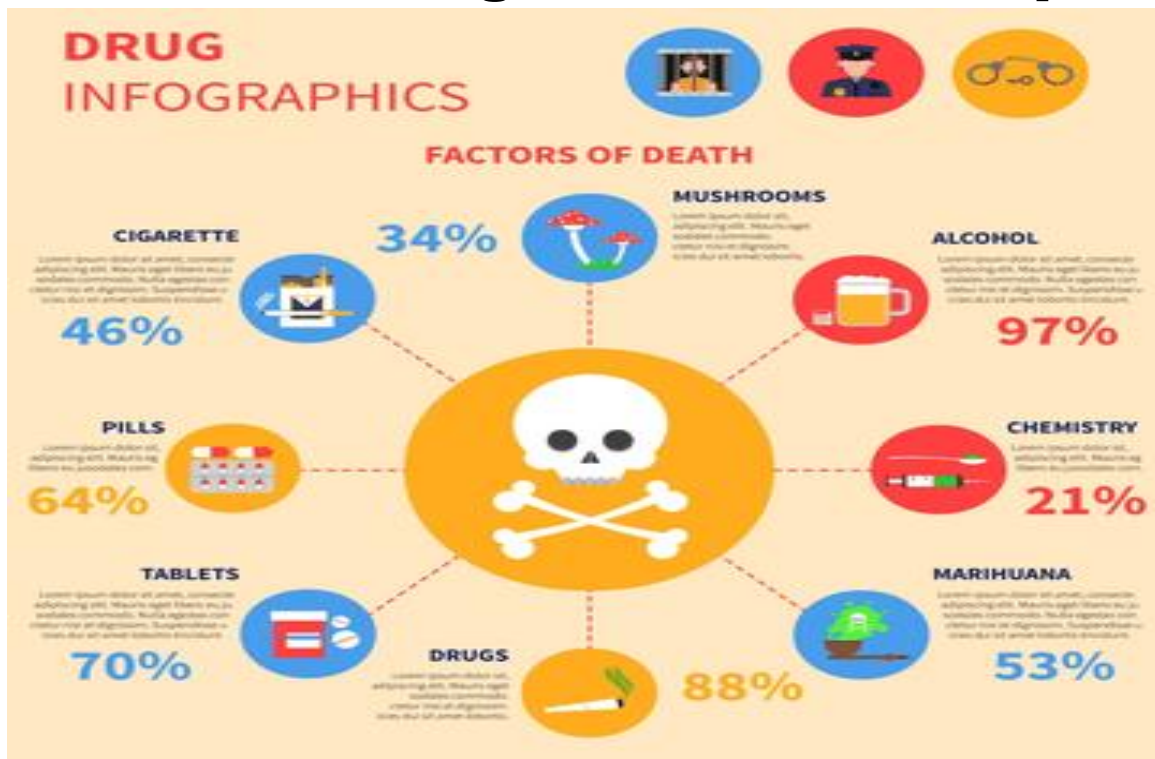


SOCIAL SCOPE

SEAP ICSW SOUTHEAST ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL NEWSLETTER. #2 26

US 'war on drugs' or war on the poor?



Laura Capote

The constant insistence of the US discourse on the 'war on drugs' seems to reflect a moral crusade by successive US administrations to rid their country of drug use. However, the truth is far removed from this simplistic idea that is often perpetuated by the mass media.

In reality, what the so-called war on drugs seeks to achieve, as demonstrated by our region's history, is a facade for the development of various mechanisms of imperialist intervention. Since the 1970s, these have involved a combination of methods ranging from military financing to countries in the region, the installation of military bases, and even explicit support for certain candidates in electoral contests.

The most [recent dossier prepared by the Tricontinental Institute develops](#) the main hypothesis that the so-called war on drugs is actually directed against the poor, who are the weakest link in the production chain leading to narcotics.

In fact, drugs and their huge profits are of little concern to the US ruling class and global capital's financial circuits, despite making every effort to separate them from the 'legitimate' practices of capitalism.

In reality, the criminal transnational enterprise that is the drug trafficking industry is a fundamental element of the accumulation circuits of capitalism on a global scale.

The dossier states that "the War on Drugs is merely an attempt by capitalist states to ensure that these narcotics circuits remain underground so that the money siphoned from illegal trade can continue to liquefy a banking system that would not function without it".

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the region most affected by the so-called war, the Colombian case stands out as paradigmatic in understanding the different consequences of this US policy: from the criminalisation of peasant farmers to the financing of a war and repression apparatus against the popular classes, including training and financing provided by the US to the country's military forces with a counterinsurgency doctrine that found its perfect justification in the 'war on drugs'. The research indicates that the demand for illicit goods does not vary substantially despite price variations, given the nature of the demand in terms of its levels of dependency, providing a breeding ground for crimes such as petty theft in order to finance consumption by any means possible.

"The violence in the passage of the drug from farms to the streets, and the violence of overdoses, rarely disrupts either production or the market."

In this way, lives can be sacrificed without interrupting the process of capital accumulation in the formal economy.

