

24 July 2020

English only*

**Forty-fourth Meeting of Heads of
National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies,
Asia and the Pacific**

Item 3 of the provisional agenda **

**Major regional drug trafficking trends and
countermeasures****Current situation with respect to regional and subregional
cooperation in addressing and countering the world drug
problem****Report by the Secretariat****I. Introduction**

1. The focus of illicit drug market activity in South-East Asia and the Pacific has transformed rapidly from opiates to synthetic drugs (mainly methamphetamine). In the study on this subject undertaken by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2019, it was estimated that the scale of the methamphetamine market in South-East Asia now stands at \$61 billion per year, and the large majority of methamphetamine is produced in and trafficked from conflict-prone areas where there is weak governance. Many armed groups operating in the area, especially in Shan State in Myanmar, are believed to be involved with or profiting from the trade in and production of synthetic drugs. Trafficking routes for methamphetamine, heroin and ketamine originate in Shan State and extend throughout the Mekong subregion across land borders. They also extend to high-value drug markets as far away as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the Republic of Korea via maritime trafficking routes.
2. The South Asia region continued to face challenges related to trafficking in illicit drugs and controlled substances, in particular tramadol, and related illicit financial flows.
3. For both South and South-East Asia, criminal phenomena have been further exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic since early 2020.

II. Asia-wide initiatives

4. The illicit drug markets in East Asia, South-East Asia and Oceania are experiencing a profound transformation associated with the steep increase in the manufacture of and trafficking in synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine. In

* Available only in English, which is the working language of the subsidiary body.

** UNODC/HONLAP/44/1.



response to this threat, UNODC held two meetings, from 10 to 12 December 2019 and from 18 to 20 February 2020, for drug forensic specialists and drug and precursor intelligence specialists, respectively. In cooperation with the Government of China, the first meeting, held in Beijing, brought together drug forensic specialists from 11 countries who were responsible for testing and analysing the chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs to discuss the latest developments in chemical profiles of synthetic drugs seized in South-East Asia and neighbouring countries. In addition, drug forensic specialists from partner countries, notably Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the United States of America, also participated. It was agreed that the findings of that meeting, presented in this report, should be shared with all the participants, as well as with law enforcement officials responsible for detecting illicit drugs and their precursor chemicals.

5. The second meeting was co-organized by UNODC and the Government of Myanmar and brought together intelligence specialists from East, South and South-East Asia, as well as Australia, Canada and the United States, in Mandalay, Myanmar, to exchange intelligence on recent precursor diversion and trafficking cases, with a view to setting the stage for an action plan to disrupt trafficking in chemicals in the region. The meeting agreed to coordinate with UNODC to address trafficking in precursor chemicals and laboratory equipment and that the UNODC regional precursor programme would be central to such efforts.

6. The global Synthetics Monitoring: Analysis, Reporting and Trends programme continued to support countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific in enhancing data development capacity. In Bangkok on 15 May 2020, UNODC launched a report entitled *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges*. The report explains that the synthetic drug market in East and South-East Asia has continued to expand and diversify in terms of the variety and volume of products available, while the price of methamphetamine has dropped to the lowest level in a decade, as the supply has surged and the purity of the methamphetamine has remained high.

III. Regional cooperation initiatives

A. South-East Asia

7. In the course of the chairmanship by Thailand of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2019, UNODC worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to make border management a priority. Together, the ASEAN member States developed a road map for border management that is to become a key bridge between the security and economic development agendas of ASEAN, as it is aimed at promoting trade development while at the same time countering the threat of illicit drugs, organized crime and terrorism in the region, especially at borders where there are capacity gaps and weak governance. In July 2019, Thailand submitted the road map document for consideration at the 19th Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime in Myanmar, and subsequently, in November of that year, it was advanced to the 13th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime in Thailand, at which ASEAN leaders agreed to strengthen border cooperation in the region. The road map will be advanced further by Viet Nam under its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2020.

8. UNODC has continued to strengthen the capacity of the network of border liaison offices to address transnational organized crime by providing necessary infrastructural support to the existing border liaison offices, expanding the network in high-risk locations, facilitating trust-building among officers across borders and providing technical capacity to identify and interdict cases involving transnational organized crime. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNODC supported border liaison offices across South-East Asia through several initiatives. Personal protective equipment, including masks, protective suits, goggles and gloves were distributed to

more than 80 border posts across Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. Information guides, including back-pocket guides, were also developed and translated into five languages of the Mekong subregion, to be distributed to front-line officers at the borders. The guides provide useful information and best practices for front-line border officers on duty during the pandemic, aimed at slowing the spread of disease and keeping individuals and communities safe.

