

LESSONS FROM BOLIVIA

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**INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AND CONCERTED COCA REDUCTION
IN POST-CONFLICT COLOMBIA**

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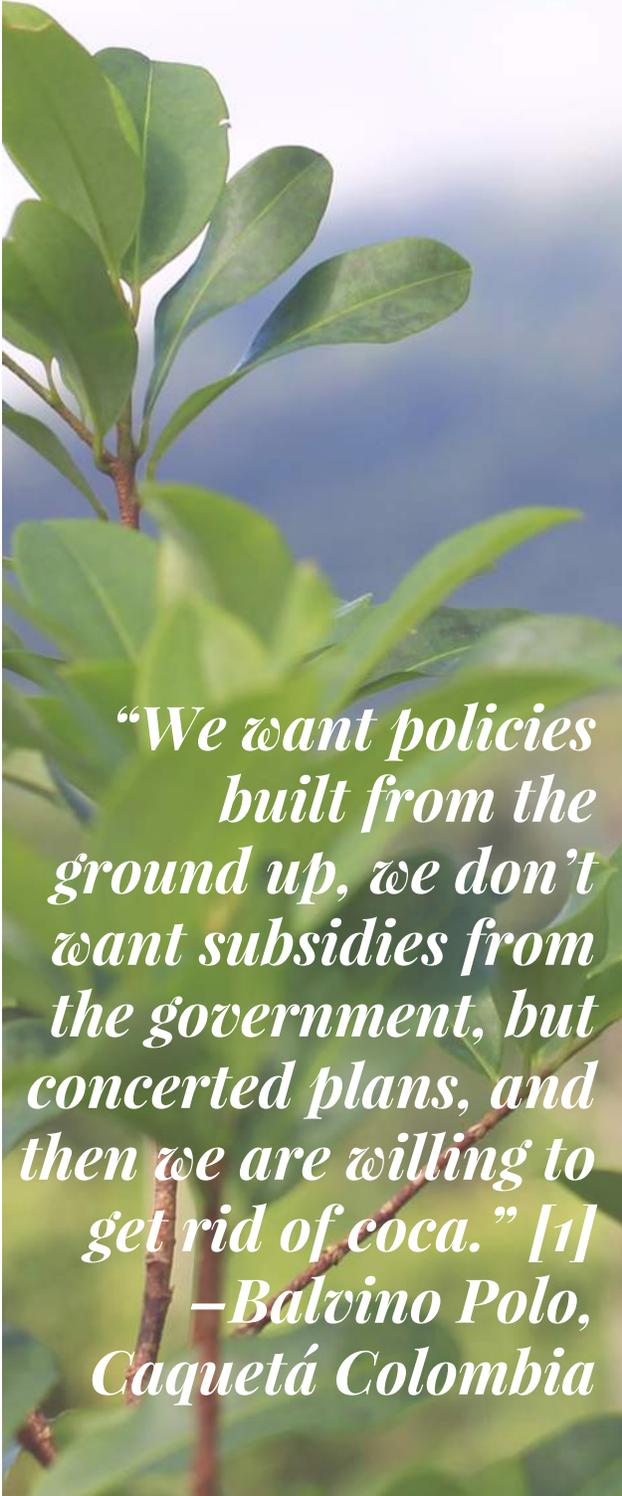


Introduction

In February 2017, a delegation of 8 coca growers from across Colombia traveled to Bolivia to learn about the country's shift from forced eradication and conditioned alternative development to community coca control and integrated development. Through meetings with civil society, social organizations, and government ministries, the delegation was encouraged to envision how Bolivia's experiences could apply to Colombia, where coca reduction has emerged as a critical point in the historic post-conflict transition.

Colombia's government-FARC peace agreement, signed in September 2016, brought renewed vigor to crop reduction programs. Accordingly, officials assert that unlike coca reduction strategies of the past, "alternative development" in a post-conflict environment will achieve unprecedented success. President Santos said "with the FARC's commitment to help substitute illicit crops we can reach a solution to the drug trafficking problem."^[2] However, a look at the experience of neighbor Bolivia demonstrates that crop substitution programs have failed to combat illicit cultivation in Colombia for structural reasons beyond the armed conflict. Since the agreement, the coexistence of crop substitution programs with violent forced eradication has generated mistrust, and sparked protest among coca farming communities across the country.

Although completely eradicating illicit crop production is impossible given the demand-driven nature of the industry, transforming development programs cooperatively with affected communities could both reduce coca cultivation and secure social peace. To do this, there are a number of lessons Colombia can learn from Bolivia.



