



Analysis of the RCSS's joint pilot drug eradication project with UNODC and the Thein Sein government

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By the Restoration Council of the Shan State Anti-Narcotics Committee (RCSS ANC)

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Although RCSS has been maintaining its contact person to keep in touch with the CCDAC and UNODC for the crop substitution and drug eradication program for a year, the CCDAC has never made any official contact.

The government's failure to adhere to its agreement is affecting trust building in the peace process.”

This analysis paper supports the above conclusion and describes the attempts by RCSS to implement a pilot drug eradication project jointly with the UNODC and the Thein Sein government, under the RCSS's ceasefire agreement. Over a year since it was agreed upon, the project has been delayed due to lack of cooperation from the government at different levels. This experience is affecting trust building in the peace process.

Background to the joint drug eradication project

After the RCSS made a ceasefire with the Thein Sein government (in December 2011), there was a tripartite meeting between the RCSS, UNODC and the Thein Sein government in Tachileik on 27-28 October 2012 for cooperation on alternative development projects for opium farmers and a 9-point agreement was reached.

The 9-point agreement reached at the roundtable discussion was as follows.

1. To conduct a joint needs assessment by the Government, UNODC and RCSS in the townships of Mong Nai and Mong Pan of Shan State.
2. Based on the data from the needs assessments, to conduct a joint selection by the Government, UNODC and RCSS of alternative development pilot locations in these two townships.
3. To jointly undertake community consultations in pilot locations as part of a joint alternative development programme design process for these selected pilot locations.

4. To implement this process as soon as possible under a joint Government, UNODC and RCSS partnership in these selected pilot locations.
5. UNODC will provide technical assistance to the Government and the RCSS in support of these alternative development processes.
6. UNODC will discuss with international donors to get the funding currently needed in joint selected pilot project locations.
7. RCSS will keep the local people as well as its members informed about protection against dangers of drugs, reduction and total eradication of opium cultivation, cooperation in the control of drugs and implementation of the crop substitution project.
8. For effective implementation of joint control of narcotic drugs and alternative development projects, the Myanmar Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC), Shan State Police Force and RCSS will each appoint contact persons and exchange information through emails, telephones and other appropriate means.
9. Security issues in the joint CCDAC-UNODC and RCSS crop substitution project sites will be presented to the higher authorities.

Lack of government authorization to begin the project

To carry out the 9-point agreement, RCSS appointed a contact person at the RCSS Liaison Office in Taunggyi on 24 January 2013 to keep in touch with the CCDAC and UNODC.

In the agreement there was no specific timeframe to start implementing the agreement, but it was stated that joint cooperation would be carried out as soon as possible.

On 24 January 2013, the head of the RCSS Anti-Narcotic Committee (RCSS ANC), Lt. Col. Sai Harn and their contact person, Maj. Wan Seng met the State Minister for Security and Border Affairs Col Aung Thu and enquired from him when the crop substitution and alternative projects would be started, informing him that the RCSS was getting ready for joint cooperation on the projects. Col Aung Thu said that there was still no reply from above. When asked, Pol. Col. Win Tun (Shan State Police Chief) also stated that there was still no order from above with regard to this issue.

Delays and obstruction to the joint needs assessment for the project

On 10 February 2013, at a meeting between the UNODC and RCSS chairman Lt. Gen. Yawd Serk in Loi Tai Leng, UNODC Country Manager Mr. Jason Eligh said that in March 2013 there would be joint cooperation from the three sides to work on a needs assessment in Mong Pan and Mong Nai. He stressed that UNODC was also in the process of meeting with and encouraging cooperation from the government.

Before the joint needs assessment by the three parties, the RCSS Anti-Narcotic Division (RCSS AND) made a pre-needs assessment in 9 villages in Mong Pan Township and 11 villages in Mong Nai Township in February and March 2013. It was found that the income of local people depends on growing opium poppies. There is little chance of better income from other crops and they have to buy rice. There are no schools for the kids and no clinics for the

villagers. The land is not fertile, and there are difficulties with water. Forests have been destroyed. In the past, these communities had endured forced relocation by the Burma Army.

The RCSS AND held public consultations with villagers who earn their living through opium poppy plantation. They said they would rather grow other crops than opium poppy if there were alternatives which provided sufficient income and if markets for substitute crops existed. However, until the end of March 2013, there was no news from the CCDAC.

On 2 April 2013, the head of the RCSS ANC, Lt. Col. Sai Harn and the secretary, Maj. Seng Wan met Mr. Jason Eligh at the UNODC office in Taunggyi. He said that UNODC would discuss with the government about the joint needs assessment in Mong Nai and Mong Pan around the last week of April 2013.

On 5 April 2013, an enquiry was made to Pol. Col. Win Tun about when the needs assessment would get started. However, he said he would need to ask the UNODC about the issue.

In other words, on the one hand the UNODC was saying the needs assessment could not begin as there was no authorization from the government, while on the other hand the State level CCDAC was saying they needed to ask UNODC.

Finally, in July 2013, a joint needs assessment by RCSS, UNODC and CCDAC was begun in Mong Nai and Mong Pan. Liaising with UNODC, the RCSS ANC contact person Maj. Wan Seng imparted information about the needs assessment in Shan to the local villagers in advance for easier understanding. This greatly facilitated the process.

On 23-24 July 2013, the joint needs assessment was carried out at the Town Hall in Mong Nai among representatives from 17 villages. However, on 25 July 2013 in Mong Pan, the RCSS ANC was prevented from participating by Pol. Maj. Kyaw San of CCDAC, who said that the Shan State government had not been informed about RCSS's involvement in the joint needs assessment. In order to find out the reason for this, the head of RCSS ANC wrote a letter to Pol. Col. Myint Thein of CCDAC on 29 July 2013, but received no response.

In fact, the head of RCSS ANC had already informed the Shan State police chief on 21 July that RCSS would cooperate in the needs assessment. And throughout the needs assessment, the Military Affairs Security (MAS) and Special Police had followed each and every step of the process, noting everything down and reporting to their superiors. As this joint needs assessment by the three parties was obviously initiated through discussions between UNODC and CCDAC, it is impossible that the Shan State government did not know anything about it. The joint needs assessment was the first point of the 9-point agreement reached in Tachileik.

RCSS not invited to meet diplomatic delegation to project area

On 30 November 2013, UNODC informed RCSS that Mr. Jason Eligh would bring the US Ambassador, EU Ambassador and other donors to visit the sites of the alternative development projects in Mong Nai (on 3 December 2013) and Mong Pan (on 4 December 2013). He said that they intended to meet local people as well as RCSS officers. However, as the CCDAC and the Shan State government did not officially invite or inform RCSS about this visit, RCSS was unable to meet with the delegation. This was in violation of the 9-point agreement.

Conclusion

The experience of RCSS in attempting to carry out the joint drug eradication project indicates that the agreement is on paper only and the government has no intention of cooperating on drug eradication.

Although RCSS has been maintaining its contact person to keep in touch with the CCDAC and UNODC for the crop substitution and drug eradication program for a year, the CCDAC has never made any official contact.

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