Chapter 6
Healthcare Service, Food Security, and Sustainable Development: Main Reasons to Grow Opium Poppy in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to analyze discrimination and disadvantage of local farmers in the process of opium eradication in Myanmar based on their specific explanations. The author utilizes some data and information collected from official reports and statements of the Myanmar Opium Farmers’ Forum (2013-2018). Some multiple sources from inside and outside Myanmar in terms of human rights of ethnic minorities’ opium farmers are also added. The current findings point out that there are a number of concerns and disadvantages with local opium farmers to look for survival livelihood, food security, and sustainable development in ethnic minorities’ communities in Myanmar, particularly at Shan and Kachin States. The chapter also calls for further researches with specific recommendations and effective solutions for local opium farmers in the next stages.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0125-2.ch006
INTRODUCTION

Lying at the heart of the Golden Triangle with a number of curious statistics about the real volume of opium cultivation, Myanmar\(^1\) has been a hot topic for assessing the process of supply reduction among of unlimited efforts of international and regional community. More than 20 years ago, Myanmar succeeded relatively in destroying poppy fields in the Golden Triangle on the eastern border of Laos and Thailand since 1996. But now it seems that the poppy-land area once again rises with poppy fields stretching from valley to valley in the southern plateau.

Historically, until the 1980s, Myanmar remained the world’s largest supplier of illicit opium. During half of a decade, between 1981 and 1987, the total of opium size estimated around 700 tons annual production, which had continued to rise until 1996 when it topped annual production levels of about 1,600 tons (UNODC, 2017). Then the product of Afghanistan flourished, disrupting the position of Myanmar since 1991 with its higher opium yield per hectare that made Afghanistan outpace Myanmar as the world’s largest producer of opium (UNODC, 2018a). Efforts to squeeze opium cultivation in the Golden Triangle, however, have been unable to prevent poppy fields from re-exporting and blooming in the mountains of the south territories of gunmen and ethnic minorities (Kramer, 2005; Kramer et al., 2014; Kramer, 2015a; Meehan, 2016b). According to UNODC surveys, poppy yields in Myanmar have so far increased nearly twofold since 2006, from 21,600 hectares to 37,100 hectares in 2018 (UNODC, 2019). Almost Myanmar’s opium is judged to be of exceptional quality and cheap, particularly in mainland China market and beyond in the Southeast Asia region as well. This led to the difficulties to control supply-and-demand scale so far.

Since the first crop monitoring and its related publications cooperated by UNODC and the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) in 2003, after 16 times surveying, the fluctuation of opium size in Myanmar showed the complications and challenges to data collection and analysis, though combined between satellite imagery, field yield assessment and socio-economic survey. Particularly, the link between ethnic conflict, land rights, opium eradication and alternative development need to be emphasized as the main concerns for government and regional cooperation to drug control. In addition, although a new quasi-civilian government has started with the new hopes to change the political process, economic development and democratic society after the first non-military rule established through the 2015 National Election (Kramer, 2015b: 356), the sustainable achievement of the real reform based on a nationwide ceasefire between government and ethnic armed opposition groups has still been considered as doubtful question for international and regional concerns. To some extent, the story regarding opium cultivation and its related eradication
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