*“We want policies built from the ground up, we don’t want subsidies from the government, but concerted plans, and then we are willing to get rid of coca.” [1]
—Balvino Polo, Caquetá Colombia*



DELEGATION VISITS PINEAPPLE FARM, CHAPARE (FEB 2017)

Why Alternative Development Failed in Bolivia

For over 20 years, Bolivia implemented alternative development strategies orchestrated by USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development), which spent an estimated \$300 million USD to deter Bolivian farmers from cultivating coca. These programs failed to achieve a sustained reduction in coca production due to three primary problems identified by coca growers: “1) an uncoordinated strategy that operates outside of existing community organizations and local governments; 2) inflexible conditions of assistance on eradication; 3) and a large, expensive bureaucracy.” [3]

1) Subverting Community Structures:

Although USAID consistently lauded the success of alternative development programs in the Chapare (at the time, the largest coca-producing region of Bolivia), farmers mistrusted the operations. USAID refused to work directly with established unions in the Chapare, whom had played a significant role in community life since the 1960s. Instead, USAID created alternative structures, which excluded community participation. As objects of program mandates, rather than active collaborators, farmers were forced to accept programs that destroyed their livelihoods. [4]



"alternative development programs promised livestock and agriculture that in many cases 'did not last longer than a week after the inauguration ceremony.'"

2) Conditioning Aid on Eradication:

Between 1998 until 2004, USAID, police, and the military, jointly implemented forced eradication tied to alternative development assistance. Involvement of security forces in eradication gave alternative development a coercive face. As the prioritized leg of Dictator Hugo Banzer's "Plan Dignidad," eradication eclipsed the impact of alternative development, such that slow efforts to provide alternative livelihoods insufficiently relieved farmers from the blows of eradicating their only source of income. Between 1997 and 2001 approximately 45,000 hectares of coca were eradicated in the Chapare, and alternative development plans failed to "bridge the gap between when the farmers gave up their coca crops and when their alternative crops put food on the table." [5] Violent confrontations between community members and security forces became increasingly common. Forced eradication also failed to reduce coca cultivation. Facing economic desperation, farmers opted to replant coca. The U.S. State Department estimates that "between June 2001 and June 2002 production in the Chapare increased by 23 percent even as the Bolivian government eradicated 17,000 hectares of coca." [6]

3) Private Consultants and Export Agriculture:

Alternative development's emphasis on multinational private sector partnerships and commercial scale production failed to account for structural obstacles. In a landlocked country with weak infrastructure, farmers struggled to bring products to distant markets. Rather than invest in improved transportation systems or guarantee access to viable markets, these alternative development programs promised livestock and agriculture that in many cases "did not last longer than a week after the inauguration ceremony." [7]

Ultimately, alternative development in Bolivia, primarily implemented through USAID during the 1990s and early 2000s failed to achieve sustained results due to alternative development's coexistence with aggressive eradication efforts and the imposition of uncoordinated, top-down strategies—all of which contributed to mistrust among affected communities. Many of these same issues can be identified in alternative development programs in Colombia today.



DELEGATION VISIT TO THE BOLIVIAN SENATE COORDINATED BY CONGRESSWOMAN BRIGADA QUIROGA & EX-VM OF COCA DIONISIO NÚÑEZ, LA PAZ (FEB 2017)

Overview: Alternative Development in Colombia

The government-FARC agreement signed on September 26, 2016 includes an entire section on the illicit drug problem. While groundbreaking in key areas, the agreement maintains mechanisms, such as conditioning aid to eradication and failing to work transparently with affected communities, that have alienated coca-growers in Colombia for decades.

Alternative development in Colombia largely developed under the Plan Colombia framework, the U.S.-funded counter-narcotics aid initiative. Between 2000 and 2007, US economic assistance to Colombia exceeded \$600 million USD a year (80% of which was destined for security forces). [8] In the initial allocation of Plan Colombia funds, \$42.5 million USD were established for alternative development programs. [9] Since then, program visions have shifted based on national and international priorities. Nonetheless, both USAID and UNODC programs have continued to require the verifiable absence of illicit crops prior to distributing economic aid. [10]

USAID projects have also continuously selected U.S.-based for-profit contractors to implement programs. [11]

Despite high levels of alternative development funding, coca cultivation in today's Colombia is nearly as high as it was in 2002, and is the highest of the Andean countries. [12] Replanting coca after eradication or participation in alternative development programs is fairly common. According to UNODC's 2015 report, of the areas with alternative development programs 39% have intermittently produced illicit crops, 17% have a permanent presence of illicit crops and 4% became affected by illicit cultivations for the first time in three years. [13]



CONCERTED ERADICATION MISSION WITH UDESTRO, CHAPARE (FEB 2017)

