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MEASUREMENT MATTERS:

Designing New Metrics for a Drug Policy that Works

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Thai Hmong hill tribe small-holders involved in a UN-sponsored project to discourage the local production of opium poppies. UN Photo/J Sailas

Abstract

Supporters of progressive drug policy are committed to using scientific evidence as the basis for informed public debate and policy-making. This is more radical proposal than it first appears. It requires a fundamental shift in how governments and societies think about monitoring and measuring production, trafficking and consumption. To help advance this thinking, the following Strategic Paper proposes a new set of generic goals, targets and indicators to track the intended and unintended consequences of drug policy. Based on dozens of interviews with the world´s top experts, it offers an innovative framework to align drug policy metrics with improvements in public health, safety and citizen security. The paper introduces 2 high level impacts, 6 goals, 16 targets and 86 indicators and subjects them to a preliminary reality check in Colombia. While there are challenges related to data availability and access, there are also tremendous opportunities to rethink old paradigms and design new approaches to designing, implementing and monitoring drug policy that works.

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Designing New Metrics for a Drug Policy that Works

Robert Muggah, Katherine Aguirre and Ilona Szabo de Carvalho[1]

Introduction

An inspiring feature of the new emerging drug policy debate is its commitment to scientific evidence as the basis for public policy. Drug czars, elected officials, activists and health specialist are unanimous in their affirmation of the importance of data-driven responses to drug demand, supply and consumption.[2] After all, effective policy prescriptions depend fundamentally on an informed understanding of the problem and the expected positive impact of proposed solutions. This commitment to evidence is more radical development than it first appears. In the past, global and domestic drug policies were not necessarily forged or measured on the basis of reliable data. Indeed, interventions designed to address narcotics production, trafficking and use tended to be guided by the wrong kinds of metrics. The misalignment of data, metrics and responses has contributed in many cases to worsening the drug "problem".

There are encouraging signs that these contradictions are being recognized and reversed. For its part, the Global Commission on Drug Policy[3] signaled its commitment to evidence-based policy-making. In 2011 and 2014 Commissioners called for a different way of gauge the effectiveness and efficiency of drug policy. Specifically, the Commission encouraged governments to "establish better metrics, indicators and goals to measure progress" in achieving drug policy reform.[4] It acknowledged how the "current system of measuring success in the drug policy field is flawed … [and that] a new set of indicators is needed to truly show the outcomes of drug policies according to their harms or benefits for individuals and communities".[5] It is of course one thing to call for better metrics and data collection, but quite another to set-out a roadmap for how this might be done.

This Strategic Paper proposes a new set of generic goals, targets and indicators to better track the intended and unintended consequences of drug policy. These goals and targets are distilled from expert opinion gathered from leading drug policy specialists, together with the Global Commission on Drug Policy. The proposed goals, targets and indicators are designed to provide strategic direction to policy makers and practitioners intend on changing course and getting control over the illicit drugs. They can and should be

2 See MacGregor et al (2014). See also the latest statement of the UNODC (2014).

3 See http://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/.

4 See Global Commission (2014).

5 See Global Commission (2011) Recommendation 4, pg 13.

adapted and contextualized to meet specific country needs. They may also require expansion or contraction depending on the needs on the ground. Either way, they are intended to provoke a critical reflection on the direction of drug policy, and the possible alternatives to a more progressive outcome. The Strategic Paper is also designed to assist decision-makers as they reflect on the forthcoming United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) in 2016.

The first section of this Strategic Paper revisits the conventional metrics applied by governments and organizations around the world to monitor and enforce changes in drugs demand and supply. The Secretariat finds that these indicators tend to be focused on inputs and outputs related to the war on drug production, interdiction and consumption. They are seldom concerned with outcomes and impacts associated with safety, citizen security and public health. These traditional indicators are not only outdated, they are counter-productive, a legacy of narrowly-defined political and institutional interests that have prevailed since the mid-twentieth century. What is needed are metrics that are updated to twenty-first century realities.

The second section of the Strategic Paper recommends a shortlist of 2 high-level impacts, 6 goals, 16 targets and 86 indicators that emerge from findings of successive Global Commission reports and a wide range of consulted criminologists, economists and public health specialists. These metrics were refined and short-listed on the basis of extensive consultations with leading international experts. In order to genuinely assess the outcomes of drug policy, they privilege impact indicators over output or process metrics. And instead of narrowly judging the success or failure of drug policy on changes in the supply or demand of drugs, the focus is on the extent to which illicit narcotics generate harms. The reversal of use, pain and suffering is of course ultimately the end game of a drug policy that works.

The final section of the paper undertakes a reality check of the proposed indicators, drawing specifically on the case of Colombia. The Andean region is ground zero in the war on drugs, having been the site of literally thousands of interventions and billions of dollars to end production, transit and use. Colombia also features one of the most complete information systems on drug demand and supply. It is important to stress that in spite of the comprehensiveness of the available data, there are still real challenges in applying the proposed goals, targets and indicators proposed in this paper. Predictably, the data collection bias is weighted toward "old" metrics. Even so, there is considerable enthusiasm in Colombia, and in many countries across Latin America, to implement new and updated indicators. This reflects the political and social desire for changing course.[6]

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6 See Szabo (2013).

Old debate, old indicators

The debate on global drug policy over the past five decades has been influenced by a very different set of aspirations than those recently proposed by the Global Commission on Drug Policy beginning in 2011. Very generally, certain governments and inter-governmental bodies traditionally advanced punitive enforce-led approaches seeking to criminalize producers, sellers and consumers of illegal drugs. The expectation was that the threat of military action, more repressive policing and tougher prison penalties – all subsumed under the banner of a war on drugs – would deter would be drug manufacturers, traffickers and users from availing themselves of narcotics.[7]

Since the 1960s a number of basic metrics were established to assess whether the goals of the war – reducing supply and demand – were being achieved. These included mapping the physical amount of land under cultivation by certain types of drugs (e.g. coca, poppies and cannabis), the extent of crops eradicated by different means (e.g. slash and burn, fumigation, alternative crops), the weight and volume of drugs being seized (e.g. interdiction at borders, raids on sellers), the number of producers, traffickers and users detained and imprisoned (e.g. cartel leaders, low-level traffickers, addicts), and the extent of drug use in societies (e.g. prevalence of consumption among teens, reduction in overdoses). International organizations such as the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) were enlisted by proponents of the drug policy regime to track changes in these indicators over time.[8]

The goals, targets and indicators elaborated by the drug policy regime over the past half century not only failed to materialize, they unintentionally generated unexpected consequences where applied. When the higher-order objectives of a policy call for results based on an enforcement model, it is hardly surprising that there is a corresponding motivation to increase the amount of drugs seized and producers and consumers imprisoned. Predictably, the law and order-based approach to drug policy has generated many negative impacts, including more violence and incarceration. Among the more pernicious repercussions are an overall expansion of drug production, a decline in the cost of drugs, the spread of criminal markets, the fatal corruption of political, policing and judicial systems in producer, transit and consumer countries, and devastating costs for human health and long-term wellbeing.[9] Notwithstanding the enormous expenditures devoted to repression, there is comparatively limited evidence of success – even when measured by the regime´s declared goals, targets and indicators.

