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# DECISION-MAKING OF FORMER COCA PRODUCER IN ONE COMMUNITY IN MONZON: RIO ESPINO

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: Pablo García

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# 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 Monzon, Huanuco. 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).

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## 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 the Monzon Valley, where AD activities were later implemented. From 6,564 hectares with coca crops registered in 2012, at the Monzon district level, these were reduced to 227 hectares in 2013 (DEVIDA, 2015). This study is undertaken nearly 3 years after the AD intervention in this area.

According to the 2015 participative assessment from DEVIDA, Rio Espino had 382 residents grouped in 99 families. Houses have electricity but do not have either potable water or sewage. There are two educational institutions in the community (pre-school and primary, with 64 children enrolled) and lacks a health post. The population receives attention mainly from public programs such as Qali Warma, Juntos, Beca 18 and Pension 65.

The dominant economic activity is agriculture (91%), followed by livestock and trade. Seventy-one families grow cacao and coffee as AD participants with support from DEVIDA; there are no producer associations in Rio Espino or a productive infrastructure in the community.

# 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 other two ethnographic studies conducted in Agua Blanca and Shanantia) guaranteed that data collection in each of the communities were 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, and b) their economic situation relative to other families in the community.

Three families were prioritized for this study<sup>1</sup>. Family 1 (Garrido) participates in AD, are former coca producers with land titles and have three adult children. Now they grow cacao and meet their basic needs with difficulty. Family 2 (Rocha) also participates in AD, grows cacao and coca for ENACO, has land title, four adult children and a young one, and has difficulties to meet their basic needs. Family 3 (Rodríguez) grows cacao but are not AD beneficiaries. They have coca for ENACO, livestock, and do not have land title. They meet their basic needs without difficulties.

The immersion period within the community lasted five weeks, between March and April 2016.

<sup>1</sup> All names that appear in this report are pseudonyms.

# FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

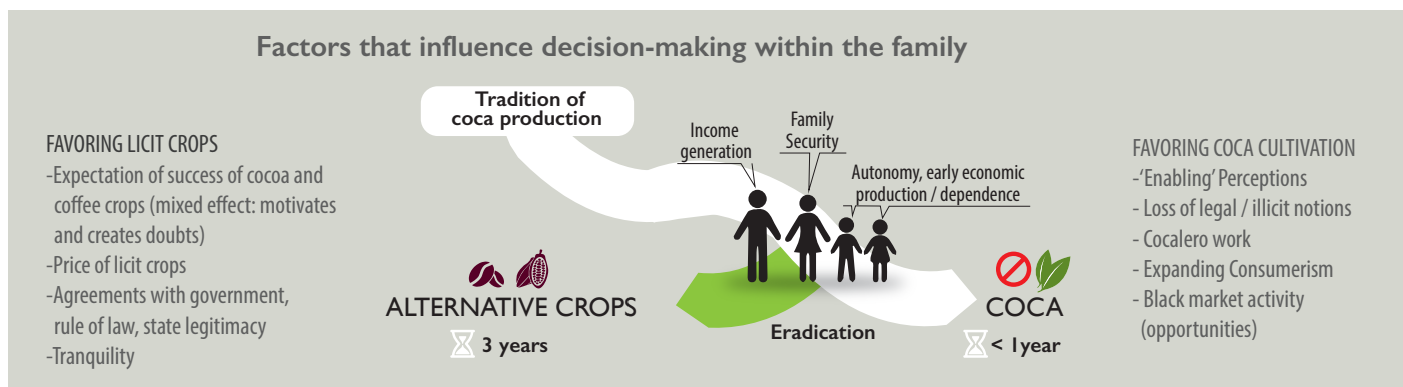
## Findings

The coca tradition of the valley suggests a historic inertia altered fundamentally by the 2013 eradication and by the intervention of DEVIDA and other AD agents. Families have been faced with the decision to abandon coca and bet on alternative development crops thinking in a medium term economy that opposes the short-term economy of coca.<sup>2</sup> The cultivation of licit crops is supported by children schooled in an urban setting, as well as by the spouses of families with a minimum level of economic resources. Another mitigating factor is to have sufficient economic and material resources to not depend on coca. Among these resources is having enough land area, with good soil and preferably a land title. The latter supposes legal recognition for agricultural producers as they receive benefits in exchange, such as credit access. An additional factor to not grow coca is the relative new climate of tranquility that permeates the town and is highly appreciated and particularly supported by spouses.

