



The Bolivian Experience with Community Coca Control and Regulation

Past Strategies: Eradication Efforts in the Andes

A cornerstone past strategies in the Andean region has been the eradication of coca crops. US policymakers are strong supporters of forced crop eradication; however, a growing body of research indicates that it does not meet its targets and generates wide-ranging harmful impacts.

Forced eradication is inefficient; it generates incentives for poor farmers to replant as it forces up the price of coca, while simultaneously denying farmers their only source of income. Thus when crops are reduced in one area, production inevitably expands in other geographic locations; analysts refer to this as the ‘balloon effect.’

UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document

The Bolivian model for community coca control and regulation tackles recommendations for joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem in the UNGASS Outcome document. The model increases cooperation at all levels to reduce the illicit cultivation of coca bush within the framework of sustainable crop control strategies and measures (Chapter 3) and pushes for national drug policies with an integrated and balanced approach that fully respects all human rights and wellbeing of individuals, families, and vulnerable communities, ensuring measures to prevent illicit cultivation of coca respect fundamental human rights while taking into account traditional licit uses (Chapter 4). At the same time, alternative development programs for the cultivation of crops used for the illicit production and manufacture of drugs take into account the socioeconomic circumstances such as poverty alleviation, strengthening of public services and institutional frameworks and enhance welfare of affected and vulnerable communities (Chapter 7). These programs reduce illicit crop cultivation, empower and promote shared responsibility for coca growers, all the while addressing the needs of coca grower communities.

The Bolivian Model: Community Coca Control and Regulation

The Chapare is one of Bolivia's main coca-growing regions, and it is home to the Quechua and Aymara Indigenous peoples, many of whom work as coca farmers. Although coca can be used to make cocaine, for centuries Bolivians and other Andean peoples have used it in medicine, as a mild appetite suppressant, and as a central element in religious ceremonies. Eradication policies between late 1980s and 2004, aimed at supporting the 'war on drugs' discourse had a devastating effect on Chapare coca growers. During that period, U.S. funded forced eradication policies led to violent conflicts between Indigenous farmers and government troops.

To calm growing tensions with coca growers from the Chapare region, the Mesa administration (2003-2005) implemented the *cato* policy, which allowed families in the region to cultivate a small plot of coca, or '*cato*' (1600 square meters) destined for the licit market. The concession, which flew in the face of US eradication mandates, effectively ended forced eradication in the region. The initiative marked a shift in vision away from the eradication and criminalization imposed narrative, which portrayed coca farmers as active participants in the drug trade, to subsistence farmers working to feed their families. Protests, violence and human rights violations subsided immediately after the '*cato* accord' was implemented. Union members went from staunch resistance to the government to active citizen participants, working to limit their crop to one *cato* per union member. Coca leaf prices increased and provided each family with the equivalent of a monthly minimum wage.

Although designed as a temporary measure, the system was adopted and extended to other coca growing regions, including the La Paz Yungas (Bolivia's largest coca-growing region) by President Evo Morales in 2006. Using funding from the EU, the Morales administration designed and implemented a multi-faceted strategy in 2010. The strategy was built on the previous efforts of the Coca Federations and the EU's municipal strengthening program, (PRAEDAC by its Spanish acronym), initiated in 1998 under the premise that poverty reduction (through providing basic services), engaging coca grower organizations, land titling and strengthening local governments can contribute to break farmers' reliance on coca cultivation.

