

Appendix A:

The Review Committee analyzed commentary on the Souk, and conducted additional outreach. We spoke to or reviewed input by the following individuals. For your reference, we have included in these appendices a quote synthesis organized by shared framework criteria, and the full Souk discussion stream.

- 1. Burma Project:** Maureen Aung-Thwin (Director)
- 2. Communications:** Patrick Gallahue (Communications Officer, GDPP)
- 3. Fellowships:** Gregg Gonsalves (former OSF Fellow)
- 4. Global Drug Policy Program:**
 - a. Scott Bernstein (Program Officer);
 - b. Ruth Dreifuss (Advisory Board Chair);
 - c. Kasia Malinowski- Sempruch (Director);
 - d. Ethan Nadelmann (Advisory Board Member)
- 5. Human Rights Initiative:** Mary Miller Flowers (Senior Program Officer)
- 6. International Renaissance Foundation:** Olena Kucheruk (Program Manager, IHRD)
- 7. Latin America Program:**
 - a. David Holiday (Senior Regional Advocacy Officer);
 - b. Catesby Holmes (Program Coordinator)
- 8. Open Society Justice Initiative:** Marguerite Angelari (Senior Attorney)
- 9. OSEPI:** Israel Butler (Senior Policy Analyst, Fundamental Rights Justice and Home Affairs)
- 10. OSF-CEU Liaison Office:** Zoltan Kristof Varga (Director)
- 11. OSI-DC Advocacy Office:**
 - a. Stephen Rickard (Director, OSI-DC and OSPC);
 - b. Jasmine Tyler (Senior Policy Analyst)
- 12. OSIFE:** Balazs Denes (Project Director, European Civil Liberties Project)
- 13. OSIWA:**
 - a. Afia Asare-Kyei (Program Manager, Law Justice & Human Rights Program)
 - b. Abdul Tejan-Cole (Executive Director)
- 14. Public Health Program:**
 - a. Jonathan Cohen (Deputy Director);
 - b. Kathleen Foley, (Medical Director, IPCI);
 - c. Daniel Wolfe (Program Director, IHRD)
- 15. Scholarship Programs:** Matthew Wilson (Program Manager)
- 16. Strategy Unit:** Alexandra Sveikauskas (Program Associate)
- 17. U.S. Programs:**
 - a. Adam Culbreath (Program Manager, Soros Justice Fellowships);
 - b. Ruzana Hedges (Program Associate);
 - c. Kima Taylor (Director, National Drug Addiction Treatment & Harm Reduction Program);
 - d. Ken Zimmerman (Director)
- 18. Youth Exchange:** Maryanne Olson (Program Coordinator)

Appendix B: Excerpts from Souk Discussion According to Shared Framework Criteria

To inform our deliberations, the Review Committee analyzed the discussion on The Souk according to the four criteria for a shared framework. Some additional Souk comments were posted after this compilation, but the Souk discussion nevertheless supports our overall conclusion that the shared framework should proceed, while at the same time highlighting a number of challenges and unresolved questions.

Overall, several themes clearly emerged from the Souk discussion: (i) the impact of prevailing drug policy on a stunningly diverse array of local actors and stakeholders, which mirrors OSF's interdisciplinary strength on this issue; **(ii)** the interdependence of geographies on this issue, whether it be inter-regional learning on progressive reform or cross-border implications of drug trafficking routes, which opens up interesting possibilities for collaboration between regional programs; **(iii)** the relationship between global policy and domestic responses (in both directions), which makes the choice of a UN meeting relevant and speaks to our global/local governance and structure; and **(iv)** perhaps most emphatically, the need for a new global narrative on drugs, for which an UNGASS is a demonstrated inflection point, as shown by the previous drugs UNGASS (1998) and the 2001 UNGASS on HIV/AIDS.

Excerpts relevant to each shared framework criterion follow.

1) Is there is a *real and timely opportunity* in the field;

Daniel Wolfe makes a powerful comparison between the 2016 UNGASS on drugs and the 2001 UNGASS on HIV, which was an incontrovertible turning point in the global AIDS response:

Those of us at the 2001 UNGASS on HIV experienced it as a true turning point, the preamble to a new global commitment to treatment for people who had been left to die, and a place where civil society pushed back indifference and cynicism and UN incrementalism and helped align spending and morality.... The value of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs is not likely to be in the political declaration the meeting produces, but in the opportunity in the leadup, during and after to engage media and groups who have suffered consequences of the drug war but not yet spoken out on drug policy. I am reminded of the inspiring video of the "flash mob" that recently gathered in a fish market in Odessa. Section by section, at first almost imperceptibly, musicians joined forces until they were producing a rousing version of "Ode to Joy" that was clearly a rebuke to the old government. I imagine a similar effect possible here: with youth hurt by dishonest drug education in one section, scientists and doctors unable to study or prescribe needed medicines in another, women experiencing the effects of prolonged and disproportionate incarceration in yet another, lawmakers from Portugal and Uruguay who have legislated away criminal penalties to positive effect in yet another, etc, all joining voices to counter the ugly, uninspired song of the drug war and its choirmasters (US, Russia, Japan and Sweden).

