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# Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Interplay between Human Rights and Sustainability

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## Preface

The following collection of manuscripts emerged from an interdisciplinary virtual exchange held during the Winter semester of 2023/2024 at the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, organized by Prof. Dr. Milena Valeva and Prof. Dr. Kathrin Nitschmann. Additionally, Prof. Dr. Héctor Bombiella Medina, a lecturer of anthropology in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Iowa State University, contributed to the virtual exchange and supervised case studies 3 and 4, bringing his extensive experience in this field and facilitating the international exchange. Within the elective module on Human Rights, students from the Bachelor's programs "Nonprofit and NGO Management" and "Environmental and Business Law," as well as the Master's program "Energy and Corporate Law," explored the interconnections between human rights and sustainability.

In an era marked by unprecedented environmental challenges and profound social transformations, the intersection of human rights and the rights of nature has emerged as a critical area of inquiry and debate. Today, as we face the dual crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, the traditional boundaries between human and environmental rights are increasingly blurred. This confluence demands a fresh, interdisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing the complex and interrelated issues at hand.

Human rights, fundamental to the dignity and freedom of individuals, are deeply impacted by environmental degradation. Communities worldwide are experiencing firsthand the devastating effects of polluted air, contaminated water, and deforested landscapes, all of which undermine basic human rights to health, livelihood, and well-being. Conversely, recognizing the rights of nature – the intrinsic value of ecosystems and species – challenges us to reconsider our legal, ethical, and philosophical frameworks. It calls for a paradigm shift from an anthropocentric world-

view to one that embraces the interconnectedness of all life forms.

Engaging in robust discussions and research on these topics is essential in today's context. By exploring interdisciplinary perspectives, we can forge innovative solutions that honor both the rights of individuals and the integrity of nature. This special issue aims to contribute to this vital discourse, providing insights and fostering dialogue on how we can collectively navigate the complex landscape of human rights and environmental sustainability.

The first chapter „Human rights and SDGs in the context of democracy“ examines the significance of international human rights in today's context and links them to new value systems like sustainability.

The second chapter, the case study „Rights of Nature“ explores the concept of granting legal rights to nature itself by comparing laws from various countries to show how it combats environmental exploitation.

The third chapter, the case study „Traditional coca leaf consumption and drug trafficking in Colombia“ delves into the complex issues surrounding coca cultivation in Colombia, highlighting its economic, social, and political impacts.

The fourth chapter, the case study „The artisanal fishing community of Chorrillos, Peru“ aims to provide theoretical insights and recommendations for improving the livelihoods of artisanal fishing communities in Peru, considering legal, ethical, and environmental perspectives as well as how economic liberalization, privatization, and deregulation affect the community's socio-economic conditions.

play a significant role in bridging the gap between remote areas and the central government, fostering a sense of inclusion and participation among rural populations.

To effectively address the multifaceted social, economic, and ecological challenges posed by coca cultivation, a holistic approach is needed. This approach calls for concerted efforts and collaboration among governments, international organizations, and local communities. Only through such collective endeavors can sustainable solutions be found that not only mitigate the issues surrounding coca cultivation but also significantly improve the living conditions of the farmers involved. This comprehensive strategy would contribute to a more balanced and equitable development in Colombia, aligning with broader goals of peace, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

In essence, the use of glyphosate in Colombia, particularly in the context of the government's aerial fumigation program, is a matter of profound complexity. It encapsulates a plethora of concerns ranging from immediate public health risks to long-term environmental sustainability, from the intricacies of national security policy to the broader global discourse on human rights and environmental ethics. Addressing these issues requires a nuanced, multi-faceted approach that balances the immediate demands of drug eradication with the overarching objectives of social justice, environmental stewardship, and sustainable rural development.