Evidence of the real or relative effectiveness of conventional approaches to addressing drug production, trafficking and consumption is limited. The UNODC reported in its 2013 *World Drug Report* that in spite of tens of billions spent "the manufacture and use of substances that are under international control remain largely

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7 Very generally, "the current choice of global drug control system is predicated upon police and military enforcement of blanket prohibitions of drug production and supply, and punitive enforcement against drug users – a "war on drugs" in popular political, public and media discourse" (AWDR, 2012; p. 19)

8 See, for example, the work of the UNODC and its *World Drug Report*. Consult http://www.unodc.org/wdr2014/.

9 The *Alternative World Drug Report* highlights the negatives impacts of the war on drugs across seven areas: undermines international development and security, and fuels conflict; threatens public health; spreads disease and causes death; undermines human rights; promotes stigma and discrimination; creates crime and enriches criminals, causes deforestation and pollution; and wastage of billions on ineffective law enforcement (Transform Drug Policy Foundation, 2012).

stable as compared to 2009". And while the seizure of cocaine, heroin and opium appears to have moderately increased, production has not showed any signs of decline.[10] For the UNODC, a *status quo* that contains the so-called "drug problem" was equated with success: "… evidence shows that while the system may not have eliminated the drug problem, it continues to ensure that it does not escalate to unmanageable proportions".[11] Moreover, UNODC (2013) data on drug demand shows that consumption is in fact increasing, if measured by the prevalence of illicit drug use and "problem-using" users.

A concern raised by some critical participants in the drug policy debate is whether the international community is in fact setting the right goals or monitoring the most appropriate metrics. There is a risk that some multilateral and bilateral institutions only "measure what they treasure", focusing on a discrete set of indicators that fulfill narrowly prescribed political and bureaucratic interests rather than issues more relevant to the public interest. Moreover, many of the traditionally applied indicators are process-oriented and do not reflect actual changes in the benefits or harms to individuals (including the unintended costs of repression). It appears that the bulk of policies and practices are not themselves oriented toward improving human health and welfare. As stressed by the Global Commission "arresting and punishing drug users does little to reduce levels of drug use, taking out low-level dealers simply creates a market opportunity for others…" (GCDP, 2011; p. 13).

Put succinctly, conventional drug policy metrics appear to be measuring the wrong variables. They explain "how tough we are being, but do not tell us how successful we are" in achieving the overall goals of a progressive humane outcome.[12] As is often the case in public policy, the focus of measurement tends to gravitate to measuring what seems most visible or tangible, or what reflects the dominant power influences.[13] And this conceptual and ideological orientation has potentially devastating real world implications. The persistent aspiration to diminish the supply and demand for drugs has not only generated adverse consequences, but also has subordinated equally (and potentially more) important priorities associated with protecting the health, safety and security of citizens.

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10 See UNODC (1999, pg 31-41) and UNODC (2012, pg 26 and 35).

11 This type of statement reflects the political position of an institution with roles "as both center for research and dissemination and a prime outlet for moral and political messages targeting drug use" (Hallam and Bewley-Taylor, 2010; p. 1).

12 See Global Commission (2011, p.13).

13 Consider, for example, the primary goals set by the 1998 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Drugs (UNGASS) in New York: "these objectives comprised "eradicating or significantly reducing" the illicit production of plant-based drugs, limiting the illicit manufacture and trafficking of synthetic drugs and the "significant and measurable" reduction of the demand for illicit drugs" (Hallam and Bewley-Taylor, 2010; p. 1).

Time for new goals, new targets, new indicators

The Global Commission Secretariat – in consultation with leading experts and officials from around the world – is proposing a progressive drug policy agenda tailored to the realities and needs of governments and societies in the twenty first century. These metrics are based on evidence of what works. They are not intended to be all applied at once, but rather to inspire new thinking and ideas on the locus of priorities. At its center are a set of several goals that can, if pursued in an integrated manner, can ensure a more effective and efficient approach to mitigating the harms generated by drugs. These goals can be imputed from a wide range of consultations with experts[14] together with the recommendations of the Global Commission on Drug Policy. They can be summarized as:

1. Ending the criminalization and stigmatization of drug users;

2. Curbing drug use through public health measures;

3. Diminishing incarceration of non-violent drug-related offenders;

4. Targeting violent organized crime groups and drug traffickers;

5. Providing viable alternatives to illicit crop producers; and

6. Encouraging experimentation with different models of drug regulation

These are not the only recommendations advanced by the Global Commission or indeed progressive drug policy experts around the world. However, they do differ in many ways from the goals advanced by proponents of repression and punitive approaches. Indeed, the latter propose few tangible measures for tracking changes in the health, safety or welfare of people involved in or affected by drugs. Nor do they draw attention to ensuring value-for-money or cost-benefits of competing policy options. Yet these are precisely the kinds of priorities that all forward-thinking public policy makers urgently require.

In 2012 the Global Commission Secretariat began a process of critical reflection on possible goals, targets and indicators for more progressive drug policy. Between 2012 and 2014 the Secretariat and its partners consulted globally-renowned experts involved in counter-narcotics, policing and justice reform, public health and other sectors to review a range of metrics, but also assess the quality of available datasets, plausible methods to gather information, and opportunities and challenges. The Secretariat was also tasked with articulating specific theories of change – in particular, "a results chain connecting desired impacts with carefully selected goals, and targets with indicators that measure change".[15]

In order to move these proposed goals, targets and indicators from theory to practice, they need to be tested with real data. It is true that drug production, trafficking and consumption data is of varying and uneven quality and often in short supply. Nevertheless, information can be gathered at the country, state or city level from administrative records as well as expert reviews. In order to test the viability of the framework, the Secretariat initiated a pilot review of the selected indicators from several Latin American countries throughout 2013 and

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14 More than 50 experts were consulted in the preparation of this Strategic Paper. Consult the Annex for a shortlist of some representatives from around the world.

15 As noted by the Global Commission (2011, pg 11): "a new set of indicators is needed to truly show the outcomes of drug policies according to their harms or benefits for individuals and communities."

Needle exchange programs can reduce harms to drugs users and their partners, families and wider networks.
Photo: Trinn Suwannapha / World Bank

2014 and collated information from various institutions, including National Observatories of Drugs, Ministries of Defense, Health and Interior, as well as police departments, attorney offices, penal agencies and polling organizations.[16]

The preliminary list of goals, targets and indicators in this paper are thus informed by expert opinion and a review of a vast scientific literature. In total, 2 high-order impacts, 6 goals, 16 targets and 86 indicators were identified after reviewing hundreds of possible alternatives (see Figure 1). They include impact indicators[17], outcome indicators (tracking the goals) and outputs indicators (tracking the targets).[18]

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16 This Strategic Paper does not include a lengthy review of these pilots since they will be the subject of a separate study. However, the Strategic Paper does consider findings generated from a rapid survey in a single country, Colombia.

17 The collection of impact indicators is the first step to developing scientific evaluations of drug policy interventions.

18 Outputs consist of indicators of different activities generated by a specific intervention. Outcomes measure the results of concrete activities and imply the effects or impacts of interventions. A description of these categories can be found at http://www.enterprise-architecture.info/Images/Documents/mfo-outcomes.pdf / and https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2699/526780PUB0Road101Official0Use0Only1.pdf?sequence=1.

Figure 1. A framework for new progressive drug policy

High level impacts	Impact indicators
(1) Improve health and welfare of the population and (2) Enhance security and safety of people involved with drugs and the wider public	Lethal and non-lethal outcomes of drug-related violence Displacement of populations affected by drug violence Opportunity costs of spending on responding to drug production, transit and use (on law enforcement versus other social sectors)

GOALS AND TARGETS

GOAL 1. END CRIMINALIZATION AND STIGMATIZATION OF DRUG USERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of people detained/arrested/convicted for drug use in small quantities	
Death penalty for any drug related offenses	
Employment rate of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (convicted for drug possession)	
Educational enrollment/attainment of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (accused of drug possession)	

Targets and output indicators

1.1 Decriminalize drug use	Existence of legislation that decriminalizes possession of drugs in small quantities for personal use
	Number of legislative proposals focused on drug decriminalization
	Number of civil society groups actively lobbying for drug decriminalization
	Number of persons arrested/detained for drug law offences in small quantities
1.2 Promote opportunities for former drug offenders	Number of companies/firms that promote employment opportunities for former drug offenders/users
	Number of educational institutions (formal/vocational) promoting opportunities for former drug offenders/users
1.3 Reduction of bias in media reporting	Number media articles that attribute positons to credible scientific evidence
	Editorial positions on issues related to decriminalization and harm reduction
	Reporting in regional/domestic press on progressive drug policy strategies