Jasmine Tyler echoes this point with a statement that drew widespread agreement on the Souk:

The movement can't afford to fail to organize around this opportunity.... This gathering provides an opportunity for us to move the needle of public opinion for drug policy. While the majority of citizens pay little, to no attention, to treaty reviews, the current debate on legalization in the US indicates that there is a growing appetite for US taxpayers to understand drug policy better and encourage better policy spending practices. Indeed, austerity issues around the globe provide another theme for potential exploration here. Social media campaigns could also play a critical role in garnering media focus that could help influence the dialogue in member countries.

At the same time, there are differing opinions on the Souk about how the success of the UNGASS and the overall shared framework will be measured, a point that should be revisited in the charrette:

Success of this initiative will be measured by key changes in policy at the national and international level, increased levels of research and debate around drug policy reform and effective response to misinformation, and increased levels of support for reform among the public and governments. (Scott Bernstein)

The value of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs is not likely to be in the political declaration the meeting produces, but in the opportunity in the leadup, during and after to engage media and groups who have suffered consequences of the drug war but not yet spoken out on drug policy. (Daniel Wolfe)

We do not need to "win" at the conference to achieve a major victory -- we only need to demonstrate that there is no longer a consensus on the old, repressive approaches. This is a much, much easier goal than trying to produce a document that we actually like. (Steve Rickard)

The importance of using the before, during and after of the UNGASS to shift the global narrative on drugs is repeatedly emphasized, though the content of the counter narrative is not decided and could also be revisited in a charrette:

We very much need, and I think this conference can provide, a unifying narrative that pulls together disparate events like the developments in Uruguay, the Global Commission Report, the Colorado and Washington marijuana referenda. Again, that narrative is simply that people are fed up with suffering the consequences of these failed policies and that the old consensus is broken -- governments are going to experiment. (Steve Rickard)

I fear that by 2016, the current dominant counter-narrative being proposed of the "failed drug war" is not going to be sufficient. While I don't think that marijuana regulation should be the central part of a narrative around UNGASS, the reality is that these experiences present the greatest challenge to debate around the drug conventions...If we don't have a consistent and nuanced (and possibly critical) narrative based on evidence about what these experiments mean, then we risk that gap being filled by either frequently sensationalist anecdotal tales (as some of us witness recently at the Police Executive Research Forum meeting in DC) or half-baked, mediocre analysis from the likes of Kevin Sabet (probably funded from official sources). (David Holliday)

While USP has made a strategic, resource driven decision not to fund research concerning the emerging Washington and Colorado marijuana production and distribution systems(beyond our substantial support to DPA), we note that we believe the U.S. domestic debate is being driven significantly by politics. That in no way diminishes the importance of research regarding U.S. marijuana legalization in global drug policy debates, but it does highlight the need for a shared framework that links work occurring in one place with its significance to reform elsewhere. (Ken Zimmerman)

To some degree, a narrative is already emerging around the Special Session, which reflects the beginning of a withdrawal from the “war on drugs”. We have worked over the last year to promote this narrative and illustrate the divisions that are prevalent in the drug control system. This work has crossed many OSF jurisdictions. At various times our press releases and story pitches have included staff from the Latin American Program, International Harm Reduction Development Program and US Programs, as well as GDPP. Through these efforts, media are recognizing that the special session is more than ‘just another UN meeting’ and have thus far treated it as a transformative moment. So far, we have managed to get UNGASS-related pieces on the front pages of two editions of The Guardian and another page-one piece in The Financial Times. A strong press strategy can set the background music for the event and highlight some of the internal divisions on drug policy, which could embolden governments to pursue alternative strategies regardless of the outcome of UN General Assembly Special Session. (Patrick Gallahue)

2) does the concept exercise a *powerful insight*;

While the distinct insight that would fuel this shared framework is still emerging, several kernels of insight can be found in the Souk discussion. Some of them relate to regional dynamics, such as Catesby Holmes’s important nuancing of the presumption of a “Latin America bloc”:

I think one of the strengths of a shared framework on drug policy would be the possibility of operationalizing OSF’s global network to bring together reform-minded Latin American leaders with their peers from other parts of the world. If we can, as Daniel suggests, build a wide reform platform that could encompass different types of opposition to the status quo, it might create a stronger and more realistic coalition than the theorized Latin American bloc—one that could demonstrate decisively that the consensus has been broken. Frankly, even if that’s all that our shared framework accomplished—forcefully revealing dissent in the ranks—I think it would be an achievement. There is energy coming from Latin America, but anything OSF can do to bring in new voices to join them in the international debate would help.

This is reinforced by Abdul Tejan Cole’s call for a global response to drug trafficking in an interconnected world, which also leverages OSF’s strengths:

West Africa alone cannot address the challenges posed by the drugs trade. There is a need to go beyond a regional approach. In an interconnected world, there is a need to seek a global response. A shared framework provides a unique opportunity for OSF to think globally about this issue. It will

provide a great opportunity for OSF's programs and foundations to share their knowledge and benefit from their respective experiences. OSIWA is fully supportive of this shared framework.

