



Policies of the Un To Combat Drug Abuse

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Received 26 Aug., 2024; Revised 03 Sep., 2024; Accepted 05 Sep., 2024 © The author(s) 2024.

Published with open access at www.questjournas.org

Today's international drug control system is rooted in efforts made a century ago to address the largest substance abuse problem the world had ever faced: Drug Abuse. Number of international and national policies guides the development of strategies and substance prevention programmes. International policies, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Drug Abuse, and the African Youth Charter, mandate signatories to protect children, adults and each age group of individual from the use of substances, and their involvement in the production and trafficking of substances. The main goals of the strategy are to retain individuals, children, adults or youth and to create a safe learning environment that contributes towards quality education. The key objectives include ensuring that community areas, homes, schools and the whole society become alcohol and drug free zones, increasing knowledge, life skills and confidence amongst individuals or learners so that they are less likely to engage in problematic alcohol and drug use, and managing alcohol and drug use-related problems amongst adults or children in order to enhance learning outcomes and learner retention.

Drugs are barriers to learning and teaching to children and adults or youth: to this end, existing structure and support systems outlined in CSTL and in SIAS frameworks are key and need to be integrated at international, national, provincial, district and school level. It is estimated that globally between 3.5 percent and 5.7 percent of the population aged 15-64 years of age used illicit substances at least once during 2008 (UNODC, 2010)¹. Similar rates of use were reported for this age group in 2000 and 2004 (4.2 percent and 4.7percent, respectively) (UNODC, 2000; UNODC, 2004b²). Of individuals who used drugs in 2008, between 16 and 38 million were problem drug users, who required treatment (UNODC, 2010³). In 2014, transnational organized crime groups across the globe were estimated to have generated between approximately one fifth and one third of their revenues from drug sales. Various international and national policies guide and help to combat or control drug use and drug trafficking, directly as well as indirectly.

UN PRINCIPLES TO COMBAT DRUG ABUSE

Drug policies must be based on solid empirical and scientific evidence. The primary measure of success should be the reduction of harm to the health, security and welfare of individuals and society. Effective policymaking requires a clear articulation of the policy's objectives. The 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs made it clear that the ultimate objective of the system was the improvement of the 'health and welfare of the mankind'. Drug policies were initially developed and implemented in the hope of achieving outcomes in terms of a reduction in harms to individuals and society – less crime, better health, and more economic and social development. However, the success in the war on drugs has primarily been measured by

entirely different measures – those that report on processes such as the number of arrests, the amounts seized, or the harshness of punishments. These indicators may tell how tough the laws are, but they do not tell us how successful these are in improving the ‘health and welfare of the mankind’.

Drug policies must be based on human rights and public health principles. Stigmatization and marginalization of people who use certain drugs and those involved in the lower levels of cultivation, production and distribution should be brought to an end, and people dependent on drugs should be treated as patients and not criminals. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanathem Pillay has stated, “Individuals who use drugs do not forfeit their human rights. Too often, drug users suffer discrimination, are forced to accept treatment, marginalized and often harmed by approaches which over-emphasize criminalization and punishment while under-emphasizing harm reduction and respect for human rights.” A number of well-established and proven public health measures (generally referred to as harm reduction, an approach that includes syringe access and treatment using the proven medications methadone or buprenorphine) can minimize the risk of drug overdose deaths and the transmission of HIV and other blood borne infections⁴.

The development and implementation of drug policies should be a global shared responsibility, but also needs to take into consideration diverse political, social and cultural realities. Policies should respect the rights and needs of people affected by production, trafficking and consumption as explicitly acknowledged in the 1988 Convention on Drug Trafficking. The UN drug control system is built on the idea that all governments should work together to tackle drug markets and related problems. The idea of shared responsibility has too often become a straitjacket that inhibits policy development and experimentation. The UN, through the International Narcotics Control Board, and in particular the US notably through its ‘certification’ process, has worked strenuously over the last 50 years to ensure that all countries adopt the same rigid approach to drug policy – same laws and same tough approach to their enforcement. As national governments have become more aware of the complexities of the problems, and options for policy responses in their own territories, many have opted to use the flexibilities within the Conventions to try new strategies and programs, such as decriminalization initiatives or harm reduction programs. When these involve a more tolerant approach to drug use, governments have faced international diplomatic pressure to ‘protect the integrity of the Conventions’, even when the policy is legal, successful and supported in the country. A current example of this process, what may be described as ‘drug control imperialism’, can be observed with the proposal by the Bolivian government to remove the practice of coca leaf chewing from the sections of the 1961 Convention that prohibit its non-medicinal uses.

