



The 1993 Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control: reflecting on 20 years of partnership and cooperation



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



The MOU Countries of Southeast Asia

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Drug Control in the Greater Mekong Sub-region brings together six countries in East and Southeast Asia – Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam – to work together to contain the threat of illicit drug production, trafficking and use.

With technical assistance from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and support from the international community, MOU states have worked together to fight illicit drug threats for 20 years.

The work continues today.

Unfortunately opium poppy cultivation and production in remote parts of Myanmar and Lao PDR has increased since 2005.

The Mekong sub-region and most of East and Southeast Asia are also challenged by new patterns of production, trafficking and use of methamphetamine and other amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS).

The diversion of precursors – licit chemicals and pharmaceutical preparations for the manufacture of methamphetamine and heroin – is also a concern – as is the emergence of new psychoactive ‘designer drugs’, and the region’s limited capacities for effective drug treatment and forensic analysis.





Sub-Regional Action Plan (SAP)

The Sub-Regional Action Plan (SAP) articulates MOU state priorities in a strategic workplan.

The SAP is implemented through clearly-defined goals, focusing assistance towards building the capacity of MOU member institutions to address illicit drug problems.

The UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific works with MOU states and partners to establish mechanisms and initiate activities that enhance sub-regional cooperation on drug control matters between responsible agencies and across MOU borders.

UNODC also continues to actively engage with ASEAN through its various steering committees and senior officials meetings on drug and crime issues. UNODC supported the ASEAN Airport Interdiction Task Force initiative in 2012 and anticipates further collaboration in 2013.

ASEAN and UNODC goals for the region are closely aligned and opportunities will be sought to operationalise the ASEAN-UNODC MOU on Drug Control and Crime Prevention Cooperation.





UNODC and the MOU Member States

The UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific (ROSEAP) works with MOU countries and partners in the international community to establish mechanisms and programmes that enhance cooperation on drug control matters between national authorities agencies and across borders.

UNODC supports the MOU Member States with activities and capacity-developing support in these areas:

- ❖ Drug Demand Reduction
- ❖ Illicit Drugs and HIV/AIDS
- ❖ Opium Surveys and Alternative Development (AD)
- ❖ Amphetamine-type Stimulants (ATS) and the SMART Programme
- ❖ Border Liaison Offices (BLOs)
- ❖ eLearning
- ❖ International Cooperation on Judicial Matters
- ❖ Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)
- ❖ Precursor Control





Drug Demand Reduction

In the past 20 years, the six MOU countries have seen a significant shift in illicit drug consumption patterns. In Cambodia, Lao and Thailand, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) have displaced opiates as the primary drug of use. In China, Myanmar and Viet Nam ATS are now a growing concern alongside heroin use and dependence.

The MOU's Sub regional Action Plan for drug demand reduction aims to halt and reverse the upward trend of illicit drug use and ease the social and public health burdens of drugs through national policies, strategies and programmes that are based on regionally relevant knowledge and evidence.

Programmes provide vulnerable groups, people who use drugs and their families with effective services that respond to their needs, increase protective factors and reduce drug use risk factors.

The drug demand reduction sub-programme seeks to:

- ❖ Provide information to plan and evaluate prevention, harm reduction, treatment and care interventions.
- ❖ Develop tested intervention models for opiate and amphetamine use and dependence validated in Southeast Asia – and that take into account the needs, circumstances and resources in the GMS.
- ❖ Assist in the implementation of public health oriented approaches for prevention, harm reduction, treatment and care, including community-based prevention and treatment programmes in pilot sites.
- ❖ Improve the capacity and motivation of professionals to deliver evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions through subregional and international mentoring and technical cooperation.





Drugs and HIV/AIDS

HIV epidemics in Asia remain concentrated among people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, transgender people and sex workers. Among people who inject drugs HIV prevalence remains high in several MOU countries, including Myanmar (22 %), Thailand (22 %) and Vietnam (13 %). An estimated 2.9 million people inject drugs in the six GMS countries.

