



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

DECISION-MAKING OF FORMER COCA PRODUCER IN ONE COMMUNITY IN MONZON: AGUA BLANCA

SEPTEMBER 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: Betty Cardaña

This publication was created at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared independently by Betty Cardaña, consultant to Partners for Global Research and Development LLC (PGRD), under Contract No. AID-527-C-13-00002.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand in a comprehensive manner the decision-making behavior of households residing within an alternative development (AD) community to grow coca or not, in this case Agua Blanca in Monzón, Huánuco. The target audience for this study are decision-makers and individuals providing technical assistance on behalf of public institutions and the Government of Peru, from the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo y Vida sin Drogas – DEVIDA, in addition to counterparts in foreign cooperation agencies, mainly the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

BACKGROUND

The Monzon Valley, located in the Peruvian Jungle close to the highlands, received its first colonists more than a century ago. Its geographic, isolated, and precarious conditions favored the onset of criminal organizations, where illegality prevailed mainly due to activities resulting from massive coca growing (DEVIDA, 2015). In 2013, CORAH eradicated coca crops from the communities of Rio Espino and Agua Blanca, located in the Monzon Valley, where AD activities were later implemented. From 6,564 has with coca crops registered in 2012, at the Monzon district level, these were reduced to 227 has in 2013 (DEVIDA, 2015). This study is undertaken nearly 3 years after the AD intervention in this area.

According to DEVIDA's 2014 assessment, 272 individuals reside in Agua Blanca, accounting for 79 families. From 79 households, 75 have electricity and none have potable water or sewage. Similarly, families do not hold land titles. The primary multi-grade school has 46 students, where the high school, inaugurated this year, has 10 students. DEVIDA, Juntos, Pensión 65, Vaso de Leche and QaliWarma are some of the welfare programs in which families participate. Additionally, the community also has a health post.

Agriculture is the main economic activity. The main products are cacao, coca, plantains, corn and to a lesser extent, livestock. Agricultural production is done individually, using basic, traditional technology.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

- a) What are the main sources of monetary and non-monetary income of the household participating in AD activities? What are the livelihood generating opportunities in the area? How much time is devoted to income generation activities?
- b) What are the main factors that enter into the decision making process of a farmer in AD areas to cultivate or not coca?
- c) What are the roles of the members of a household participating in AD in terms of decision-making, income generation, consumption and saving patterns, children's education and health, among others?
- d) What is their perception of AD activities? How much does a household value the services provided, promoted or supported by AD activities? What do they think about the State's presence in the area?
- e) What are the material and social aspirations of the local people? What are their daily priorities?
- f) What are the perceived economic and social opportunities and risks?
- g) How do households manage processes, changes and challenges?
- h) How do farmers become community, social and political leaders? What is their sense of community belonging? What are the incentives or disincentives to participate in community development activities? What is the nature of their networks? How do they create their network?
- i) What is the influence and mechanisms that households have on the decision making process at the community level? What is the role of access to information?

Research methodology and limitations

This study adopts a reflexive approach and a constructivist standpoint to provide a coherent answer to the main research questions and subsequent more specific and focused questions that emerged during the fieldwork. This reflexive approach considers the ethnographer's influence and the subjectivity of the end findings, and coupled with a constructivist viewpoint emphasizes the holistic, analytical, and interpretive dimensions of an ethnography as a research method.

The research questions were operationalized into three data collection instruments: the household observation guide (11); the basic interview guide (12); and the interview guide for key community informants (13). The use of these instruments, common to the three ethnographic studies (Agua Blanca, Río Espino, Shanantia) guaranteed that the surveying in each of the selected communities where similar.

The unit of analysis in this study is the family (the household) of former coca producers. Six and then three families were selected based on two criteria: a) their "participation in AD or lack thereof" to compare families benefitting versus not from AD and b) their "best or worst economic situation" relative to other families in the community (proxy: meets basic needs?) to compare between families with higher versus lower socioeconomic status.

Family 1 (Calderón) participates in AD (cacao and coffee project), former coca producer, has two young children, and meets basic needs without difficulty. Family 2 (Villafuerte) also participates in AD (cacao project), is a former coca producer, has two young children, and meets basic needs with difficulties. Family 3 (Blanco), ex AD participant, has returned to coca growing, has two young children and an older son, and also meets basic needs with difficulties.

The immersion period within the community lasted five weeks of 6-7 workdays during fieldwork, taking place between March and April 2016. Nonetheless, this period was very short to gain more in-depth knowledge and understanding of a complex community.

FINDINGS

The three families are linked to the coca cultivation that still exists in small scale. The factors influencing the decision-making of families to grow coca or not are closely related to the role of family members and their life stories. Women and young children play an important role. In the case of the former, their level of influence depends on their participation and knowledge of different family spheres such domestic, community, and income generation, related to a premise of wellbeing of all the members and to a permanent contact with the situations that affect each one of them. His spouse and the aforementioned priorities influence the man, head of the family, while his main role is more related toward income generation. Older children are also key actors in the decision-making process to continue or leave coca cultivation. Children with greater temporal experiences beyond those offered by the rural setting of Agua Blanca constitute a strength in their families and are an essential piece for the motivation and undertaking of productive activities withdrawn from coca.

