Introduction

The illicit crop cultivation of drugs, is the key component to the dangerous drug supply chain that has created a world drug crisis. Nowadays millions of people participate in the illicit drug crop cultivation, most of whom come from the global south, where this issue is the catalyst for thousands of youth drug addictions, horrific acts of gang violence and high rates of criminal activity. The reason why there’s such a high contribution to the cultivation of these drugs, is due to the major and significant income it provides to people, who are struggling to find income elsewhere and are considered below the poverty line. Nearly 4.5 million people are dependent on the crops for income and 50% of it comes from illicit cultivation. It was found that the majority of cultivators are poor rural farmers who grow such crops to be able to provide for themselves and their families, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) has identified smallholder rural farmers as “the group most at-risk of cultivating drug crops due to poverty and lack of land”.

Thus it can be seen that the clear motive behind the illicit drug crop cultivation is the economic value it provides to its owners. In Afghanistan, the opium produced had an annual value of $31 billion dollars, due to the high demand coming from drug traffickers, to drug dealers to drug addicts. It all starts with a simple seed and some soil, yet the damage that comes after is horrifying. From this, it can be seen that to tackle the whole world drug crisis, the solution starts at tackling the illicit narcotic crop cultivation. Moreover, this shall be done by preventing smallholder rural farmers from growing such crops by counteracting the positive financial incentive they get from cultivating narcotic crops.

Definition of Key Terms

Illicit crops

Illicit crops are crops or plants which have been deemed illegal to grow by the government. There are 3 main crops which are the basis of drug crop cultivation. The three crops are opium poppy, cocoa bush and cannabis.
Narcotics/Drugs

Narcotics have different meanings in different contexts, if referred to medically, narcotics have chemical agents which induce insensibility to pain, drowsiness or coma. However in the context of international drug control, narcotics are an addictive substance (drug) that affect mood or behaviour rather dangerously, and are considered lethal and illegal.

Opium Poppy

The opium poppy is a species of flowering plants Papaveraceae, a substance found in the seed capsule of an opium poppy is derived and used in the production of codeine, morphine and heroin, all illicit drugs.

Coca Bush

The coca leaf of the coca bush, is raw natural material, a plant which is used for the manufacturing of the illegal drug cocaine. One of the most addictive and dangerous drugs that have a powerful stimulant and anesthetic, of which are extracted from coca leaves.

Cannabis

Cannabis is a type of plant, where its dried leaves, stems and seeds are derived and used as a psychoactive drug. The drugs extracted from the cannabis plant can be used for medical or recreational purposes, The main psychoactive part of cannabis is tetrahydrocannabinol.

Crop Cultivation

Crop cultivation is the act of growing and caring for plants or crops. These plants are usually harvested extensively for profit or subsistence.

Drug Trafficking

The illegal transport of illicit narcotics usually across country borders.

Background Information

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs

The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 is one of the main 3 primary conventions that have contributed to international drug policy and drug reduction offers. The other 2 being the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988). however the strongest and most primary one being the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961. This convention was established by the United
Nations (ECOSOC) to replace all existing multilateral agreements, in efforts to minimize the wide range of organizations tackling the illicit narcotic issue, to create further efficiency. The main goal was to control and monitor the use of raw materials (the crops grown) to produce narcotics, such as the opium poppy, coca bush and cannabis. Two committees were branched off from the ECOSOC the Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the International Narcotics Control Board, these committees had the same target as all the other ones, to fight off illicit narcotic crop cultivation with the UNODC.

The Articles created and agreed upon by such committees all work on monitoring and controlling the narcotic trade, through allowing the growth of such crops, but being in control of the trade, and actions that follow. Article 23 of the convention calls all parties to allow for the growth of the opium poppy, for the extraction of the poppy, under the monitoring of specific government agents and representatives. Furthermore such agents would have to monitor the growth by permitting specific areas only where farmers can grow the crop, and control it by specifying on each farmers license. As well as to purchase such crop from the further in the span of 4 months, no later and to be responsible for the trade, the import and export and the maintenance of the stock. Similar articles were created with the same rules applying to the coca bush, in article 26 of the convention as well as article 28 of the convention calls for the same rules for cannabis crop cultivation. Moreover, Article 24 of the convention calls for control and limitation of the growth of the opium poppy in order to prevent surplus of the crop and accessibility to narcotic trade.