While Cambodia, Thailand and Myanmar have reported a decline in the number of new infections among adults and children, the number of new infections, people living with HIV, and deaths due to AIDS continues to increase in some GMS countries -- mainly due to low coverage levels of interventions known to prevent HIV transmission among people who inject drugs.

Currently fewer than one in 5 people who inject drugs are reached with needle and syringe programmes, and less than one in 10 receive opioid substitution treatment -- even though both interventions are particularly effective in preventing transmission of HIV.

The HIV subprogramme supports Member Countries' efforts to expand HIV prevention, treatment and care services so that there is sufficient coverage levels among people who inject drugs (PWID) in GMS communities and in prison settings, with a focus on areas with particularly high prevalence.

Suggested future sub-regional cooperation through the MOU mechanism:

- ❖ Put into practice normative guidance on effective HIV prevention, treatment and care interventions for people who inject drugs and in prison settings and facilitate ongoing technical support to national efforts to expand access to these services;
- ❖ Support national consultations and reviews of laws and policies that may impede implementation of National Strategic Plans on HIV/AIDS;
- ❖ Support training of law enforcement officials on HIV and drugs;
- ❖ Provide opportunities for south-to-south dialogue on effective approaches to address HIV and drug dependence in the community in lieu of detention of people who use drugs.





Opium and Alternative Development (AD)

With a total area of over 58,000 hectares in 2012, most opium poppy cultivation in Southeast Asia takes place in Myanmar, with a smaller but growing amount in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Notwithstanding the dramatic decreases in cultivation between 1998 and 2006, Myanmar continues to remain the second largest opium poppy grower and producer in the world after Afghanistan, accounting for 25% of global opium poppy cultivation. The Lao PDR accounts for an additional 3%.

Despite a consistent downward trend in opium poppy cultivation from 1998-2006, when Myanmar experienced an 83% reduction and Lao PDR saw the largest relative decline among the three countries, opium poppy cultivation in the region has since increased. Cultivation in Myanmar has increased from 21,600 hectares in 2006 to 51,000 hectares in 2012, while in Lao PDR it increased from 1,500 hectares in 2007 to 6,800 hectares in 2012.

Overall, opium poppy cultivation in the region has doubled since 2006, a trend that is driven by cultivation increases in Myanmar in general, and in its Shan State in particular.





Alternative Development: Reducing Poppy Cultivation

Southeast Asia's opium poppy reduction successes, particularly in Thailand, were built upon decades of successful alternative development work in rural communities. The basic concept: Help opium poppy growers grow marketable and profitable alternative crops and they will stop growing poppy.

This led to the effective elimination of illicit opium production in Viet Nam (in 2000) and Thailand (in 2003). In 2006, even the Lao PDR declared the significant elimination of opium poppy cultivation in its borders and, until that same year, Myanmar also had witnessed a continuous decline of poppy cultivation and opium production.

Result: Where effective, long-term alternative development assistance has been provided opium elimination has been sustained; However, only a small percentage of the total cultivation areas has been and continues to be covered, and as a result alternative development needs to be expanded rapidly and sustained.

In 1999, the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (GOUM) and local authorities in opium poppy cultivation areas developed a 15-year plan to eliminate illicit crop production by 2014. The fact that until 2006 there was a considerable decrease in the total land area under opium poppy cultivation in Myanmar is one measure of the initial success of this plan. Unfortunately, illicit opium poppy cultivation has since then continued to increase although it is still well below the levels reached in the 1990s.





This indicates that achievements in reducing the cultivation of poppy and production of opium can only be sustained if alternative livelihoods are available to local communities widely and long-term, and that programmes are developed in line with local environmental conditions.