A second set of important insights relates to the hidden and unlikely allies who have not yet spoken out as loudly about the war on drugs as some players.

I imagine a similar effect possible here: with youth hurt by dishonest drug education in one section, scientists and doctors unable to study or prescribe needed medicines in another, women experiencing the effects of prolonged and disproportionate incarceration in yet another, lawmakers from Portugal and Uruguay who have legislated away criminal penalties to positive effect in yet another, etc, all joining voices to counter the ugly, uninspired song of the drug war and its choirmasters (US, Russia, Japan and Sweden). (Daniel Wolfe)

The field and we often define the scope of drug policy narrowly, which acts to limit the number and diversity of participants working to change the current paradigm. Regarding groups that do not self-identify as drug policy organizations, the field tends to engage only with people who use the same language and have the exact same views. This results in missed opportunities, hinders forward progress, and creates a self-made barrier to the field's achieving its ultimate goals. Outsider views are often not understood or embraced simply because people with the same goals are speaking different languages. The Souk and charrette will allow OSF to model what we hope to see in the broader world by inviting and sharing the ideas of people who are not formally in and have never thought of themselves as working in drug policy. Their views can help us shape the work to be more effective with diverse communities and stakeholders. (Kima Taylor)

A third set of developing insights relates to the role of evidence versus emotion in public policy and opinion on drugs. As Kristof Varga notes:

The popular constituency for the war on drugs has been formed more on an emotional than on a factual basis. Simply exposing voters to evidence contrary to their beliefs will do little to bring them over to the other side. In fact a social psychologist may say that such exposure may even reinforce their beliefs. I think it is important to map out the attitudes of the "war on drugs" constituency (the majority of the population in many contexts), and plan our engagement with them accordingly. Engagement could include countering claims with evidence, but other tools as well that take into account the ideological nature of the debate. In particular our tactical approach should include activities that lessen the political risk for elected officials who already understand the evidence, but shy away from supporting reform because they do not want to alienate the conservative vote.

This crucial insight is reinforced by Maryanne Olson's call to engage with youth on campaigns that have the potential to engage in the realm of narrative and culture:

We've found that youth are particularly adept at social media campaigns and also providing physical peer-learning opportunities on college campuses, in night clubs, and in their local communities. But very rarely are these youth-led organizations given space to meaningfully engage in high-level drug policy conversations and we also see a gap in the academic space for training in drug policy at law

schools or other campuses as well as support for youth-led research on drug policies and approaches that affect young people.

This is not to downplay the importance of evidence, for example of the impact of progressive reforms in Colorado, Washington, and Uruguay.

3) can OSF exercise a distinctive role and make a needed contribution that fills important gaps in the field;

Souk participants argue persuasively that OSF's global reach, interdisciplinary approach, track record, connection to civil society/movements, and resources give us a distinctive role in the debate. But they also emphasized that we cannot act alone.

OSF - given its global focus and long-standing commitment to drug policy reform - is best positioned to help channel and build the energy of specific communities to lift up a unified message going into the review and a strategy for follow-up coming out of it. (Jasmine Tyler)

Where is it important for OSF to be in the limelight, and where is it important for us to be in the background? What does our current (and, in my opinion, unwarranted) reputation on drug policy as "legalizers" mean for how we move forward in the public sphere? (David Holliday)

4) does the framework would engage multiple OSF programs and foundations and external partners; and does the proposed project stimulates participants to re-conceptualize an external opportunity in a more holistic frame than they would approach it on their own.

The answer to the first part of this question is evident from the breadth and quality of the Souk discussion, but the answer to the second part is more complex. Thus may depend on what the "holistic idea" is and whether it is consistent with the individual program strategies driving work on drug policy in various parts of the foundation. This should be explored in a charrette.

US Programs is particularly reflective on how a shared framework on drug policy could affect its thinking and strategy. Ken Zimmerman notes:

The next several years are a remarkably important and ripe opportunity for drug policy reform within the United States, as reflected not only in the marijuana legalization steps in Colorado and Washington, but the significance of the ACA (mostly, but not entirely positive), the potential of LEAD to be a leading local model that can engage and broaden alternative approaches, and, more broadly, strong advances in criminal justice reform efforts (such as a deep engagement we have made in California), to name but a few.

Especially in a world of limited resources (financial and human), one question is the extent to which UNGASS 2016 offers the most important or valuable organizing basis for domestic constituencies, especially given the limited interest and value UN-based policies have for most US constituencies. In many respects, these observations are a reflection of the success of recent years, in that issues are

now joined that we wish to influence in a diverse array of settings. This goes to the best role for USP, not about the value of the shared framework for OSF as a whole.

Within USP, we are thinking of the UNGASS not just as a reconsideration of the formal global drug control regime (which we hope it will be), but also as a gathering of policy makers and opinion shapers from around the world to share ideas that they will bring back to their home countries, adapt to their national needs, and pursue in practical ways to reduce drug related harm in a more humane and rational manner – all of which will accelerate the process toward a future reform of the global drug policy framework. There may be ways in which our U.S. based grantees and collaborators can both learn and contribute by participating in the forum presented by the 2016 UNGASS.