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# Coca Cultivation in Colombian Economy – Considering the 2007 US-Colombian Free Trade Agreement

Author: Daniel Förster

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## 1 Introduction

According to the overarching theme *Should something happen somewhere else that we don't want to have here?*, this research paper deals with the extended question *How does the 2007 free trade agreement between Colombia and the USA affect the situation in Colombia?*. Focusing on the aspect of coca cultivation this paper is framed by the question of projecting the situation in Colombia onto the situation in Germany. Universal human rights are the unifying force between Colombia in Latin America and Germany in Central Europe. Through the United Nations Declaration, these rights have universal validity regardless of national or ethnic affiliation. (United Nations, no D.) These rights apply to all countries of the world, including Colombia. The situation of the population regarding the economic and ethical components is illuminated on the basis of coca cultivation. Starting with the

topic of coca cultivation, the challenges and interests by groups of people involved are described. The Colombian economy is then examined in order to classify the importance of this topic. The topic of the "free market" is a very relevant one, particularly regarding the economic component and can be supported by free trade agreements. This means that the domestic economy is not only restricted to its own sales market without regulation but is also largely extended to other partner countries. In terms of market liberalization, this would also be relevant for coca distribution. Thus, opening to other markets at the direct level is an export opportunity, but also at the indirect level. Exports can also be expanded via third countries. However, national governments are also responsible for this process. Therefore, this paper also explains the role of Colombian politics in coca cultivation, as it has a significant role in the cultivation

and trade of the coca plant as well as in external economic relations. Furthermore, the paper attempts to construct a possible solution to improve the living situation of the people in Colombia. The factors of the economy, politics, foreign policy and the relationships between the individual actors are considered in order to arrive at a solution that is as balanced as possible, taking into account the norms of human rights.

## 2 Coca Cultivation

The first section describes the challenges and individual interest groups involved in the cultivation of the coca plant. This is followed by a description of the effects resulting from cultivation, with a distinction made between the social, economic and ecological aspects.

### 2.1 Social Impact

This section covers the effects the cultivation of the coca plant has on the population in Colombia. The first impact is in the workplace. As coca production is an agricultural industry, it is traditionally associated with large amounts of manual labor. This sector therefore has a positive impact for society, as it generates jobs. As a result, employment opportunities are created that require little to no education, creating a viable source of income is available for many inhabitants. This is an opportunity for partial independence, especially for those who are not gainfully employed. This area would be a possible source of income

As coca production is an agricultural industry, it is traditionally associated with large amounts of manual labor. As a result, employment opportunities are created that require little to no education, creating a viable source of income is available for many inhabitants.

for 11% of the population. (Statista, 2022) Thus, people can organize their lives more freely and can therefore participate better in life.

In addition to the social aspect of life involvement, there is also a social effect of spiritual benefit which has a long traditional use in South American culture. The pure leaves of the coca plant, administered as tea or chewed, are traditionally used for spiritual reasons. (Gustafson, 2010) The focus is on the hallucinatory effect and the trance-like states induced. In addition to the spiritual effect, which is still used in indigenous circles today, the medicinal effect also plays a role. (Biondich and Joslin, 2016) It is traditionally used to fight cancer, stress and hunger. The benefits against stress in particular are generated by a temperature-regulating effect, although it is not known exactly how this is generated. (Goldstein, et al., 2009) It is also traditionally used to counteract the symptoms of altitude sickness. (Bauer, 2019) As part of its spiritual effect, it also shapes and influences social groups.

However, the cultivation of coca also has negative effects on society. For example, the financial interests of political groups cause divisions in society. (International Crisis Group, 2021) Additionally, the large financial profit from production and distribution, which will be explained later, creates tensions in society. These civil society groups form their outgrowths on both the left and right of the political spectrum. For example, groups such as the FARC, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, operate in the left-wing political sphere and groups such as the AUC, Auto-defensas Unidas de Colombia, in the right-wing political sphere. (Felbab-Brown, 2005) In the following chapters, these constellations will be placed more precisely within the construct of coca cultivation.

