

Second Annual Conference of COPOLAD

6th and 7th June 2012, Brussels, Belgium

The Second annual conference of [the Cooperation Programme between Latin America and the European Union on Drugs Policies](#) (COPOLAD) took place in Brussels, Belgium, in June 2012.

COPOLAD is a programme is funded by the European Union (EU) and seeks to strengthen bi-regional dialogue between the EU and Latin America. More specifically, the programme aims to consolidate the establishment and work of national monitoring centres on drugs, and the design and implementation of drug policies on demand and supply, based on evidence.

This year's conference focused on six different topics.



1- A comprehensive approach for alcohol related problems and effectiveness of prevention policies

This session started with a keynote speech concluding that the policies most likely to have a positive impact on alcohol related problems were those which controlled the price and access of alcohol, as well as those providing adequate treatment and early intervention.

Discussions following the formal presentation highlighted the divergences of opinions in Latin America regarding prohibition and legal regulation – while Panama called for alcohol to be included in a strict drug prohibition regime, Uruguay called for an open debate on drug policy reform, in which “regulation” should have a place.

2- The strengthening of the bi-regional dialogue in the framework of the Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs EU-CELAC

One of the objectives of COPOLAD is to strengthen the EU-CELAC mechanism. The activities implemented during the first year of the COPOLAD project included the organisation of a conference revising successes and failures of the bi-regional dialogue, a seminar on the evaluation of strategies and action plans on drugs, a seminar and workshop on best practice on decentralisation and institutional cooperation, and the gathering of information on documentation centres on drugs in partner countries.

The activities planned for the second year of the COPOLAD project will include:

- The second annual conference of COPOLAD
- The creation of a virtual platform for cooperation and exchange of information
- A report on methods of evaluation of drug strategies and action plans on the basis of the seminar organised in year 1
- A report on examples of decentralisation identified during the seminar organised in year 1.

Representatives from Panama and Guatemala then provided some insights into their experience in being part of the COPOLAD project. In both countries, COPOLAD enabled them to participate in seminars and workshops and build their capacity in specific areas of work. COPOLAD also encourages dialogue, exchange of best practice and cooperation. In Guatemala, COPOLAD has been particularly useful for the development of objectives that are realistic and can be adequately implemented. COPOLAD also supported a restructuration within the Guatemalan government to ensure better professionalization, monitoring and evaluation, exchange of information and best practice, and transparency.

3- The role of monitoring centres to take informed decisions on drugs

Monitoring centres aim to provide data on consumption and programme implementation, and to enable governments to monitor the situation and adapt their programmes if necessary. The information gathered by monitoring centres should also be analysed and transcribed into readable documentation. In Chile, for example, the work of monitoring centres has been instrumental in improving drug dependence treatment programmes.

The activities implemented during the first year of the COPOLAD project included the drafting of a report on indicators for drug demand and supply reduction, and on the situation of information gathering systems, the organisation of a meeting on the advances made in strengthening monitoring centres, the organisation of two courses (one on biostatistics and epidemiology as applied to drug use, and the other on the elaboration of scientific articles – which will be delivered in year 2), the identification of key competences to establish national monitoring centres (for both gathering and analysing data) and of networks of monitoring centres willing to participate in COPOLAD activities, the organisation of workshops on the elaboration of data gathering tools and of analysis in particular on problematic use of alcohol, marijuana and cocaine, the drafting of a report on existing Early Warning Systems, and research into which organisations and networks work on drug policy in both the EU and Latin America (report being finalised).

The activities planned for the second year of the COPOLAD project will include:

- Coordination meetings to ensure easy communication around the project
- A summary report on minimum common indicators and protocols for data gathering
- Review reports on pilot projects for data gathering in each country of the COPOLAD project
- The delivery of two courses as planned in year 1
- The delivery of two workshops as planned in year 1
- The organisation of a session to exchange information on experiences of creating networks working on early warning systems regarding the emergence of new patterns of drug use
- The organisation of one meeting on research in the drugs field.