The Dangers of Illicit drug crop cultivation

Illicit drug crop cultivation contributes to one of the worlds largest crises and is the key component in it all, the global drug crisis. The drug supply chain goes like this, drug crop cultivation, sold to drug traffickers, sold to drug dealers, sold to drug addicts, and usually such drug traffickers, and drug dealers also addicts. Further contributing to the destruction and dangers that drug addictions and drug trade in general pose to society, and to communities, also referred to as Narcoterrorism. Narcoterrorism is an extremely substance and severe issue, worldwide and mounts off of illicit drug trading and crop cultivation, it is often associated with terrorist on illicit actions and violence to fight anti narcotics governments and groups, and to encourage the illicit narcotici chain, whether it be the trafficking, growing, or use of drugs. Narcoterrorism can be seen as a major issue in a country like Afghanistan, Afghanistan being the largest producer of opium poppy in the world, producing almost 90% of the world's opium poppy, “this natural resource is an extraordinarily large attractive force” for Afghanistan's largest terrorist group Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda has been dominating Afghanistan's Opium poppy Production since 1889 and have formed strong ties with other countries such as Pakistan which supports and assists Afghanistan and Al Qaeda in its illicit cultivation of the Opium Poppy. By involving a terrorist organization and attracting it to the illicit crop cultivation many dangers have surfaced, the violence and narcoterrorism
from such groups has caused and still is causing instability, danger, fear and excruciating criminal acts in the country.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**UNODC**

In efforts to tackle the drug crisis and drug trade, the first thing looked at is the prevention of the illicit crop cultivation of such drugs. The main 3 drugs that must be monitored are the Opium poppy, Coca bush and Cannabis, this is due to these crops being the base of the narcotics produced. Many suggest, the eradication of such crops in the first place, however these crops and plants offer other benefits such as their significant use in medicine as anesthetics, or painkillers. Thus growing such plants is not illegal everywhere, however there is strong monitoring against these crops to ensure that they are not to be used in the illicit drug trade, and to ensure it is only grown by farms who are permitted to.

The main organization in charge of the monitoring is the UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), the main countries being monitored, which are the countries that hold the most illicit crop activity are ; Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos in relations to the opium poppy, Bolivia, Columbia, Peru in relations to the Coca Bush and Morocco for the Cannabis. There are many various ways of which the UNODC monitors such activity, in attempts to control the illicit crop cultivations. These could be done through ways but not limited to;

- Interviews with involved parties
- Demographic socio economic analysis
- Satellite imaging
- Geographic Data
- Fly Over verifications
- Field and Village Assessments.

Even with such techniques and monitoring, the goal has not been reached to the extent wanted, the illicit crop cultivation activity until modern times is still at very high rates. Through monitoring by the UNODC, and as stated in the UNODC Afghanistan opium survey of 2018, cultivation and Production, in Afghanistan, opium poppy cultivation was at its highest rate in 2017 where it was at
9000 tons, or 328,000 hectares of opium poppy crop cultivation. Although by 2018 the opium poppy cultivation had decreased by 29%, where it was 7,200 or 263,000 tons, a bit less than the previous year it is still shown to be 1 of 3, highest rates of opium poppy cultivation since 1994. Proving the need for an emergent solution now more than ever. The reason for this could be because of the difficulty and uncertainty that comes with monitoring the growth of crops on land, which is due to many reasons, one of them being for example the monitoring of the coca bush. The coca bush poses the biggest threat and difficult for ground detention because of its ability to grow amongst other plants and spread, tis ability to grow anytime of the year, its accessibility because of its cheap price to farmers, and it's easy access and mobility. Moreover, one of the threats that comes with monitoring is the dangerous attacks from locals to ground surveyors and monitors, eg there have been a few situations where surveyors had to face dangerous traps and attacks, from locals trying to protect their crops.

**Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is one of the major countries involved with drugs the crop cultivation and more specifically a large production of the opium poppy, transferred to morphine, heroin and codeine. According to the UNODC Afghanistan Opium Poppy survey, “The total opium poppy cultivation area in Afghanistan was estimated at 263,000 (242,000 – 283,000) hectares in 2018” which is more than any other country. This is due to the fact being that opium poppy is a crucial part of the afghan economy. In rural farming areas the production of opium poppy contributes to almost the whole communities income, because of the lack of viable alternatives, the afghans have become extremely dependent on opium poppy production. Moreover, it was found that weeding and harvesting the opium poppy provided almost 354,000 full time jobs. Thus Afghan farmers have used the production of opium poppy as the bases to sustaining their livelihoods.