9. As Chair of the 2019 Ministerial Meeting of the Signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control of 1993, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand hosted the annual Senior Officials Committee Meeting and the biennial Ministerial Meeting of the Signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding in Bangkok from 13 to 15 November 2019. As a major outcome of the Ministerial Meeting, the Bangkok Declaration and the latest revision of the Subregional Action Plan on Drug Control (SAP XI) were endorsed by ministers at the meeting. Serving as a key document, the action plan provides a strategic framework that includes activities designed to enhance cooperation among UNODC and the six States signatories to the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding in addressing challenges related to the production, trafficking and use of illicit drugs.

B. South Asia

10. Responding to the increasing trafficking in tramadol and to enhance information exchange to counter illicit trafficking in the substance between India, Ghana and Nigeria, in May 2019, UNODC organized a trilateral meeting between high-level decision makers from the anti-narcotics agencies and the food and drugs administrations of Ghana, India and Nigeria. The meeting was held in New Delhi, India, at the premises of the Narcotics Control Bureau of India, and was aimed at fostering stronger cooperation, coordination and exchange of intelligence to counter tramadol trafficking on the basis of ongoing investigations. That was followed by a debriefing meeting in Nigeria in July 2019 to discuss and share intelligence-led cases related to imports into West Africa of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine from India.

11. With the aim of strengthening regional cooperation to counter drug trafficking, in October 2019, UNODC convened a regional workshop in Manipur, India, for senior drug law enforcement entities and policymakers from South Asia to foster collective action and formulate recommendations aimed at countering trafficking in opiates and amphetamines in South Asia. The workshop was attended by more than 100 officials from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, as well as UNODC experts and representatives of Governments of states in north-east India, including Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The key recommendations emanating from the workshop were presented in the form of a project proposal, including to the Government of India for its consideration.

12. In February 2020, a UNODC regional expert on drug law enforcement delivered a presentation at a high-level conference of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) on trafficking in and abuse of narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances. The presentation addressed issues related to drug trafficking and darknet courier and postal interdictions. The regional conference provided a platform for exchange between South and South-East Asian countries and enabled the sharing of information and techniques to counter the drug problem in countries of the BIMSTEC region.

IV. Organized crime

A. Prevention of drug-related crime and drug trafficking

1. South-East Asia

13. The illicit drug market in East and South-East Asia continues to undergo a rapid transformation related to the steep increase in manufacturing of synthetic drugs, especially methamphetamine, particularly in northern Myanmar. Recent developments have clearly demonstrated that the ongoing expansion of the methamphetamine market in East and South-East Asia has been driven by supply. The growing signs of an intensification of methamphetamine manufacturing activities within and around the Golden Triangle and nearby countries, as well as a corresponding decrease in the number of production facilities dismantled in other parts of the region, indicates that methamphetamine manufacture has consolidated in the lower Mekong region. Given the deficits in vital institutional integrity, capacity and resources, this trend is becoming a concern, as it makes several countries in the region attractive targets for organized criminal groups. Countries in East and South-East Asia have collectively witnessed sustained increases in seizures of methamphetamine over the last decade, more than in any other part of the world. In 2019, countries in the region confirmed seizures of 115 tons of methamphetamine, representing an estimated market size of \$61 billion.

14. Given the surge in methamphetamine manufactured in and trafficked from the traditional area of the Golden Triangle, the Government of Myanmar has intensified its drug trafficking prevention and drug seizure efforts. This has led to the successful dismantling of several methamphetamine manufacturing facilities of unprecedented scale, including as part of a recent operation in May 2020 that culminated in the largest series of seizures of the substance in the country's history. Between 2018 and 2019, a total of 14 clandestine drug laboratories were seized in Myanmar, representing a significant development in the country, compared with 2017, when no manufacturing site was dismantled.