Representatives from Mexico and Romania then shared their experience on the importance of monitoring mechanisms. In Mexico, data gathering started as early as 1972. Since 1988, surveys on drug use have been organised every 5 years. The national drug prevalence remains quite low although it increased over the past few years – in 2002 there was a prevalence of drug use of 0.8%, which then rose to 1.4% in 2008. Mexico organised a national prevention and information campaign with the creation of a network of 334 primary health care centres for people who use drugs, as well as a network of data gathering centres throughout the country.

4- The importance of community-based programmes to promote social inclusion in Latin America

This session started with a keynote speech on the importance of acknowledging the complexity of community relations and drug use. Social inclusion creates more equitable conditions for people and communities to respond to drug use and related harms. The speaker concluded that the war on drugs had been ineffective and led to numerous negative consequences, which made it necessary to see the issue in a different way – we are moving away from considering drug users as criminals to considering them as ‘sick’, to purely considering them as ‘citizens’ within a given society. In this context, the decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use should form the basis of a health and social inclusion policy. It is also necessary to invest in long term, inter-sectoral and evidence-based projects, both in the fields of supply and demand, with the involvement of local authorities, NGOs, peers and academics. RAISSS was mentioned and described as a successful example of such an approach. Other projects developed in Uruguay and Colombia were also described as interesting examples of how social inclusion could be promoted in Latin America.

The Spanish representative reacted to this presentation by highlighting the fact that government policies should follow public demands, and in his case, society demanded a stronger approach against people who use drugs. Working both to promote social inclusion and to respond to the public expectations has been one of the central pillars of Spanish drug policy. The government has also worked with drug using communities on themes related to violence, and with wider communities on the human rights of people who use drugs.

Another interesting intervention came from Costa Rica, which raised again the issue of drug regulation, and the necessity to investigate, educate and debate on the issue.

5- Evidence of effectiveness in the field of demand reduction

This session started with a presentation from the EMCDDA about the evidence base for drug prevention in Europe. There are various levels at which we can act in terms of drug prevention – the macro (society, economics, tax, regulation), meso (physical and social contexts, school, community, recreational settings) and micro level (emotional contexts, family). One of the key aspects of this presentation was the acknowledgement that prevention means “socialisation”, not necessarily “abstinence”. In this regard, prevention should aim to increase social inclusion, promote specific attitudes, norms, beliefs and behaviours. Today, prevention overly relies on ineffective programmes which seek to disseminate basic information about drug use, based on the auto-competence of an individual without taking due account of the impulsivity and social norms which often lead to drug use in the first place. Non-evidenced and clearly ineffective drug prevention measures need to be abandoned.

The next presentation focused on the minimum quality standards guidance on drug prevention recently developed by the European Union. The standards aim to provide advice on how to plan, implement and evaluate prevention programmes, based on available evidence. The guidance is based on a cycle which includes understanding drug use (including how to consider the role of drug use among young people’s lives, risk taking, etc.), resource assessment, the formulation of programmes, monitoring their delivery, research and evaluation, and sustainability. These standards can be applied to a wide range of prevention activities (universal, selective, indicated and environmental) to tackle a variety of issues (drug use, problematic drug use, risky behaviour). The second phase of the project will focus on developing a set of toolkits on how to implement these quality standards in practice.

The activities implemented during the first year of the COPOLAD project in the field of demand reduction have included the sharing of information about demand reduction activities, the organisation of an e-course on integrated systems of primary social and health care for drug dependence, the design of an interactive system of support for the planning and evaluation of drug demand reduction programmes, the initiation of a study on how to define criteria of accreditation for demand reduction programmes with the publication of a document on evidence-based prevention, treatment and harm reduction (to be published in year 2), and the development of a resources directory on demand reduction services on the COPOLAD website.

Costa Rica shared its experience with collaborating to COPOLAD on demand reduction. Thanks to COPOLAD, the government managed to strengthen and increase coordination between data gathering centres, to set up an urgent warning system, to identify basic needs for improvements of national monitoring centres, and to develop an initial resources and services directory in the field of demand reduction. COPOLAD also ensures better coordination between the country, other countries from the region and international cooperation institutions.