The illicit goods economy, with extreme worker exploitation, generates massive flows of laundered cash that lubricate the financial system. This allows for the control of marginalised communities through social demoralisation and police intervention.

With a review of the coca production process, the dossier seeks to highlight how profits are concentrated in the links of the chain furthest from plant cultivation with, paradoxically, the workers of these illicit crops being the most criminalised and persecuted by the alleged 'war' on drug trafficking.

The role of peasant farmers is one of the main concerns of the research, highlighting how, from the perspective of the Colombian peasantry, the political economy of the war on drugs responds to a complex connection between crops, lack of rural development, and armed conflict that has characterised the country's agrarian history.

The Colombian case has been the paradigmatic example on the continent of what lies behind the simplified narrative of this so-called war. It is the deepening of the neoliberal model in agriculture that has accelerated the extinction of small farmers. Peasants face a lack of land access and tenure, as well as social and economic exclusion, unemployment, oppression and marginalisation. This is exacerbated by weak public policies, inadequate rural health and education, and the impossibility of accessing decent housing.

In Colombia, the crisis is further intensified by land grabbing, usurpation and legalisation. The ‘regularisation’ of illegally dispossessed land is carried out through a paramilitary model with state funding and consent at the service of large transnational corporations.

Beyond being the targets of a media moralistic narrative that ignores their economic and social reality, peasants are the least of the beneficiaries of the drug trade.

Instead, large profits are reaped by big capitalists who, as President Gustavo Petro has repeatedly said, operate in places like Florida. These individuals are well-known to US authorities and inhabit the same social spheres where the cocaine they so often point to is consumed, resulting in nearly one million Latin American deaths.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the peasant movement in Colombia has also developed tools to organise in the territories where coca is grown. From historic peasant marches in the mid-1990s to the present day, peasant communities that produce coca leaves have been demanding that the state voluntarily replace crops and cease forced eradication methods using glyphosate, which have only brought an increase in military presence to the territories, generating violence and dispossession.

“The problem is not the coca plant but the economic system that criminalises the rural poor while absorbing and recycling the enormous liquidity generated by illicit markets,” the research states.

“The financial sector depends on these flows. Global banks welcome them. And the wealthier nations that promote eradication simultaneously rely on the stability that this hidden capital provides.

“To treat the campesino as the enemy is to conceal the real architecture of the drug trade, which stretches upward into the circuits of legal finance, global commodities and state power.”

If the goal is to end violence and economic dependence on coca cultivation, then the starting point should not be militarisation or eradication, but the reconstruction of rural life: agrarian reform, guaranteed prices for legal crops, infrastructure, public services, and political rights for those who cultivate the land.

Without transforming the social and economic conditions that push families into illicit agriculture, the cycle will simply repeat itself.

Without confronting the financial institutions that launder the profits, the global drug economy will continue to function as an unofficial pillar of capitalist liquidity. – [Globetrotter](#)

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Drugs and Social Destruction

The social impact of drugs encompasses a wide range of effects on individuals, families, and communities, including health issues, **crime, economic burdens, and strained relationships.**

Health and Addiction

Drug use and addiction can lead to significant health problems, including mental health disorders, physical health deterioration, and increased mortality rates. Substance use disorders (SUDs) often exacerbate existing mental health issues and create new challenges for individuals, leading to a cycle of addiction that is difficult to break. The stigma surrounding addiction can further isolate individuals, making it harder for them to seek help support.

Family Dynamics

The impact of drug abuse extends to families, often resulting in strained relationships and emotional distress. Family members may experience feelings of betrayal, anger, and helplessness as they witness a loved one struggle with addiction. This can lead to a breakdown in communication and trust, creating a toxic environment that perpetuates the cycle of substance abuse. Children in families affected by drug addiction may face neglect, abuse, and instability, which can have long-lasting effects on their development and well-being.

Community and Social Relationships

At the community level, drug abuse can lead to increased crime rates, including drug trafficking, theft, and violence. Communities may experience a decline in safety and quality of life as drug-related activities become more prevalent. Additionally, the economic burden of drug abuse on communities can be substantial, with increased healthcare costs, law enforcement expenses, and lost productivity due to addiction-related issues.

Economic Consequences

The economic impact of drug abuse is significant, affecting not only individuals but also families and society as a whole. The costs associated with healthcare, legal issues, and lost productivity can strain public resources and hinder economic growth.

Moreover, individuals struggling with addiction may find it challenging to maintain stable employment, leading to financial instability and increased reliance on social services.

Social and Ethical Issues

The social and ethical implications of drug use are complex, often influenced by cultural, religious, and personal values. Debates surrounding drug legalization, harm reduction strategies, and the moral responsibilities of society to address addiction are ongoing. These discussions highlight the need for comprehensive policies that consider the multifaceted nature of drug use and its impact on society.

Conclusion

Understanding the social impact of drugs is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems. Addressing the root causes of addiction, providing access to treatment, and fostering supportive community environments can help mitigate the negative effects of drug use and promote recovery for individuals and families affected by addiction. By recognizing the interconnectedness of health, social relationships, and economic stability, society can work towards more effective solutions to the challenges posed by drug abuse.

