
An Overview of the Drugs Situation.

Format

Prior to attending the conference all participants received a set of background materials that provided an overview of the drugs situation and related issues. These included short articles by members of the planning team on the antecedents of drug use, a front-line workers' perspective on drugs work in a community setting, selected materials of interest from a variety of publications and the collected views and opinions of conference participants on four specific drugs questions. The latter were submitted as part of the registration process.

The planning group composed an opening address to participants that was delivered by Victoria Martin. In it, she highlighted the fact that this was a working conference and encouraged participants to 'go to work'. On drugs issues, Victoria highlighted a number of the issues discussed during the planning phase in London.

Following the speech, participants moved into pre-arranged discussion groups, that ensured a mix of people from different regions and different backgrounds. This was the first opportunity to share general views about the drugs situation and appropriate responses. These groups were facilitated by participants at the conference, who had been briefed the previous evening.

All groups then reported back to a brief plenary chaired by Mr Saudagar Singh of the Malaysian group of participants.

In her delivery of the planning group's address, Victoria Martin highlighted some of the issues they had considered at their planning meeting.

a) On the Supply Side:

- the link between the drug industry/economies of various countries
- seizure of assets
- legal exporting of substances from one country to another
- extradition of people involved in the illicit drug business
- the exchange of information between police and customs organisations
- frontier controls
- distribution techniques used for the drugs supply
- trans-shipment of drugs
- pricing of drugs
- smuggling techniques
- the confiscation of the assets of drugs
- crop substitution
- crop destruction
- marketing, advertising and availability
- distribution
- types of outlets (e.g. buying alcohol in supermarkets)
- the skills and resources available for the drugs supply
- export markets
- the controversy over human rights and punishment (harsh penalties vs. rights of individuals)
- the availability of manufacturing equipment for traffickers
- the cost of justice (how prepared are societies to spend money and resources on a system of justice and incarceration?)
- community/cultural/religious attitudes

b) On the Demand Side:

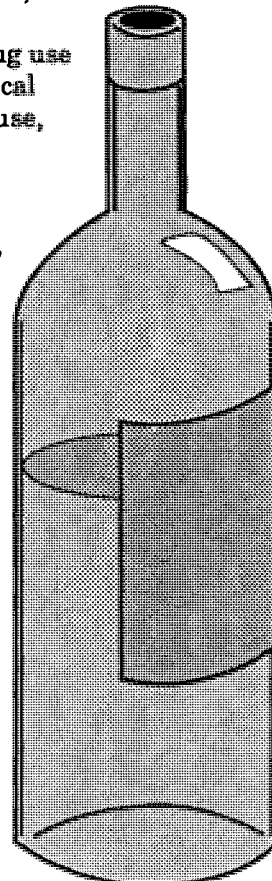
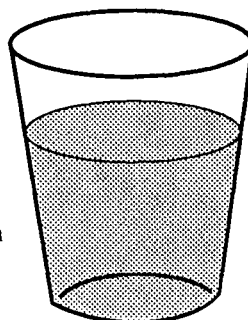
- psychotherapy
- group therapy
- substitution
- work training
- social skills training
- recreation/diversion therapy
- social integration
- role modelling
- behaviour modification
- parent education
- self-help groups
- attitude based training
- education for family, schools and communities
- employment assistance programming
- information vs. education
- mandatory vs. voluntary programmes
- should parents/families be involved in treatment?
- use of 'scare tactics'
- self-esteem
- looking at the broader issues of poverty, unemployment, racial minorities, housing, general health care.

c) Harm Minimisation

- the link between harm minimisation and AIDS (e.g. needle exchanges)
- safe sexual practices and sexually transmitted diseases
- the ethics of additives to alcohol (for example Thiamine added to beer)
- controlled drinking programs
- strategies to minimise the harm of drug use to families, communities and workplace
- medical management of health damage related to drug use (e.g. treatment of alcohol related brain damage, medical treatment of motor vehicle accidents related to drug use, medical de-toxification)

The groups that were formed to discuss these issues, focussed in on particular aspects of the drugs situation. These included the:

- problem of illicit brewing in much of Africa where alcohol is the major problem
- trend in Hong Kong which is away from hard drugs towards soft drugs
- movement in Malaysia's policy towards prevention
- role of the Rastafarian movement in the Caribbean in encouraging the use of marijuana
- growing heroin problem in Sri Lanka
- major emphasis on advertising and promoting alcohol, with a particular emphasis on rum, in many Caribbean islands



- need for flexible prevention programmes that redirect the energies of young people away from the misuse and abuse of drugs
- focus of education and prevention programmes being on the family as that is the social unit that is likely to have most effect
- strong roles played by unemployment, lack of skills and negative media coverage of young people in creating an environment conducive to drug use
- normalisation of drug use in many countries through the acceptance of tobacco and alcohol as being normal
- importance of a comprehensive, wholistic approach to tackling the drugs problem
- motive for drugs trafficking being the high profit margins that the 'pushers' can attain

All groups became aware that the problems varied from country to country. Some had major illicit (e.g. cocaine, heroin, crack) drugs problems, whilst others were solely concerned about alcohol and tobacco. Some viewed marijuana as a problem; others did not. A number of countries reported that they were being used as trans-shipment and/or banking venues whilst others were end-users or missed out on the shipping lanes altogether.