Drug Abuse Prevention in a Coca Producing Country: mobilization from the ‘private’ sphere of the home to the ‘public’ domain of national society

CARMEN MASIAS
Centro de Información y Educación para la Prevención del Abuso de Drogas—Roca y Bolana
271, San Antonio, Miraflores, Lima 18, Perú

Introduction
The Center for Education and Information on Drug Abuse Prevention (CEDRO) is a nonprofit, private volunteer organization founded in 1986 by a group of 82 individuals representing all sectors of Peruvian society and committed to a comprehensive, integrated approach for addressing drug abuse and drug-related problems. The purpose of the organization is to raise the level of public awareness relative to drug abuse and other drug-related problems, to mobilize the general public, key decision makers, and community leaders to advocate and carry out concrete actions against drug availability and abuse.

With some outstanding exceptions, drug awareness and education programs in Latin America have tended to focus on the medical and pharmacological aspects of drug abuse. Communication has been a one-way process often using messages and channels ill-suited to the needs, concerns, literacy levels, culture, and social environment of target groups. In many instances, educational methodology continues to be teacher-oriented rather than learner-centered. Through this approach prevention programs have transmitted scientific abstractions, transcribed anti-drug laws, and incorporated materials imported directly from developed countries without regard to their relevance or cultural appropriateness for intended audiences.

Drawing upon experiences rooted in grassroots, participatory approaches to development such as community mobilization, nutrition and health programs, cooperative and micro-enterprise, CEDRO developed a variety of programs to form its overall holistic, multi-dimensional strategy for prevention. In doing so CEDRO has developed much of its approach to behavioral change and community mobilization moving upwards and outwards from the family unit and the ‘private’ sphere of the home. Key to this process has been the role of women as agents of change within their families and their communities. In Peru, women have been at the forefront in recognizing and taking action against the negative effect on their families of alcohol and drug abuse and drug-related problems such as child abuse, domestic violence, and ecological damage in coca growing areas.

This paper describes several of CEDRO’s programs and their projection from
the ‘private’ domain to achieve change at the ‘public’ domain of government actions, legislative initiatives, and judicial processes at the local municipal, provincial and national levels.

Women: a population at risk—agents of change

Women’s roles in Peru as elsewhere in Latin America are in a stage of dramatic change: increasingly women are working, women are in school, and women are supporting children on their own. Parallel to this process has been the indication that growing numbers of women are abusing a wide variety of drugs. While more men than women abuse psychoactive substances, the implications of male substance abuse are also significant for women as are drug-related problems involving coca cultivation, drug production and trafficking. Yet relatively little attention has been paid to the issue of women and substance abuse. Most substance abuse prevention initiatives and treatment programs focus on men, while most women’s health efforts focus primarily on reproductive, and maternal child health. In addition, only limited attention has been paid to the impact that male substance abuse has on women. In its programs CEDRO has addressed this issue in three dimensions: first, women as users of alcohol and other drugs; second, women as agents of change within the immediate family and in the community; third, as victims of drug abuse by others and drug-related problems.

While men in Peru as in all other countries in the region, are more likely than women to use alcohol and other drugs, early on CEDRO recognized the impact that drug use by men has on the family, particularly on women and young children. It also recognized the role of women in Peruvian society, particularly at the community level where they take on an inordinate responsibility for looking out for the overall welfare of the entire family. Thus, CEDRO’s programs initially addressed issues that reflect both the interests and the role of women in preventing drug use in the family through school, community and community support programs. In school and community, CEDRO’s efforts reach out to prevent drug use and are designed to be gender-specific in recognition of the significant gender differences of drug use and dependence.