15. Seizures of methamphetamine manufacturing sites were also reported in other countries in the lower Mekong region in 2019. For example, in July 2019, authorities in Viet Nam dismantled the country's largest-ever methamphetamine manufacturing facility, in Kon Tum Province, located near the border with Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. A total of 20 tons of laboratory equipment and 13 tons of various chemicals, including more than 1,050 litres of P2P (1-phenyl-2-propanone), 14 litres of benzyl cyanide and 213 kg of tartaric acid, were reportedly confiscated. Furthermore, for the first time since 2015, a synthetic drug refinery was dismantled in Phnom Penh, in April 2019. That resulted in the seizure of 18 kg of methamphetamine, 52 kg of ketamine, 80 kg of MDMA and 173 kg of pyrovalerone, as well as a variety of laboratory equipment and molds. There are also indications that the level of illicit manufacture of methamphetamine in maritime South-East Asian countries may be decreasing. For instance, in 2019, for the first time in recent years, there were no seizures of methamphetamine laboratories in the Philippines, and the number of methamphetamine laboratories dismantled in Indonesia and Malaysia was the lowest since 2014.

16. Beyond important regional trends in methamphetamine, the illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and use of heroin remains a significant public security and health problem in the Mekong region, as well as in the neighbouring country of Malaysia. However, supply-side indicators suggest a notable decrease in heroin production in South-East Asia. Seizure data and other supply and demand indicators, such as decreases in the potential amount of opium for use in the manufacture of heroin and expert perceptions on heroin use, confirm this trend. In Myanmar, the area under opium poppy cultivation has been in sharp decline since 2014. In 2019, the total area under opium poppy cultivation fell to 33,100 hectares, from 37,300 hectares in 2018, representing an 11 per cent decline. The trend was connected to the continuing shift

in the regional drug market to synthetic drugs, which has also caused prices for fresh and dry opium to decrease in recent years.

17. The number of new psychoactive substances (NPS), including potent synthetic opioids, reported in the region has increased steadily. As of the end of 2019, a total of 461 different NPS had been reported by countries in East and South-East Asia. Moreover, the number of NPS with opioid effects identified in East and South-East Asia has increased markedly in recent years. While only three synthetic opioids had been identified in the region as of the end of 2014, the number had increased to 28 substances as of the end of 2019. Some synthetic opioids identified in the region, such as fentanyl analogues, are extremely potent, and there is growing concern that their emergence will accelerate as the regional drug market matures.

18. While the non-medical use of ketamine has long been a challenge in East and South-East Asia, there have been changes in the ketamine market in recent years. As with methamphetamine, seizures of ketamine have increased significantly in South-East Asia since 2015. The steep surge in such seizures has been primarily driven by substantial quantities of the drug being illicitly manufactured in and trafficked from the Golden Triangle. Although most of the ketamine available on the drug market is supplied from within the region, there are also indications pointing to supply routes from other regions, including South Asia and Europe.

19. With respect to the increasing diversification of precursor chemicals and illicit drug production methods in recent years, the quantities of precursors seized remain far below the level of the regional drug supply. This may be the result of several factors, including difficulties in coping with the increasing diversion of, trafficking in and illicit manufacture of key precursor chemicals, as well as changes in the average purity of drugs found in the region. Since 2015, seizures of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine have decreased significantly in Myanmar and insignificant quantities of the substances have been seized in East and South-East Asia. However, drug forensic profiles reported by countries in the region indicate that ephedrine and pseudoephedrine remain the major precursor chemicals used for the manufacture of methamphetamine in the region. This indicates the existence of significant intelligence gaps in addressing the diversion of, trafficking in and illicit manufacture of these key precursor chemicals. At the same time, seizures of P2P have greatly fluctuated, with only insignificant amounts (300 litres) of the chemical seized in 2019. In fact, only five countries in South-East Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam) reported having seized either ephedrine, pseudoephedrine or P2P in 2019. This points to the increasing challenges in detecting methamphetamine-related precursor chemicals in the region.

2. South Asia

20. Drug-related challenges facing South Asia include increased heroin trafficking and the rise of methamphetamine trafficking, especially along the maritime routes; a shift from narcotic drugs to synthetic drugs, precursors and synthetic drugs; the smuggling of heroin originating in Afghanistan using land and maritime routes; and the increased use of courier services, the darknet and Internet pharmacies for trafficking. In addition, South Asia has been identified as a source region for pharmaceutical ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, which are diverted and used in the clandestine manufacture of methamphetamine within the region and elsewhere. While this development is mostly visible in the case of methamphetamine manufacture, there are indications that the manufacture of ketamine and NPS is being displaced to other countries in Asia.