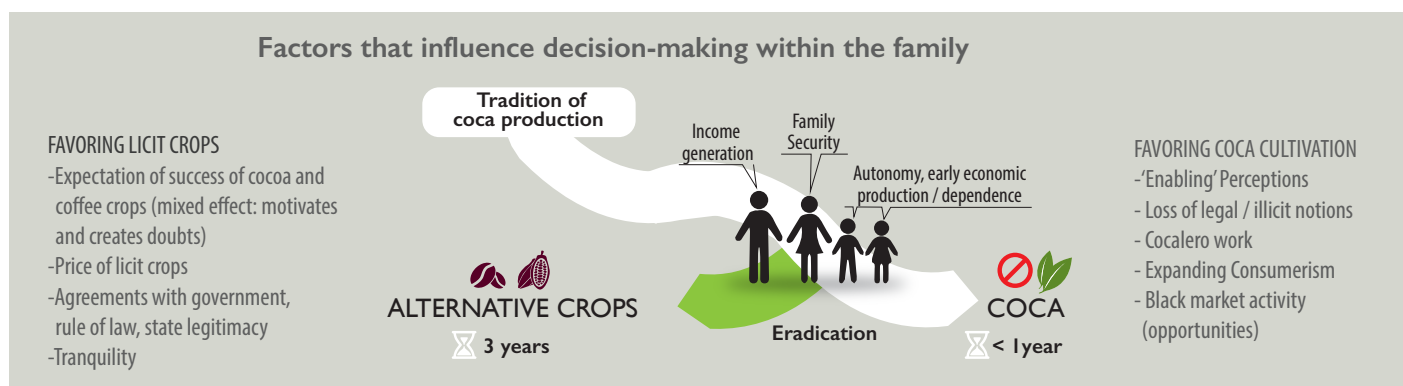
The job and income generated from the coca cultivation is economically valued. In this sense, teenagers can already participate in the economic activity of coca and begin a process of economic independence since 13/14 years of age. In some cases, this enables them to make decisions to plant, grow, invest and reap benefits from it.

On the other hand, AD is not such a determining and attenuating factor to grow coca as was expected partly due because promoted crops have not reached an important productive cycle that also generates significant income. Currently, AD support and the presence of the State are considered insufficient and inefficient, coupled with a scarce accountability and supply of public information.

Families with certain economic resources and physical assets are more inclined toward licit crops. On one side, they have greater economic and physical resources (ei: quality of the soil or land extension). On the other, their reduced dependency on coca crops leads to a greater appreciation of family tranquility. A greater control from the State and/or the perception that the former exists and the implications regarding a potential penalization diminish their inclination to cultivate coca.

The following figure presents the different factors that appear to influence the household's decision to cultivate coca or not.

FIGURE 1: DIAGRAM OF FACTORS INTERVENING IN THE DECISION TO CULTIVATE COCA OR NOT.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As a starting point, it is noteworthy to stress the richness and diversity represented by each one of the families studied, and that due to their particularities it would not be possible to generalize their characteristics, potentialities, and weaknesses to the entire community. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to consider each one of the findings as a characteristic that can be common to many other families and that when combined, can lead to clues and allow to present strategies that address the situations set forth by the reality of the families, both as receiving subjects but also as active subjects and main actors of their own development.

An important conclusion is the increase in social differentiation because of AD/DEVIDA's targets and evaluations. DEVIDA prioritizes the number of hectares dedicated to AD as an indicator of success, rather than the continuation of the families in the program and their empowerment. Besides this, the most economically disadvantaged families are those who face the greatest risk of being excluded from the AD program.

Based on the study of three families in the Agua Blanca community and on the limited time of this research, the AD hypothesis is yet to be validated. This is partly due to the timing in which the studies take place that represents three years, approximately, from the start of the post-eradication program. The hypothesis suggests that insofar the agricultural producers that participate in AD benefit from the licit economy, their participation in illicit activities will diminish. From what has been observed in Agua Blanca, present-time benefits are not sufficiently visible and determinant. Depending on the specific circumstances of each family, some families more than others await those benefits and others see their hopes diminish. There is uncertainty regarding support from the State once the technical assistance for crop installation has finished. This has a demoralizing effect that can constitute a contributing factor to return to coca cultivation.

This hypothesis also suggests that strengthened value chains and improved local governance will remove agricultural producers from illicit activities. As evidenced by the findings, farmers have not removed themselves completely from illicit activities given the favorable context for the coexistence of alternative crops and coca. On one side, the farmers doubt the income opportunities derived from licit crops. On the other, coca is still perceived as a viable option vis a vis the low efficacy of the post-eradication program and the ambiguity regarding the existence of DEVIDA's program.

As a result, the theory of change within AD cannot be, at least in the present time, and based on the three families studied, validated. This study shows a decision-making process of the families whose conviction and behavior do not signal toward the definite withdrawal from coca cultivation.

The content of this document is based on the report, "Decision-making of former coca producer in one community in Monzon: Agua Blanca". You can find the complete report on PGRD: <http://www.pgrd.org/> | http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00mpcz.pdf

This publication was made possible by the generous support of the People of the United States of America, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of the Evaluations Project under contract No. AID-527-C -13-00002. "The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the author (s) and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of USAID or the Government of the United States."