or 'cato' (1600 square meters), destined for the licit market. The concession, which flew in the face of US eradication mandates, effectively ended forced eradication in the region. The initiative marked a shift in vision away from the US imposed narrative, which portrayed coca farmers as active participants in the drug trade, to subsistence farmers working to feed their families.

With the launch of the cato policy, protests, violence, and human rights violations subsided immediately. Union members went from staunch resistance to the government, to active citizen participants, working to limit their crop to one cato per union member. The underlying logic of the program helped to guarantee its success, the equitable distribution of the small plots of coca among established union families, effectively increased leaf prices, and provided each family with the equivalent of a monthly minimum wage.

The 'cato accord' was initially designed as a temporary measure,<sup>10</sup> however on entering office in 2006 President Evo Morales (an ex-coca grower) adopted the cato system as the cornerstone of his coca control strategy and extended it to other coca growing regions, including the La Paz Yungas. Morales also increased the previous cap on coca cultivation from 12,000 to 20,000 hectares nationally.<sup>11</sup> With funding from the European Union, the Morales administration designed and implemented a complex, overlapping multi-faceted strategy to support the project. The six pillars include:

1. Land titling for coca growing families with catos.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The terms of the October 2004 accord stipulated that the cato policy and coca distribution would be re-evaluated after the publication of a broad-based legal market study. Publication of long-awaited study occurred in October 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The administration's justification for extending the amount of land under coca cultivation is that coca, in its natural state, is not a drug.

<sup>12</sup> Coca growers had long resisted state land titling initiatives in the past for fear of expropriation for growing coca and erosion of sindicato control.

2. Biometric registry of coca growers authorized to grow the cato.
3. The registration and recurring measurement of each cato of coca by the state monitoring organization, the Economic and Social Development Unit (UDESTRO by its Spanish acronym).<sup>13</sup>
4. The creation and maintenance of a sophisticated database (SYSCOCA), which aids the monitoring of coca cultivation and traces coca leaf transport and sales.
5. Integrated development projects to complement subsistence income generated by the cato.
6. The empowerment of the community to self-police to restrict coca cultivation to the one cato limit. This includes training for union representatives on database use, and community joint action to monitor and restrict coca planting.

This innovative program did not emerge overnight, but rather was built on the previous efforts of the Coca Federations and the European Union's (PRAEDAC) municipal strengthening program.<sup>14</sup> Initiated in 1998 (during the peak of US-driven forced eradication) the landmark EU initiative functioned on the premise that poverty reduction (through providing basic services), engaging coca grower organizations, land titling and strengthening local government, can contribute to break farmers' reliance on coca. Nicolaus Hansmann, attaché to the Cooperation Section of the European Union in Bolivia, told the authors that beyond its concrete on the ground achievements, one of PRAEDAC's most significant contributions was to change the image of alternative development and to build trust in government and legitimate the state in the region.<sup>15</sup> In other words, PRAEDAC created a credible foundation for community coca control.

Building on this groundwork, once in power the MAS administration channelled development assistance to coca growing regions and increased state presence through investments in roads, schools and health posts with the aim to bring the region into the economic and social mainstream. In contrast to previous US-driven initiatives, these government led programs recognize the importance of restricted coca cultivation and the strategic advantage of working with the well-organized union structure. The Chapare farmers are making the most of these opportunities and are

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<sup>13</sup> Bolivia shares its coca data with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

<sup>14</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/bolivia\\_praedac\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/bolivia_praedac_en.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Nicolaus Hansmann, EU. 11 november 2014, electronic communication

successfully diversifying their sources of income. In 2011 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) noted that for the first time there had been a significant expansion of non-coca crops in the zone (UNODC, 2011: 47); even USAID echoed the sentiment (GAO, 2012: 17). Coca growers confirm that over the past nine years the regional economy has started to pick up, this is evidenced by rising land prices, home improvements and increased car and motorbike ownership.

PRAEDAC's initial efforts to strengthen Chapare local government and reduce poverty allowed for the successful transition of coca control agencies (previously funded and supervised by the US Narcotics Affairs Section) to be efficiently run by farmer representatives. The State offices that monitor the distribution of the coca crop and plan its reduction now integrate local civil society representatives into state institutions, further enhancing their legitimacy. This credibility, first-hand knowledge of coca farming, rapport and capacity built through training and enhanced technology funded by the international community (EU, UNODC, US, and Brazil) has led to the development of transparent and efficient systems and guidelines that protect the subsistence rights of the farmer. The rules of the game are clearly defined and reached by consensus.

