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**THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLICIT DRUG CULTIVATION, TRAFFICKING AND
USE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: POSSIBLE AREAS
OF RESEARCH WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE
PROGRAMME OF WORK OF ECLAC**

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ABSTRACT

The issues of illicit drug production, trafficking and use in the region, as well as those raised by the drug economy and drug culture, encompass a wide array of sub-topics and perspectives that would be impossible to cover in their entirety. Accordingly, the Commission's contribution to efforts to deal with these issues must necessarily be confined to some of the following subject areas.

First, ECLAC is in a position to systematize the relevant information available at the regional level and, on this basis, to help formulate proposals for experience-based policies that could be tied in with broader strategies for promoting social development, institution building and the development of the production sector.

Second, a vicious circle clearly exists between the drug economy and culture, on the one hand, and processes of social disintegration, on the other. ECLAC can draw upon the integrated approach to development that underlies its work in order to help ensure that policies for dealing with these issues will transcend the current mainstream focus, which stresses the penal aspects of the issue, and move on to an approach that emphasizes the objective of social integration.

Third, in its compilation of regional experiences, ECLAC can focus on the economic and transnational dimensions of illicit drug production, trafficking and use and on money-laundering activities. The current globalization of trade and financial operations has caused the drug economy to become highly sensitive to a broad range of exogenous factors, and the connection between the two needs to be understood more fully.

As a fourth option, a more in-depth exploration of the demand for illicit drugs in the region, together with a qualitative and quantitative baseline analysis of this phenomenon, could be undertaken. Along these same lines, a classification of drug use patterns and motivations could serve as a highly useful tool for the design of preventive policies.

1. Among its other effects, economic globalization has paved the way for a similar globalization of illicit drug production, trafficking and use, as well as of the harmful effects which these activities have on local communities and national societies. In view of this situation, the United Nations has redoubled its efforts to generate a greater awareness and consensus at the international level concerning this multifaceted phenomenon and to provide technical cooperation in connection with attempts to evaluate, understand and address the issues it poses. The United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna, 1988), the creation of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control, the sanctions adopted by the General Assembly at its seventeenth special session on 23 February 1990 and General Assembly resolution 48/12 of October 1993 are instruments that clearly illustrate the response of the United Nations to this problem.

2. ECLAC has followed this process closely. At its twenty-third session (Caracas, May 1990) and through the Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action on international cooperation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, in which the period from 1991 to 2000 was proclaimed to be the United Nations Decade against Drug Abuse, the Commission has reaffirmed its commitment to this struggle and its willingness to take timely action, to the extent that its scarce resources permit, within its regional sphere of action.

3. When viewed from the standpoint of the integrated approach to development which underlies the work of ECLAC, it becomes evident that this issue encompasses a broad range of sub-issues and perspectives. Simply identifying the causes of the problem involves the analysis of many different factors: the production of illicit drugs and the socioeconomic conditions which foster this activity in the region; opportunities for crop substitution and obstacles to this course of action; the impact of drug trafficking on urban areas and public institutions and in terms of violence and crime rates; sociocultural conditions that promote drug use among various high-risk groups; the laundering of drug-related money, the methods used to do so and its impact on national economies; links between drug production and trafficking and licit economic activities; and other related subjects.

4. It is obviously impossible to address all these issues at the same time or in depth. A simple list of the subjects involved serves to illustrate the difficulties entailed in analysing the issue of drugs in all its complexity. Given this situation, and considering the ways in which ECLAC can help to deal with the issues of illicit drug production, trafficking and use in the region, four areas are outlined below in which the Commission can contribute to this struggle in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Area 1: Compilation of regional experiences

5. Over the last 15 years, many Governments in the region have designed and implemented a variety of policies, strategies and measures for controlling the supply and demand for drugs. These steps have been motivated by their desire to fulfil their international commitments and by their own interest in dealing with the most critical problems caused by illicit drug production, trafficking and use in their

countries. In pursuing these efforts they have drawn upon varying degrees of technical and financial support within the framework of international, bilateral and multilateral cooperation initiatives.

6. The region has a wealth of experience encompassing many lessons, successes and failures. In the course of these experiences it has built up a great deal of expertise in systems for controlling drug production, trafficking and use within the region and in determining penalties based on their social costs and benefits. In the field of the prevention of drug addiction and the rehabilitation of addicts, a survey of national monitoring and follow-up programmes could be conducted and sectors in which positive results have been achieved (health care, education and information systems) could be identified.

7. Sufficient experience in the area of public action has been accumulated to permit the identification of the most effective and replicable measures which have the lowest costs in both social and material terms. However, this information is widely scattered and has not been organized as an instrument that could be made available to health-care, judicial and law-enforcement authorities, directors of educational and information campaigns, the legislature, or agencies concerned with drug-related problems. Thus, this information has not been systematized in a way that would contribute to the design of experience-based policies that could tie in with broader strategies for promoting social development, institutional consolidation and the development of the production sector. In the light of existing conditions, drug-control policies need to be updated as an integral component of public health and education policies, penal and law-enforcement policies, and agriculture and rural development policies.