### 2.2 Economic Impact

The following section delves into the intricate economic dynamics surrounding coca cultivation. It meticulously examines not only the intrinsic value generated within the cultivation process but also the subsequent value generated in foreign markets. However, the value added from the actual cultivation of the coca plant to the financially valuable cocaine is explained first.

In the beginning, the production of cocaine, a product of the coca plant, is described. It is assumed that there is suitable land available for agriculture. The coca plant grows on this land and yields a harvest. Value creation turns out to be extremely lucrative and financially rewarding. For understanding the process, the steps for value creation are as follows:

1. The coca leaf serves as the basic material. This is then processed into a coca paste.
2. This paste is then processed further until it finally becomes cocaine base paste.
3. It is the direct precursor to the subsequent final product cocaine hydrochloride, better known as cocaine.
4. Very profitable value-added processes are carried out in phases via these steps, which are carried out by various individual players or a single player. In this way, each step has its own value chain with its own beneficiaries.

Then, following, the first value creation process starts with the farmer, who cultivates the perennial shrubs. As this can usually be done for many years with the same shrubs, it can be assumed that only the yields are considered. The prices for one kilogram of the corresponding component are assumed in order to be able to establish comparability with normal quantities. In the beginning, the starting product, the coca leaf, costs \$0.60 USD per kg. In the next step, the value increases by 91,108%, from \$0.60 USD per kg of coca leaves to \$547.25 USD per kg for the coca leaf paste. This enormous increase leads to a significant enrichment of individual groups of people. This enrichment continues with the processing of the base paste for cocaine. At this point, however, there is only a very small increase in value added of 19%, with 1 kg of this base paste costing \$651.18 USD. Taking the product to its final form, cocaine hydro-

chloride, creates a further increase of 88%, making 1 kg of cocaine in Colombia cost \$1,224.61 USD. Incentives to trade in this commodity are also set in this section of the value chain. Additionally, it should be mentioned that this value creation mechanism is carried out illegally. (Statista, 2022) This value creation, coupled with the high production rate of 783 metric tons in 2022, arouses appetite among target groups and value drivers. Due to the fact that the production and sale of cocaine is also illegal in Colombia, the state does not receive any tax revenue from it. This can lead to a deficit in the performance of state functions. However, the value added also provides benefits for the groups involved, that they have a source of income, which in turn has a positive effect on economic performance. However, it is important not to forget who or which groups are involved in the income. For example, left-wing groups such as the FARC use the income from the coca business to finance projects for the general public. (Felbab-Brown, 2005) Of course, it should be noted that this is not done in cooperation with the government, but under its own para-military leadership. This creates a para-military structure that exists parallel to the recognized structures.

### 2.3 Ecological Impact

The following section analyzes the ecological impact and consequences of agriculture using the coca plant. In Colombia, 207,000 km<sup>2</sup> are used for the cultivation of coca, which corresponds to around 18% of the country's land area. (Statista, 2023) The area used for the agricultural use of the plant is mainly located in protected nature reserves. This may be due to general illegality and cultivation by para-military groups, and is accompanied by the deforestation of natural areas of rainforest. This results in a loss of biodiversity, which adapts to the natural conditions of the forest. This type of management can be traced back to the FARC groups. However, projects by the government in cooperation with the society shows a trend towards converting agricultural land into land for livestock farming. This is then controlled by the state but encroaches even more strongly on the areas that should be protected. (Murillo-Sandoval, et al., 2023) Together with the associated monoculture, this has negative consequences for

the environment. These include the deterioration of soil quality and the scarcity of drinking water. The deterioration in soil quality is often due to the one-dimensional natural demand for nutrients and the scarcity of drinking water resulting from the pollution of groundwater, which is caused by the increased use of pesticides and fungicides. (Puri et al., 2023)

### 3 Economic Situation

The following section focuses on Colombia's economic situation to illustrate the importance of coca value creation. The GDP, gross domestic product, is the main indicator of economic success. It can be used as an indicator of performance, i.e. the end products and services produced within a time period. This value can be used to evaluate a country's economy and compare it with other countries or groups of countries. However, it should be noted that the results shown by GDP are purely economic in nature and do not include factors such as society or the environment, it is therefore a purely economic projection. (Callen and Sarwat, no D.)

