



FAO in Action

Strength in diversity

FAO battles cocaine trade in Bolivia by introducing alternative crops

For thousands of years, the coca leaf has been a part of Bolivian culture. Its first uses are traced back to 3 000 B.C., when it was used for ritual, medicinal and religious purposes. Today, mountain dwellers use it to fight altitude sickness, the poor use it to stave off cold, hunger and fatigue, and the superstitious use it to foretell their future.

However, coca leaves are also the basis for cocaine. Bolivia is the world's third-largest producer of the drug, which is responsible for almost 1 percent of Bolivia's GDP, worth US\$75 million, and direct and indirect employment for thousands of Bolivians.

Cocaine not only causes human suffering all over the world, but coca leaf cultivation has an adverse effect on Bolivia's forests. Although Bolivia ranks eighth in the world in terms of biodiversity, species are lost at an alarming rate. Forests are slashed and burned to clear land for coca and other crops and, because farmers seldom add nutrients to the soil, the land quickly loses its fertility. As a consequence, the fields are abandoned and more forest is cleared.

FAO's Forestry Department has in cooperation with the United Nations Drug Control Programme, USAID and the Government of Bolivia taken a first step to battle the cocaine production and the deforestation by giving nearly 2,000 poor Bolivian farmers an alternative to growing coca. In the Cochabamba Tropics, where 300,000 hectares of forest have been cut in the last 30 years, a five-year FAO project was introduced in 1997 aimed at diversifying and strengthening local economies so that the farmers in the area will have less incentive to grow coca illegally.

"If we are to give these families the chance to lead healthy lives in a healthy environment and keep them from becoming dependent on the coca-

cocaine industry, we must offer them the opportunities and the skills to make a decent living from the resources available in the Cochabamba Tropics," said Victor Villegas, the project's national director.

The US\$ 9.5 million project fosters sustainable production of wood and introduces farming techniques that combine agriculture and forestry. In these systems, trees and legume cover crops are interplanted with annual and perennial crops. In combination with home gardens and small livestock raising, these systems are designed to bring in immediate extra income for farm families and improve their nutrition. Over the longer term, they help diversify food production and reduce the threats posed by unstable markets, insufficient rainfall and pests. They also protect the environment by maintaining soil fertility and preserving forest cover.

To ensure the sustainability of the project the Cochabamba Tropics Centre for Forestry Technology has been established. This centre provides local farmers, business groups and the government with ongoing technical support in forestry and agroforestry management.

The project has strong potential, although nobody claims it is a cure-all against drugs. "We don't pretend these agroforestry systems will be as profitable as growing coca illegally," said Greg Minnick, FAO's chief technical advisor for the project. "What we're trying to do is provide an attractive income comparable to other legal economic activities that farm families have at their disposal. If we can raise local standards of living and improve household nutrition and health, we can make farmers far less interested in running the risks of growing coca," said Mr Minnick.



Facts and figures

About forestry

The **FAO Forestry Programme** addresses one of the very important, complex and controversial issues of modern times – how to maximize the potential of trees, forests and related resources to improve people's economic, social and environmental conditions while ensuring that the resource is conserved to meet the needs of future generations.

In assisting its member countries to conserve and utilize forest and tree resources in a sustainable way, FAO works in partnership with governments, international organizations, international financing agencies, non-governmental groups, the private sector, communities and various interest groups and individuals. It strives to use scarce resources efficiently, share experience and avoid duplication of effort.

FAO's work in forestry is a comprehensive effort comprising normative and operational activities. FAO works with its member countries through the Organization's headquarters in Rome, Italy; through a network of decentralized but closely coordinated offices at country, subregional and regional levels; and through field projects. It also works closely with the other technical sectors within FAO's mandate, through interdisciplinary activities, both at headquarters and in the field.

FAO's work in forestry is organized into major programmes. Through the **Programme on Forestry Policy and Planning**, FAO promotes understanding of the socio-economic situation and potential of forestry activities and of tree and forest-based products. The Programme comprises collection, analysis and dissemination of information on production, trade and consumption; and monitoring of trends in development and investment as a basis for long-term policy formulation and sector planning. It also includes community forestry and strategies for involving rural people in forestry activities and benefits.

Through the **Programme on Forest Resources**, FAO prepares and promotes the adoption of guidelines for the management of both natural and plantation forests of all types and the biological diversity they contain. **Forest resources assessment** – the collection, analysis and

dissemination of information on the present status and trends of the world's forests – is a key element of the programme. The programme also includes agroforestry, urban forestry and the protection of forests from fires, insects and diseases, as well as consideration of the impact of climatic change on forests.

Through the **Programme on Forest Products**, FAO promotes the environmentally sound and efficient utilization of all types of forest product, both wood and non-wood, at varying levels of complexity of operation and size of enterprise. The programme also targets efficient use of forest biomass for energy and provides information on the role of forests and forest products in carbon sequestration

The **Forestry Field Programme** provides direct technical assistance through field projects, mainly in developing countries. The FAO Investment Centre helps countries increase the flow and performance of investment in the forest sector.

FAO stresses networking and capacity-building in all of its work in forestry development. Emphasis is placed on building national capabilities in forest policy development and strategic planning, on institutional strengthening, on human resources development and on assisting local communities and organizations. This includes assistance in training staff, developing efficient extension methodologies and supporting research in sustainable forest management.

Finally, FAO's Forestry Programme provides technical inputs to the intergovernmental dialogue on sustainable forest management through the programme's role in the interagency Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

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