



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING AND COCA CULTIVATION

HOUSEHOLD ETHNOGRAPHIES IN SHANANTIA, HUIPOCA
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF UCAYALI, PERÚ

OCTOBER 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: Tania Vasquez

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

PURPOSE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

The main purpose of this ethnographic study is to understand the decision-making behavior regarding the cultivation of coca by households in an Alternative Development (AD) community. In this case, in the village of Shanantía, in the area of Huipoca, Padre Abad District, Province of Padre Abad, Ucayali Region. Target audience are those making decisions and providing technical assistance as members of the institutions of the Government of Peru (GOP), the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (DEVIDA); and of the international cooperation agencies, particularly the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

BACKGROUND

The village of Shanantía was formally established as a caserío on September 23, 2009. Its colonization dates to the late 1940s. At that time, colonists were initially motivated by the extraction of rubber, wood, and after a while, by the cultivation coca and the economy of drug smuggling (*narcotráfico*). Its population (292 persons), very diminished after the year 2000, gradually increased, due to the natural population growth and to the emigration and immigration related to fluctuations in the coca leaf economy. This is a community of internal migrants, mostly heralding from provinces of Huanuco, but also from other states. It is geographically accessible, located just 30 minutes by mototaxi from the Centro Poblado Menor of Huipoca, which is located on the Francisco Basadre highway between Aguaytía and Pucallpa. Since August 2015, a non-paved road connecting the villages of Shanantía and Esteros is being built with financial support from DEVIDA, increasing road accessibility of the village.

In Shanantía, coca was cultivated massively. Due to the high demand for labor, older residents immigrated very young, between 1991 and 1993, to work on the coca harvests. Later, according to the interviewed families, after herbicidal aerial fumigations (1993-1994) occurred in Shanantía, many families emigrated. Some returned years later. Those who did not leave supported their families through subsistence farming, raising chicken and cultivating crops that “resisted fumigations” since some crops other than coca plants were also affected by it.

From 1996 to 2011, inhabitants of Shanantía continued planting coca. They resisted state mandates to stop growing coca through their participation in the coca growers’ movement (including participations in road shutdowns, strikes and “marches of sacrifice” to the capital of Lima), and, during the 2011 presidential election, they started believing in the possibility that eradication would be suspended. The same year, Shanantía experienced their first state-forced coca eradication, after which, DEVIDA started meeting with the community with the aim of presenting its AD proposal. Community members from Shanantía signed the “Memorandum of Understanding” between themselves and DEVIDA on June 28, 2012. The village thus became “the first community in the area” (the conflictive area of Huipoca) that signed a Memorandum of Understanding with DEVIDA. At that time, 55 families committed to participating in AD and 84 hectares of cacao would be installed in the village. Then, the addition of 05 supplementary addenda to the Memorandum increased the number of participants, excluded some from the list of beneficiaries and increased cacao goals from 1 to 2 hectares per family. According to the latest addendum (April 30, 2015), there are 79 beneficiaries (heads of household).

RESEARCH METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

Methodology was based on an interpretive approach that considers the influence of the ethnographer and their subjectivity in the outcome of research, and on a constructivist approach that emphasizes the holistic, analytical and interpretative dimensions of an ethnography as a research method. This helped answer the main research questions, as well as consider more specific, and focused, questions that emerged during fieldwork.

Research questions

1. What are the main factors that affect the decision-making process of a farmer to replant coca in an AD area? How is the decision made?
2. What are the roles of the members of an AD participating household in terms of decision making, income generation, saving and consumption patterns, education and children's health, among others?

Research questions were operationalized and three data collection instruments were created: the "Observation Guide for Households (11)", the "Basic Interview Guide (12)" and the "Interview Guide for key informants in the community (13)". The application of these instruments as the basis of the three ethnographic studies (Agua Blanca, Rio Espino, Shanantía) guaranteed that the studies among the three selected communities were consistent and comparable.