The activities planned for the second year of the COPOLAD project will include:

- Meetings to coordinate the training of 60 professionals in the field of prevention, treatment and social inclusion
- The finalisation of the first online course on integrated systems of primary social and health care for drug dependence in December 2012

- The development of second online course on evidence-based drug prevention
- The finalisation of an interactive support system for the planning and evaluation of drug demand reduction programmes
- The elaboration of best practice guides (topics to be defined)
- The further development of the resources directory on demand reduction services, incorporating NGO-led centres and services, and available resources in each country of the COPOLAD project.
- The development of a database on available demand reduction services

6- Successes and challenges in the field of supply reduction

The first part of this session focused on how to prevent and investigate the diversion of precursors into the illicit drug market. The speaker mentioned a range of international and regional mechanisms which exist to prevent diversion, including Prisma, Pila, PRELAC and DROSICAN. In the course of year 2 of the COPOLAD project, France will organise a conference in the Dominican Republic on tackling maritime drug trafficking.

Colombia took the lead in this area of work. It organised a conference on synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances in Latin America, and will organise a conference on prevention, control and police investigation on the diversion of precursors on year 2 of the COPOLAD project. Colombia will also organise a seminar on police investigation in cocaine trafficking via the sea, and a workshop on methods of investigation, coordination and exchange of intelligence with regards to drug trafficking.

At the European Union level, some actions have taken place in combatting synthetic drugs. Discussions have taken place at the Horizontal Drugs Group (HDG) on the issue, and a pact against synthetic drugs is being implemented to counter production and trafficking, tackle the rapid emergence of new psychoactive drugs, and train law enforcement in detecting, examining and dismantling clandestine laboratories.

The importance of legal consumption of psychoactive substances was raised during the discussions – the discussion on how to avoid diversion should be balanced by one that identifies the needs for these substances as well. It was noted that an online regional system would facilitate this process.

Another issue touched upon during the discussions was that of technical and financial difficulties to dispose of controlled substances and precursors once seized. This point was reiterated at various points of the conference.

The second part of the session focused on alternative development. Peru shared its experience in this domain. At first, coca growers were presented with alternative development programmes which were unsustainable and over which they had no ownership. A pilot project was developed to respond to these problems, this time focusing on social rights, in the Valle del Rio Apurimac (VRA). A study was conducted to identify the social gaps in the area through interviews, surveys and workshops. The study identified several important facts – the cultural, social and economic diversity among the populations present in VRA, and the lack of NGOs and associations in the area. On the basis of these findings, a set of recommendations were developed to improve the alternative

development programme in the area, including: a consolidation of the right to land ownership, the strengthening of access to basic services and infrastructure, and the importance of participation of affected communities, young people and women in programme design and implementation.

Ecuador then discussed the concept of preventive alternative development for people living in extreme poverty and vulnerable to get involved in the illicit drug market. A meeting and a workshop will be organised in collaboration with COPOLAD in Lima, Peru, in September 2012 to discuss the issue. Nationally, Ecuador also organises training courses for civil society and local authorities. The idea behind preventive alternative development is to provide social and economic initiatives based on a series of criteria – responding to vulnerability, the added value of the goods and services transformed through the process, better labour conditions based on human rights, putting the local communities in direct contact with their clients, protecting the environment, and creating a platform of collaboration worldwide (portal available at www.consep.gov.ec/sellodap).

The activities implemented during the first year of the COPOLAD project have included a study analysing subsistence systems in coca cultivation areas (in VRA), the identification of communities and relevant stakeholders involved in local drug policy and the development of a work plan for the organisation of capacity building workshops (to take place in years 2 and 3 of the COPOLAD project).

The activities planned for the second year of the COPOLAD project will include:

- A study on the lessons learned about coca cultivation, gender issues and alternative development in Bolivia
- The development of a guide for the analysis of lifestyles and alternative development projects
- The organisation of forums involving representatives from trading associations (coffee, cocoa and palm oil) (3-5 September 2012 in Bogota, Colombia)
- The organisation of a technical workshop on a potential international trade control for products originating from drug producing regions (13-14 November 2012, in Lima, Peru)
- The organisation of a capacity building workshop for relevant communities and stakeholders (1st semester of 2013)