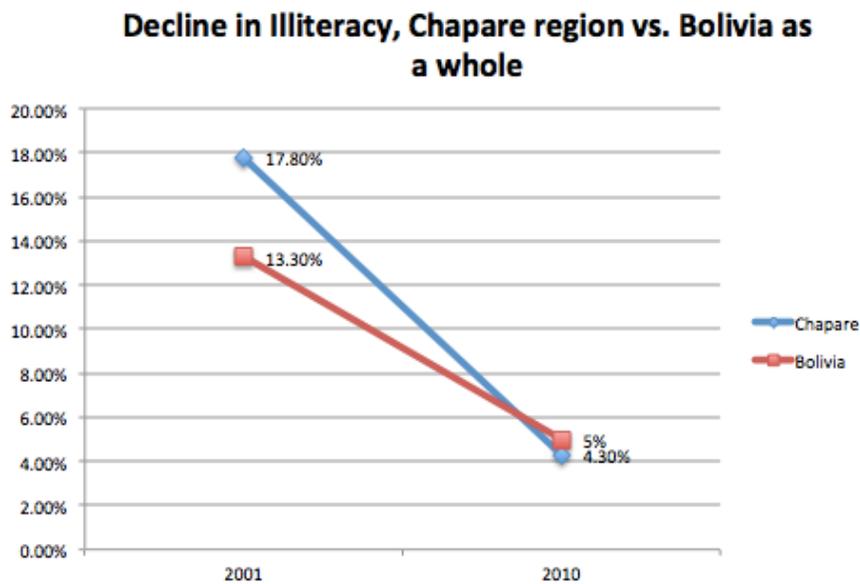
The model, which would be later referred to as "control social de la hoja de coca" is based the following six pillars and employed to this day:

1. Land titling for coca-growing families with *catos*.
2. Biometric registry of coca growers authorized to grow the *cato*.
3. The registration and recurring measurement of each *cato* of coca by the state monitoring organization, the Economic and Social Development Unit (UDESTRO).
4. The creation and maintenance of a sophisticated database (SISCOCA), which aids the monitoring of coca cultivation and traces coca leaf transport and sales.
5. Integrated development projects to complement subsistence income generated by the *cato*.

6. The empowerment of the community to self-police in order to restrict coca cultivation to the one-cato limit. This includes training for union representatives on database use and community joint action to monitor and restrict coca planting.

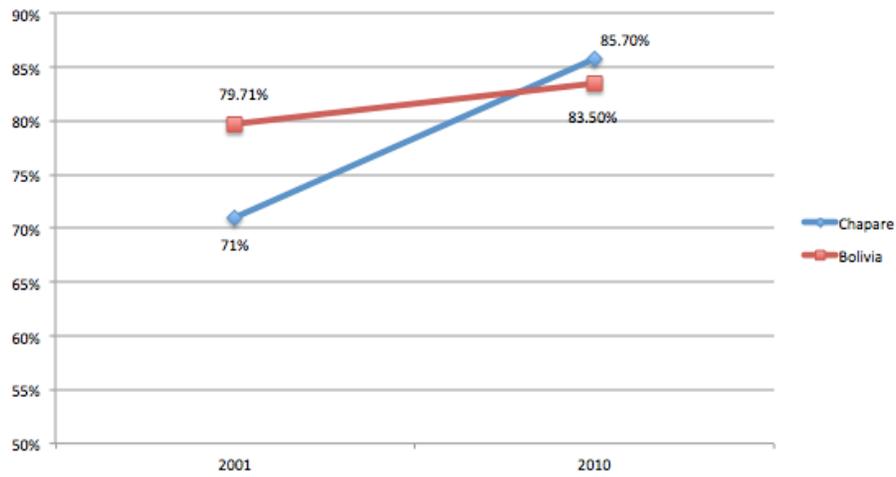
The Bolivian model is based on sovereignty, shared responsibility and respect for human rights. It shifts the focus from reduced hectares of coca to farmer subsistence, allowing registered farmers to grow a limited amount of coca while working with coca grower federations and security forces to voluntarily reduce any excess coca production and diversifying the economy in coca-growing regions. It is a more humane, sustainable and productive alternative to the forced eradication of coca crops.

Bolivia's community control initiative has effectively integrated evidence, such as satellite and census data into its social investment and development policy decisions and implementation. More reliable and agreed-upon statistics have enabled better, negotiated joint strategies between producers, the Bolivian state, and the UNODC. The initiative has curtailed negative consequences for farmers as well as their punishment and criminalization through a limitation on violence and repression. In separating coca from cocaine, it has developed an integrated and coordinated policy that engages growers in assisting the state in controlling trafficking. Moreover, it has improved citizens' access to information; it has enhanced legal identity through biometric registry; it has promoted rights to land and property through significant boosts in land titling; and it has advanced legal participation through citizen input into governance and through increased provision of services such as health care and education in marginalized communities.