**Columbia**

Columbia is one of the world's largest suppliers of coca and opium plant which is used to make cocaine and heroin. Bolivia, Colombia and Peru together account for more than 98% of the world cocaine supplies. Around 4 million families depend on these crops, and they mostly live in remote rural areas, and they depend on these crops which are seen to be more reliable than other crops in a dangerously unstable economy. However, they are exploited by unreliable middle men, with families becoming essentially employees of large commercial farms owned by traffickers of narcotics. Finally, there is always the threat of forced eradication of their crops by the government. Most of the 700,000 families, given suitable alternatives, would gladly switch to other sources of income, however these measures would have to be tailor made to the needs of their rural communities.
**Mexico**

Mexico, like Afghanistan is also one of the largest producers of opium poppy, in fact it is the largest producer of opium poppy in the Americas. Mexico also struggles with the same socio economic issues as Afghanistan, due to the overwhelming amount of poverty and the large drug chain and community in Mexico, the production of such narcotic crops is heavily demanded. Thus with the pressure on demand, and the large amount of income, as well as the opportunity of a high paying secure job (secured by the large gang and criminal groups), the poor and less fortunate farmers always appeal to such an option. Subsequently the opium poppy in Mexico in 2016-2017 reached 30,600 hectares for Mexico alone.

**South East Asia**

Another Region, with overflowing and an immense illicit narcotics crop cultivation is the South East Asia. The south east asia is known as being the golden triangle for global heroin trade, due to that are producing over 60% of the world’s opium production and producing heroin and codeine. Due to the heavy narcotic industry in that area, it has imposed serious, dangerous and terrible effects on the communities, the economies and the social life. They have had “ an insidious, corrosive, far reaching, and at times, highly destabilizing impact”, meaning due to such industry the region has seen levels of corruption and inhumanity like nowhere else. It was found that the narcotic industry was also directly linked to a sudden outburst of the spread of AIDS, heavy social instability, extreme illness and lack of economic performance, and a heavy growing force of organized crime.

**United States of America**

Although the USA is not a known narcotic crop producer, and produce much less than surrounding countries, it still largely contributes to the issue. The US indirectly contribute because of its extremely large demand and engagement with the drug issue. USA being one of the largest consumers of narcotics, it is natural for a lot of the production to be outsourced from these countries to the US, where they are then destroyed, sold, trafficked and heavily used. Not only does this increase the income of these less developed countries like Mexico and Afghanistan, however it also reinforces their illicit ctro cultivations and encourages them to do so by being a large consumer and source of income. Because of this the US government works greatly on tackling this issue, and has continuously released resolutions and was one of the largest supporters of Plan Columbia, and more.

**Timeline of Events**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Ratification of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973-1975</td>
<td>Research discovered on the effects of drugs on the body and the brain by scientist Eric J. Simon laboratory</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Convention on Illicit trafficking on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), established</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Resolution published by ECOSOC on the international cooperation on elimination of illicit drug crops and alternative monitoring, March 29th.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Resolution published on the promotion of integrality, sustainability and development as a key component on drug control strategies in nations where drug crop cultivation is illicit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Commission on Narcotic Drugs announces resolution on controlling and strengthening the growth and movement of poppy seeds extracted from opium poppy illicitly grown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>UNs Principles on Alternative Development and related commitments on alternative development and regional, interregional and international cooperation on development - oriented, balanced drug control policy addressing socioeconomic issues</td>
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### Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- International cooperation on the elimination of illicit drug crops and alternative development ([ECO/RES.44/11](#))

- Promoting sustainability and integrality in alternative development as an essential part of the drug control strategy in states where illicit crops are grown to produce drugs.2008 ([ECOSOC resolution E/RES/2008/26](#))

- Strengthening systems for the control of the movement of poppy seeds obtained from illicitly grown opium poppy crops, 12 March 2010, Commission on Narcotic Drugs ([Resolution 53/12](#))
Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