Finally, several Souk participants provide sobering reality checks and reminders of the enormous risks of effecting changes in global policy and public opinion on an issue as entrenched and emotional as the “war on drugs.” Kristof Varga reminds us:

While the „war on drugs” regime is cracking it is far from collapse. For example last year the Hungarian government adopted a national drug strategy with the main objective of making Hungary „drug free by 2020”. The implementation of this strategy started with withdrawing funding from needle exchange programs

Steve Rickard ends on a more optimistic note:

Whereas I would normally expect it to be a huge problem to try to move the US government on this, because of Colorado and Washington the State Department is already taking the position that parties to the UN drug treaties should be allowed to experiment and to adopt "flexible" interpretations of their obligations. This is a huge shift. We still have some work to do with the US, but it is now more about improving its views rather than reversing them.

The full Souk discussion from which these excerpts are drawn follows.

Appendix C: Concept Note (Nominator: Scott Bernstein), April 18, 2014

Dear Colleagues, I am posting a nomination for a new shared framework:

Concept Title: **Fostering a New Era in Drug Policy**

Nominator: *Scott Bernstein, Program Officer, Global Drug Policy Program*

Telephone: 212-547-6948 x1948

Email: scott.bernstein@opensocietyfoundations.org

WHAT?

1. ***The opportunity:* What is the opportunity this concept represents?**

As the 2001 AIDS UNGASS was a focal point for coalescing international will towards providing access to HIV treatment, the 2016 United Nations Special Session on drugs (the “Special Session”) represents a unique and transformational inflection point for nations of the world to articulate – individually and in unison - the harms of the current global drug policy regime, and to imagine and describe alternative policies that reflect Open Society principles of democracy, human rights, respect for the rule of law, public health and the dignity of individuals.

2. ***Goals and strategies:* What is this concept trying to achieve? What are some of the initial strategies you envision for getting there?**

Our aim would be to leverage the resources and prestige of the Open Society Foundations to mobilize an international movement that would have the momentum and force to effect substantive change in global drug policy. There is now evidence that the long-held consensus supporting current drug policies (the “war on drugs”) is beginning to crack. These policies have led to a widespread global public health crisis of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C epidemics, mass incarceration, organized criminal violence, environmental degradation, and draconian law enforcement measures - including the death penalty - for drug offences. These impacts have been disproportionately experienced by the most marginalized groups in society, including the world’s poorest individuals and minorities. A strategic effort across the regions and programs represented by OSF targeted at the Special Session, however, has the potential to tip the balance in the drug policy debate in the right direction and lead to substantive change at the international level.

Why?

1. ***OSF Value:* Why should OSF work on this? What is our distinctive advantage(s) on this issue?**
2. ***Why Now?* What is the importance of this effort to the world now?**
3. ***Why Shared Framework?* How does your concept lend itself to a shared framework formulation? In other words, what is the added value of addressing this issue by using a shared framework approach?**

OSF is, undoubtedly, already the largest supporter of drug policy reform in the world, including funding extensive efforts around civil society advocacy, harm reduction, criminal law reform, and access to justice. There are currently several regional and thematic programs that describe all or part of their grant making and advocacy work as “drug policy” and often work in collaboration with each other. This *shared idea*, however, has never been articulated as a primary mission or focus of the foundations. There has never been a common goal around which all of the relevant and interested OSF programs could coalesce - in which all of them have a crucial role to play.

But now, with the upcoming Special Session and the growing understanding of the harms of the current system across the world, the time is very opportune for OSF to marshal our resources to this common goal. Greater strategic collaboration across the organization promises not only greater efficiency of efforts already in motion, but an opportunity to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Fundamental change in drug policy, though, will not happen without a significant global effort -- and time is short. Only an entity with the resources, expertise and relationships of the Open Society Foundations has the potential to mobilize such international movement. One way or another the 2016 UN Special Session on Drugs will be a watershed moment. It will either represent a turning point in the effort to bring about change or it will serve as a critical "firebreak" against those efforts that lead to a re-entrenchment in the *status quo* with incalculable consequences for vulnerable people across the globe. A strategic effort across the regions and programs represented by OSF targeted at the Special Session, however, has the potential to tip the balance the right direction.

How?

1. ***Internal and External Actors Engaged:* What are some internal OSF entities (programs, offices, instruments/tools) and external actors you envision would be relevant to the concept strategy and why?**
2. ***Outstanding Questions?* What are some issues or questions to which further attention could help inform this concept/process?**

In order to foster the greatest opportunity for substantive change, a concerted effort with additional resources will be needed to support and build the capacity of civil society to engage in research and advocacy in nations in key areas of the world, including Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. Likewise, it will be important to support civil society actors and governments organized around common goals, including youth, public health, the environment, poverty and gender. There is the potential for several regional and advocacy offices as well as thematic programs within OSF to join this collaboration, including IHRD, LAP, US Programs, Youth Exchange, Washington Office, HRI, OSJI, OSIWA, etc. There is also a great potential to use this effort to build the capacity of external actors to facilitate the most effective impact at the international level, including current grantees of OSF. Consequently, the collaboration imagined here would involve contributions from several programs in areas that where each determines it can best contribute to articulated objectives. But ultimately we will need a high level of overall coordination in order to amplify our efforts and ensure that programs allocate resources in a strategic and efficient way.