Women have been involved from the beginning in the design, development, and implementation of CEDRO’s programs. Of the 82 founding members of CEDRO, 26 are women representing the various sectors of Peruvian society, from members of the legislature to community leaders from the Mother’s Clubs. Currently CEDRO’s deputy director, director for research, controller, and the director of the documentation center are all women. A significant number of women are also involved as technical supervisors (13 women out of 32 total) and as promoters (40 out of 71). They work directly with children, youth, and community leaders. Regional coordinators in the provinces are women for the most part, as are many of the other volunteers staffing the community children and youth centers (Centros Infantiles y Juveniles). These women have been and continue to be involved in the design, technical direction, and management of all of CEDRO’s programs through their day-to-day functions.

Beneficiaries of CEDRO’s training workshops include social workers (mostly women), health workers, and teachers. In both the education and community-based programs, women are participants not only as targets of the programs but also as trainees and as trainers of trainers. In most cases, the majority of
multipliers in a given school or community will be women. The role of community organizers which women have taken upon themselves is the external expression of their concern with the health and welfare of their families, communities and the society in which they participate to an increasing extent and in numerous ways.

Community Programs

The Department of Training, Technical Assistance, and Community Assistance has as its goal the support of public and private sector community groups, both secular and religious. CEDRO provides training and technical assistance to enable these groups to learn about and implement programs relevant to drug abuse prevention and preservation of the environment. CEDRO has formed a national network of almost 2500 collaborating organizations working at the community level throughout the country. Priority geographical areas are those which are at highest risk for producing, trafficking, and consuming drugs.

Organizations participating in the program include: mothers' clubs; voluntary youth organizations; community governing bodies; businesses; high-risk groups, such as street children; government institutions that work with high-risk groups, such as the National Institute for Family Welfare (INABIF), the Juvenile Courts of the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the President, etc.; and community development entities.

CEDRO's philosophy for working with community groups is to select and train promoters to work with youth, parents, community boards, and other community agencies. A democratic focus is essential, with participation of the target population in all cases. Individuals with ability to organize, lead discussions, analyze ideas, and propose actions that will help individuals and communities to cope with health promotion and prevent abuse of drugs are recruited to be trained as promoters in 17 2-hour sessions. Topics are taught in a participatory manner and include: the role of the promoter, risk factors, legal and illegal drugs, prevention models, family dynamics, child development, communication skills, etc.

Upon graduation, promoters receive a manual which guides their work with youth. The manual advises promoters to begin their work in the community by meeting with the community board and with parents to get their approval of and understanding for the program. Parents are told that part of the training with youth involves joint parent-child activities and their active participation is encouraged.

Before being trained, potential youth promoters interested in the program are carefully screened by adult promoters who apply a sophisticated instrument to evaluate their abilities in the following skill areas: motor, intellectual, emotional, social, and work. Each candidate is carefully measured because each youth has to be a multiplier agent and train others in the community.

Successful applicants are trained in nine 90-minute sessions. Topics covered in a participatory and reflexive manner include: self-esteem, communication skills, decision making, drugs, use of free time, and job orientation. The latter two sessions are important because deserving youth are invited to develop a business plan with help from CEDRO and apply for seed money to start micro-businesses. Examples of micro-enterprise for youth include: taxi service, sewing,
welding, production of glass showcases, and marketplace booths for selling cookies and candies.

Educational Programs

Program with the Ministry of Education

For several years CEDRO has collaborated with the Ministry of Education's specialized Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse (COPUID) and has assisted in refining a curriculum used for high school students between the ages of 12–18. During 1994 COPUID in association with CEDRO also began to work on a curriculum and teaching guide for primary school teachers. As of the fourth quarter of 1994, 709 schools had been incorporated into the drug education project, 29,306 teachers trained, and 626,306 students reached. In addition to the public schools, 70 private schools have also used this drug prevention program.

A decentralized approach is used to prepare teachers for applying the curriculum. Teachers are trained by specially formed Ministry of Education multidisciplinary training teams that are located in regions, subregions, and in the various educational districts in Lima.

Two types of training are used, self-study and group training. In the former, materials are sent to teachers in isolated areas. The texts describe the drug education program and show how it can be incorporated into the curriculum. The group training is carried out by the multidisciplinary training teams under joint COPUID–CEDRO supervision.