Drug policies must be pursued in a comprehensive manner, involving families, schools, public health specialists, development practitioners and civil society leaders, in partnership with law enforcement agencies and other relevant governmental bodies. With their strong focus on law enforcement and punishment, it is not surprising that the leading institutions in the implementation of the drug control system have been the police, border control and military authorities directed by Ministries of Justice, Security or Interior. At the multilateral level, regional or United Nations structures are also dominated by these interests. A theoretical problem – repeated studies have demonstrated that governments achieve much greater financial and social benefit for their communities by investing in health and social programs, rather than investing in supply reduction and law enforcement activities. However, in most countries, the vast majority of available resources are spent on the enforcement of drug laws and the punishment of people who use drugs⁵.

INTERNATIONAL POLICIES

1. United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child

This convention sets a global standard to ensure human rights for children aged 0 to 18 years. Article 33 mandates the signatories to institute measures to protect children from the illicit use of substances and the use of children in the production and trafficking of substances (UN, 1989⁶).

2. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

This document provides a framework for tobacco control measures at national, regional and international levels in order to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use and the exposure to tobacco smoke. It includes measures affecting both the supply and demand of tobacco products (WHO,

2003⁷).

3. Protocol on Combating Illicit Drugs

This protocol was signed by the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It aims at assisting in the reduction and eventual elimination of drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption and the illicit use and abuse of drugs through co-operation among enforcement agencies. Other objectives include the elimination of the production of illicit drugs and the protection of the region from being used as a conduit for drugs destined for international markets (SADC, 1996⁸).

4. Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961

This Convention aims to combat substance abuse by coordinated international action to deter and discourage drug trafficking. It limits the use and distribution of drugs to medical and scientific purposes. It also lists scheduled substances and urges Parties to the Convention to take practical measures to prevent the abuse of drugs, and to provide early identification, treatment and rehabilitation. With regard to the youth, it urges Parties to develop leisure and other activities conducive to the sound physical and psychological health of young people.

5. Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971

While the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 was mainly focused on controlling drugs obtained from plant material e.g. cannabis, opium, cocoa leaves, this Convention aims to control the use and distribution of psychoactive substances like amphetamines, psychedelics, benzodiazepines. The Convention limits the use and distribution of psychoactive substances to medical and scientific purposes. Similarly, to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, it also lists scheduled substances and urges Parties to the Convention to take practical measures to prevent the abuse of drugs, and to provide early identification, treatment and rehabilitation. Parties are also urged to assist with the prevention of substance abuse amongst the general public; where there is a risk that substance abuse will spread (UN, 1971⁹).

6. Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988

This Convention provides comprehensive measures against drug trafficking which include mandating international cooperation in tracing and seizing drug-related assets as well as providing a legal basis for extradition in drug-related cases amongst countries with no other extradition treaties. The Convention also includes provisions against money laundering and the diversion of precursor chemicals (UN, 1988¹⁰).

7. African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children

This Convention provides comprehensive measures against drug trafficking. These include mandating international cooperation in tracing and seizing drug-related assets, as well as providing a legal basis for extradition in drug-related cases amongst countries with no other extradition treaties. The Convention also includes provisions against money laundering and the diversion of precursor chemicals (UN, 1988¹¹).

8. African Youth Charter

This charter makes explicit provision for the development of life skills to form a part of the education curriculum. It states that substance abuse prevention, as well as topics such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health should form a part of the curriculum. The charter also makes provision for the rehabilitation of young people affected by drugs and legislative steps to address the consumption.

9. UNESCO International Convention Against Doping in Sports, 2007

The Convention provides a legal framework with which all governments can address the growing prevalence and increasingly insidious use of performance-enhancing substances and methods in sports. In the interest of education and sports, UNESCO, through the Convention emphasizes the need for action to curtail trafficking and to regulate dietary or nutritional supplements which fall under the auspices of governments. The Convention also helps ensure coordination of testing and the development of education, training and research programmes.

The first International conference to discuss the world's Narcotics Problem was convened in February 1909 in Shanghai. This forum came to be known as the 'Opium Commission'¹². The Hague Convention of 1912, the International Opium Convention of 1925, and the 1931 Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and regulating the Distribution of Narcotic drugs provided a basis for controlling the illicit trade in psychoactive substances. The permanent Central Opium Board concluded that by 1934-35, the legal manufacture of opiates and Cocaine had dropped to approximately the level of legitimate demand. The League of Nations convened a conference in 1936 that drafted the 1936 Convention for the Suppression of Illicit Trafficking in Dangerous Drugs signed on 22 July 1936¹³.

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