Results?

1. **If this effort moves forward, what would success look like at the end of four years? Describe specific results or products that might be achieved.**
2. **Risk Analysis/External Challenges: What might prevent this effort from working in the way you foresee?**

While it cannot be argued that the state of the current drug policy advocates mimics the organized civil society efforts in preparation for the AIDS UNGASS or Beijing Conference on Women, effective OSF collaboration would significantly contribute to serious efforts to orchestrate solutions consistent with human rights and health. Success of this initiative will be measured by key changes in policy at the national and international level, increased levels of research and debate around drug policy reform and effective response to misinformation, and increased levels of support for reform among the public and governments. This collaboration would optimally be structured on a three-year timeline, leading up to the Special Session in 2016 and in the third year, amplifying the outcome of that session across the globe after its conclusion. The strategy, however, requires input from multiple partners within OSF in order to take best advantage of opportunities.

As with any campaign for bringing about fundamental global change, there are risks. One risk is that our efforts could fuel backlash from anti-reform forces that leads to an entrenchment of the harmful *status quo*. Although these forces are already marshaling their resources to prevent meaningful change, our strategy would be to enhance coordination and cooperation among nations and partners supporting reform to amplify reform voices to effectively counter anti-reform voices with evidence.

Appendix D: Full Souk Discussion

Posted by [Daniel Wolfe](#) on Monday, April 21 2014 12:50

Given that this is the first such UN meeting since 1998, and that the last "UNGASS" made no mention of HIV or overdose or hepatitis C, of the suffering caused by mass incarceration and punitive drug "treatment," or of the fact that there is no evidence that a drug free world is achievable/desirable, I think engagement is critical. The UN agency (UNODC) that usually drives the discussion is dominated by a crime and drug control ideology, but this meeting will be in NY (not their home base of Vienna), and if we work at country level (in multiple countries) beforehand, we have a chance to disrupt that narrative.

Those of us at the 2001 UNGASS on HIV experienced it as a true turning point, the preamble to a new global commitment to treatment for people who had been left to die, and a place where civil society pushed back indifference and cynicism and UN incrementalism and helped align spending and morality.

As you say, the value of the 2016 UNGASS on drugs is not likely to be in the political declaration the meeting produces, but in the opportunity in the lead up, during and after to engage media and groups who have suffered consequences of the drug war but not yet spoken out on drug policy. I am reminded of the inspiring video of the "flash mob" that recently gathered in a fish market in Odessa. Section by section, at first almost imperceptibly, musicians joined forces until they were producing a rousing version of "Ode to Joy" that was clearly a rebuke to the old government.

I imagine a similar effect possible here: with youth hurt by dishonest drug education in one section, scientists and doctors unable to study or prescribe needed medicines in another, women experiencing the effects of prolonged and disproportionate incarceration in yet another, lawmakers from Portugal and Uruguay who have legislated away criminal penalties to positive effect in yet another, etc, all joining voices to counter the ugly, uninspired song of the drug war and its choirmasters (US, Russia, Japan and Sweden).

Orchestrating such a response would cut across multiple OSF programs and countries, and is beyond any one program or initiative. But we could/should work together (with partners and grantees) to shape a platform ample enough to bring people together, but focused enough to note that we need meaningful reform. We would be happy to work on this-- by rallying doctors and scientists, trying to identify two countries in the former Soviet Union able to speak out on the need for a policy rethink at the UN, connecting US and international harm reduction activists, etc. I also have some thoughts on a simple, five- or six-point platform, but don't want to let my enthusiasm run wild in the Souk.

Daniel and IHRD

Posted by [Maryanne Olson](#) on Tuesday, April 22 2014 13:30

Young people are among the most directly affected by drug policies that criminalize users and small-time dealers; drug policies that are rooted in criminalization contribute to high rates of imprisonment of young people and harmful interactions between youth and police. As Daniel points out as well, young people are subjected to dishonest drug education which vilifies drug use rather than provide information and in many parts of the world even access for young people on the best treatment options.

For the last several years we've supported several youth-led organizations (including SSDP, Youth RISE, Espolea, ProDerechos, and YODA) to both advocate on drug policy in their respective communities and also organize awareness campaigns for their peers around issues related to harm reduction and drug policy that directly affects youth. We've found that youth are particularly adept at social media campaigns and also providing physical peer-learning opportunities on college campuses, in night clubs, and in their local communities. But very rarely are these youth-led organizations given space to meaningfully engage in high-level drug policy conversations and we also see a gap in the academic space for training in drug policy at law schools or other campuses as well as support for youth-led research on drug policies and approaches that affect young people.