GOAL 2. CURB DRUG USE THROUGH PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of drug overdose related deaths	
Number of deaths related to long-term health problems directly associated with drug use	
Prevalence of drug-related infectious diseases (HIV, Hepatitis B and C) among drug users	

Targets and output indicators

2.1 Create a national strategy for drug prevention	Evidence of a national strategy focused on drug prevention

	National/state/municipal spending on drug prevention (as reported in budgets and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy)
	Number of persons entering prevention/harm reduction programs
2.2 Create a national strategy for harm reduction	National/state/municipal spending on harm reduction (as reported in budgets and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy)
	Number of harm reduction interventions
	Number of accredited public hospitals/health institutions providing harm reduction programs

GOAL 3. A MORE BALANCED APPROACH TOWARD INCARCERATING DRUG OFFENDERS – INCLUDING DECREASING OFFENCES FOR NON-VIOLENT AND FIRST-TIME OFFENDERS

Persons referred to alternative sentencing for non-violent and small-scale drug related offences

Proportion of prison population incarcerated for low-level drug offences

Overall level of overcrowding in prisons

Reported cases of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of drug users (and indeed all prison populations)

Targets and output indicators	
3.1 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug users	Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first time and non-violent consumers
	Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent consumers
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time consumers
	Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time consumers
3.2 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug dealers	Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first/second time and non-violent dealers
	Fines (as opposed to sentencing) for non-violent dealers
	Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent dealers
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time dealers
	Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time dealers
3.3 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug producers	Proportion of non-criminal penalties for low-level/family-based producers
	Rehabilitation/alternative crop opportunities for non-violent producers
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time producers

3.4 Increased in support for alternate sentencing for drug-related crime	Number of diversion mechanisms with a tested/demonstrated success rate
	National/state/municipal expenditures on diversion mechanisms
	Existence of legislation citing alternative sentencing options for first time offenders

GOAL 4. TARGET VIOLENT ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS AND DRUG TRAFFICKERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of arrests, convictions and incarcerations of people suspected of high-level trafficking, corruption and/or money laundering associated with drugs

Prison population of persons convicted for high-level organized crime involvement and/or affiliation

Prison population of those convicted of high-level illegal drug trade

Amount of confiscated assets from illicit drug markets, drug trafficking and money laundering

Prosecutions of cases of corruption associated with drug markets

Targets and output indicators	
4.1 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending violent organized crime	National expenditures on intelligence and anti-organized crime units
	Existence of legislation to tackle organized crime and large-scale drug trafficking (including assets apprehension)
	Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on organized crime
4.2 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending money laundering and corruption	Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on money laundering
	Creation of mechanisms to monitor, detect and confiscate drug-related laundered funds and assets
	Extent of confiscated assets from organized crime groups connected to drug trafficking and money laundering
4.3 Reduce corruption associated with drug markets	Existence of legislation and explicit measures to punish corruption related to the drugs trade
	Creation of anti-corruption commissions or tasks forces within state institutions
	Existence of independent media entities monitoring corruption related to the drugs trade
	Existence of non-governmental organization(s) tracking corruption related to the drugs trade

5. PROVIDE VIABLE ALTERNATIVES FOR ILLICIT CROP PRODUCERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of (former) illicit producers benefiting from alternative livelihood programs (by dollar value/by household)

Per capita income of former illicit producers before and after alternative livelihoods investment

Expenditures devoted to crop substitution and alternative livelihoods programs

5.1 Promote crop substitution	Existence and publication of legislation setting out standards and procedures for crop substitution
	National expenditures on crop substitution and livelihood policies
	National programs planning and implementing crop substitution
	Number of credits to small farmers to implement crop substitution
5.2 Strengthen markets for alternative goods	Existence of a national/subnational policy explicitly devoted to developing markets for alternative products
	Creation of institutions promoting transparency on prices of goods and services
	Safe credit and loan opportunities for small-holder farmers
	Subsidies for supporting trade associations
	Incentives to promote interaction between larger purchasers and smallholder farmers

GOAL 6. EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT MODELS OF DRUG REGULATION (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Profits of organized drug cartels and traffickers

Government tax revenue associated with controlled/regulated management of drugs

Open illicit trafficking/selling of illicit drugs

Overdoses and associated morbidity with poor quality/cut illicit drugs

6.1 Review the scheduling of different illicit drugs	Existence of legislation that reflects re-classification of illicit drugs
	Number of changes in regulations of reclassified drugs (from illicit to controlled)
	Existence of legislation that enables production and distribution of drugs for scientific research purposes
	Existence of legislation that permits cultivation, trade, and/or consumption of medical marijuana
	Existence of legislation that prescribes the regulation of drug availability (medical, retail, licensed sale)
6.2 Creation of a regulatory system for managing production, selling and use of drugs	Existence of systems for managing the production and transit of drugs
	Existence of oversight and management for dosage, preparation, pricing, packaging of drugs
	Existence of prescriptions for licensing, vetting, and training vendors
	Existence of rules for advertising, branding and promotion of drugs
	Existence of legislation for managing location of outlets, age controls and licensing arrangements for buyers for retail.

There are *ethical* and efficiency-gains considerations when thinking about the higher-order impacts of progressive drug policy. An ethical approach to drug policy should achieve improvements in health, welfare, security and safety while inflicting a minimal amount of harm on the least number of people. A key impact should be a reduction in scale of violence associated with drugs, including human rights violations and real and perceived insecurity. Meanwhile, an *efficient* approach should ensure that savings generated by more targeted drug policy – returns from rehabilitated sellers and users being integrated into the labor market or the proportion of the budget once devoted to police and prisons being redirected to school and health expenditures – are plowed back into other productive social sectors. The current approach to drug policy with its emphasis on greater investment in military, policing and intelligence infrastructure coupled with incarceration is what economists call "unproductive" expenditure and garners few meaningful returns to society as a whole.

The overarching objective of a progressive drug policy is naturally intended to generate positive higher-order impacts. There should therefore be two basic expectations underlying all of these metrics. First, progressive drug policy should improve health and welfare rather than diminish it. Second, such approaches should also enhance the security and safety situation for drug users and the wider public alike. While minimizing drug production, trafficking and consumption are of course expectations – they are *means* rather than *ends* of public policy. The real yardstick of successful drug reform should be whether it meaningfully improves basic citizen security. At a minimum this means lowering mortality and morbidity associated with illegal drug use and reducing the stigmatization and criminalization of drug users. The goal is not to benefit drug producers, drug trafficker and drug users, but rather the society as a whole.

An unintended consequence of repressive approaches to drug policy is that they generate significant levels of organized and inter-personal violence. There is of course unacceptable levels of victimization generated by those involved directly in the drug business. Narco-cartels, organized crime and gangs are often responsible for ruthlessly enforcing rules and defending territory from competitors. In the process, innocent civilians can become victims of violent encounters between factions and retributive justice. And yet punitive drug policies – whether forceful military and police intervention or harsh penal laws targeting young people – aggravate the problem. Paradoxically, it is often the forceful and arbitrary approach to curbing drug production, retail and use that is associated with the most egregious forms of violence. Meanwhile, there are encouraging signs that policies and programs focused on preventing and reducing violence – by focusing on hot spots and hot people – are more effective than interventions emphasizing drug prohibition alone.