The majority of poppy farming households in the region depend on poppy cultivation for their food security. Any immediate disruption to this crop will have significant, negative impacts on the food security of these already vulnerable communities. Poppy eradication, in the absence of development alternatives, could lead to increases in food insecurity and vulnerability. Furthermore, opium cultivation is generally linked to the presence of conflict and the concomitant absence of human security. This duality indicates the added requirement that programmatic solutions to poppy cultivation be aligned with sociopolitical initiatives in these areas.

Key elements for Alternative Development success

- ❖ Longer-term vision, no quick fixes
- ❖ Active involvement of beneficiaries
- ❖ Sequencing + timing + sufficiency of assistance

Opium not resolved

- ❖ Continued increase in cultivation
- ❖ Poverty still endemic to opium-producing areas
- ❖ Food insecurity a significant cultivation driver
- ❖ Cultivation is exacerbated by environments of conflict and instability
- ❖ Opium production undermines attainment of Millennium Development Goals





SMART and ATS:

Data Gathering & Analysis

In 1998, United Nations Member States adopted a Political Declaration to Eliminate or Significantly Reduce Illicit Drug Abuse by 2008. Monitoring progress toward this goal requires reliable and systematic drug-related data that was unavailable at that time. As a response to this need, UNODC, in collaboration with regional governments, undertook to harmonize regional drug data collection and analysis in East and SE Asia.

Problem:

The use of synthetic drugs, in particular amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) like methamphetamine and ecstasy, has been one of the most significant drug problems worldwide in recent years. ATS abuse has affected societies in East and SE Asia particularly harshly.

Solution:

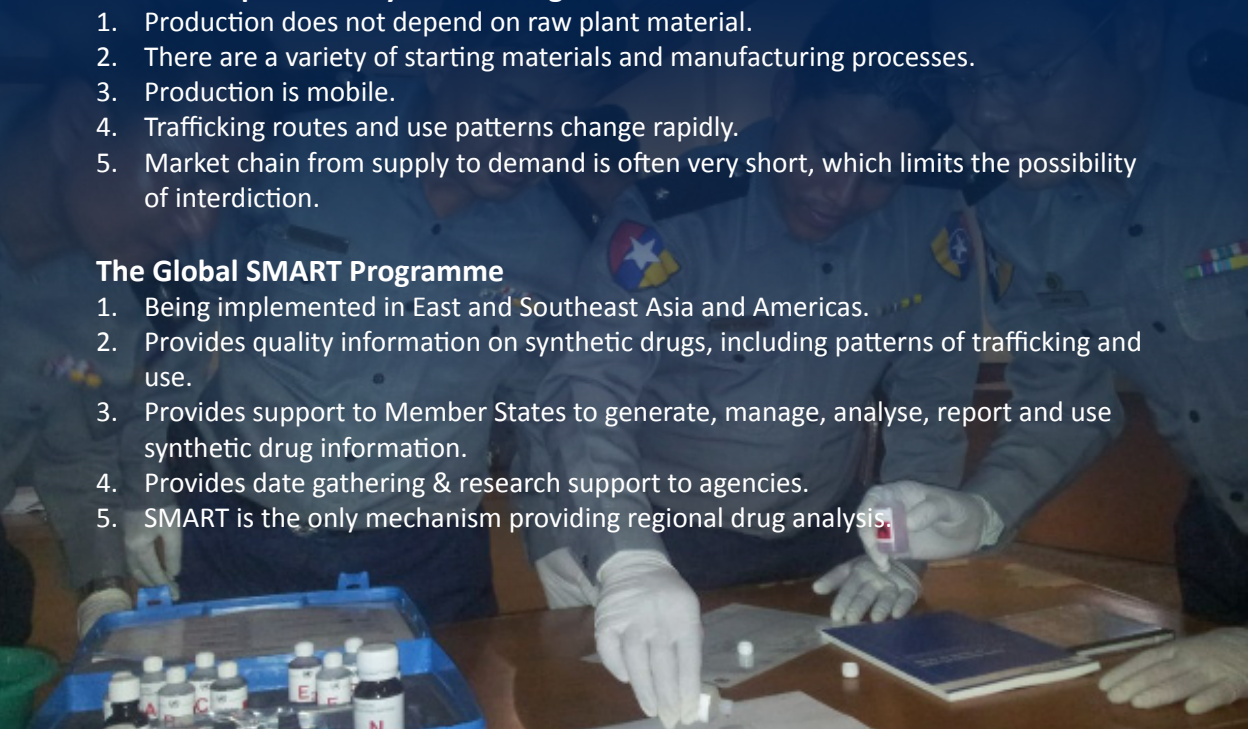
As a response to the synthetic drug problem, UNODC has developed the Global SMART programme. This will enhance the capacity of Member States and authorities in priority regions (starting in East and SE Asia) to generate, manage, analyse, report and use synthetic drug information to design effective policy and programme interventions.