An external evaluation conducted in 1993–94 found that 81% of the teachers who had been trained thus far incorporated drug prevention content and strategies into their classes. Ninety-three percent had positive attitudes toward the program, and 80% had added or modified elements of the program to adapt to the needs of their students. Forty-seven percent felt that the program was having a positive effect in preventing drug use.

In addition to curricular activities, community activities have been emphasized as part of an extracurricular program designed to bring together students, parents, teachers, and community leaders. These include the organization and training of local committees and clubs composed of teachers, parents, and community leaders. These groups have organized various activities to increase awareness about drug abuse, such as organizing marches on 'No Smoking Day', and displaying posters and special newspapers. Collaboration with CEDRO's Parents' School trains teachers to train parents to treat children at home in ways that help them develop high self-esteem.

Parents' School

The Parents' School program works directly with parents through Parent–Teacher Associations in schools and community committees. The objectives are to enable parents to develop skills to prevent and identify high-risk behavior associated with their children's drug use in the home. Parents are taught the stages of child development and learn ways to discipline and talk about touchy subjects, such as suspected drug use, with their children without damaging their self-esteem.

Among the activities of the Parents' School class is the use of sociodrama to
-enable parents to explore ways to communicate and deal with their adolescent children who are using drugs. Evaluation interviews conducted with parents have revealed that they were satisfied with the course, had applied their learning at home, and used it in recreational activities with youth. By October 1994, 76 public schools had adopted the parents program. More than 60 workshops for over 4100 teachers were conducted and the program reached 8684 parents with over 34,600 adolescents.

Community Support Programs

Among the main activities supported by CEDRO is the development of locally designed prevention programs in high-risk communities, including those adjacent to coca-growing areas. The approach used in all instances is orientation, training, technical assistance, provision of materials, and continual follow-up and reinforcement to promote development and implementation of locally produced prevention activities. This is followed by information and incentives, in the form of seed money on credit, to foster the development of micro-enterprises. Twenty-two self-help projects have been developed in the areas around Huancayo, Tarapoto, and Lima.

Examples of these community programs are those located in ‘Asentamiento Humano’, a rapidly-growing low-income community beset by unemployment and under-employment; in Huancayo in the Andean region east of Lima; and the Upper and Central Huallaga valley, a major coca-producing area. Until recently, both the Huallaga river valley and the town of Huancayo were plagued with terrorist activity by Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the Huallaga valley was considered to be under the political domination of both the narco-traffickers and Sendero. Although CEDRO has been working in both areas for several years, their activities, until recently, had been severely limited due to lack of security. The Peruvian government’s pacification actions in the last 2 years have given CEDRO the opportunity to expand its activities in those two areas, as well as other areas around the country.

Huancayo

For the past 8 years CEDRO has provided training and technical assistance and materials to Huancayo through CIPRES (Andean Center for Information and Prevention), a local private voluntary organization. In April 1993, CEDRO selected a high-risk neighborhood community ‘Justicia, Paz, y Vida’ (Justice, Peace, Life) as the site for a pilot project on ‘Family Education’. The community of 17,000 inhabitants (40% under 18 years of age) is well organized with its own governing body and is well on its way to improving housing and sanitation conditions for its people.

The work in Huancayo started with a situational analysis (3000 interviews) to determine the status of the health, education, self-government, human rights, quality of life, and the ecological environment surrounding the community. This was followed by a process of orientation and sensitization of the community and its leaders in order to obtain their approval and support of the program. This initial effort has paid dividends; the community governing body has provided the group with space in its new community center. Once approval was obtained, CEDRO proceeded to form youth groups and train them on several of CEDRO’s
programs, 'Community Mobilization', 'Community Action Programs', 'Communal Libraries', 'Ecology and the Environment', 'Sembrando Vida (Cultivating Life)', and 'Micro-enterprises'. The youth trained are then expected to train other youth, creating a multiplier effect.