On the other hand, the economic rationality of the agricultural producer is the first contributing factor for coca cultivation, as the decision of one crop over the other is profit-based. While the productivity of alternative development crops (cacao and coffee) is still insignificant, income derived from coca is still comparatively much more profitable regarding the less time and money required. Another contributing factor are the family life stories and within them the coca tradition of the valley, which includes immigrants from the highlands that arrived following the coca. People are convinced in their reality that certain soils located only on the beaches but not on the hillsides and in higher altitudes are apt for producing alternative development crops with the expected yields. The spouse's influence within the household can be considered a mixed factor, as it can favor either way. In households lacking sufficient economic means, women support the decision to grow coca. Finally, the risk of new eradications does not necessarily dissuade the agricultural producer of cultivating coca again.

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.

AD in Rio Espino faced a series of difficulties and challenges that, according to some agricultural producers, would question its sustainability. Upon arrival, immigrants found that the larger and best lands were already occupied, by which they had to occupy less productive grounds while simultaneously bearing a small farm regime. Smallholdings noticeably

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to AD crops, coca is harvested each three or four months.

## >>FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

limited their productive and diversification capacity, thus inviting coca cultivation. The economic profitability of the latter per square meter significantly outweighs that of any other crop.

This fact is compounded by AD characteristics that propose tangible results in three years since the eradication without offering sufficient solutions to a subsistence problem while the harvesting arrives. This medium term dimension of AD results, to some families used to and dependent on coca, is very difficult to accept. If for 2016 agricultural producers do not witness tangible and convincing results, the risk of returning or continuing with coca cultivation is high. Currently, as one of the household head stressed: *“The AD is yet to be seen”* (Emeterio Rodríguez 13/03/16).

The AD approach that suggests all productive units and households are homogenous, without differentiating among socioeconomic levels, family structures or life stories, possibilities and available resources, etc., seems to be validated in some cases but not in others. As perceived through direct observation and interviews, each family has different time availability and necessary resources to execute the requirements of the technical assistance. Families with younger children that demand more attention, without extensive social networks and in need of temporary work outside the house to meet basic needs, holds a more unfavorable position when compared to other families with economic resources and without young children, who better comply with technical assistance plans.

Given this scenario which confronts household heads with the possibility of replanting coca, there are internal elements within the own family structure that act as forces in favor or against the return to coca, given each case. On one side, spouses of household heads, with the authority derived from the domestic sphere and their participation in the management of the family's economy, can influence in favor or against replanting. On the contrary, in those homes with fewer difficulties to meet basic needs and with a more diversified economy, it is much more likely for the women to advise the husband to “not get into troubles” (legal) with the coca. This wish to not return to coca cultivation is fueled by the social tranquility which, when compared to previously days of turmoil, is highly valued by a population conscious of the difference in this regard visàvis the past.

The AD hypothesis suggests that an important change should happen on the socioeconomic level where the AD is being implemented. The reality found on the ground does not permit validating this hypothesis. First, the benefits of a licit economy are not sufficient yet to make a living out of it, while the outcome of this third critical year of the program is still to be seen. This fact is pushing many families to think of coca as the necessary complement for their economies. At the same time, social and productive networks are not strengthened. No producer association or cooperative exists in Rio Espino, in the hope that the Cooperative of Monzon can be organized someday. The community board is neither showing capacity to gather the people around. In the absence of a strong leadership, the community is divided. This fact has a negative effect on community development.

There is room to improve transparency and institutional information about AD and the State's presence through its development plans. Similarly, the Municipality of Monzon is failing in effectively communicating to the people its projects for the valley, which only feeds an already negative perception with regard to the support and the services lent by the State. As for these, the positive opinion from families regarding social programs does not hide an evident dissatisfaction with respect to basic services in infrastructures, health, education, or roads.

Keeping all these things in mind, the AD hypothesis cannot be validated for now. As of today, coca and alternative crops coexist despite the “cero coca” policy stipulated in the memorandum of understanding all families must sign. If, in the practice, DEVIDA workers do not object to the small coca plots in the fields, the normative and social value of the document where the prohibition of coca cultivation is made explicit under the penalty of been excluded from the program, seems to weigh more on the grower's conscious. This ambiguity between a “cero coca” policy and some degree of tolerance in the practice generates confusion.

This document's contents are based on the “Decision-making of former coca producer in one community in Monzon: Rio Espino”. You can find the complete report on PGRD: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pa00n45t.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00n45t.pdf)

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