Problems specific to Synthetic Drugs markets:

1. Production does not depend on raw plant material.
2. There are a variety of starting materials and manufacturing processes.
3. Production is mobile.
4. Trafficking routes and use patterns change rapidly.
5. Market chain from supply to demand is often very short, which limits the possibility of interdiction.

The Global SMART Programme

1. Being implemented in East and Southeast Asia and Americas.
2. Provides quality information on synthetic drugs, including patterns of trafficking and use.
3. Provides support to Member States to generate, manage, analyse, report and use synthetic drug information.
4. Provides data gathering & research support to agencies.
5. SMART is the only mechanism providing regional drug analysis.





Border Liaison Offices (BLOs)

What are they?

A Border Liaison Office (BLO) is a co-ordination mechanism promoting greater cross-border cooperation among the law enforcement authorities of the countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. The BLO mechanism was first initiated among the signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding on drug control in 1993.

What's their objective?

BLOs promote communication and cooperation between different national law enforcement agencies working along a common border. They foster greater cross-border law enforcement cooperation through the sharing of real-time information on crimes along and across the border.

BLOs have the potential to increase arrests and seizures but most importantly they can become an important source of information related to crime trends along the borders. When the Law allows it, BLOs can also facilitate the implementation of cross-border controlled deliveries.

How do they work?

Each enforcement agency at the border appoints a representative to the BLO, on each side of the border. The BLO members meet on a regular basis both formally and informally to exchange intelligence based on agreed standard procedures.





eLearning

eLearning goes mobile and gets a new look for the future

The UNODC eLearning Programme builds on the experience and achievements of previous UNODC Computer Based Training (CBT) originally developed for the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region and now implemented globally.

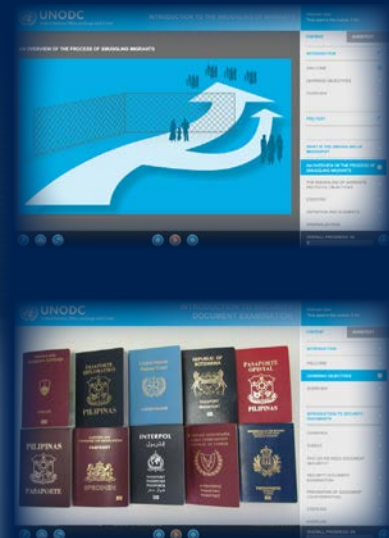
CBT is now integrated into a UNODC global e-Learning strategy for training law enforcement personnel, strengthening the capacity of Governments to counter drug trafficking and other transnational organised crime in a way that is cost-effective and sustainable.

UNODC eLearning now travels to where it is needed most - the front line. Deployed from vehicles, mobile classrooms, suitcases and across the internet UNODC eLearning can now reach further and faster than ever before.

Delivering knowledge when it is needed, where it is needed.

goLEARN

goLEARN is the new UNODC Learning Management System. Designed with open-source technologies as part of the UNODC Global eLearning Programme it makes available modern interactive multimedia material to law enforcement personnel.