Colombia's GDP in 2022 was \$6,624 USD per capita, which is below the average for all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In this average, it is \$10,344 USD per capita, which corresponds to a higher level of 56.16%. In relation to this, Brazil and Mexico in particular raise this average level of GDP in Latin America and Caribbean. (World Bank, no D.) The sector distribution of GDP has also seen an increase in the share of agricultural production in recent years, which is in line with the trend in this region. From 2012 to 2022, this rose almost continuously from 5.58% to 8.29%. (Statista, 2023) This puts it on average 2% above the agricultural GDP shares of Latin America and the Caribbean. (Statista, 2022) Colombia's average income is \$6,510 USD per capita, which is around a quarter below the regional average income. (Statista, 2022) The country therefore appears to operate below the regional average in economic terms. However, against the background of the high profitability on which coca value creation is based, this calls the financial distribution into question.

The Gini coefficient, which assesses the income distribution of private households according to their distribution situation, is used for that apprai-

sal. It shows what percentage of the population receives what share of income. A society is divided into parts and the corresponding income amounts are assigned to them; two extremes of distribution are assumed as limits. One extreme represents total equality, which assigns the value 0 to the Gini coefficient; it is assumed that every participant in society receives the same share of income. The other extreme represents total inequality, which assigns a value of 1 to the Gini coefficient. In this case, it is assumed that one person receives the entire income and all other members of society receive no income. In reality, the values 0 and 1 cannot be assigned in the income distribution equation. For practicability, the Gini coefficient for the income range is defined on a scale of 0 to 100. According to this finding, the Gini coefficient is suitable both for the consideration of an individual state to evaluate the national distribution and equity policy, as well as for comparison with other states. (Office for National Statistics, 2022)

The Gini coefficient for Colombia is 54.2, making it the highest in Latin America. (UNDP, 2022) One reason for the high Gini coefficient in contrast with the low average income may lie in the added value of the coca plant. This can result in a very small number of people receiving a large share of the nationally available income. The value added of over 204,001% based on the price per kilogram in combination with an average of 146,500 households in 2014 indicates a very compressed distribution of added value. (UNODC and Government of Colombia, 2015)

### 4 Political Situation

This section explains the political situation and foreign policy events. Colombia is currently a presidential republic, under the leadership of President Gustavo Francisco Petro Urrego since 2022. Congress is divided into two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Elections are held every four years. (Auswärtiges Amt, 2023) The combination of high regulatory measures on the part of the government and the low threshold of compliance with the law, that allows laws to be broken creates an area of tension, and this tension creates room for corruption. (Statista, 2023) Regarding to this situation, both left-wing and right-wing forces have formed organizational structures.

This is how the Marxist guerrilla organization FARC came into being in 1964. The 10,000-strong group has control over large areas of the countryside and is aiming to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor. However, it also opposes the foreign policy efforts of the current government, which is in favor of strong foreign trade and economic agreements. In the view of the FARC, cooperation with other countries, particularly the USA, is an unwanted behavior by the government. For example, the FARC take on state tasks in the areas under their control. Taxes are collected to implement public welfare projects. However, it is this tax revenue that the state lacks in order to carry out state functions. This results in an undesirable tax shift by the state when distributing the tax sum. Due to this conflict between the elected government and the FARC, there are repeated military conflicts in the controlled areas. The left-wing organization uses kidnappings, attacks and sabotage to exert pressure. After many years of violent conflict, a peace agreement was reached between the Colombian government and the FARC for the first time in 2017, which resulted in the handover of all weapons to UN representatives. Since then, the FARC has increasingly transformed itself into a political party and has secured 10 non-elected seats in parliament. (Britannica, 2024) In addition to the FARC, the ELN, National Liberation Army, is also active on the left-wing spectrum. Like the FARC, this group was formed in 1964 and fights against the government. The main point of confrontation is injustice in social, political and economic issues, for which the Colombian government is held responsible. Likewise to the perspective of the previously mentioned organization, the foreign policy relationship with the USA is a thorn in its side. In addition to its activities in the drugs business, the ELN is also involved in illegal gold mining in Colombia itself, as well as in Venezuela. Its methods of exercising power include the kidnapping of political actors and para-military confrontations. (Stanford University, 2019)