The control initiative also demonstrates Bolivia's commitment to address the international community's concerns about coca cultivation for the illegal market. The Morales administration has made efforts to industrialize coca for licit uses, including setting up coca processing plants to manufacture coca tea in sachets along with a range of other products. However, for the meantime these plants run well below capacity because coca remains on the UN list of restricted substances, so these products cannot be legally exported and the domestic legal market cannot soak up Bolivia's current coca production.<sup>16</sup>

Today Bolivian government and UNODC monitoring teams are now able to accurately measure the coca crop and its distribution in situ. As a result, for the first time in any country, there is a consensus amongst major players and the international community about how much coca there is and where it can be found.<sup>17</sup> The data

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<sup>16</sup> A EU funded study suggests that Bolivia needs 14,000 hectares to satisfy domestic consumption CONALTID (2013a) 'Gobierno presenta resultados del Estudio Integral de la Hoja de Coca', *Edición Especial de la Secretaría de Coordinación CONALTID*. La Paz, Bolivia, Ministerio de Gobierno de Bolivia..

<sup>17</sup> Coca data in Bolivia is now so accurate that in 2013 the United States government felt obliged to quietly downscale their own coca growing estimates for Bolivia during Morales's tenure by an average of 5,000 hectares per year Andean Information Network (2013) 'ONDCP Dramatically Downscales Potential Cocaine Production Estimates for Bolivia', in Ledebur, K. (ed) *AIN Policy Memo*. Cochabamba, Andean Information Network.

shows that in 2010 the Bolivian coca crop stood at 31,000 hectares, but by 2013 it had declined to 23,000 hectares, less than half the coca found in either Peru or Colombia (UNODC 2014). Significantly, Bolivia has dramatically reduced its coca supply while respecting new benchmarks for success, including respect for human rights, full citizenship rights for farmers, empowering local communities, and developing long-term economic alternatives to coca. Undoubtedly, a negotiated approach like Bolivia's community coca control, will take longer to show results than forced eradication, yet, coca reduction under the new system can be more readily sustained as farmers are provided with real economic alternatives.

### ***6.1 How community coca control works on the ground***

In the past policy makers viewed Bolivia's coca grower organizations as an impediment to coca control. In contrast today they are seen as key to the effective implementation of the cato policy and complementary development initiatives. Drawing on long term ethnographic research in the region, this section outlines how control is enacted on the ground by the agricultural federations.

The Chapare region is characterised by strong agricultural unions. At the grassroots are the 'sindicatos,' these are territorially bound self-governing units composed of anything from 20 to 200 people. The sindicatos are grouped into sub-centrals, which in turn make up six federations representing more than 40,000 families. In order to gain a cato each member of a sindicato has to acquire a land title, register for a bio-metric ID card and have their cato measured and logged by the state coca monitoring institution (UDESTRO). It is then largely up to the sindicatos to exercise internal controls to ensure that nobody exceeds this limit. The sindicatos are well positioned to do this have they have a long history of self-governing (Grisaffi, 2013).

Base level sindicatos carry out regular checks of coca plantations to ensure that all members comply with the agreement. First time offenders lose their right to grow coca for a year, repeat offenders lose coca-growing rights permanently and can be expelled from their community. These consequences are perceived by the community to be fair and logical. The sindicatos are serious about self-monitoring. Farmers claim that the controls are tighter today than when the US 'zero coca'

policies were enforced. To date more than 800 farmers have lost the right to cato because of non-compliance (Opinion, 2014).

Farmers have very good reasons to self-police. For one, the policy was designed at the coca federation's grassroots meetings; as a result farmers have a strong sense of ownership over it. Indeed farmers often refer to the accord as 'our little cato,' others say that they respect the cato because, 'we fought for it'. Moreover the farmers know that by restricting coca cultivation the price of coca goes up. Thus 'envidia' or jealousy plays an important role, one farmer said, 'look everyone knows how much coca I have, and they don't want me to get rich at their expense' as a result he said '...they would not hesitate to denounce me.' Finally the coca growers identify strongly with the goals of the MAS administration; they sincerely believe that they have a duty to respect the cato as a support to Morales who they know is working to legalize coca at the International level.

Notwithstanding these advances, there are challenges associated with implementing the new policy—not least the refusal by a minority of farmers to comply with the regime.<sup>18</sup> In situations where a sindicato fails to exercise adequate control representatives from UDESTRO negotiate with community leaders, and if needs be they will organize for the coca to be forcibly eradicated. However, eradication is no longer accompanied by violence, as one female coca leader explains 'we no longer rebel when they come to cut the coca – we just show them where it is and let them get on with their work.'

