



# DROGAS EN MOVIMIENTO NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS

Un proyecto de Espolea A.C. [www.drogas-en-movimiento.org](http://www.drogas-en-movimiento.org)

## Drug policies and Forest Development policy: A necessary reflection on the World Environment Day

By: Eduardo Jr. Arenas \*

Forests are crucial to human survival. They are water collectors, habitat for biodiversity and generate fertile soils that provide sustenance for our food systems. In Mexico, we have 63 million hectares of tree-covered area, one third of the country. However, the current model of land management that has been implemented in most forests has generated deforestation, degradation and has prevented economic, social and environmental benefits as the result of a sustainable management of these. Pressure on such ecosystems is high, and drug policies now seem to enhance those existing pressures and create new ones. The World Environment Day provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the influence drug policies are inflicting over the forests.

In early 2014, the journal *Science* published a research paper entitled [\*"Drug Policy as Conservation Policy: Narco Deforestation"\*](#) written by a group of scientists who ensure that current drug policies have significant impacts on the deforestation dynamics in Central America, calling on several stakeholders to deepen the understanding of such relationship. In the paper the authors list three interrelated mechanisms by which the loss of forests follows the establishment of routes for drug trafficking. The first one refers to the forest clear-cutting to build roads and airfield runways for drug trafficking. The second one suggests that drug trafficking intensifies the preexisting pressures on these areas with cash and weapons. This exacerbates stakeholders to expand their activities (speculation, livestock farming and palm oil plantation), which, in turn, requires space (forestland). Finally, they also note the relevance of the establishment of new plantations and cattle ranches for money laundering arising from the drug trade.

The research also points out the impacts that crop eradication policies are having on ecosystems. Crop eradication consists in detecting and eliminating – through physical and/or chemical processes – illicit drug crops. Crop eradication has demonstrated to be not very effective in reducing drug trafficking and ignores that by still keeping the demand latent, new plantations will be established in less visible areas with fewer human presence or more “environmentally sensitive” places. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the impact that crop eradication chemicals have on the soil, groundwater, flora and fauna of the area; that the establishment of new plantations is relatively easy; and that the culture of short-term logics may encourage the depredatory practices for production. The research does not analyze in-depth the already known relation between illegal logging and drug trafficking.



# DROGAS EN MOVIMIENTO NUEVAS PERSPECTIVAS

Un proyecto de Espolea A.C. [www.drogas-en-movimiento.org](http://www.drogas-en-movimiento.org)

In response to the research paper on *Science*, the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests published a report entitled ["Indigenous Peoples and Rural Communities Defending Territorial Rights: Case studies about prevention and defense experiences before drug trafficking and organized crime in Mesoamerica"](#). The report describes how the recognition of property rights and community forest management in areas under the impacts above noted, allow the communities and organized groups in these territories to defend their land from deforestation. The report includes two examples from Mexico (Michoacán and Guerrero), one in the Guatemalan Petén – in the border with Mexico – and one in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, respectively.

It seems then that, in some cases, community and 'ejido' forest management has succeeded in stopping the progress, growth or strengthening of organized crime groups in the areas with good organization and community governance. This underlines the importance of strengthening schemes for social and entrepreneurial organization of forest communities in Mexico, understanding that different dynamics like migration, abandonment, drug trafficking and organized crime are playing now a fundamental role in the use and care of forests and rainforests in the country.

For several decades now, drug trafficking has affected rural areas in the country. However, a more violent context and an increase in the number of stakeholders in rural areas are making more complex the already complicated dynamics. The recent political shifts on the use and sale of marihuana in some latitudes might seem a relief for the situation. Nonetheless, it won't be enough since policies for heroine and cocaine are not being modified. Thus, the pressure will continue and forests, and mostly its inhabitants, will keep suffering the non-intentional consequences of the current repressive and punitive drug policies.

\* Chief Advocacy Officer at Reforestamos México