

# Reflections on Drug Policy and its Impact on Human Development: Innovative Approaches

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HIV, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT





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YEARS

*Empowered lives. Resilient nations.*



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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CARICOM	Caribbean Community and Common Market
CND	Commission on Narcotic Drugs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
LBHM	Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Masyarakat
LEAD	Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion
OHCHR	Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSF	Open Society Foundations
OST	Opioid substitution therapy
PACS	Programme to Support Community Coca Leaf Control
PAPS	Sectoral Budgetary Support Programme for Integrated Development with Coca
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNGASS	United Nations General Assembly Special Session
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

Current approaches to drug policy have not proven to be effective in reducing the supply and demand of illicit drugs. Without effective drug control strategies that counter or prevent drug-related harms, poverty, inequality and exclusion will persist and we will not deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Drug policy cuts across core areas of sustainable development: health and well-being, gender equality, peace, justice and strong institutions amongst others. Drug control and human development policies share a common objective of reducing drug-related harm. Yet there has been growing attention to the harmful consequences of many drug control laws, policies and enforcement practices on the poor and marginalized. In 2015, as a contribution to the debates leading up to the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs, UNDP released a discussion paper describing the development dimensions of drug policy.

Many countries are now exploring different policy solutions that address the harmful consequences of drug policy approaches on their citizens. These include alternatives to arrest and incarceration for minor drug offences, scaling up harm reduction programmes, decriminalization of drug users and small farmers and increased access to pain medication. In the context of HIV, we cannot hope to “end AIDS” if we don’t prioritize populations at the greatest risk of contracting HIV, a group that includes people who use drugs. This paper – *‘Reflections on Drug Policy and its Impact on Human Development: Innovative Approaches’* – describes some of these initiatives in an effort to enrich the body of evidence about what works and what does not. These initiatives might help countries better understand how to address drug-related issues in their respective economic, political and social circumstances.

Ultimately rational, rights-based and evidence-informed strategies can contribute to making drug policy more effective, more just and more coherent with the aspirations and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Human Development.

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## Introduction

Drug control policies have left an indelible footprint on human development. In many instances, they have fuelled the poverty, marginalization and exclusion of people and communities linked with illicit drug use or illicit drug markets. They have entrenched and exacerbated systemic discrimination against poor and the most marginalized populations and resulted in widespread human rights violations.

Involvement in drugs — whether its cultivation, production, sale or use — has traditionally been treated as a criminal problem, with the solution found through law enforcement. In recent years, there has been growing recognition that this vision is narrow and counterproductive. There has likewise been growing recognition that the connection between drugs and crime is not so straightforward and that drug control efforts focused on criminal law responses have had harmful ‘unintended’ consequences.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has also identified illicit drugs and crime as a “severe impediment” to achieving sustainable development, as well as to securing human rights, justice, security and equality for all (UN, 2012). There has also been increased attention to the multidimensional relationship between drug control and development outcomes and to devastating consequences of drug control efforts on public health, security and development. As various UN organizations have observed, these efforts’ harmful collateral consequences include: creating a criminal black market;



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