We see this shared framework as an opportunity to work across OSF's programs and foundations to help build meaningful connections between traditional civil society actors and researchers with youth leaders, academics, and youth-led organizations around shared goals for the UNGASS. We feel that youth could contribute to a global campaign through locally-crafted awareness campaigns around specific global key topics, as delegates from the civil society community with a fresh, forward-thinking perspective, and as allies with traditional OSF partners on-the-ground. Young people themselves could learn from mentoring opportunities with established civil society organizations, access to research and educational tools to assist them in their local campaigns, and trainings to help youth advocate at a high-level on these issues.

Maryanne Olson for the Youth Exchange

Posted by [Matthew Wilson](#) on Thursday, April 24 2014 13:12

Despite the tremendous scale of the drug economy and its intersection with nearly every realm of psycho-social, health, and public policy, formal academic engagement on this issue has been limited. Scholarship Programs (SP) had the opportunity to sit in on GDPP's recent portfolio review and, as their materials point out, there are no specialized graduate degree programs in existence focused on drug policy. Furthermore, although there is broad recognition among academic and policy researchers that punitive approaches to drugs have not only failed, but in many instances aggravated harms, a 2012 LSE IDEAS report notes that very little 'serious scholarship' has been conducted.

One of the main thrusts of the drug reform movement is to bring evidence based research to bear on shaping future policy choices. Drug policy intersects with a number of academic disciplines, many of which SP has engaged with for years: law, economics, health, public policy, psycho/socio-logy, social work, media, etc. In the lead-up and follow-up to the 2016 UNGASS, SP may be able to contribute by helping to increasing the research expertise of national level academics, researchers and practitioners in the drug reform movement.

GDPP, LAP, and others at OSF have been working to develop research centers at accredited universities in South/North America, Europe, and Asia for a number of years. SP has in the past supported faculty and career professionals interested in 6-12 month placements at accredited universities to engage in research and curriculum development that we hope will feed back into recipients' home country context. It could be interesting to think of these OSF supported academic centers as potential hosting sites for mid-level scholars and early to mid-level career practitioners from highly effected countries across South America, West Africa, and Southeast Asia (among others).

By drawing on OSF's extensive network of drug policy activists and academics, SP may be able to contribute to this shared framework by supporting research placements at GDPP's existing university network in the hope of increasing the capacity of national level actors. It might be interesting to utilize the CEU short-course or others currently under development as either a kick-off or cap-stone to these placements. SP also have a large number of alumni who may be able to be tapped as a resource. Some alumni may already be working on related issues and others might be interested in further training to specialize in this field. Future, current or recent scholarship recipients might also be interested in an internship placement at one of OSF's partner organizations working on drug policy reform. By engaging in this shared framework, SP might be able to develop some combination of program elements that build research capacity in affected countries, supports research centers by supply national level expertise, or bolster current civil society efforts by bringing new actors into the movement.

Matt Wilson - Scholarships, Program Manager

Posted by [Zoltan Kristof Varga](#) on Friday, April 25 2014 08:29

This is a very important objective. I commend you on your courage to take on the United Nations. I can attest to the timeliness of this framework proposal. While the „war on drugs” regime is cracking it is far from collapse. For example last year the Hungarian government adopted a national drug strategy with the main objective of making Hungary „drug free by 2020”. The implementation of this strategy started with withdrawing funding from needle exchange programs.

There is little room in the proposal framework for the „how”. Thus it may be unfair to pick on your single hint at methodology: „counter anti-reform voices with evidence.” However in the spirit of constructive debate I'd suggest that evidence could play a less useful role in this struggle than we wish. The popular constituency for the war on drugs has been formed more on an emotional than on a factual basis. Simply exposing voters to evidence contrary to their beliefs will do little to bring them over to the other side. In fact a social psychologist may say that such exposure may even reinforce their beliefs. I think it is important to map out the attitudes of the “war on drugs” constituency (the majority of the population in many contexts), and plan our engagement with them accordingly. Engagement could include countering claims with evidence, but other tools as well that take into account the ideological nature of the debate. In particular our tactical approach should include activities that lessen the political risk for elected officials who already understand the evidence, but shy away from supporting reform because they do not want to alienate the conservative vote.

Finally, I'd like to underlie the potential in working with the Central European University developing this framework. I have been building academic interest and capacity at CEU for drug policy research and teaching with colleagues at the Drug Policy Program since 2012. In particular the CEU School of Public Policy is developing an MA degree in drug policy and hired an expert to its faculty (Julia Buxton). CEU Legal Studies run a course this year entitled “Human Rights and Drug Policy” and also has some professors with interest and knowledge in the topic (Sejal Pramar). I propose to involve interested faculty from at least these two CEU entities into this debate. We are in a period when alternative drug policies are being implemented worldwide and it is of great importance to do new research on their performance. I'd be happy to assist in bringing these experts into the discussion, if agreed.

Best,
Kristof

Posted by [Catesby Holmes](#) on Friday, April 25 2014 14:27

One common perception in the reform community is that in recent years Latin America has taken the lead in challenging the status quo on drug policy, from marijuana regulation in Uruguay to reformist rhetoric from Guatemala and Colombia. This thinking suggests some sort of regional unity around the drug issue, and possibly a Latin American bloc that could come together to demand changes to the Conventions at UNGASS 2016.