Proposed goals, targets and indicators for drug policy that works

A revised approach to thinking about drug policy goals should set out the intended or desired impacts up front. As signaled in Figure 1 above, higher-order goals of a new progressive drug policy are to (1) improve health and welfare of the population and (2) enhance security and safety of people involved with drugs and the wider public. Old goals such as "a drug free world", "eradicating drug use" or "killing and capturing drug barons" are acknowledged by even the most stolid defenders of the war on drugs as implausible, unrealistic and even potentially unethical. In order to measure that higher-order goals are being achieved, impact indicators are needed to track changes in the overall quality of life of the population. These might include metrics associated with changes in lethal[19] and non-lethal outcomes of drug-related violence, displacement of populations affected by drug violence, and the opportunity costs of spending on responding to drug production, transit and use (on law enforcement versus other social sectors). What will also be needed in the medium- and longer-term are robust scientific impact evaluations to isolate treatment (intervention) and non-treatment effects of drug policy in relation to health and security.

Goal 1. End the criminalization and stigmatization of drug users

A major drawback of present drug policies are their continued criminalization and stigmatization of users. Oddly, the people most negatively affected by penalties associated with the illegal drug market are users and low-level consumers and dealers (and not major producers or traffickers).This is evident in the dramatic sentences accorded to first-time users and addicts and the considerable long-term social and economic costs incurred to them personally, their families, employers, and communities. The penalty assumed by users in fact reduces the pressure on higher-order organized crime groups. It also distracts policy makers from what should be their real priority, which is disrupting the drug market and interrupting associated violence. The focus is instead given over to policing and repression which often fails rather than public health and preventive approaches with an evidentiary track record of success.

Possible outcome indicators:

1. *Number of people detained/arrested/convicted for drug use in small quantities;*

2. *Death penalty for any/all drug related offenses;*

3. *Employment rate of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (convicted for drug possession); and*

4. *Educational enrollment/attainment of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (accused of drug possession).*

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19 Violent death is a convincing proxy. Part of the reason for this is that it is measurable – the gravity of death is such that it is accounted for in public health, judicial and other administrative records systems. As such, a target focusing on reducing (rather than rewarding) violent deaths – including those due to police, extra-judicial, or gang-related activities – would send a strong message that it is not acceptable as collateral damage.

Target 1.1 Decriminalize drug use

The focus on decriminalizing drug use can be justified on human rights, public health and evidentiary grounds. Specifically, the Global Commission calls for "drug policies based on human rights". This also implies guaranteeing the human rights of drug users. Indeed, as noted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2009): "… too often, drug users suffer discrimination, are forced to accept treatment, marginalized and often harmed by approaches that over-emphasize criminalization and punishment while under-emphasizing harm reduction and respect for human rights." What is more, it is clear that drug dependency itself is a complex health issue involving social, psychological and physical causes. Applying a criminal justice solution to what is a public health problem is not only ineffective, it is corrosive and promotes discrimination.[20]

Possible outcome indicators:

1.   *Existence of legislation that decriminalizes possession of drugs in small quantities for personal use;*

2.   *Number of legislative proposals focused on drug decriminalization;*

3.   *Number of civil society groups actively lobbying for drug decriminalization; and*

4.   *Number of persons arrested/detained for drug law offences in small quantities.*

Target 1.2 Promote opportunities for former drug offenders

A major impact of regressive drug policy relates to how it permanently affects individuals involved in all aspects of the drug market, whether producers, sellers or consumers. The impacts of a sentence for small-scale possession or trade can have long-term impacts on citizens, especially young men from minority groups. The imprisonment of young men can generate massive long-term productivity losses for their households owing to the costs associated with the judicial process, lost income, and permanent limitations on employment. In many cases the costs are so prohibitive that young men may be forced to deviate from the formal economy altogether, thus generating yet another (perverse) incentive to pursue a life of crime. It is vital, then that promoting public and private spending on rehabilitation, job placement and education programs be supported to reverse these crippling losses.

Possible output indicators:

1.   *Number of companies/firms that promote employment opportunities for former drug offenders/users;*

2.   *Number of educational institutions (formal/vocational) promoting opportunities for former drug offenders/ users.*

Target 1.3 Reduce bias in media reporting

While there are clearly changes in global public opinion about drug policy, the fact remains that many societies still adopt very conservative attitudes toward the use or consumption of drugs. Some countries have liberalized

20 See AWDR (2012), pg11.

drug legislation from countries and states in North America and Western Europe to Australia, New Zealand and a selection of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, others have tightened their legislation or doubled down on the war on drugs, including Russia. The extent of changes in a government's position and its laws is to some extent a reflection of domestic sentiment. And the media also can alter, reflect, amplify or contradict the *status quo*. For example, some media outlets – from the Economist to the New York Times to o Globo – recently started calling for responsible changes in drug policy. Meanwhile, others can reinforce the stigmatization of producers, sellers and users and encourage retrograde policies. At the very least, media outlets must be encouraged to report on the basis of available evidence.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Media articles that attribute positons to credible scientific evidence;*

2. *Editorial positions on issues of decriminalization and harm reduction; and*

3. *Reporting in regional/domestic press on progressive drug policy strategies.*

Goal 2. Curb drug use through public health measures

A key omission in current top-down law and order policies related to drug control is an honest consideration of public health, harm reduction and preventive strategies. Rather, they are often relegated to an after-thought with correspondingly low investment from public authorities. And yet a progressive approach would put the health of the population front and center. A key goal should be to reduce preventable deaths and illnesses generated by drug use and promote the health and welfare of consumers, low-level offenders and the wider public. This means reducing deaths related to overdoses and long-term health-related problems associated with drug use, and HIV-AIDS, Hepatitis A and B, and other transmitted diseases.[21] Supporters of drug policy must not incarcerate users or spread the so-called collateral damage and attenuated costs of a war on drugs to individuals and society. An approach that privileges health, harm reduction and prevention will also achieve the higher-order impacts associated with reducing mortality and morbidity of users as well as associated risk-taking behaviors such as injecting in unhygienic and unsupervised environments.

Possible outcome indicators:

1. *Number of drug overdose-related deaths;*

2. *Number of deaths related to long-term health problems directly associated with drug use; and*

3. *Prevalence of drug-related infectious diseases (HIV, Hepatitis B and C) among drug users.*

Target 2.1 Create a national strategy for drug prevention

The Global Commission does not condone illicit drug consumption. To the contrary – it advocates that ideally drugs should not be used, that its provision should be controlled and limited, and that their quality should be supervised and monitored. This is a pragmatic approach, consistent with the realities of drug use in the

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21 A concerted focus on reducing excess mortality and morbidity is consistent with a rights-based approach set out by the Global Commission.

There is growing international support for rethinking traditional drug policy and implementing more pragmatic harm reduction strategies. Photo: Kaytee Riek

twenty first century. Most countries have adopted national legislation and/or strategies to prevent and reduce drug trafficking and use. However, most of these measures are aligned with the International Conventions and endorse punitive norms and practices that run counter to progressive thinking on drug policy. What are instead urgently needed are comprehensive prevention strategies, focused on public health measures together with appropriate and responsible law enforcement and justice interventions.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Evidence of a national strategy focused on drug prevention;*

2. *National/state/municipal spending on drug prevention (and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy across all sectors); and*

3. *Number of persons entering prevention/harm reduction programs.*

Target 2.2 Create a national strategy for harm reduction

The promotion of interventions that promote harm reduction is key to curbing drug use and protecting the lives of drug consumers. There are well-known and accredited strategies to reduce the harms associated with drugs. These are applied around the world, and there is a growing evidence base demonstrating what works,

and what does not. The most successful of them include safe injection sites, user rooms, needle exchanges, opiate substitution programs, and mobile units for heavy users. At best, these activities seek to minimize the risk of drug overdose deaths, the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne infections, and in some cases consider the use of substitution treatments (including methadone and buprenorphine).[22]

Possible output indicators:

1.   *National/state/municipal spending on harm reduction (and as reported in budgets and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy);*

2.   *Number of harm reduction interventions; and*

3.   *Number of accredited public hospitals/health institutions providing harm reduction programs.*

Goal 3. A more balanced approach toward incarcerating drug offenders – including decreasing offences for non-violent and first-time offenders

The emphasis of the current drug policy regime on enforcement and incarceration has resulted in an explosion in prison populations around the world. The United States, China, Brazil and Russia have the largest prison populations on the planet with a sizeable proportion due to drug-related offences. Indeed, there is a disproportionate level of sentencing of people accused to have possessing and consuming small quantities of drugs. They may suffer drastic penalties even if they are caught for the first time, if they were not involved in committing any violent crime, or have no criminal record. In other cases, drug consumers are detained in institutions (rather than jails) and exposed to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments. A goal for a progressive drug policy that works should be to re-balance the approach some societies take to sentencing. This may include revisiting the burden of penalties allotted to first-time and non-violent drug offenders and considering alternate kinds of sentencing. Many countries are already experimenting with new approaches to reducing prison populations and the proportion of public spending devoted to servicing the penal system.