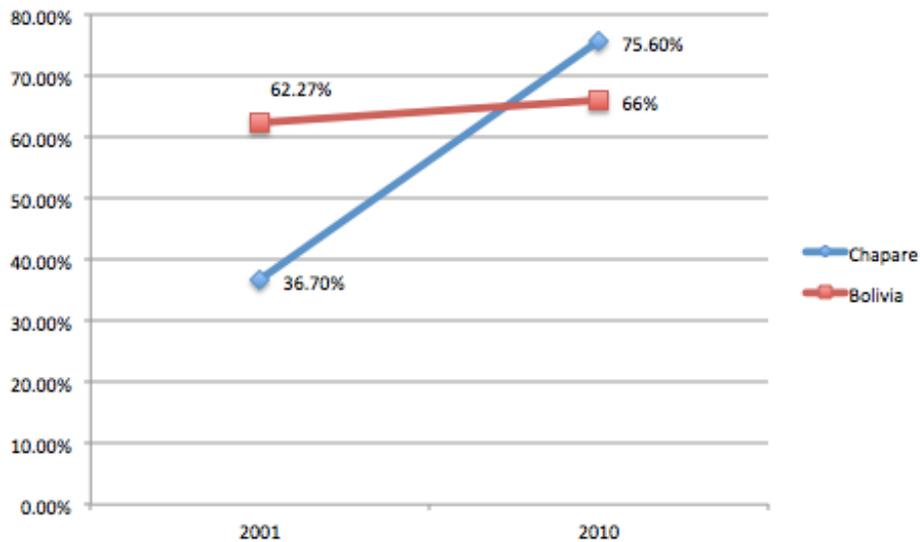
Source: Andean Information Network

School Attendance Rate (6-19 year olds) Chapare Region vs. Bolivia as a whole



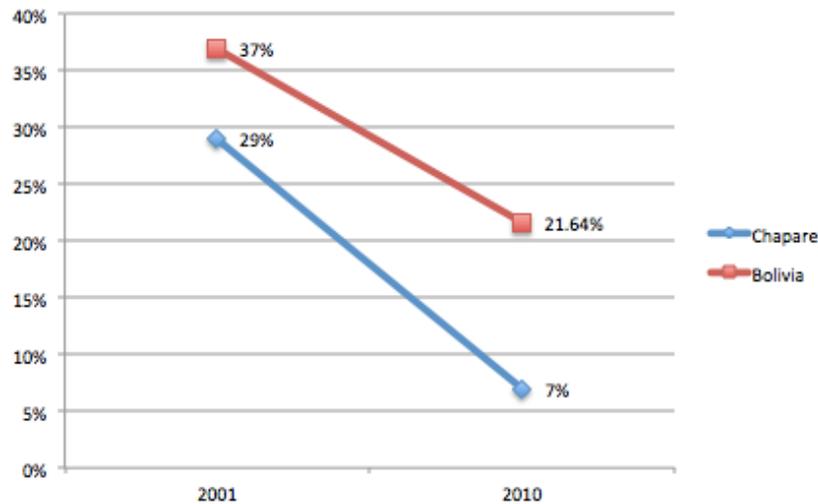
Source: Andean Information Network

Receives drinking water through pipe system Chapare region vs. Bolivia as a whole



Source: Andean Information Network

Living in Extreme Poverty Chapare region vs. Bolivia as a whole



Source: Andean Information Network

Applicability in Other Countries

The most obvious application of the community control model is in countries where both a legal and illegal market exists or can be developed. This most directly applies to Peru where the same quantity of coca is legally permitted as in Bolivia under current law, and to a lesser extent Colombia where indigenous people are permitted to consume the leaf and small amounts of cocaine (and marijuana) are permitted for personal use, although sales of any quantity are illegal. Bolivia's experiment with community control of coca relies on a strong foundation of technological monitoring. It has been most successful where local organizations are strongest.