Peal Deal Proposals

The government-FARC agreement initially included promising efforts for collaboration with coca farmers on concerted crop reduction. However, concessions to the opposition resulted in a harsher final agreement, which fails to reform current crop substitution infrastructure and generates contradictory mandates. For example, although the agreement calls for a civilian authority to execute projects with active community participation and area-specific implementation, it also plans to work closely with “the state authorities necessary to guarantee its development, including security forces and community protection officials.” [14]

Under this program, the government signs agreements with coca producing communities to “formalize communities’ commitment to voluntary substitution, no replanting, the full commitment not to cultivate nor be involved in labor associated with illicit crops, nor participate in the illegal commercialization of primary materials derived from these crops.” [15] Only after committing to these conditions are communities eligible for alternative development support. Furthermore, although the agreement stresses collaboration with local communities for “voluntary”

reduction, it also states: “in the cases where there is no agreement with communities, the government will proceed to eradicate the illicit crops, prioritizing manual eradication when possible, taking into account respect for human rights, the environment, health, and livelihood. The government, if substitution is not possible, does not reject other instruments deemed effective, including spraying, to guarantee the eradication of illicit crops.” [16]

Putting Policy into Practice

The government has both highlighted its commitment to collaborative coca reduction and raised the stakes for eradication. It announced a plan to eradicate 100,000 hectares in 2017: 50,000 through manual eradication and manual fumigation, and the other 50,000 through voluntary crop substitution. [17] 700 new officers have been hired for the anti-narcotics division, and they will be paid based on the number of hectares they eradicate. [18] Four strategic centers will be established across coca growing regions, consisting of police officers, soldiers, and government officials who will work with the farmers on substitution programs.

According to Pedro Arenas, director of the Observatory of Illicit Crops and Crop Producers (OCDI) a Colombia-based NGO reporting on drug policies' impacts on farming communities: "the concern is that on one hand the Government sends officials from the Presidency to sign agreements with farmers, and on the other the Defense Ministry enters [communities] to forcefully eradicate. Obviously, the Defense Ministry has more resources, speed, logistical and response capacity than the civilians of the Post-Conflict Ministry to get to the corners of our country." [19]

Coca Growers Respond

Coca grower organizations are coordinating protests across the country against violations of the peace agreement. In late February, coca producers in the southern region of Nariño organized a 6-day protest against forced eradication efforts. [20] On March 25th, 500 coca growers marched in Briceño to demand that officials comply with substitution promises prior to eradicating their coca plants. [21] As tensions escalated, coca growers in Nariño took 11 eradicators hostage between April 12th and April 14th. [22] In the Tibu municipality of North Santander, families protesting eradication during ongoing crop substitution negotiations faced tear gas from military officers. [23]

Delegation participants confirmed this disconnect between government rhetoric and policy implementation. According to Francisco Javier Ayma Parra of the Central Valley Farmers Association in Magdalena Medio (ACVC-RAN): "the peace agreement says politics from the bottom up, but the government is not complying with this. The government does not understand concerted, gradual programs." [24]

Similarly, Jimeno Hermosa Arias from Briceño explained that in March of 2016, 11 communities participated in a program aimed to substitute coca

for corn, beans, passionfruit and other crops. In June, other communities joined the plan, but with less public attention on them, the army forcefully eradicated their coca crops, without the concerted, gradual procedure promised in the pilot agreement. [25]

Ermeliza Mancilla of Guaviare lamented that although her community had already begun negotiations with the state for voluntary eradication, in November of 2016 her coca was forcefully eradicated, removing her and her four children's livelihood. [26]

In Bolivia, the delegation of Colombian coca farmers saw that an alternative to forced eradication is possible. In fact, over ten years ago, Bolivia began to implement a concerted coca reduction and integrated development model that sought to address some of their same concerns.



FISH FARM INITIATIVE CHAPARE
(FEB 2017)



BANANA PACKAGING PLANT,
CHAPARE (FEB 2017)

An Alternative to Alternative Development

The election of Evo Morales in 2005 was in part due to dissatisfaction with the forced eradication and failed alternative development programs of the previous decades. Upon taking office, Evo Morales has promoted a policy of regulation that allows limited coca cultivation among registered growers, monitored by Bolivia's coca farming unions, the state, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), using a complex multilevel database. Accordingly, permitting limited coca cultivation (a cato or 1,600 square meters in the Chapare) provides farmers with a steady subsistence income as they risk investing in other economic activities, which usually take up to two years to become economically profitable.