Possible outcome indicators:

1.   *Persons referred to alternative sentencing for non-violent and small-scale drug related offences;*

2.   *Proportion of prison population incarcerated for low-level drug offences;*

3.   *Overall level of overcrowding in prisons; and*

4.   *Reported cases of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of drug users (and indeed all prison populations)*

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22 Harm reduction includes those "policies, programs and practices that aim primarily to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal psychoactive drugs without necessarily reducing drug consumption. Harm reduction benefits people who use drugs, their families and the community." See AWDR (2012), pgs. 64 ref 16.

Target 3.1 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug users

As a means of showing their commitment to persecuting the drug war, many countries have enacted legislation and sentences that are out of proportion with the seriousness of drug-related crimes. Considerable research has shown that in spite of these draconian penalties, they do not generate the anticipated deterrent effects among users. A more progressive approach to drug policy would focus on diminishing the number of persons arrested, detained and convicted due to small amounts of drug possession (and no other charges). Likewise, it would seek to reduce the severity of sentencing for non-violent drug related crimes and encourage alternative sentencing for modest drug offences.

Possible output indicators include:

1. *Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first time and non-violent consumers;*

2. *Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent consumers;*

3. *Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time consumers; and*

4. *Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time consumers.*

Target 3.2 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug dealers

There is robust commitment in many countries to enacting severe sentences against known and suspected drug dealers. Indeed, the majority of those arrested in aggressive fight against drugs are not organized crime cartels or major players. Rather, they consist predominantly of young people, many of them exploited and from low-income marginal areas, who do the risky work of retail. In other cases they consist of couriers who are coerced or bated into transporting drugs across borders or dependent users seeking to generate funds to cover their own supplies.[23] Many of these individuals are indiscriminately prosecuted under the very same legal provisions of violent organized gangsters who control the market.

Possible output indicators include:

1. *Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first/second time and non-violent dealers;*

2. *Fines (as opposed to sentencing) for non-violent dealers;*

3. *Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent dealers;*

4. *Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time dealers; and*

5. *Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time dealers.*

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23 As observed by the Global Commission (2011, pg14) "Most people involved in drug trafficking are petty dealers and not the stereotyped gangsters from the movies – the vast majority of people imprisoned for drug dealing or trafficking are 'small fish' in the operation (often coerced into carrying or selling drugs), who can easily be replaced without disruption to the supply."

Target 3.3 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug producers

While a comparatively small number of countries produce illicit drugs in large quantities, there are extremely severe penalties accorded to citizens who do so. These strictures are in accordance with the International Conventions, and often result in disproportionately severe punishment for small-holder farmers and individual home-production for personal consumption. In some cases, notably in Andean countries as well as Afghanistan and parts of Southeast Asia, coca, opiate and cannabis producers are forced to generate crops under duress, or in the absence of sustainable livelihood alternatives. In other cases, drug production is the only viable alternative. Crop substitution programs have generated only meager returns and disproportionate sentencing only makes illicit drug production more lucrative (see Goal 5 below).

Possible output indicators include:

1. *Proportion of non-criminal penalties for low-level/family-based producers;*

2. *Rehabilitation/alternative crop opportunities for non-violent producers;*

3. *Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time producers; and*

4. *Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent producers.*

Target 3.4 Increased in support for alternate sentencing for drug-related crime

There is considerable experience and experimentation with alternative forms of sentencing for illicit drug use, selling and production. A key objective of progressive and more humane drug policy should be to steer non-violent and first time offenders away from the criminal justice and penal systems. Governments must deprioritize pursuing non-violent and minor participants in the drug market – and instead direct enforcement resources to the most disruptive and violent elements of the drug trade. Positive examples include dissuasion commissions (in Portugal) for those accused of petty drug-related crime or are drug dependent. In Ecuador, there are examples of the early release of "drug mules" who were serving prison sentences. It is important also to stress that there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of "drug courts" since they apply an old paradigm of criminalization.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Number of diversion mechanisms with a tested/demonstrated success rate;*

2. *National/state/municipal expenditures on diversion mechanisms; and*

3. *Existence of legislation citing alternative sentencing options for first time offenders.*

Goal 4. Target violent organized crime groups and drug traffickers

The limited resources of law enforcement and justice agencies could be more usefully devoted to taking the fight to organized crime than on petty drug producers, small-time dealers and habitual users. Many of these crime groups have expanded their reach into the public and private sectors and display a formidable

influence over informal economies and the drug trade. Their capabilities have sometimes been enhanced by heavy-handed militarized approaches to controlling drugs which unintentionally bolstered a thriving illegal drugs market. In some cases, organized crime groups have infiltrated public institutions, including executive, legislative and juridical branches of government, as well as corrupted military and policing institutions. A key target therefore must be efforts to curb the reach and influence of organized crime, including their financial assets and relationships with the banking sector.

Possible outcome indicators:

1. *Number of arrests, convictions and incarcerations of people suspected of high-level trafficking, corruption and/or money laundering associated with drugs;*

2. *Prison population of persons convicted for high-level organized crime involvement and/or affiliation;*

3. *Prison population of those convicted of high-level illegal drug trade;*

4. *Amount of confiscated assets from illicit drug markets, drug trafficking and money laundering; and*

5. *Prosecutions of cases of corruption associated with drug markets*

4.1 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending violent organized crime

A key target of progressive drug policy should be redouble efforts to target organized crime groups and reduce their sources of funding, including money laundering. Rather than narrowly focusing on small-time non-violent drug offenders – whether producers, retailers or users – time and resources should be devoted to cartels and gangs. This is because many of these latter groups are responsible for undermining health and ratcheting-up insecurity for citizens around the world.

Possible output indicators:

1. *National expenditures on intelligence and anti-organized crime units;*

2. *Existence of legislation to tackle organized crime and large-scale drug trafficking (including assets apprehension); and*

3. *Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on organized crime.*

4.2 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending money laundering

A key emphasis must be on eroding the capability of organized crime groups to launder money. This will have the effect of shrinking the profits generated from the illegal drug market. Addressing money laundering requires a comprehensive approach - assembling intelligence and anti-crime units as well as enabling legislation and specialized departments focused on retrieving and managing seized assets.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on money laundering;*

2. *Creation of mechanisms to monitor, detect and confiscate drug-related laundered funds and assets; and*

3. *Extent of confiscated assets from organized crime groups connected to drug trafficking and money laundering.*

4.3 Reduce corruption associated with drug markets

The illicit drugs trade has a corrosive effect on public and private institutions. It can undermine the integrity of democratic institutions, corrupt military, intelligence, policing, justice and customs institutions, and negatively affect the formal economy. There is an urgent need to introduce and properly resource accountability and transparency-related mechanisms to reduce the opportunities for corruption related to the drugs trade.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence of legislation and explicit measures to punish corruption related to the drugs trade;*

2. *Creation of anti-corruption commissions or tasks forces within state institutions;*

3. *Existence of independent media entities monitoring corruption related to the drugs trade; and*

4. *Existence of non-governmental organization(s) tracking corruption related to the drugs trade.*

Goal 5. Provide viable alternatives for illicit crop producers

Drug producers are routinely criminalized and severely punished by national and local authorities. Yet as noted in target 3.3 above, most people involved in the illicit cultivation of plant-based illicit drugs are themselves small-holder famers seeking to make a meager living for themselves and their families. Drug production tends to be found in socio-economically marginalized populations and they seldom benefit from the astonishing profits of the drug trade. Farmers earn on average roughly 1 per cent of the overall global income generated from illicit drugs. Instead, they often have small landholdings, face volatile market prices for non-drug crops, contend with high transport-to-market costs and require considerable investment to grow rentable alternative crops.

