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ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT MUST TAKE A BROADER APPROACH TO ACHIEVE DESIRED EFFECTS, SAYS BOARD

Calls for Improved Market Access for Legitimate Crops; Emphasizes Importance of Security and Good Governance in Affected Areas; Advocates Extension of Alternative Livelihoods to Cities

The alternative development approach must be repositioned in order to work as an international drug control strategy, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) says in the first chapter of its Annual Report released today (1 March 2006). The Board observes that there are substantial limitations in alternative development approaches taken in the past, and the concept needs to be broadened in order to achieve large-scale, sustainable results.

Though the Board notes that there are cases in which alternative development has contributed to successes in the reduction in areas cultivated with illicit drugs crops, it focuses on the main weaknesses of the classic alternative development approach. These are its focus on crop substitution rather than more broadly-defined legitimate livelihoods; its limitation to isolated projects rather than the whole economy of a country; its lack of consideration for international terms of trade; and its neglect of urban areas and the problem of drug abuse.

To date, alternative development has focused almost entirely on crop substitution. "This narrow and mechanical approach does not have the desired effects," said Hamid Ghodse, President of the INCB. "A truly comprehensive concept of alternative development includes not only the cultivation of alternative crops, but also transport and infrastructure development, education, health care, security, stability and good governance," he added.

The implementation of alternative development largely in the context of individual rural development projects in isolated areas does not provide the desired impact on drug control on a larger scale, says the INCB. Alternative development should be taken out of the confines of a "project-by-project" approach, and be seen as a cross-cutting issue, involving a multitude of players at the local, national and international levels.

The INCB warns that the long-term sustainability of legitimate livelihoods should be taken into account, in particular in light of international tariffs and terms of trade. Member States should formulate their domestic and international trade policies with a view to improving market access for alternative development products.

The Board also points out that the global problem of drug trafficking warrants a global response. Countries can no longer afford to pay attention only to drug abusers in their own territory. If demand influences supply, then drug production both in the national and international arena, is affected. Illicit drug abusers often belong on the fringes of society, living in slums of large cities. Members of marginalized communities in urban areas may also be forced by violent gangs into drug dealing. In such situations, well-defined policies are needed to provide opportunities for earning legitimate income and help reduce drug problems.



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The issue of legitimate alternative livelihoods needs support in both rural and urban areas where illicit drugs are abused, instead of only addressing rural areas where illicit drug crops are cultivated.

The INCB also emphasizes the need for international support to Governments in establishing political stability, security and good governance in illicit crop cultivation areas, often characterized by various types of conflict and lack of law and order. People living in such areas may have little direct experience with the State except for the military and law enforcement authorities. Unless Governments are able to establish their authority and provide a safe environment, alternative development has no chance of being effective. Law enforcement must be sensitive to crop growers' living conditions, and should focus on drug trafficking and criminal organizations and their armed networks.

Bearing in mind the complexity of the global drug situation, a longer time frame is required to achieve both drug control and sustainable development objectives, the Board says.