8. By virtue of its close ties with the Governments of the region and its proven ability to prepare up-to-date baseline studies on economic and social conditions in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC is the most qualified institution to carry out the essential task of compiling and systematizing such information on a regular basis. This would make it possible to issue regular reports on state-of-the-art strategies, policies and programmes in this area and, even more importantly, to provide selective analyses of the types of measures that have had the greatest impact, at the lowest cost, on the illicit drug economy and culture.

Area 2: The impact of drugs on national economies

9. Given ECLAC's identity as an economic commission with a regional focus, it would appear essential for it to consider economic and transnational aspects of the issue in its compilation of the region's experiences. A number of subjects are clearly of interest in this regard: the outcomes of crop-substitution programmes in Andean areas, as well as their potential contribution to the development of production activities and their costs; measurements or estimates of the drug economy's impact on selected national economies; the impact of money laundering on selected markets and prices; the relationship between the drug economy and employment; and others.

10. All these subjects are more national than transnational in nature and might, in some cases, be explored by means of cross-country comparative studies. Such studies could then serve as a basis for action-oriented proposals that could be applied to more than one country. Inasmuch as many studies on these topics have already been conducted, ECLAC would focus its efforts on monitoring, compiling and updating the information available in the region on an ongoing basis.

11. Some of the more specific topics that might be covered in these analyses are: i) the causal relationships existing between policies providing for the subsidization and protection of agriculture in some industrialized countries and Latin American agriculture's "specialization" in such crops as coca (*Erythroxylon coca*), opium poppies (*Papaver somniferum*) and marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*); ii) the point(s) along the drug economy's production/distribution chain—which runs all the way from peasant labourers to retail distributors in the cities of industrialized countries—at which the greatest profits are realized; iii) an exploration of the highly significant question as to whether demand is what drives the supply and distribution of drugs or whether it is the supply-side of the drug economy that creates the demand for these substances.

Area 3: The issue of drugs from a social integration perspective

12. A vicious circle clearly exists between the drug economy and culture, on the one hand, and processes of social disintegration, on the other. Drug producers', small-scale traffickers' and users' lack of social integration are the foundations upon which the drug economy is built, and that economy, in its turn, embodies a drug culture that seriously undermines any community in which it exists. Hence, the drug problem is both a cause and an effect of social disintegration.

13. A lack of social integration is exceedingly evident at every point along the drug production/distribution chain. At the production end, this chain is anchored in peasant groups which, throughout their history, have remained on the sidelines of the agricultural modernization process. These groups are part of a subsistence economy that affords little access to credit, training, expanded markets, the educational system or social services, and their demands have invariably been put off and accorded scant attention within the political system. For its part, the drug traffic could not exist without a wide-ranging network of small-scale distributors whose prior position in society has also, as a rule, been extremely insecure. Indeed, the breeding ground for the small-scale drug dealers whose recruitment is essential to the drug trade is produced by such factors as high rates of informal and occasional employment, low income levels, marginality, membership in social groups marked by a great deal of violence, highly mutable moral codes and a lack of identification with society at the local and national levels. At the consumption end of the drug chain, the most serious problems are found among young males whose aspirations to social mobility have been thwarted and who would have great difficulty in becoming productive members of society.

14. It is therefore no coincidence that the areas within the region in which drug production is concentrated are areas which have historically exhibited high rates of rural poverty; nor is it surprising that small-scale drug trafficking and the most destructive forms of drug abuse are primarily found in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, the slums of Santiago, Chile, the hills of Caracas and the shantytowns of Lima and Mexico. In Latin America and the Caribbean, all aspects of the drug trade, from its production to its consumption, go hand in hand with the so-called "survival strategies" and "vicious circles of poverty" that predominate among those groups having the least access to economic modernization processes, social benefits, productive development and opportunities for political participation. The figures tell the story: young males who are outside the loop of social advancement or institutional recognition are the most likely to become addicted to illicit drugs.

15. The drug economy also gives rise to subcultures that add further to the already rapid process of social disintegration by fostering attitudes that erode the very fabric of society and its institutions. These attitudes include: the desire to "get rich quick" while expending as little productive effort as possible and

with no regard for the established ground rules; the assimilation of violence and crime as customary means of settling disputes; corruption, especially in the form of trading in favours; the loss of the ability to make medium- and long-term plans; the subordination of social ties to drug trafficking and use; and addiction to money and to power, as well as to drugs themselves.

16. The foregoing considerations lead to the inescapable conclusion that, since the drug economy and culture feed upon social disintegration while at the same time heightening it, then strategies for dealing with drug-related problems need to include policies designed to promote social integration. This is a highly relevant challenge for ECLAC for two reasons: first, because the Commission has built up a great deal of know-how in the area of social integration and is, moreover, focusing its technical expertise on the configuration of integrated approaches to development; and, second, because the issue of social integration was firmly established as a subject of concern at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 and now occupies a particularly important place in the agenda for international cooperation and concerted national action.