Possible outcome indicators:

1. *Number of (former) illicit producers benefiting from alternative livelihood programs (by dollar value/by household);*

2. *Per capita income of former illicit producers before and after alternative livelihoods investment; and*

3. *Expenditures devoted to crop substitution and alternative livelihoods programs.*

Target 5.1 Promote crop substitution and strengthen markets for alternative goods

A key challenge for farmers involved in illicit crop production is the absence of a viable alternative. Many farmers do not own their land (or lack evidence of title) and thus are unable to obtain credit. In other cases,

they may face major barriers to entry given limited infrastructure. What is more, local producers in many areas where crops are grown are coerced into producing a certain yield for organized crime groups and traffickers. As such, a combination of enabling legislation, comprehensive investment, and access to credit may be required to make a genuine impact.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence and publication of legislation setting out standards and procedures for crop substitution;*

2. *Increase in national expenditures on crop substitution and livelihood policies;*

3. *National programs to support planning and implementing of crop substitution; and*

4. *Number of credits to small farmers to implement crop substitution.*

Target 5.2 Strengthen markets for alternative goods

The success of a crop substitution program relies in large part on the existence of adequate markets in which to sell these goods. There is a need, then, to support the enabling conditions for a market in which farmers can buy and sell goods and inputs. This may be challenging in environments previously dominated by a single (drug-related) crop. As such, it is important to consider creating incentives for such markets, introducing certain regulations to ensure quality control, and assist in promoting transparency of information.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence of a national/subnational policy explicitly devoted to developing markets for alternative products;*

2. *Creation of institutions promoting transparency on prices of goods and services;*

3. *Safe credit and loan opportunities for small-holder farmers;*

4. *Subsidies for supporting trade associations; and*

5. *Incentives to promote interaction between larger purchasers and small-holder farmers.*

Goal 6. Experiment with different models of drug regulation

There is growing interest globally in exploring new legal models and approaches to decriminalize and regulate drug production, retail and use. Since the publication of the 2011 Global Commission report, countries as far-reaching as the United States and Uruguay have seen major national and subnational adaptations, including full legalization of cannabis. There appears to be a growing chorus for taxing and regulating some types of illegal drugs. Some contend that this could undermine the power of organized crime by stripping them of lucrative profits. Others argue that such a market could have tremendous positive benefits in relation to public health, both in terms of access to certain drugs but also in limiting risks to users. There is no blueprint for drug regulation – but an array of regulatory tools is available. A wide spectrum of policy options for regulating drugs ranging from decriminalization all the way to a rules-based open market. Different drugs will likely require different systems of regulation in much the same way as alcohol and cigarettes.

A key metric of the "old" approach to monitoring drug policy is the interdiction of illicit narcotics by customs, intelligence and policing officials. UN Photo/J Sailas

Possible outcome indicators:

1. *Profits of organized drug cartels and traffickers;*

2. *Government tax revenue associated with controlled/regulated management of drugs;*

3. *Open illicit trafficking/selling of illicit drugs; and*

4. *Overdoses and associated morbidity with poor quality/cut illicit drugs.*

Target 6.1 Review the scheduling of different illicit drugs

The illicit drug market is exceedingly diverse and complex. Any strategy to mitigate the harms and associated violence emanating from the drug trade will require differentiated strategies. These interventions will require close monitoring and adaptation over time given the vagaries of the market. At a minimum, national authorities are encouraged to review the scheduling of different substances. The current typology was established some five decades ago with minor modifications introduced over time. This has generated a number of serious anomalies including the coca leaf and cannabis which appear to now be incorrectly scheduled. Of course, different drugs will inevitably require different models of regulation.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence of legislation that reflects re-classification of illicit drugs;*

2. *Number of changes in regulations of reclassified drugs (from illicit to controlled);*

3. *Existence of legislation that enables production and distribution of drugs for scientific research purposes;*

4. *Existence of legislation that permits cultivation, trade, and;/or consumption of medical marijuana; and*

5. *Existence of legislation that prescribes the regulation of drug availability (medical, retail, licensed sale).*

Target 6.2 Creation of a regulatory system for managing production, selling and use of drugs

Drug markets that are subject to strict legal markets are not in fact "free markets". Regulation is about governments taking control so that public authorities, not criminals, render decisions on the availability or non-availability of different substances. Some drugs can be made accessible subject to appropriate controls (such as medical prescription). Other drugs may remain necessarily prohibited owing to their extreme health harms (such as crack cocaine). But unlike the criminal drug market, legal regulation enables governments to control and regulate most aspects of the trade.

Possible output indicators:

1. *Existence of systems for man aging the production and transit of drugs;*

2. *Existence of oversight and management for dosage, preparation, pricing, packaging of drugs;*

3. *Existence of prescriptions for licensing, vetting, and training vendors;*

4. *Existence of rules for advertising, branding and promotion of drugs; and*

5. *Existence of legislation for managing location of outlets, age controls and licensing arrangements for buyers for retail.*

Testing new drug policy goals, targets and indicators in Colombia

There are already examples around the world of progressive drug metrics being applied in a piece meal manner. For example, in Switzerland, many of the targets and indicators proposed under Goal 2 are already being monitored. Likewise, in Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Portugal, many of the targets and indicators under Goal 3 are considered a priority. In the United States, especially in Washington and Colorado, observers are closely tracking metrics listed under Goal 6. And yet there are few cases where governments at the federal or subnational level have attempted to bring all these goals and associated metrics together. But this is precisely what is needed to change the paradigm and move from a war on drugs to a drug policy that works.

In order to move from theory to practice, it is important to test the above-listed goals, targets and indicators in a single case. It is also worthwhile to examine their viability not in an upper-income setting – where such data may in fact be readily available – but rather a middle- or low-income environment where the challenges are often many times more acute and the associated resources to deal with these problems less abundant. This Strategic Paper considers the case of Colombia, a middle-income country in Latin America. The country is recognized as a major stakeholder in the global drug policy debate extending back since the beginning of the regime in the 1960s.

There are several reasons why Colombia is a strong candidate to test progressive drug metrics. For one, it is ground zero for the war on drugs. It has experienced all main features of the drug challenge – from production (of cocaine, heroin and marijuana as well as synthetic drugs) to transit and trafficking, to distribution and consumption. The country is a player in global production and retail chains, and its political economy has been profoundly shaped by the drugs trade, as well as the violent persecution of drug producers, traffickers and users. One implication of all of this is that the country also has developed a comparatively robust array of datasets on drugs, amongst the most sophisticated in Latin America.

Meanwhile, the debate on drug policy in Colombia has also evolved considerably over the past decade. Once a recipient of more than $8 billion worth of military, policing and penal assistance (i.e. Plan Colombia), the country´s leaders are now rethinking the dominant approach to containing the drug problem at home and abroad. The sitting President is an outspoken critic of the war on drugs and has precipitated an international debate on its effectiveness. Governors and mayors have also experimented with new approaches to addressing drug supply and demand, in some cases with remarkable effects. And a considerable proportion of these investments have also been data-driven, resulting in the further enrichment of its information gathering and dissemination capabilities.