Although community coca control is not easy, and demands constant negotiations with different coca growing communities, the long-term impact far outweighs its shortcomings. From the perspective of the Chapare coca growers, the new policy is a step in the right direction. The violence provoked by forced coca eradication is regarded as a thing of the past, and they have been able to re-establish themselves after years of impoverishment. Most coca growers agree that limiting coca cultivation is a small price to pay for peace, full citizenship and economic stability.

Bolivia's coca control program was not designed to limit drug trafficking, but there is evidence to suggest that since the launch of the cato accord the coca growers are now motivated to actively collaborate in the fight against drug production. Each

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<sup>18</sup> Some farmers plant more than one cato on their plots, meanwhile others sub-divide or buy land in distant villages which they register under the name of a different family member. The federations are determined to eradicate these surplus catos (known locally as 'catos blancos' or 'catos fantasmas') to ensure that each farmer has only one cato.

sindicato takes on the responsibility to ensure that none of its members are involved in processing cocaine paste. If a production site is found on a members' plot, then the landowner will immediately lose their cato and potentially also their land. The profits derived from processing cocaine paste are so slim that most farmers are not willing to run this risk. Rather, they are much more likely to denounce traffickers to the police. As a result of this pressure, the *drug workers* have been forced to alter their behaviour, with many shifting their operations outside of the Chapare and into urban areas (Grisaffi, 2014a).

## **6.2 Best practices from Bolivia**

The United States has been highly critical of Bolivia's coca policy; in September 2014 the White House renewed the 'decertification' of Bolivia for the seventh consecutive year, stating that the country had 'failed demonstrably in the past twelve months to make substantial efforts to adhere to its obligations under international counter-narcotics agreements.'<sup>19</sup> Not all evaluations have been so negative, however. In 2014 the European Union's Ambassador to Bolivia explained, 'our efforts have been a success; you can also see the impact in the effective and sustained reduction of coca production... the European Union's experience has been very positive.'<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile the Organization of American States cited Bolivia's social control program as an example of, 'best practices that are not just well known but are also available for implementation and replication.... initiatives that enrich dialogue and can inspire each country to understand how it can successfully manage the various challenges posed by drugs within its particular context and economic, political, and social circumstances.'<sup>21</sup> Thus in the final two sections the authors draw out the best practices from Bolivia and consider what aspects might be translated to other contexts.

The Bolivian case shows that successful crop reduction is dependent on the state treating coca farmers as citizens and partners, rather than as criminals who actively stimulate the drug trade. Land-titling combined with the legal recognition of

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/13/presidential-determination-major-drug-transit-and-drug-producing-countri>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia/seguridad/17092014/ue\\_califica\\_de\\_exitosa\\_lucha\\_antidroga\\_de\\_bolivia](http://www.erbol.com.bo/noticia/seguridad/17092014/ue_califica_de_exitosa_lucha_antidroga_de_bolivia),

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction\\_and\\_Analytical\\_Report.pdf](http://www.oas.org/documents/eng/press/Introduction_and_Analytical_Report.pdf)



a limited amount of coca, can create the framework for non-repressive state engagement, and the protection of citizen rights. Further the Bolivian experience goes to illustrate that strong social organizations, with a sense of group efficacy, have to be permitted within a state structure and be recognized as valid counterparts in local coca control and development. Thus another important step is the strengthening of local government (including capacity building and guaranteed budget provision) to allow it to act upon coca grower requests. The European Union's municipal strengthening program in the Chapare region is a key example in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

National governments and their local operators also need to focus on providing adequate social services, such as road infrastructure, health, and education (basic responsibilities of all states), without conditioning them as rewards for eradication of coca crops. Delinking human development from crop and drug control objectives is an indispensable prerequisite to establish the legitimacy of state actions and the trust to implement further initiatives. Control efforts will inevitably fail if policymakers continue to operate a system which encourages people in coca-producing regions to perceive the government as a repressor, and not as a service provider.

Finally, coca production cannot be significantly reduced without implementation of a viable sustainable livelihoods approach. It is common sense that proper sequencing is a crucial element to integrated development in coca producing regions. Yet, the Bolivian approach goes further, by employing subsistence income from coca (which has no comparable substitute in terms of income generation) as the anchor for unprecedented income and crop diversification.

Coca farmers have long been subjected to externally imposed alternative development 'packages' funded by USAID in Bolivia and replicated, in spite of their inefficacy, in Colombia and Peru. Thus, we recognise that it is not feasible to apply Bolivia's unique home-grown strategy in other coca growing or illicit crop production regions, without significant modification appropriate to each context. Nevertheless, the community coca control initiative does present some fundamental elements that could be integrated into strategies applied elsewhere.