21. Trafficking of methamphetamine tablets from Myanmar, as the source country, to Bangladesh and India, as the destination countries, has been reported. Bangladesh has received a large amount of methamphetamine as a result of frequent cross-border movements. There have also been reports of methamphetamine precursor chemical trafficking flows into Myanmar from India. In June 2020, approximately 78 kg of crystal methamphetamine was washed ashore in the southern State of Tamil Nadu in

India. The crystal methamphetamine was packed in packaging bearing the label of a Chinese tea brand and sealed inside a drum.

22. Recent cases involving ketamine manufacture and trafficking indicate that drug trafficking syndicates in India may play a role in the ketamine market in East and South-East Asia. For instance, in June 2017, authorities in India dismantled a synthetic drug laboratory in Chennai and seized approximately 110 kg of ketamine destined for Malaysia, together with 55.5 kg of pseudoephedrine. In India, seizures of trafficked tramadol, codeine and diazepam, among other substances, have revealed that most of these pharmaceutical opioids reach West Africa illegally and most originate in South Asia. There is a threat that India may emerge as a manufacturing centre for synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and tramadol. The quantities of methamphetamine seized in India have increased over the years, and in 2019, seizures exceeded 2 tons. As a result of the restrictions on exports of tramadol by India in 2018, there has been a significant decrease in West Africa in seizures of tramadol originating from India.

23. The greater use of land routes and the connectivity of Myanmar with north-east India has led to a rise in methamphetamine trafficking. The police in Mizoram State in India reported a seizure of 3.9 million tablets of the substance in February 2020. There has been an increased use of coastal routes, and the Ministry of Home Affairs of India has reported the increased misuse of digital platforms and darknet markets; for example, in February 2020, seizures of substances trafficked using the darknet included 20 kg cocaine (out of a total of 55 kg trafficked from Australia) and 200 kg of methamphetamine. Moreover, the seizure of 1,527 kg of methamphetamine in the Bay of Bengal and of 1,156 kg of the substance by the Coast Guard in Nicobar was also highlighted at the BIMSTEC conference in February 2020. A consignment of 371 kg of methamphetamine, believed to have originated in Myanmar, was also intercepted.

24. In Sri Lanka, the drug seizures reported by various agencies between 1 November 2019 and 30 June 2020 totalled 1,713 kg of heroin, 7,088.7 kg of cannabis, 1,389 kg of cocaine, 2,295 kg of hashish and 775.2 kg of synthetic drugs (in capsule and tablet form), some of which were of unknown composition.

25. As a change from the usual land-based trafficking of pharmaceutical drugs such as tramadol capsules, nitrazepam tablets and codeine-based cough syrup in Bhutan, in 2019, the country carried out its first seizures from air couriers of 600 kg of crystal methamphetamine and 1,575.2 kg of khat. This indicates that traffickers are using air mail services to traffic and introduce new drugs into Bhutan. It was noted that the drugs had been destined for other countries, indicating that Bhutan was being used as a transit country. Seizures of solvents (dendrite and thinners) were also noted.

26. In Nepal, cases related to drug trafficking increased in the period 2018–2019, in comparison with 2017. Nepal continued to be used as a transit country for drug trafficking. For example, in November 2019, the Narcotics Control Bureau, with the support of the customs office at Tribhuvan International Airport, arrested a foreign national at the airport carrying 2.1 kg of cocaine believed to be destined for trafficking elsewhere.

27. Over the years, Bangladesh has been a destination country for large amounts of methamphetamine from Myanmar, owing to its proximity as a neighbouring country and to the regular movements across the border between the two countries. According to the Government of Myanmar, approximately one third of all methamphetamine tablets seized in 2018 had been found in Rakhine State, indicating large flows of the drug from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

28. Maldives is strategically located at the intersection of one of the most important and busiest trans-shipment routes in the world, making it vulnerable to drug trafficking operations, for which it is used as a trans-shipment port by international drug trafficking networks in collaboration with local criminals.