This is good rhetoric for spurring debate and getting media coverage on the issue, but it's not necessarily the reality. In March at the Informal Dialogues on Drug Policy in Quito, Ecuador—a project organized by WOLA and TNI and co-funded by LAP and GDPP that's attended by UN and OAS delegates, drug czars, and civil society advocates from across the region—I got a somewhat different impression. UNGASS was indeed a major topic of conversation, but among the opinions I heard put forth were:

- When did the UN system get more power than local heads of state? When the UN only serves to reinforce status quo, and it can't be altered to meet local needs, it's not working—forget the UN, it's an undemocratic institution
- Latin America needs to have realistic goals for UNGASS 2016, one of those might be having a bloc of countries, not just Latin American, that agree on a proposal with a minimal but achievable goal, like creating a committee to review the Conventions
- The Conventions need complete reform, everyone should withdraw from their obligations and rejoin in the Bolivian style, dissenting on the grounds of patrimony, development, diversity, and sovereignty

In other words, there is no a Latin American bloc, at least not currently. There *is* widespread disagreement with the UN conventions, but for different reasons (Bolivia on coca, Uruguay's on marijuana legalization, Guatemala re violence and trafficking). Plus, states contend with different domestic political realities, hold differing opinions about the importance of the UN, and disagree on how to approach UNGASS. While I'm only familiar with the Latin American context, I take it from Daniel's and others' comments that something similar holds true in other regions.

So I think one of the strengths of a shared framework on drug policy would be the possibility of operationalizing OSF's global network to bring together reform-minded Latin American leaders with their peers from other parts of the world. If we can, as Daniel suggests, build a wide reform platform that could encompass different types of opposition to the status quo, it might create a stronger and more realistic coalition than the theorized Latin American bloc—one that could demonstrate decisively that the consensus has been broken. Frankly, even if that's all that our shared framework accomplished—forcefully revealing dissent in the ranks—I think it would be an achievement. There is energy coming from Latin America, but anything OSF can do to bring in new voices to join them in the international debate would help.

I think there is already excellent collaboration between OSF's various drug policy-related network programs, and GDPP has been working hard to coordinate internationally around UNGASS 2016. But as Scott proposes, a shared framework facilitates a much wider and simultaneously more targeted collaboration, bringing into the conversation more network programs and national foundations that may not currently work together (LAP, at least, currently works primarily with thematic programs, not other regional programs). It also opens the door to creating new and different cross-regional linkages between OSF's many local civil-society partners, something LAP's grantees have often requested of us. Under

LAP's new regional director, Pedro Abramovay, one of LAP's new mandates as a regional program is to be an integrator, connecting OSF to Latin America and vice-versa. So a shared framework in drug policy would fit well with this new goal and seem to be strategic for LAP to dedicate time and resources to, though I'll leave it to others to discuss the concrete inputs, if and when the time comes.

Posted by [Alexandra Sveikauskas](#) on Monday, April 28 2014 10:12

The current "war on drugs" approach is, in effect, a war waged against some of most marginalized and vulnerable people, from drug users and poor farmers, to petty dealers and youth. Many of us have witnessed firsthand the destructive results of these punitive policies---mass incarceration, rights violations, impediments to basic health services, and the destruction of the environment. With the upcoming 2016 United Nations Special Session comes a key opportunity; how can OSF most effectively take advantage of this moment and work together to shift the existing drug policy paradigm?

On Wednesday, March 26, twenty-three participants from eight programs (including Global Drug Policy, Latin America Program, OSI-DC Advocacy Office, Public Health Program, U.S. Programs, Youth Exchange, the Office of the President, and the Strategy Unit), came together to develop a clearer collective picture of the potential scope and frame of OSF collaboration on drug policy reform. The group discussed how OSF could most effectively coordinate and align its work in the context of the upcoming 2016 UNGASS, as well as independent of UNGASS. Together with Ruth Dreifuss, UNGASS expert and Global Drug Policy Advisory Board Member, the group identified four key areas of collaboration:

- 1. *Civil Society/NGO Engagement***
- 2. *Preparing and Supporting Government and Government Agencies***
- 3. *Promoting National-Level Approaches & Models of Drug Policy Reform***
- 4. *Framing and Campaigns***

Key next steps from this meeting included:

- 1) Developing a Drug Policy Shared Framework proposal, and through the process, strengthening and coordinating a common OSF platform on drug policy reform.
- 2) Developing a concrete strategy, set of objectives and outcomes OSF wants to achieve from UNGASS, as well as a wider strategy that goes beyond UNGASS.

To learn more, please see the [meeting notes](#) and [data capture](#), as well as the [pre-meeting information sheets and meeting agenda](#). For your convenience, these files are also stored in the Drug Policy Folder in the Files section of the Souk.