Notwithstanding these developments, there are still enormous challenges to tracking new drug policy goals, targets and indicators in Colombia. The publicly available information (online/open) is still negligible, though this is set to change. The capabilities of many subnational entities to track changes in policies are also, in spite of some successes, rudimentary. A key entity seeking to improve the state of data in the country is the National Observatory of Drugs. Yet even the Observatory struggles to produce detailed or disaggregated information across key metrics, it is possible to identify possible sources and collect preliminary data (see Figure 2). While it is possible to use existing metrics to develop (imperfect) proxy indicators for some of the aforementioned

outcome indicators[24], there are many challenges ahead. More positively, the Observatory is actively seeking to enhance its capacities and reproduce many of the goals, targets and indicators listed in this paper.

A key limitation of testing out the recommended goals, targets and indicators is that the required information simply has yet to be collected. A serious and concerted investment in data production will be needed. This is not an insurmountable task. It is worth recalling that this state of affairs can be reversed. Before the production of Millennium Development Goals for child mortality rates (CMR), most governments simply did not know how many under-five year olds were dying in their countries. Today, 15 years later, all countries generate CMR data. But to achieve similar improvements in the case of progressive drug policy will require leadership, lobbying and resources.

24 For example, an indicator such as violence associated with drugs can be retrieved by cross-tabulating variables associated with the locations of drug plantations or drug trafficking with homicide levels.

Figure 2. Preliminary assessment of the availability of indicators in Colombia

High level impacts	Impact indicators	Data sample
(1) Improve health and welfare of the population and (2) Enhance security and safety of people involved with drugs and the wider public	**Lethal and non-lethal outcomes of drug-related violence:** Violence associated with drugs can be retrieved by cross-tabulating variables associated with the locations of drug plantations or drug trafficking with homicide levels. Possible source: National police, Legal Medicine and conflict databases.	National homicide counts 2013 - 15,149 2012 - 16,440 2011 - 14,746 Subnational information also available
	Displacement of populations affected by drug violence: subnational information on population displacement from CODHES.	Internal displacement figures 2013 - Not available 2012 - 261,050 2011 - 259,140
	Opportunity costs of spending on responding to drug production, transit and use (on law enforcement versus other social sectors): Departamento Nacional de Planeación (DNP) reports on drug policy spending.	As of 2010, total expenditures on combating drugs amounted to COP$1.9 billion. This is the equivalent of 5% of total national budget spending

GOALS AND TARGETS

GOAL 1. END CRIMINALIZATION AND STIGMATIZATION OF DRUG USERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of people detained/arrested/convicted for drug use in small quantities: information from people captured for drug use is available from the National Police. Nevertheless, there is no detailed information of captures by quantity. Data available corresponds to the current regulation (Tráfico, fabricación o porte de estupefacientes, Law 30).	People captured for drug possession (all quantities), National Police. 2013: 91,148
Death penalty for any drug related offenses.	No death penalty in Colombia
Employment rate of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (convicted for drug possession): This information can be gathered from the SUICAD (database of centers of attention for former drug consumers).	Information not currently available
Educational enrollment/attainment of ex-drug users or ex-convicts (accused of drug possession): This information can be gathered from the SUICAD (database of centers of attention of former drug consumers).	Information not currently available

	Targets and output indicators	
1.1 Decriminalize drug use	**Existence of legislation that decriminalizes possession of drugs in small quantities for personal use:** from national databases of regulations and legislation.	Despenalization of personal dose (1994)
	Number of legislative proposals focused on drug decriminalization: from database of regulations and laws of the Secretary if the Congress.	No initiatives in place
	Number of civil society groups actively lobbying for drug decriminalization: this information can be gathered at the chamber of commerce or NGOs associations.	Information not currently available

	Number of persons arrested/detained for drug law offences in small quantities: from National Police statistics.	Some 91,148 people were arrested in 2013 for drug possession (all quantities) according to the National Police
1.2 Promote opportunities for former drug offenders	**Number of companies/firms that promote employment opportunities for former drug offenders/users:** this information can be gathered at the association of commerce and the industrials.	Information not currently available
	Number of educational institutions (formal/vocational) promoting opportunities for former drug offenders/ users: this information can be gathered at the Ministry of Education.	Information not currently available
1.3 Reduction of bias in media reporting	**Number media articles that attribute positons to credible scientific evidence**.	This database must be built based on incidents reported in national local media outlets
	Editorial positions on issues of decriminalization and harm reduction.	
	Reporting on regional and/or domestic press of strategies of drug policy.	
GOAL 2. CURB DRUG USE THROUGH PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES (OUTCOME INDICATORS)		
Number of drug overdose-related deaths: info can be gathered from death registrations (ICD 10, code T40 of the National Statistical Office), and the Sistema Integral de Información de la Protección Social (SISPRO).		Not publicly available
Number of deaths related to long-term health problems directly associated with drug use: same as overdose.		Not publicly available
Prevalence of drug-related infectious diseases (HIV, Hepatitis B and C) among drug users: possible source Sistema Integral de Información de la Protección Social (SISPRO).		Not publicly available
Targets and output indicators		
2.1 Create a national strategy for drug prevention	**Evidence of a national strategy focused on drug prevention**.	There is no national strategy, but there are sector specific strategies elaborated by the Ministry of Health and the UNODC in Colombia
	National/state/municipal spending on drug prevention (as reported in budgets and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy): Departamento Nacional de Planeación, report on drug policy spending.	As of 2010, the spending on consumption reduction strategies amounted to just $78,977, or 4% of the total spending on drugs strategy
	Number of persons entering prevention/harm reduction programs: possible source SUICAD (database of centers of attention of former drug consumers).	Information not currently available
2.2 Create a national strategy for harm reduction	**National/state/municipal spending on harm reduction (as reported in budgets and as a proportion of total spending on drug policy):** possible source DNP.	Information not currently available

	Number of harm reduction interventions: possible source SUICAD.	Information not currently available
	Number of accredited public hospitals/health institutions providing harm reduction programs: possible source SUICAD and Ministry of Health.	Information not currently available
GOAL 3. A MORE BALANCED APPROACH TOWARD INCARCERATING DRUG OFFENDERS – INCLUDING DECREASING OFFENCES FOR NON-VIOLENT AND FIRST-TIME OFFENDERS		
Persons referred to alternative sentencing for non-violent and small-scale drug related offences: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.		Information not currently available
Proportion of prison population incarcerated for low-level drug offences: Aggregated information for all offences associated with drugs is available from the National Penitentiary and Prison Institute, or INPEC.		As of 2013, an estimated 15% of the prison population is directly related to drug offences (18,000 people)
Overall level of overcrowding in prisons: See INPEC for information on overcrowding.		Estimated at 49% in 2014 according to press clippings
Reported cases of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of drug users (and indeed all prison populations): Possible source INPEC.		Information not currently available
Targets and output indicators		
3.1 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug users	**Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first time and non-violent consumers:** The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
	Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent consumers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time consumers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time consumers.	Information not currently available
3.2 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug dealers	**Proportion of non-criminal penalties for first/second time and non-violent dealers:** The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
	Fines (as opposed to sentencing) for non-violent dealers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Rehabilitation opportunities for repeat non-violent dealers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time dealers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent and first-time dealers.	Information not currently available

3.3 Promote more proportionality of sentencing for drug producers	**Proportion of non-criminal penalties for low-level/family-based producers:** The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
	Rehabilitation/alternative crop opportunities for non-violent producers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Pre-trial detention for non-violent and first-time producers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Prison sentences (incidence and duration) for non-violent producers: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
3.4 Increased support for alternate sentencing for drug-related crime	**Number of diversion mechanisms with a tested/demonstrated success rate:** possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	National/state/municipal expenditures on diversion mechanisms: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available
	Existence of legislation citing alternative sentencing options for first time offenders: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	According to Law 1709: "… there is the possibility that people convicted for activities that involve small amounts of narcotics can fulfill the second half of the sentence in their place of residence …" (Art. 28)