29. Given the continuing globalization of the synthetic drug market, as well as the relatively low level of awareness and knowledge of synthetic drugs and the existence of a large chemical and pharmaceutical industry operating within a weakly enforced regulatory framework, there is a risk that South Asia could become a main source of synthetic drugs, including synthetic opioids and the precursor chemicals used in synthesizing them. In 2019, with the assistance of the UNODC-World Customs Organization Container Control Programme, national authorities seized 68 kg of gold, 5 kg of cocaine, 9 kg of methamphetamine, 1 kg of crystal methamphetamine, 2 kg of cannabis, 2 kg hashish and 2,996 kg of fabric in Bangladesh, and an unidentified amount of an illegal beverage (beer) in Maldives. Approximately 162 kg of endangered species of wild fauna and flora was seized in Nepal.

B. Illicit financial flows, money-laundering and asset recovery

1. South-East Asia

30. Instances of money-laundering have continued to rise across the Asia and Pacific region in relation to both domestic predicate crimes and other transnational organized crimes. Most of the financial gains from such crimes must be “laundered” using different means and through legitimate businesses. It is important to note that instances of cash smuggling have increased across the region, possibly owing to the additional checks that are now being carried out in the financial sector and other regulated sectors. This may imply that criminals are relying less on banks and other financial institutions to move their money across borders, preferring to return to older methodologies and tested methods such as cash smuggling and trade-based money-laundering.

31. To counter the growth in money-laundering, including the corresponding growth in the illicit cross-border movement of cash, UNODC has been supporting jurisdictions in complying with relevant United Nations conventions and the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on combating money-laundering and the financing of terrorism. This includes assisting countries in preparing for the latest round of FATF mutual evaluations and supporting those countries that have been evaluated and found to have not performed well. FATF operates the International Cooperation Review Group, a mechanism to bring poorly performing countries under review and establish action plans to improve the operational effectiveness of legal frameworks. The initiative enhances the capacity of law enforcement entities to make better use of financial investigation techniques in activities to combat money-laundering, prosecutions and asset forfeiture. The recommendations on “know your customer” and “customer due diligence” measures are a positive outcome of the work of FATF.

V. Drug prevention and treatment

A. Prevention of drug abuse, treatment and recovery

1. South-East Asia

32. UNODC continued to support countries, in line with the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016, and with the Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem. In that regard, UNODC has supported countries in the South-East Asia region in addressing a wide range of topics, including drug abuse prevention, treatment for drug dependence, and HIV prevention for people who use drugs and people in prisons. The use of opiates and amphetamine-type stimulants such as methamphetamine continues to be a major problem in South-East Asia, and people who use drugs are among the most severely affected population groups.

33. In 2019, UNODC held three training events for national policymakers on the nature, prevention, and treatment of drug use disorders, in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam, respectively. The training was aimed at supporting member States in developing appropriate policies, strategies, programmes and interventions targeted at preventing drug use and increasing the availability of and access to comprehensive systems of care for people affected by drug use and drug use disorders.

34. Young people with drug use disorders, including those in, or at risk of, contact with the criminal justice system, and their families, often face grave challenges if they do not have appropriate support and access to effective treatment and rehabilitation services. UNODC, in consultation with international experts, has developed a training package on family treatment to address this concern. To promote the new training package, entitled "Treatnet Family Interventions for Youth with Substance Use Disorders", UNODC held a regional training event in Bangkok from 16 to 21 September 2019. Forty-two experts from across South-East Asia were invited to the event.

35. In April 2019, UNODC held at a regional round table in Kuala Lumpur on the use of amphetamine-type stimulants. The round table was hosted by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies. Experts from across the region discussed challenges in treating stimulant use disorders, as well as related policy and legal barriers. Recommendations on strengthening health systems to align them with international standards and effectively serve the target population were shared. Specifically, the 2019 UNODC publication entitled *Treatment of Stimulant Use Disorders: Current Practices and Promising Perspectives — Discussion Paper* was promoted. In addition, as part of the support for the Twelfth Malaysia Plan, 2021–2025, UNODC and other United Nations entities in Malaysia commissioned analytical work for the drafting of a strategic paper on leaving no one behind: marginalized populations at risk for HIV and living with HIV and co-infections. The Twelfth Malaysia Plan is the country's five-year development plan for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and directs the focus of the Government and relevant stakeholders towards sustainable development.

2. South Asia

36. In South Asia, health systems and providers of drug dependence treatment face challenges posed by new drugs, as well as by unknown combinations of drugs for which treatment is not available or has not yet been developed. Furthermore, there are difficulties in tackling the harms, such as HIV and hepatitis C, associated with drug use, in particular injecting drug use, which affects not only communities but also prisons. The most noteworthy development in terms of data on drug abuse in South Asia was the publication of the results of the 2019 national survey on substance abuse in India, after a gap of more than 15 years.