There have been many attempts to solve this issue, one of them being illicit crop eradication, however this plan has been proven unsuccessful. An example of this plan can be seen through the past events in Columbia. Plan Columbia which was aided by the USA was a plan to eradicate illicit cocoa crop through aerial fumigation. To eradicate the crops, a large amount of poisonous chemicals was sprayed into the air above the crops, killing not only the cocoa crops but many other crops in the area with it. This was a repeated process that was done several times, however the eradication of other crops also caused a large crease in other crop productions, and would affect many farmers and their families, less production meant less exporting meaning less income. Thus putting less privileged class people in even more poverty and struggle than their previous citation, which is what pushed them to grow illicit narcotics in the first place. The aim of plan colombia was to attempt to reduce the coca production by 50% by 2005. This was the second attempt at crop fumigation, a plan similar to plan colombia was set in place in the 90’s, where the movement had attempted this plan however not only did it fail to decrease the production, it caused the coca production to triple Subsequently the Columbian government eradicate the plan and tried to find a new method. How are the reason because of the failure of other method was due to one thing. The colombian Government overlooked the root of the crop production which is, poor rural farmer families trying to provide income for their families and survive. Due to illicit crops bringing in much more production than normal crops, this approach was often taken by these families, causing an overwhelming amount of illicit Narcotic Production. because of this Columbia has decided to take a new approach that tackles the root issue, the farmer families’ poverty.

Afghanistan’s government is taking similar livelihood actions to the colombian government, in terms of giving the farmers the incentive to stop the growing illegal crops such as cannabis. Columbia is also offering financial rewards to the farmers who found the incentive to eliminate these illicit crops. the recent report that columbia release showed that almost double of the families participated after the effort that they have made, meaning it was partly successful. however, this program is still not good enough for countries such as afghanistan, where 80% of the farmers grow these illicit crops. all of the past efforts that afghanistan have made, were not environmentally friendly, although some of them were, they were affecting the quality of soil, and the government wanted to plant crops after the illegal crops were eradicated.

Possible Solutions
Eradication of Illicit Crops

The eradication of illicit crops is only a short term solution to this issue, for a long term issue the root of the crop production must be looked at. However if looked at from an emergent point of view, eradicating touch illicit crops can usually be seen as effective. Firstly, if the crops are eradicated and destroyed they cannot be utilized, secondly this instills fear within the farmers growing such crops, due to the risk of losing more harvest and more income. Although this method is not prioritized and is usually used as desperate and last option solutions, it can still be somewhat effective in certain countries.

Stricter Border Control

By enlisting stricter border controls and stricter checkups of finding narcotics as well as strict checkpoints at farming areas and the exports that come out of it. If less narcotic crops were to be exported it would become much less accessible and reduce the amount needed and the demand becomes much less. This causes less requirements for farmers to grow the crops because the use would be minimalized. As well as to achieve this cooperation amongst neighbouring countries is extremely required and should also be looked at.

Alternative Development

Alternative Development is one of the strongest approaches and plans that could be used to tackle this issue. Alternative development aims the vulentabilities and the reasons behind farmers or any individuals' involvement in illicit narcotic crop production. It does this by promoting factors and offering solutions that work towards a stronger and more sustainable economic standard through replacing the vicious circle with a virtuous circle, as can be seen in the figure below. The biggest change being, developing capacity building in such rural areas to provide farmers with viable alternative options instead of growing illicit crops. Alternative development offers plans for substitute crops and diversified cropping patterns to offer higher returns so smaller frames. As stated in the UNODC article Chapter II on alternative development "In contrast to development in general, the alternative development objectives of strengthening the economic and social development of the target areas are not, on the whole, an end in themselves; they are a way of approaching the objectives of reducing the supply of raw material for producing drugs and for re-establishing a legal economy in drug-producing areas"
Guiding Questions

1. What plans or protocols is your country currently implementing?
2. Does your country have a large production of illicit narcotic crops?
3. What plans or protocols has your country attempted to implement before and has failed?
4. Is your country heavily involved with direct illicit crop cultivation, or is it only an outsourcer?
5. What is the biggest narcotic crop grown in your country and how can it be eradicated?
6. What are your country’s neighboring countries and how strict is the border control amongst them?
7. Has your country previously spread awareness on the dangers of this issue, and if so through what campaigns or programs?
8. Has your country attempted implementing alternative development?

Bibliography


  • https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/105761000265548