Community Participation and Full Citizenship

The success of the policy is largely due to coca grower federations' ability to enforce the agreement with state collaboration. [27]



Each federation appoints a secretary to monitor compliance with the cato agreement. Violation of the cato results in severe internal sanctions, including eradication and in extreme circumstances expulsion from the union. Since the implementation of this strategy, the quantity of coca produced in Bolivia has reduced from 30,500 hectares in 2008 to 20,200 in 2015. [28]

Assistance without Eradication

Another key component of Bolivia's approach is integrated development with coca, providing investments in agriculture, infrastructure, education, healthcare, and other previously underserved institutions of coca producing areas. The European Union has been a key partner in this effort. In the 1990s, the European Union began to implement a pilot program in the Chapare, PRAEDAC, which unlike USAID, worked directly with coca growers unions and municipalities and did not condition economic assistance on eradication. The program also effectively framed indicators of success on population welfare and poverty reduction, rather than the quantity of coca eradicated.

Twenty years later, the EU continues to support Bolivian government initiatives, especially through FONADAL, an agency within the Ministry of Rural Development, which provides low interest loans, training, and strategic investments to improve agricultural production and human development in coca producing regions. According to FONADAL director, Miguel Erlan Oropeza: "we value EU investments, mostly because the aid is not executed by the EU but by Bolivia. Before, projects were implemented top-down. Now they are developed from the bottom and are managed with Bolivian norms, although using external support...The EU is a friend to us, not just a donor..." [29]

Visible Results

Partly using this external support, the government has invested \$350 million USD in the Chapare since 2006. There are currently 12 productive projects in the region, including pineapple and citrus farms, processing plants, and beekeeping. Through 2014, production volume of key crops, such as banana, hearts of palm, coffee, pineapple and honey experienced a biannual increase of 8% in the Yungas region and 5% in the Chapare. [30] The results of this strategy have been significant. Extreme poverty has decreased by 22% between 2001 and 2010, school attendance has grown by 14%, infrastructure is improved, all without marked social conflict.

The Bolivian policy demonstrates that drug policy results should be measured based on human welfare and internationally recognized Sustainable Development Goals. [31] Instead of targeting and criminalizing coca growers, Bolivia's approach works within organic structures such as the coca grower federations to both cooperatively reduce coca cultivation and provide communities with the services they need. Without the fear of immediate eradication, farmers are able to take chances with other crops, particularly those made available through strategic government investments. Eradication is used as a last resort for violation of the cato agreement, rather than a prioritized objective.

Key Lessons from Bolivia

REDUCTION VS. ELIMINATION

Recognizing that although coca can be reduced concertedly, it will never truly be eliminated in a demand-driven industry.

SEQUENCING

Requiring eradication prior to receiving subsidies/alternative crops leaves farmers vulnerable and susceptible to re-planting.

CONDITIONING

Conditioning assistance on eradication generates mistrust and conflict.

DEVELOPMENT

Crop substitution programs do not lead to sustainable development without infrastructural, educational, and productive projects, which take time and resources to implement.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Programs are more just and effective when formulated for and by affected communities.

FULL CITIZENSHIP

Government programs to provide full legal, social, political and economic rights to marginalized communities are crucial to program success.

FOREIGN COOPERATION

Foreign aid for alternative development should abide by national and municipal norms, rather than impose its own objectives.

MONITORING

Coca monitoring reports should be executed through transparent, multilateral efforts in coordination with local authorities and community leaders.

Conclusion



DELEGATION IN FRONT OF CATO OF COCA, CHAPARE (FEB 2017)

Unlike Bolivia (and Peru), Colombia has low levels of domestic, traditional consumption of the coca leaf. Nonetheless, the two countries share similar histories with forced eradication and alternative development as strategies to curb illicit crop cultivation. While Bolivia has shifted its approach away from U.S.-imposed crop control, Colombia has retained much of this policy.

The delegation demonstrates how bringing community members to the fore of policy formulation and eliminating eradication as a requirement for aid can improve conditions in coca growing areas. According to a delegation participant, “forced eradication is all we know. Here we are seeing alternatives, maybe our alternative won’t be exactly like Bolivia’s because we have our own particular conditions, but we can see what we’d like to bring back to our country.” [32] Pedro Arenas of OCDI affirms: “this exchange showed that illicit crop control should not violate human rights and should not be based on the prohibitionist notion of ‘zero coca.’” [33]

The post-conflict environment presents an important opportunity for Colombian and international officials to reframe coca control in a way that prioritizes socioeconomic development and human rights. Studying alternative models, like Bolivia’s, is a valuable step in this direction.

Delegation Meetings



Top: Delegation meets at FONDAL, Chapare Office; Bottom: FONADAL Office, La Paz



Top: Meeting with Acción Semilla, La Paz; *Middle:* 6 Federations Meeting, Chapare; *Bottom:* Vice Ministry Social Defense & Controlled Substances, La Paz

Endnotes

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