37. In Sri Lanka, the total number of reported drug users who had received treatment in 2019 was 3,613, a 19 per cent decrease from 2018. Of the total number of drug dependent persons treated, 19 per cent were from prison settings. In Bhutan, the use of solvents, in particular among school children, has been on the rise.

38. In July 2019, UNODC, in collaboration with the Department of Narcotics Control of Bangladesh, organized a workshop in Dhaka on implementation of all international drug policy commitments, following up to the 2019 Ministerial Declaration. The aim was to work with representatives of the government institutions involved in drug-related matters to ensure the practical implementation of the policy commitments made since 2009.

39. From 2019 to 2020, UNODC successfully implemented the Universal Family Skills Programme in Bangladesh. The main objective of the programme is to decrease the risk of drug use and other health and social outcomes among young people through evidence-based prevention, relying in particular on improving family functioning, bonding and communication. The programme has reached and benefited 80 families and 83 adolescents in Bangladesh. UNODC facilitators presented a report on the

implementation of the initiative, in the presence of the Minister of Education of Bangladesh and senior officials from the Ministry of Education, in Dhaka on 1 January 2020. At the event, families and students showcased the success of the Family Skills Programme through role plays on themes such as “drawing attention” and “peer pressure”. In addition, a presentation on the programme was given at a side event held on the margins of the sixty-third session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, in March 2020.

B. HIV/AIDS

1. South-East Asia

40. In 2019, UNODC launched a toolkit on HIV prevention, treatment and care for people who use stimulant drugs. The toolkit was used in two key regional events involving the participation of experts from the South-East Asia region. In addition, several training events on HIV prevention, treatment and care for people who use stimulant drugs were held in Viet Nam to support the country’s systems and capacities for responding to the health and social consequences of drug use. As Viet Nam recently reported that methamphetamines were its main drugs of concern, the technical support was aimed at assisting the Government of Viet Nam in addressing this emerging need.

41. UNODC, together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), launched a project on increasing the role of women in law enforcement. The aim of the project is to increase women’s participation and leadership in law enforcement activities, including border management, as well as to strengthen the capacity of front-line officers in border locations to respond to the needs of women and girls in the context of cross-border crime and migrant smuggling. As a complement to the main training curriculum, law enforcement officers were trained on occupational health and safety, HIV and hepatitis, and understanding the differences between drug use and drug dependence.

2. South Asia

42. In October 2019, UNODC, under a joint United Nations initiative, the Unified Budget Results and Accountability Framework, organized a high-level national workshop in the State of Gujarat, India, aimed at fostering collective action to strengthen HIV and tuberculosis interventions in prisons and other closed settings. The workshop, which was organized in collaboration with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the National AIDS Control Organization of India, involved the participation of more than 100 representatives of government and law enforcement agencies, prisons and civil society from 22 states in India. Among the key recommendations presented to the Government included the following: coverage for tuberculosis screening and treatment in prisons should be expanded; regular coordination meetings between prison and health departments would help in addressing programme and service delivery gaps; prison health data should be an integral part of public health data; specialized and focused health services should be provided for women in prisons and other closed settings; and prison overcrowding should be addressed through mechanisms that include alternatives to imprisonment.

VI. Alternative development

A. South-East Asia

43. UNODC has been working with the Government of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in implementing a sustainable alternative development programme, which is one of the nine pillars of the country’s national drug control master plan. The programme is currently being implemented in Houaphan Province, in the areas bordering Viet Nam. With the support of the programme, 381 families from opium

producing areas have established the Vanmai coffee cooperative, which completed its first minor coffee harvest in in the 2019–2020 season. The participating farmers are currently developing their capacities to independently process and export coffee to international markets.