Respect for grassroots organizations as legitimate interlocutors of local people is indispensable, which means that strengthening weak organizations and their ability to represent local populations is an essential element for sustained production controls. This approach has gained international recognition. The secretary general of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, has called community control, "a unique model... Bolivia has taken the lead for many years towards what should be a more sovereign and regional struggle against drug trafficking."¹ Even in locations where the product in question (such as coca or opium poppy) is clearly destined for an illicit market, much of the community control model has relevance if it is adapted to local conditions and realities.

¹ Agencia Boliviana de Información, 2013.

Conclusion

Peru, Colombia and Bolivia share a long history of ineffectual forced eradication, criminalization of coca farmers and failed development initiatives. So long as external demand for illicit drugs remains, people will keep growing coca because it presents a solution to families' subsistence needs, which cannot be easily replaced.

Bolivia's community coca control policy, even with its inevitable constraints and challenges, provides a policy initiative worthy of further consideration. It has proven more effective and cost-efficient than forced eradication in controlling coca production, and represents a local proposal appropriate to its context. It is a non-violent alternative that empowers citizens and promotes close coordination between government and strong local organizations. It ensures subsistence for farm families and offers the hope of an integrated development that both incorporates the Andes' relationship with coca and assists growers in finding livelihoods beyond it. States and the international community should seek to empower grassroots organizations and create the conditions for their inclusion and collaboration with coca policy. Finally, the international community must shift its focus and demands away from meaningless eradication statistics to human development indicators to measure progress in coca-growing regions. Bolivia's experiment with community coca control opens the door for other countries to experiment with alternative approaches to reduce coca acreage.

Recommendations

- Programs must be constructed on a thorough knowledge of the area, as well as the differences within the area.
- Efforts to limit, complement, or substitute coca and other crops used in drug production must prioritize families' economic sustenance and sustainability as a vital prerequisite to crop reduction.
- Direct engagement with growers is essential as negotiated reduction with community involvement is more sustainable and cost-effective than forced eradication.
- Economic development policies should not be subsumed by a counter-narcotics agenda, as even strong sustainable supply-side programs cannot stop or impede the cocaine trade.

- The bulk of efforts to shrink the market for illicit drugs must focus on demand-side policy and reducing the high profits associated with the illegal drug trade.
- International funders should be willing to support grassroots and host countries' efforts to innovate and “think outside of the box” when it comes to drug control. Governments and funders must provide greater support to control and monitor the illicit market, specifically by strengthening the efforts of institutions.
- Development efforts and funding organizations should ensure social inclusion, citizenship, and a central role for local community organizations by strengthening legitimate representative civil society groups as valid interlocutors.

For more information please refer to the following publications:

Reflections on Drug Policy and its Impact on Human Development: Innovative Approaches. United Nations Development Programme. 2016.

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/reflections-on-drug-policy-and-its-impact-on-human-development--.html>

Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia Monitoreo de Cultivos de Coca 2016. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2017. https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Bolivia/2016_Bolivia_Informe_Monitoreo_Coca.pdf

Farthing, Linda C. and Ledebur, K. Habeas Coca: Bolivia's Community Coca Control. Lessons for Drug Policy Series. Open Society Foundations. 2015.

<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/habeas-coca-bolivias-community-coca-control-20150706.pdf>

Grisaffi, T and Ledebur, K. Citizenship or Repression? Coca, Eradication and Development in the Andes. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2016. 5(1): 3, pp. 1–19, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.440>

Yanoff, J,R. “Lessons from Bolivia: Integrated Development & Concerted Coca Reduction”. Andean Information Network. 2017. <http://ain-bolivia.org/2017/05/new-ain-report-lessons-from-bolivia/>

Estudio de la intervención de la Unión Europea en la política sectorial de desarrollo integral y de coca en Bolivia (1998-2010). GTZ International Services. 2010.

http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/bolivia/documents/more_info/201105_informe_intervencion_ue_desarrollo_integral_es.pdf