

Lessons Learned and Recommendations¹

Alternative Development Team USAID/Peru

A. Lessons Learned

A.I. Strategy and Design

What makes a good strategy/design?

- Concentration of resources in one territory to maximize impact.
- Intervening in secure areas with law enforcement and political will.
- A learning-by-doing approach that allows continuous adaptation and improvement.
- Utilizing the expertise of external implementing partners who bring data, funding, and human resources.
- Designing effective communication strategies (e.g., “9 out of 10 coca leaves go to drug trafficking” campaign).
- Deep understanding of the target population to tailor interventions to their specific context.

What should be avoided?

- Dependency-creating aid that lacks sustainability.
- Applying one-size-fits-all models that ignore regional specificities.
- Spreading resources too thinly across too many territories, weakening impact.
- Lack of coordination with other donors operating in the same area.

¹ This document was prepared by former members of the USAID/Peru technical teams as a reflection of their professional experience. The views expressed in this text belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of USAID or the United States Government.

How does good planning contribute to effective implementation?

- Ensures technical assistance is aligned with the actual number of beneficiaries.
- Facilitates ongoing eradication in a given area, which discourages a return to illicit activities.
- Enhances visibility of efforts and results, reinforcing stakeholder commitment.
- Allows successful models to be adapted to regional specifics.
- Enables better coordination among donors, maximizing resources and avoiding duplication.
- Encourages joint coordination among all territorial stakeholders (public sector, private sector, communities, NGOs).
- Flexibility in financial resource allocation, based on available budgets.

A.2. Stakeholder Engagement and Management

- Alignment of interests and shared goals.
- Creating enabling conditions (political will, security, infrastructure, income improvement, territorial governance, connectivity) to attract private investment.
- Direct coordination with the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) to secure funding.
- Dedicated personnel needed to engage and coordinate with the private sector and to seek private funding.

A.3. Effective implementation and delivery

- Inclusion of key stakeholders, especially public sector actors (MEF, DEVIDA, MIDAGRI, MIDIS, regional and local governments) from the design phase.
- Women, shown by evidence to be agents of change, must be engaged to help shift communities away from coca production.
- A consistent communication strategy across the Alternative Development Program that involves all actors.

- Harmonize criteria, language, and technical packages across implementing partners and national agencies.
- Coordinate activities within and across project portfolios.
- Provide onboarding for local implementers to understand U.S. government regulations.
- Maintain consistent and long-term interventions with clear strategic direction.
- Ensure projects have a minimum 5-year implementation timeframe to achieve lasting results.
- Match service delivery capacity to the number of participants to ensure quality.
- Make ongoing eradication and security work a precondition for alternative development efforts.
- Segment participants and tailor technical assistance to their specific characteristics (socioeconomic level, asset access, etc.).

A.4. Sustainability and Exit Strategy

- Sustaining USAID's Alternative Development model requires prioritization at the political, institutional, and budgetary levels, with DEVIDA as the central coordinator.
- Continue supporting capacity-building to ensure institutional sustainability.
- Build technical and administrative capacities across government levels to ensure long-term viability.
- Support legal framework reforms to secure financing for public entities.
- Sustained behavioral change requires a robust communication ecosystem that promotes dialogue, transparent communication, and timely access to information to support transitions from illicit to legal activities.
- Strong institutions, a resilient communication environment, and local actor networks are essential for long-term, responsive community support.

- A sense of ownership over changes is key to sustainability.
- A clear exit strategy and graduation criteria were missing (e.g., San Martín was never fully exited).
- Promote private investment as a mechanism for long-term sustainability.

B. Recommendations

B.1. To improve future program development and implementation in Peru.

- Focus not only on agricultural value chains but also on enabling local investments in infrastructure such as telecommunications, roads, and bridges.
- Ensure intervention areas are stabilized first through a coordinated security strategy led by the Ministry of Interior in partnership with the GOP and DEVIDA. Without security, alternative development is not viable.
- While cacao and coffee have been key crops, consider broader productive diversification strategies tailored to areas where coca remains an obstacle to development. Only promote alternative crops with clear market demand.
- Conduct research, collect data, and develop evaluation tools that reflect local characteristics.
- Involve local and regional authorities, civil society, private sector, and grassroots communities in program design, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring—always with a focus on sustainability and integrity.
- Support producer organizations, including farmer associations and cooperatives.
- Involve local and subnational governments in the financing and management of alternative development programs.
- Promote production diversification driven by market dynamics, including export products.

- Build farmer capacity in areas like small business management, product quality improvement, value-added production, and market operations.
- Forge public-private alliances to provide technical and financial support to producers.
- Promote private investment.
- Consistently communicate program achievements.
- Present short-term results at the start of interventions to build long-term trust.

B.2. Emerging priorities for future projects

- Strengthen institutional capacities across all agencies involved in the drug control strategy (DEVIDA, MEF, MIDAGRI, PROMPERÚ, MIDIS, MININTER, etc.).
- Focus interventions on specific territories (e.g., El Monzón, where sustainability is still lacking).
- Develop medium- and long-term intervention strategies (revisit PAD planning tools, which once helped align and synergize activities).
- Leverage Peru's macroeconomic stability to mobilize additional public funding.
- Design a specific intervention for the VRAEM region.
- Continue supporting domestic consumption of cacao and coffee as part of alternative development value chains.
- Reevaluate promoting other alternative crops such as palm and vanilla.