By the fourth quarter of 1994, over 100 young people have been trained. In turn, under the Sembrando Vida program, they have set up program activities for children 6–12 years old, using the CEDRO Kirigami Prevention Manual'. Two hundred youngsters have been reached through this effort. A training program for parents has been established, and over 100 parents have received training to improve communication, understanding, and role modeling. Additionally, the group has succeeded in convincing the community governing body that they should pool their efforts to establish a community library which was inaugurated in October 1994.

Depending on their capabilities and interests, selected youth members were asked to develop and present proposals for establishing a micro-enterprise. The proposals were reviewed by CEDRO, and those accepted were provided with 'seed money' on credit, at no interest, to establish the enterprise. As of the end of September 1994, a total of $3740 had been granted to eight young potential entrepreneurs.

In addition, the Family Education Project is working with 55 mothers in conjunction with the local health center. Through this effort, the mothers receive training in making toys and weaving to enable them to generate alternative sources of income.

**Huallaga River Valley**

With the increased security conditions in the area, CEDRO began to intensify its activities in 1992. Prior to that time, its activities had been sporadic and had been limited to sending materials to organizations concerned about drug use. It was decided to make an intensive effort to focus on an area that has recovered some semblance of security. The area covered ranges from the city of Huanuco in the Upper Huallaga valley to Rioja in the north.

The approach employed is similar to the one described for Huancayo; orientation and sensitization of the community, followed by organization and training of selected individuals. The first step was to convince the people that they could and should begin to take control of their lives. The presence of terrorists and narco-traffickers in the area forced people in the area to keep to themselves and not get involved in organized activities of any type. This reluctance had to be overcome in order to establish a social base that would allow an effective mobilization of the communities throughout the area.

Working with people from the ministries of education and health, as well as with local government officials and other NGOs, CEDRO identified groups of volunteers willing to work with youth and children. Training, technical assistance, and a basic package of materials was provided to form Centros Infantiles y Juveniles (child and youth centers) that served as a gathering place for implementation of CEDRO's menu of prevention activities.

Materials provided consist of a few games, training manuals, posters, and an activities manual. Depending on availability, local governments and the regional offices of the two ministries have provided physical facilities where kids and youth can get together at night (where electricity is available) and on weekends
to play games, engage in knitting and sewing classes, make music, tell stories, etc. The objective is to raise self-esteem, promote leadership, and enhance the creative abilities of the youth. Formation of Schools for Parents is also a major focus of the project, thus completing the cycle of educating the entire family and beginning to wean them away from a drug culture that has formed over the years.

The volunteers staffing these centers include parents, Ministry of Education teachers, and local government officials. To date CEDRO has centers in 61 communities throughout the area, with Centros Infantiles y Juveniles in 40 of those communities. In one district, Leoncio Prado, which has 10 centers, an association of Centers has been formed to enable members to share experiences and to help each other. Each center maintains a detailed daily record of program participants.

Teachers and local volunteers in the various centers stated to evaluators that they are already seeing changes in the attitudes and behavior of the children that participate in the programs. When asked if they had conducted studies to verify this, they stated that they had not. There are no funds to do this. Most centers stated that they lack the resources to purchase the most basic materials, such as paper for posters, crayons, pencils, etc. While this is supposed to be part of the counterpart contribution, most centers are still unable to provide it. However, some centers have been very creative in looking for alternative resources, such as making toys and puppets out of tin cans and other readily available materials.

Vocational Training, Job Creation and Micro-enterprise Programs

A key project component is promotion of participatory self-help through vocational training, technical assistance and financing of small enterprise projects. CEDRO has provided support to create over 200 small businesses throughout Peru engaging in manufacturing and the provision of services. Vocational technical training in plumbing and electrical wiring was provided to 79 individuals in 1993, and to 80 in 1994. The top seven graduates were provided credit financing to buy the necessary tool kits to start working in those areas.