The study takes the family (family household) of (ex) coca producers as its unit of analysis. Six and then three families were selected per community based on two criteria: (a) their "participation or non-participation in AD," to compare between beneficiary and non-beneficiary families and (b) their "better or worse socioeconomic status," relative to other families in the village (proxy: "family meets its needs?"), to compare between families with higher and lower socioeconomic status. The families selected in Shanantía were the **Cueva Family**¹ (participant of AD / "meets its needs"), the **Sanchez family** (participant of AD / "covers its needs with difficulty") and the **Rosales family** (nonparticipant of AD / "does not cover its needs").

The period of immersion in the community consisted of five weeks of 6-7 days of fieldwork during March and April 2016. The duration of fieldwork was established in order to obtain a complete understanding of the life of Shanantía, however, this was still a limited time to observe all the changing aspects a complex agricultural village.

FINDINGS

Based on the experiences of the three selected families, we found evidence that account for four types of factors that promoted or limited the replanting of coca. The three families have some sort of relationship with **the coca economy, which continues operating** and has not been dismantled. This economy provides work in the form of employment in coca harvesting, which is economically appreciated and, given that the employer is a member of the community, is interpreted as "help to the neighbor" i.e. something morally valuable (thus normalized, legitimized). Coca harvesting also continues to socialize young workers to work in jobs related to coca cultivation and provides resources for new coca crops among them (employers give seedlings to laborers as a gift, they plant them). Another factor is the **economic activity of children and adolescents** who are productive from an early age (working with their family) and initiate a process of economic autonomy at 13-14 years of age, which enables them to make decisions such as cultivating coca, investing and profiting from it. **Labor migration** informs adolescent males of other economic activities (legal or illegal) within and outside the Ucayali region, which later facilitates coca cultivation outside the village through the support of newly acquired social networks. Finally, the **popular dependence on coca cultivation** as useful to meet basic to more expensive needs continues to encourage its replanting. In the case of these three families, only one deterrent factor influenced the decision to plant coca: the exertion **of state control – or the perception that it exists** – embedded in the activities of CORAH and in a law that criminalizes coca cultivation (D.L.124, promulgated 26/09/2015). Perceptions regarding state control prevent replanting coca, and/or, force coca growers to hide crops in remote plots and hidden locations (Atalaya for example). DEVIDA's Memorandum of Understanding must be respected and fulfilled. To many members of Shanantía, signing the Memorandum means accepting state control. The remainder of this year is key to attain a positive opinion toward the program among these citizens.

¹ The names and last names used in this report are pseudonyms.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Findings allow identifying reasonable doubts regarding the complete fulfillment of the AD hypothesis. The wording “while former coca farmers begin to participate and benefit from the legal economy, (...) the probability of participating in illegal activities will decrease” has certain limitations. Potential benefits from cacao cultivation motivate families to dedicate greater care and investments of all types, potentially causing recently eradicated or coca producing families to “withdraw” from a new cycle of producing and selling coca to the black market (with or without selling to ENACO)”. This assertion, however, does not consider that the coca economy reinserts the family in a different type of cycle, a **cycle organized by employment** (coca harvesting), which ultimately determines the return of the family to coca cultivation. Additionally, another AD condition can be discussed in the light of the ethnographic study of three families: benefits from cacao cultivation are only obtained if the crop is in good condition. However, maintaining a thriving cacao is difficult and depends on many conditions, one of which is a household structure associated with a high dependency on children. This type of structure affects the way families produce, another is the quality of soils.

In the context of a sustainable and integral alternative development approach, increased social inclusion and State presence would reduce coca cultivation. Related implications are worth discussing considering these findings. One finding that challenges the possibility of achieving this result is the collective perception about how families of Shanantía began participating in AD activities. Village members recurrently use expressions like “what were we going to do, they beat us” and “they won” to describe the period prior to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with DEVIDA. These are clearly verbalizations of the feeling of being defeated. This means that the political positioning of these families involves the idea of subjugation rather than protection. The implementation of AD activities did not occur in a space devoid of social relations, but rather in a space where experiences included violence or violent control. Eradication, and particularly “fumigations”, are regrettably remembered by these citizens who have formed themselves a negative perception of the State.

The content of this document is based on the report, “Ethnographic Study- Shanantia”.
You can find the complete report on PGRD: <http://www.pgrd.org/> | http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00mpd3.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.”