GOAL 4. TARGET VIOLENT ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS AND DRUG TRAFFICKERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)

Number of arrests, convictions and incarcerations of people suspected of high-level trafficking, corruption and/or money laundering associated with drugs: The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
Prison population of persons convicted for high-level organized crime involvement and/or affiliation: The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
Prison population of those convicted of high-level illegal drug trade: The General Attorney and Ministry of Justice may have aggregated and disaggregated information on drug offences.	Information not currently available
Amount of confiscated assets from illicit drug markets, drug trafficking and money laundering: Confiscated assets from illicit drug markets, drug trafficking and money laundering from the new agency Sociedad de Activos Especiales - SAE.	Information not currently available
Prosecutions of cases of corruption associated with drug markets: possible source General Attorney and Ministry of Justice.	Information not currently available

Targets and output indicators		
4.1 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending violent organized crime	**National expenditures on intelligence and anti-organized crime units:** possible source Ministry of Defense.	Information not currently available
	Existence of legislation to tackle organized crime and large-scale drug trafficking (including assets apprehension).	Yes. There is a compilation of legislation
	Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on organized crime.	Yes, see for example the National Director of Specialized Attorney for Organized Crime
4.2 Increase law enforcement efforts devoted to ending money laundering and corruption	**Existence of specialized law enforcement bodies focused on money laundering.**	Yes, there is legislation to combat money laundering that mandates specific activities and actors
	Creation of mechanisms to monitor, detect and confiscate drug-related laundered funds and assets.	Yes, there is a special mechanisms known as the Unit for Information and Financial Analysis (UAIF)
	Extent of confiscated assets from organized crime groups connected to drug trafficking and money laundering: Possible source UAIF.	Information not currently available
4.3 Reduce corruption associated with drug markets	**Existence of legislation and explicit measures to punish corruption related to the drugs trade**.	Yes, Corruption Statute, Law 1474 of 2011
	Creation of anti-corruption commissions or tasks forces within state institutions.	Yes, National Directorate of the Specialized Attorney for Anti-Corruption
	Existence of independent media entities monitoring corruption related to the drugs trade.	Yes, Observatory for Corruption and Transparency
	Existence of non-governmental organization(s) tracking corruption related to the drugs trade.	Information not currently available
GOAL 5. PROVIDE VIABLE ALTERNATIVES FOR ILLICIT CROP PRODUCERS (OUTCOME INDICATORS)		
Number of (former) illicit producers benefiting from alternative livelihood programs (by dollar value/by household): Detailed information at the National Observatory of Drugs.		By 2012, at least 50,902 families benefit from alternative development.
Per capita income of former illicit producers before and after alternative livelihoods investment: Detailed information at the National Observatory of Drugs.		Information not currently available
Expenditures devoted to crop substitution and alternative livelihoods programs: Detailed information at the National Observatory of Drugs.		Information not currently available
5.1 Promote crop substitution	**Existence and publication of legislation setting out standards and procedures for crop substitution.**	Yes, all available at the Administrative Unit for Consolidation
	National expenditures on crop substitution and livelihood policies: Possible source Administrative Unit for Consolidation.	Information not currently available. Map of crop substitution which is available here

	National programs planning and implementing crop substitution.	Initiatives like Forest Ranger Families Program and Post-Eradication and Containment supported by UNODC have benefited nearly 156,000 families. In conjunction with eradication programs, they have also reportedly contributed to 4.6 million hectares of land being certified as free of illicit crops. See maps here
	Number of credits to small farmers to implement crop substitution: Possible source National Observatory of Drugs and Administrative Unit for Consolidation.	Information not currently available
5.2 Strengthen markets for alternative goods	**Existence of a national/subnational policy explicitly devoted to developing markets for alternative products:** Possible source Administrative Unit for Consolidation.	Yes, all available at the Administrative Unit for Consolidation
	Creation of institutions promoting transparency on prices of goods and services: Possible source National Observatory of Drugs.	Information not currently available
	Safe credit and loan opportunities for small-holder farmers: Possible source National Observatory of Drugs.	Information not currently available
	Subsidies for supporting trade associations: Possible source National Observatory of Drugs.	Information not currently available
	Incentives to promote interaction between larger purchasers and smallholder farmers: Possible source National Observatory of Drugs and and Administrative Unit for Consolidation.	Information not currently available
GOAL 6. EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT MODELS OF DRUG REGULATION (OUTCOME INDICATORS)		
Profits of organized drug cartels and traffickers.		Information not currently available
Government tax revenue associated with controlled/regulated management of drugs.		Information not currently available
Open illicit trafficking/selling of illicit drugs.		Information not currently available
Overdoses and associated morbidity with poor quality/cut illicit drugs.		Information not currently available
6.1 Review the scheduling of different illicit drugs	**Existence of legislation that reflects re-classification of illicit drugs.**	Information not currently available
	Number of changes in regulations of reclassified drugs (from illicit to controlled).	Information not currently available
	Existence of legislation that enables production and distribution of drugs for scientific research purposes	Information not currently available

	Existence of legislation that permits cultivation, trade, and/or consumption of medical marijuana.	Information not currently available
	Existence of legislation that prescribes the regulation of drug availability (medical, retail, licensed sale).	Legislation is currently in Congress - Law 27 (2014 Senate) is seeking to legalize medical cannabis
6.2 Creation of a regulatory system for managing production, selling and use of drugs	**Existence of systems for managing the production and transit of drugs.**	Information not currently available
	Existence of oversight and management for dosage, preparation, pricing, packaging of drugs.	Information not currently available
	Existence of prescriptions for licensing, vetting, and training vendors.	Information not currently available
	Existence of rules for advertising, branding and promotion of drugs.	Information not currently available
	Existence of legislation for managing location of outlets, age controls and licensing arrangements for buyers for retail.	Information not currently available

Conclusions

Taken together, new goals, targets and indicators can help guide governments and civil societies in crafting and implementing a more progressive drug policy agenda. Such an agenda would valorize health and welfare and seek to improve safety and security of citizens. These are non-negotiable aspirations for any public policy, drug related or otherwise. It is important to stress, however, that the framework set out above is intended to signpost and not prescribe a roadmap for positive change. The fact is that some governments and societies have already made significant steps in revising their metrics in ways that suit their specific realities. Many more governments have yet to start this journey. It may also be the case that public authorities and civic leaders want to test out specific goals or targets rather than pursuing them all at once. Ultimately, each polity will need to critically reflect on what path is most appropriate and feasible.

The establishment of metrics for drug policy should proceed cautiously and on the basis of a careful review of the evidence. While global answers are needed in addressing illicit drugs[25], there are no one-size-fits-all answers and governments should experiment with different approaches suited to regional and national needs. The design of metrics is of course political – not least since they set out explicit and implicit priorities and can shape the form and content of future investment. And while there are many differences separating countries, they also share some basic priorities such as improving public health and reducing drug-related crime. At a minimum, they share the common objective of doing no intentional harm.

The adoption of a progressive drug policy agenda with associated metrics will not be simple. There are many methodological challenges related to data generation. And the fact that current drug policy related priorities are premised on an outdated model mean that new investments in data collection, interpretation and dissemination will be required. This does not mean inaction is an option. To the contrary, new thinking is needed on how to mobilize political energy, public opinion and scientific investments in the right direction. Policy makers must invest in interventions that demonstrate what works and, just as important, what does not. There are simply too many risks associated with doing nothing and the dividends of action now will be measured in safer, healthier and more prosperous societies tomorrow.

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25 According to the UNODC (2013, pg iii) "the global nature of the problem requires a response based on international cooperation and universal coverage." Moreover, as with all multilateral agreements, the drug conventions need to be subject to constant review and modernization in light of changing and variable circumstances.

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