As part of its orientation and training for beginning entrepreneurs, CEDRO prepared and distributed a guide for businesses. The guide covers administration, planning, organization, and the necessary steps to follow in developing a good business plan. It also shows how to calculate production costs and establish selling prices. By the fourth quarter of 1994, CEDRO had provided training and credit financing to start 15 micro-businesses in Lima ($17,150), 10 in Huancayo ($5040), and 3 in Tarapoto ($1700) in the central Huallaga valley area, for a grand total of $23,890. Additionally, in the Huallaga area seed money has been provided for the expansion of a rural drug store, which not only provides medicines but also serves as a first aid center and maternity ward. A second project was approved for purchase of beehives and ancillary clothing and equipment to set up a honey-producing business.

A more comprehensive and far-reaching effort has been the support and promotion for alternative crops in the coca-growing areas surrounding the Huallaga river valley. CEDRO, through a group of interested individuals, provided farmers in the area with enough cotton seed to sow over 3000 hectares of natural color cotton that is being produced using only organic fertilizer and
pesticides. This particular type of cotton is a semi-perennial plant that can be harvested over several seasons.

CEDRO provides technical assistance and oversight through a local expert on cultivation of cotton in the cultivation and promotion of the practice. Part of this technical assistance includes information on the use of organic fertilizers and pesticides, as well as the maintenance of an associated crop of beans to ensure a continuous nutrient soil environment as well as food. According to local sources, many of the farmers involved in cotton cultivation under this project were former coca growers who see this as a viable alternative crop. The first crop under this program is currently being harvested, and it appears to have great potential for the future. CEDRO estimates farmers’ gross first-year earnings at $2.5 million, sold directly from the farmers to private enterprise.

CEDRO staff have been careful to emphasize that they are not in the cotton-growing and marketing business—but are only promoting (and providing seed money literally) the development of alternative crops for the farmers.

Street Children/Child Abuse

In 1987, CEDRO began its work with street children including both those who worked in the street and had families to whom they returned at night as well as those who were homeless. This started as an attempt to set up a prevention program targeting glue sniffing which is a common practice among these children. By 1989, CEDRO decided to focus on those children who were homeless. Starting out with merely providing a shelter for the night, CEDRO’s program has evolved to the point where it now provides housing, food, clothing, medical and psychological treatment, public school education and vocational training in five safe houses interspersed throughout the Lima metropolitan area; four houses are for boys and one for girls. Additionally, a shelter has been opened for street children in Piura, approximately 1050 kilometers north of Lima. CEDRO also maintains a database system containing a complete physical, medical, and psychological profile of all the children that enrolled in the street children program.

The program runs carpentry, cloth-printing, broom-making, car repair, ceramic, sewing and knitting workshops, and a small bakery. The bakery and auto repair facilities are leased to outside firms that are required to work with and train children in these endeavors. Residence for children in the houses is transitory, i.e. children are free to leave at any time they choose. The program has a family reinsertion program, which works closely with each child and his family and/or the community to foster the child’s willingness to return home.

Results show that 85% of the children involved in the program return to school, 65% become gainfully employed, and 40% return to their families (this figure includes only those who have been back with their families for over 6 months).

CEDRO has also addressed the issue of child abuse. A child mistreatment and runaway prevention system at the community level was established in late 1992 in 12 centers serving 23 urban high-risk, low-income communities in the Lima metropolitan area. Over 300 volunteer community promoters have been trained to implement and support the program; a guide for detection of mistreatment cases has been developed and distributed, and orientation and awareness campaigns have been carried out in the 23 communities mentioned above.
In July 1993, CEDRO began its program of direct intervention in cases of mistreatment. Arrangements were made with a network of institutions (hospitals, police, church) in 30 districts to notify program staff of cases of mistreatment or alleged mistreatment. Staff then follow up the reports and where necessary, invoke the intervention of the judicial system. A community organization manual has been developed to help communities detect and prevent mistreatment, along with strategies for intervention in those cases where mistreatment is found to exist.