International Cooperation on Judicial Matters

Most national authorities fighting against transnational organized crime (TOC) groups are aware of these two important principles:

1. “Follow the money” to map out the flow of illicit funds in order to recover them;
2. “Transcend national borders” for effective investigation and prosecution.

In practice, however, they often encounter difficulties in cooperating with their counterparts in other countries due to a variety of issues including lack of mutual understanding on legal procedures and legislation.

What we did

Under the overall co-ordination of the “Towards Asiajust” project, our office has promoted a regional Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) network and an Asset Recovery Inter-agency Network for Asia and the Pacific (ARIN-AP) in close cooperation with all MOU member states.

Following a senior level workshop on MLA, held in July 2012, the existing ASEAN MLA network was reinforced and a contact point list of MLA central authorities was established.

In addition, an informal network of judicial and law enforcement agencies engaged in asset forfeiture was created upon conclusion of an expert meeting to develop ARIN-AP, held in December, 2012.

Next steps

Organize follow-up meetings for the MLA workshop and the ARIN-AP expert meeting later in 2013 to fortify the networks to be operational in the near future.





Transnational Organized Crime (TOC)

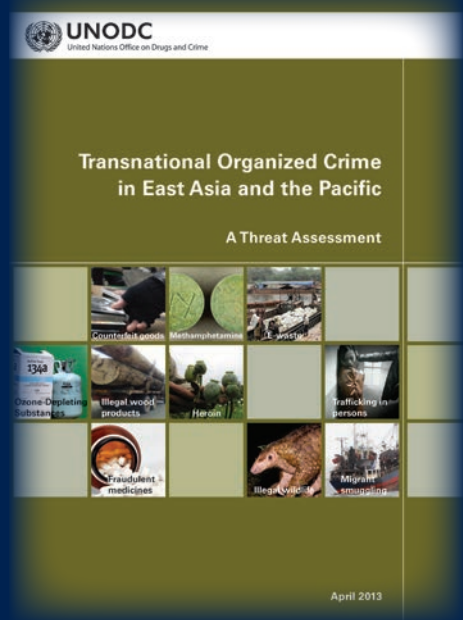
According to the UNODC report, Transnational Organized Crime in East Asia and the Pacific: A Threat Assessment, Illicit markets in East Asia and the Pacific earn organized criminal groups nearly USD 90 billion a year. This corresponds to twice the GDP of Myanmar, eight times that of Cambodia and 13 times that of Lao PDR.

The report details the major criminal flows involved and provides estimates of annual revenues generated for criminal groups by activities related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling, illicit drugs (heroin and methamphetamine), environmental crime (wildlife, wood products, e-waste and ozone-depleting substances), and counterfeit consumer goods and fraudulent medicines.

In spite of a series of efforts to eradicate narcotic drugs in the GMS, our report finds that criminal organizations still profit significantly through the trafficking of illicit drugs, in the form of heroin and ATS. More specifically, opium poppy cultivation in the GMS has shown a twofold increase in last six years and the number of methamphetamine users in the region is alarming.

The Response

It is imperative to align national responses with regional strategies for a unified and integrated response as it takes a network to defeat a network.





Precursor Controls

Precursor control is a strategy to reduce the availability of narcotic drugs by preventing illicit drug manufacturers from obtaining the chemicals they require to manufacture them. Through the MOU, an effective precursor control strategy has been established for East and SE Asia.

Success in 1994-2008

1994-1996

Project RAS.770-990: Sensitizes East/Southwest Asian countries about the need to control precursors and initiate precursor control measures.

1996-2000

Project RAS/B38: Improves the ability to counter precursor diversion and trafficking.

2001-2006

Project RAS/F34: Prepares national plans to strengthen precursor control, mobilizes the chemical industry, Enhances regional cooperation among MOU countries, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines to prevent shipments of illicit precursors, and investigate clandestine laboratories.

2006-2008

Project XAPI63: Reduces risk of safrole-oil diversion, forges cooperation between oil producing, trading and importing countries in the region.





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