Critics argue that key elements of Bolivia's initiative cannot be successfully implemented in Peru and Colombia due to the continuing presence of violent non-

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<sup>22</sup> See [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/bolivia\\_praedac\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/case-studies/bolivia_praedac_en.pdf)

state actors. Yet, in spite of the criminalization of the coca farmers and on-going conflict, civil society organizations exist in both countries (often organizing to resist state eradication efforts).<sup>23</sup> Following the Bolivian example, the authors argue that rather than an impediment to coca control or 'threat,' these organizations and their members, are the key to successful implementation of coca control policies, income diversification programs, and ensuring the rule of law. For example the presence of strong social organizations in some coca growing regions of Peru, paired with a significant licit coca market, provide potential tools to work to implement community coca control. However despite platitudes to the contrary,<sup>24</sup> Peru's President Humala remains firmly committed to US funded forced eradication paired with conditioned development.<sup>25</sup>

The Colombian coca farmers meanwhile have long advocated alternative approaches to coca control. For example in 1994 (before the advent of aerial fumigation) Colombian coca farmers proposed a coca for subsistence model with production ceilings for community reduction. This innovative approach was rejected by the government,<sup>26</sup> and coca production spiralled soon thereafter (Isacson, 2013). Today, in the context of on-going peace discussions between the Colombian government and the FARC, there appears to be some degree of political will to look for alternatives. For example the draft agreement on "The Solution to the Illicit Drug Problem" calls for voluntary crop reduction, integrated sustainable development initiatives, and the active participation of local communities in planning and execution, all features of the Bolivian model. However, in spite of these positive steps, the Colombian government continues to insist on the total elimination of coca production and that crop 'substitution' is possible and viable. According to policy expert Ricardo Vargas, the government still perceives the FARC as its primary impediment to 'total eradication'.<sup>27</sup>

The draft version of the accord conditions development assistance and state engagement, on farmers meeting prior agreements for coca eradication. It puts timelines for compliance in place, without establishing similar deadlines for the state

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<sup>23</sup> Email Communication with Pedro Arenas, Observatorio de Cultivos Declarados Ilícitos. 16 November 2014.

<sup>24</sup> For example in June 2014 the Peruvian government sacked its drug czar, Carmen Masías, and back-pedaled on announced aggressive forced eradication in the Apurímac Ene Mantaro River Valley (VRAEM) due to the possibility of violence

<sup>25</sup> Email Communication with Ricardo Soberon, October 27, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Email Communication with Pedro Arenas, Observatorio de Cultivos Declarados Ilícitos. 18 November 2014

<sup>27</sup> The Bolivian case provides an illustrative counter example; in Bolivia irregular groups have never been present even so over two decades of forced eradication failed to eliminate the entire coca crop.

initiative. The accord also sets unrealistic timespans for the provision of aid that will guarantee subsistence until other sources of income can be implemented. The government proposes six months, while the FARC has suggested two years. Looking at the Bolivian experience the authors would suggest far longer is needed. Bolivia's sustainable development initiatives took almost a decade to be consolidated, and still farmers are dependent on coca. In short the FARC - Government of Colombia accords borrow key pillars of Bolivia's community coca control strategy, without adopting its indispensable cornerstones: coca for subsistence and lack of conditionality. Without modification, this strategy risks falling short of its objective and justifying further violent forced eradication, aerial fumigation and repression.

## **7 Conclusion**

Peru, Colombia and Bolivian share one key dynamic, a long history of ineffectual violent forced eradication, criminalization of coca farmers and failed conditioned development. So long as external demand for illicit drugs remains then people will keep growing coca because in all three nations, coca production presents a solution to families' subsistence needs, which cannot be easily replaced. Thus all that drug policy makers can realistically ever achieve is to affect how and where coca is grown. Given these parameters, if US policymakers remain committed to supply side initiatives then they should opt for reduced coca production with guaranteed subsistence as a human alternative to the myth of total eradication. Less coca grown by engaged citizens who can feed their families, is preferable to continued eradication with the associated violence, poverty, and recurring failure.

To reduce coca in a sustainable, effective and safe fashion the Bolivian experience teaches that Governments should provide basic services and infrastructure in compliance with their obligations to their citizens, and not as incentives for crop reduction. States and the international community should seek to empower grassroots organizations and create the conditions for their inclusion and collaboration with coca policy. Finally, the international community must shift its focus and demands away from meaningless eradication statistics to human development indicators to measure progress in coca-growing regions.

Bolivia's experiment with Community Coca Control opens the door for other countries to experiment with alternative approaches to reduce coca acreage. The authors' hope is that Peru and Colombia might adopt some of the lessons outlined here and integrate them into their own coca reduction efforts.

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