**National Institute for Family Welfare (INABIF)**

CEDRO also works closely with the National Institute for Family Welfare (INABIF) by providing training, technical assistance, and material support to its residential houses. Since many of the staff caring for the children are largely untrained, usually adult inmates, CEDRO provides a useful service in upgrading the quality and skills of INABIF caretakers. Training in drug abuse prevention techniques and organization of activities is also provided to social workers, psychologists, and other professional staff.

In 1993, CEDRO began providing management, technical, and financial support to INABIF, extending its actions with tutors and children of INABIF’s six tutelary centers, and begin a preventive effort through INABIF’s Promotion Centers. This latter effort would require that CEDRO activate the centers and begin to provide prevention services for minors, adolescents, young adults, and families at risk of consuming and/or commercializing drugs and becoming involved in actions of violence.

Subsequently, INABIF decided that a higher priority is construction and operation of a shelter for homeless children in the selva (jungle) and provision of agricultural training for youth at risk in those areas. Based on that requirement, CEDRO provided technical assistance in the design of a suitable shelter, solicited and evaluated a feasibility study. A contract was signed between INABIF and a local construction firm. CEDRO provided oversight, monitoring and disbursement of funds as construction progressed. Now with the shelter finished, CEDRO will arrange for the necessary training of adolescents in appropriate agricultural techniques.

By the end of 1994, a feasibility study has been completed and a contract has been signed between INABIF and a local construction firm. CEDRO will provide oversight, monitoring, and disbursement of funds as construction progresses. Subsequently, CEDRO will arrange for the necessary training of adolescents in appropriate agricultural techniques.

**Public Awareness, Opinion Leaders and National Legislative Efforts**

A key factor contributing to CEDRO’s success over the past 8 years has been the organization’s sensitivity to, and focus on, raising public awareness to the dangers of drugs and drug-related problems. This has been accomplished through the use of mass media (radio, television, press), dissemination of relevant materials, and face-to-face meetings and discussions.

From the very beginning, CEDRO has been very conscious of the need to interact with key representatives of local, national, and international governments. CEDRO makes it a practice to invite these representatives to its head-
quarters to see firsthand what CEDRO staff are doing, and at the same time provide an orientation on the dangers of drug production, trafficking, and consumption. Key events are also held periodically, particularly those that involve children and youth at risk, to which the press and select opinion leaders are invited. National and international seminars are held on an annual basis.

During the period 1 October, 1993–30 August, 1994, CEDRO reached 214 opinion leaders, discussing the various aspects of drugs and drug-related problems, as compared to 207 opinion leaders during a similar period in the 1992–93 time frame.

Results of the latest public opinion survey in 1993 show that 43.5% of respondents now consider drugs among the three most serious problems in Peru, compared to 18.1% in 1987. While drug consumption is seen as the most serious aspect of the drug problem, over the past few years the populace is beginning to view production as a more serious problem for the country than drug use. Additionally, the public’s perception of drug trafficking as a serious problem for Peru has also increased over the years, going from 14.0% in 1987 to 25.2% in the latest poll. Also significant is the fact that the percentage of people that feel that drug trafficking does not result in any benefit to the country has risen from 82.5% in 1987 to 91.7% in 1993.

CEDRO supports national and international representatives by responding to requests for information that will help them perform their jobs. For example, CEDRO’s national network of institutions now numbers almost 2500 throughout the country. In the international arena, CEDRO has had some type of interaction with over 60 institutions outside Peru and with 50 international organizations with representatives in Peru. CEDRO staff brief national leaders in preparation for attendance at international conferences and meetings, such as those sponsored by the United Nations.

Additionally, CEDRO staff provide the necessary information to help the Peruvian Congress develop or modify existing legislation. A notable example is CEDRO’s input to the development of a draft national plan, presently under debate and which builds upon grassroots work from the ‘private’ world of the home and the family to participatory mobilization at the local community level until it reaches the ‘public’ domain of decision making and the social environment at the national level.