17. It is essential to leave behind the current mainstream focus, which stresses the penal aspects of the issue, and to move on to an approach in which policies for dealing with the drug economy and culture will place emphasis on the objective of social integration. This does not imply any opposition to the steps that need to be taken in the areas of control and punishment, but it does mean that a systemic approach to this issue should focus primarily on understanding the roots of the problem and changing those root causes rather than simply on combating some of its symptoms (an approach whose effectiveness is now being questioned in many quarters).

18. This entails working towards two objectives when conducting baseline studies, designing policies, or both. The first is to incorporate the idea of social integration as a criterion for specific anti-drug policies covering the entire range from crop-substitution initiatives to policies that seek to work through the educational system and mass media in order to prevent drug abuse. The second is to ensure that broad-ranging social integration strategies at the national level include the issue of drugs and the associated societal decay as a policy variable.

19. This is an area of concern that abounds in constructive challenges, and ECLAC, with its long history of tackling serious social problems from the standpoint of a more integrated view of development, stands ready to take up these challenges. Indeed, the failure of so many efforts to deal with drug-related problems in the past has largely been due to the piecemeal nature of the approaches used.

Area 4: Analysis of the demand

20. The narrowness of the approaches taken to drug-related issues is particularly evident in the failure to analyse the various categories of illicit drug users in the region. Prison officials, hospital personnel, journalists and educators lack a thorough understanding of all the various contexts in which drug abuse takes place and instead look only at the statistics on those segments of drug users which existing detection systems are able to identify. The sources of demand thus take on a generalized, vague and stigmatized profile. The lack of an understanding of the sources of demand precludes any effort to ferret out the structural roots of the problem, which are closely connected to the sweeping sociocultural changes experienced by the region over the past few decades.

21. Qualitative baseline analyses of the demand for illicit drugs are needed in order to address issues related to the drug economy and culture. One of the reasons for this is that, after expending a great deal of time and money, the futility of seeking to control the supply of drugs on a piecemeal basis has been demonstrated (so long as there is a demand, any supply of illicit drugs which the police destroy will simply be replaced). Another reason is that an exploration of the factors that promote drug abuse and demand will afford a fuller understanding of certain social pathologies that underlie these phenomena. Finally, demand has thus far been an unknown quantity whose nature must be clarified if we are to channel the energies of the persons in question into satisfactory forms of behaviour that will contribute to their personal and social development.

22. Up to now, the analysis of different categories of drug users for purposes of prevention has generally been performed on a linear basis. Distinctions are drawn among occasional, regular and compulsive (hard-core) drug use; between users of soft drugs and users of hard drugs; or among the differing collateral effects of different drugs. These classifications are used because they are the ones that correspond the most closely to the available sources of information (surveys, clinical statistics and prison records). The problem with them, however, is that they do not tell us anything about the motivations of drug users or the sociocultural contexts and processes which shed light on the reasons why illicit drugs are used.

23. A more refined system of classification would identify various groups of drug users who differ from one another in terms of their links to productive and social activity. The following examples may help to illustrate such contrasts: i) the use of cocaine and amphetamines in high-level business, political, financial and artistic circles as a way of fighting off stress or fatigue or as the result of a lack of inhibition which these users feel to be justified; ii) the use of inhalants and cocaine sulphate ("crack") by marginal urban groups whose members thus reaffirm their marginality and augment their productive and social disfunctionality; iii) occasional drug use (on festive occasions or as part of a ritual) among various social sectors or subcultures; iv) habitual use as part of a productive and nutritional diet, as in the case of the use of coca leaves in the Andean highlands.

24. Without this more comprehensive type of information, conventional classifications fail to isolate the basic element to be addressed when designing preventive policies: the process by which a high-risk group moves from a "zero-use" situation to experimental use and then to recurrent use or from there to hard-core illicit drug use.

25. Although it is clear that drug use should be classified in a way that takes into account the motivations, contexts and processes that lead to recurrent or hard-core illicit drug use, devising such a classification is no easy task. It requires an in-depth understanding of the ways in which drugs tie in with the sociocultural dynamics of groups at risk, with emotional disturbances and needs and even with changes in general consumption and cultural patterns.

26. An examination of the motivations underlying the massive escalation of drug addiction is imperative. One hypothesis is that the increase in the use of cocaine hydrochloride and cocaine sulphate is caused by a need on the part of users for stimuli that they can no longer produce endogenously. It may also be associated with sociocultural and socioeconomic phenomena which are generating a tendency towards emotional depression on a worldwide scale while at the same time undermining certain norms and standards, thereby making it more likely that people suffering from depression will lapse into drug abuse. Other factors to be considered include the lack of basic values in today's emerging culture, the loss of channels for political activity and social mobility which would provide an outlet for peoples'

energies and soaring unemployment rates among middle- and low-income urban youth (the largest high-risk group). In regard to higher-income levels, it may be relevant that the current modernization process, which could rightly be described as "hyperactive", has changed the pace of life in a way that mirrors the effects of the drugs most frequently used by these groups (cocaine, its derivatives, and amphetamines).

27. In summary, this more structurally-based understanding of demand and consumption is in keeping with an integrated approach to the issue of drug abuse.