As with the FARC, Colombia was also prepared to engage in peace negotiations with the ELN. However, these were not carried out consistently, as the group was inactive at times due to its small number of members. According to estimates, 2,402 people are currently directly involved in the orga-

nization. (Murphy and Acosta, 2019) However, the last attempts at peace negotiations in 2017 were ended by fighting on the part of the ELN in 2019 without the wanted result. ELN is still doing violating attacks there.

### 5 US-Colombian Free Trade Agreement

The following section discusses the free trade agreement between the USA and Colombia from 2007. The main objective of the FTA is to facilitate trade in goods and services between the two countries. To achieve this goal, this FTA contains three core topics. First and foremost is the elimination or reduction of taxes on imported products from both countries. This should ensure a higher density of trade and service flows, which should strengthen the respective economies. Another point is the labor and environmental regulations. The Colombian economic and social system is to be brought closer to that of the USA. However, in 2008, there were delays due to disagreements over the regulations in the agricultural sector, which pushed the project back by several years.

The agreement should bring various benefits for both countries. For example, the US would like to increase exports through easier market access to increase its own GDP. The project is also intended to facilitate American FDI in Colombia. However, this agreement also has other advantages for Colombia. For example, the agreement ensures economic stability, as certain export volumes are now more predictable and easier to plan. Furthermore, this agreement will ensure economic growth in Colombia, as the USA will be added to its own domestic sales market.

Overall, the agreement also poses challenges for the countries involved. The areas of labor law, market access and the impact on individual economic sectors are particularly important. In the area of labor law, there is concern in Colombia that the government will not be able to implement and monitor the legal provisions. Similarly, the position of trade unions is not uniformly supported, which creates social tension. In addition, the USA is concerned that it will not be able to fully exhaust all export opportunities in the agricultural sector, which is also in competition with other free trade agreements Colombia has with Canada, for example. (Villarreal, 2011)

This agreement has also changed the conditions for coca value creation, as it is now available to a much larger sales market. Due to the great importance of Colombian cocaine in the global market, which accounts for 61% of the cocaine produced worldwide, the simplified customs route via the USA makes it easier to smuggle these substances. As a result, the cultivation of cocaine in Colombia has become even more lucrative in economic terms. In the USA, for example, there has been a drastic increase in cocaine-related deaths in recent years, which can be attributed to the simplified and easier conditions for importing goods into the USA. (Statista, 2023) Under softer customs regulations, these make it easier to bring drugs such as cocaine into the USA illegally.

## 6 Solution Design

In this section, possible solutions are developed based on the overarching question *Should something happen somewhere else that we don't want to have here?*. To consider this, the situation is simplified for approachability as follows:

Colombia, a country with a government that has strong laws but is unable to enforce them, is the largest producer of one of the world's most widely consumed drugs. (Statista, 2023) In addition, these produced quantities all come from illegal operations by paramilitary organizations that fight against the government of a country and thus try

Due to the great importance of Colombian cocaine in the global market, which accounts for 61% of the cocaine produced worldwide, the simplified customs route via the USA makes it easier to smuggle these substances. As a result, the cultivation of cocaine in Colombia has become even more lucrative in economic terms.

to achieve their goals by fighting and taking the civilian population hostage.