44. UNODC continued to work with the Government of Myanmar in developing sustainable livelihood alternatives for opium-growing communities by supporting the introduction and cultivation of alternative permanent crops and establishing farmers' organizations aimed at enabling participating farmers to independently cultivate, refine and market high-quality products for export to prime international markets. UNODC continued to make progress in improving the sustainable livelihoods of farmers in Southern Shan State by supporting alternative development projects aimed at replacing opium poppy cultivation with the cultivation of a variety of licit and permanent crops, and at providing technical support to the farmer-run Green Gold Cooperative to facilitate processing and commercialization activities. Meanwhile, UNODC continued to strengthen the prominence of environmental management, focusing on agroecological zoning, agroforestry and reforestation. More importantly, UNODC assertively mainstreamed a gender perspective in its internal management and throughout every phase of its projects, ensuring that both women and men enjoy the benefits of development projects and promoting awareness of gender equality among all stakeholders.

45. In Myanmar, a total area of 1,591 hectares was used for alternative development activities, comprising 926 hectares of coffee, 17 hectares of tea and 648 hectares of avocado. More than 1,700 farmers benefited from long-term and day-to-day technical assistance on alternative development provided by UNODC. Between January and June 2020, approximately 700 beneficiary farmers produced and sold 144 tons of parchment coffee through the Green Gold Cooperative. That coffee, after the hulling and sorting process, would be valued at \$375,000 on the market. The average income of the farmers in those 6 months amounted to approximately \$400.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

1. South-East Asia

46. The illicit trade in synthetic drugs has rapidly become the most profitable illicit business in South-East Asia, while, at the same time, organized criminal groups have adapted their business model and expanded the methamphetamine market to locations where there is weak governance, in particular at borders. Therefore, it is a priority for Member States to strengthen both national and international strategic frameworks and legal mechanisms to respond to the rapid developments in the illicit drug market and threats from organized criminal groups in the region.

47. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Governments are imposing measures and restrictions on the movement of people. As a result, criminals are likely to either expand their operations online or shift them further underground, thus making their activities more difficult to detect. In that connection, UNODC can provide support with regard to online investigation techniques and help to develop regulatory frameworks to increase collaboration and promote information-sharing among the countries in the region.

2. South Asia

48. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges faced in the South Asia region with regard to the rule of law and human security, as well as the expansion of illicit online activities by criminal groups, have become much more aggravated since early 2020.

B. Recommendations

49. Member States may wish to consider taking multilateral approaches to addressing the challenges posed by organized crime and drug trafficking in South and South-East Asia and the Pacific, such as through the following actions:

(a) Refocus enforcement efforts and resources relating to backtracking investigations, the identification of high-value targets and the dismantling of organized criminal groups, moving away from a focus on operations that mostly target low-level criminal operatives and on examining financial assets;

(b) Design strategies to effectively prioritize national human and financial resources in order to build the capacity to combat the trafficking in and illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs and their precursor chemicals in the affected region;

(c) Build and enhance early-warning mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to rapidly share information on trafficking in drugs, in particular synthetic drugs, and the diversion of precursor chemicals;

(d) Develop standard operating procedures and capacity focused on drug profiling, forensic drug-related intelligence and awareness of new developments relating to illicit drug manufacture and trafficking routes in the region;

(e) Improve the collection of data and develop a mechanism to manage and share statistics using a database designed for drug profiling and classification;

(f) Foster close cooperation through consultations between Governments at all levels to promote mutual trust within Governments in all programme areas;

(g) Further enhance international cooperation on border management and strengthen the knowledge base and expertise of laboratory analysts, chemists and investigators whose work relates to precursors and pre-precursors of synthetic drugs, and new psychoactive substances;

(h) Acknowledge that evidence-based drug policy ensures that drug use and drug dependence are dealt with from a public health and social security perspective, and that evidence-based drug use prevention and treatment is crucial for combating discrimination, child labour and trafficking in persons;

(i) Ensure alternatives to incarceration for drug-related offences of a minor nature, to lessen the burden on the criminal justice system and uphold the human rights of people in prison settings; this would also help countries to mitigate the impact of pandemic viruses or diseases in the context of detention systems;

(j) Adopt human rights-based approaches that take into account the specific needs and circumstances of youth, women and girls when developing national legal frameworks to respond to illicit drug use and trafficking and organized crime;

(k) Enhance effective drug prevention programmes to ensure that the rights of children, including in relation to health, education and social protection, are upheld;

(l) Strengthen the existing coordinated mechanisms for regional policy change towards health-centred policies that focus on preventing HIV, hepatitis C and tuberculosis among people who use drugs;

(m) Strengthen international legal frameworks to respond to current developments relating to illicit drug markets and organized criminal groups;

(n) Expand drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities at the national level.