Is this what the era of globalization is all about? Should things or activities that should not take place in our own countries be outsourced? Surely this is not a solution for a peaceful and fair global community. To bring about a solution or improvement in the situation, a cessation of payment flow from consumers resident abroad could be introduced. This could be achieved through increased controls, for example by customs officials, on the movement of goods across national borders. This would have the effect of making cocaine creation less attractive and thus destroying the business model of those involved in cultivation. In addition, exports of cocaine would be much more costly and risky, which would further increase prices. With this effort, the price of cocaine would automatically be higher and possibly cause consumers to disappear from the market due to high price levels. The shortage of cocaine on the world market would also lead to demand-pull inflation. In this case, the price level of a good rises due to an increase in demand in relation to supply. (Perry, 2008) This type of inflation would be intentional, to reach fewer consumers abroad. Additionally, the necessary adjustments would not take place in Colombia, but abroad. This conclusion shows that the problem cannot only be solved within Colombia, but to a large extent via other states and governments. The para-military organizations involved would no longer have a financial basis, which could lead to their dissolution. However, this project would eliminate jobs due to overproduction of cocaine, as production as it currently exists would no longer be necessary. The almost 150,000 households involved would be forced to pursue legally regulated and state-controlled professions. This would give the state new scope for action in the exercise of state functions due to the increase in tax revenue.

Unfortunately, this concept has a difficulty. This difficulty lies in the implementation of global resolutions. They tend to be broad in scope and aim for the distant future, while trying to set directions and define common ground. (Hazeltine, 2003) Consequently, it would be very challenging to obtain a concretely helpful solution with the help of the UN as a binding and unifying element. In addition,

Colombia's coca economy is of great importance to the global economy.

The health and economic damage and the resulting possible family pain caused by the consequences of cocaine use should not be ignored. There can be both short-term and long-term consequences of using this drug, which can manifest themselves in symptoms such as palpitations, cardiomyopathy, or psychosis. In the long term, it can also lead to depression, stomach damage or liver/kidney damage, and death in the worst case. (Walter, et al., 2023) The solutions outlined above would not only reduce the suffering of the population in Colombia, but also the suffering of many of those affected globally.

## 7 Conclusion

Referring to the research question posed at the beginning, *How does the 2007 free trade agreement between Colombia and the USA influence the situation in Colombia?*, the results of the paper will now be presented. The free trade agreement influences Colombia in almost all areas of its functions. It plays a role in the areas of politics and administration, legislation, the economy and the social and civil society sectors.

Starting with the area of politics, where new diplomatic relations were presented, continuing with the administration, which has taken on other functions in part due to the changing customs conditions with the USA, and in legislation, which has taken on the labor law and environmental law aspects of the agreement. Then there was the transition to the business sector, where new export and import conditions prevail and the formation of trade unions has changed the way companies work. And finally, in the social sphere, with organizations such as the FARC gradually moving from their militant stance to the partypolitical spectrum through negotiations, just as the first trade unions enabled civil society to have a say in labor policy discussions.

However, there are also national and international disadvantages in the coca and cocaine economy. The cocaine smuggling routes resulting from the more open trade routes have had a negative impact on global civil society and the economy. At a national level, the increased quantities of cocaine produced have further increased inequality in

income distribution in the country, which brings with it the potential for social unrest. Regarding the legal situation, it can also be said that it has improved in some areas, particularly at the national level, but has deteriorated globally due to the sharp increase in the health consequences of consumption.



### Daniel Förster

is studying Nonprofit and NGO Management (B.A.) in the 3rd semester at the Environmental Campus Birkenfeld, Trier University of Applied Sciences. He is focused on bridging the gap between the second sector, known as the economy, and the third sector, known as the target group of the civil society. He is using an holistic approach to tackle these challenges.

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