Posted by [Jasmine Tyler](#) on Thursday, May 01 2014 14:17

The 2016 Special Session on the drug treaties offers OSF, and allies around the world, an opportunity to advance a new narrative around the failures of prohibitionist policies and their impact on communities across the globe. The movement can't afford to fail to organize around this opportunity. Whether it's around the impact on mass incarceration and the New Jim Crow, the heroin and prescription drug overdose crisis, the lack of access to sterile drug preparation equipment, or on compulsory treatment,

changes have begun to take hold that challenge the tactics - and indeed the very premise - of the "war on drugs" in the US and abroad.

The chorus of voices opposed to the existing drug policy regime is growing, but must be bolstered. Parent groups, faith-based leaders, and the scientific community are just a few of the types of groups who have recently found their voice and could be mobilized for maximum impact. OSF - given its global focus and long-standing commitment to drug policy reform - is best positioned to help channel and build the energy of specific communities to lift up a unified message going into the review and strategy for follow-up coming out of it.

This public education and joint action opportunity should not be overlooked and, as others have pointed out, is not limited to the UN Special Session. The time leading up to – and equally important following - will provide an opportunity to not only say what is wrong but to lift up innovative approaches being undertaken around the world to prove there is in fact another way - a new era in drug policy. This gathering provides an opportunity for us to move the needle of public opinion for drug policy. While the majority of citizens pay little, to no attention, to treaty reviews, the current debate on legalization in the US indicates that there is a growing appetite for US taxpayers to understand drug policy better and encourage better policy spending practices. Indeed, austerity issues around the globe provide another theme for potential exploration here. Social media campaigns could also play a critical role in garnering media focus that could help influence the dialogue in member countries.

The Washington Office is well situated to host lead-up and follow-up events and mobilize members of Congress, think tanks and thought leaders, and civil society groups to help influence the US delegation, as well as other member countries. Leveraging key relationships within the Obama Administration, will also be critical to ensuring the dialogue surrounding the 2016 review acknowledges and promotes the growing momentum for drug policy change around the world.

Posted by [Stephen Rickard](#) on Thursday, May 01 2014 20:48

In addition to Jasmine's comments -- which I fully support -- I want to add some of the reasons why I have personally become enthusiastic about this proposed shared framework.

First, of course, is the fact that I share everyone's horror over the continuing disaster of repressive global drug policies. With whole countries on the brink, the consequences of ignoring sound policy become more apparent every day.

Second, while I do not normally put great stock in UN conferences -- especially as a vehicle to try to move US policy -- this one is going to happen whether or not we engage. And we know that there are going to be well-organized, powerful interests seeking to use it to reinforce the idea that countries like Uruguay are outlaws. Beyond that, we do not need to "win" at the conference to achieve a major victory -- we only need to demonstrate that there is no longer a consensus on the old, repressive approaches. This is a much, much easier goal than trying to produce a document that we actually like.

Third, as Jasmine notes, we very much need, and I think this conference can provide, a unifying narrative that pulls together disparate events like the developments in Uruguay, the Global Commission Report, the Colorado and Washington marijuana referenda. Again, that narrative is simply that people are fed

up with suffering the consequences of these failed policies and that the old consensus is broken -- governments are going to experiment.

Finally, whereas I would normally expect it to be a huge problem to try to move the US government on this, because of Colorado and Washington the State Department is already taking the position that parties to the UN drug treaties should be allowed to experiment and to adopt "flexible" interpretations of their obligations. This is a huge shift. We still have some work to do with the US, but it is now more about improving its views rather than reversing them.

Taken together, I think there is a real opportunity here, but it will take strong collaborative efforts to take advantage of it, or the forces of repression will leave the conference in 2016 having persuaded the press and much of the world that the consensus on criminalizing drug users is still strong outside of a few, isolated pariahs.

Posted by [David Holiday](#) on Friday, May 02 2014 08:51

On behalf of myself and Pedro Abramovay, I want to support the idea of a shared framework focused on UNGASS, and also offer a few comments.

I agree with Steve that the shift in US policy is important -- the idea that the international conventions allow for some degree of experimentation -- but I fear that by 2016, the current dominant counter-narrative being proposed of the "failed drug war" is not going to be sufficient. While I don't think that marijuana regulation should be the central part of a narrative around UNGASS, the reality is that these experiences present the greatest challenge to debate around the drug conventions.

And while we might debate whether or not marijuana regulation fits within or is taking place outside of the international conventions, the fact is that by 2016 the state of Colorado will be two years into a system of legally regulated marijuana, with Washington and Uruguay falling in behind. By 2016, the issue will be -- so, what has experimentation yielded in this area? While two years is a short time frame to arrive at any conclusive judgments, it is incumbent on drug policy reform advocates to offer an appraisal of how these experiments are faring. The models in each of these are very different, and everyone is looking, in particular, to Colorado, since it is the first.

LAP and other institutions are focused on supporting a serious evaluation of the Uruguayan experience, but that effort -- with no previous history of medical marijuana, an ability to restrict advertising, and the ability to maintain a state monopoly on production -- may end up being *sui generis*, particularly with respect to the US. (NOTE: The regulations come out today, so more to come on that.)

Unfortunately, perhaps for lack of funds, OSF has not made a concomitant effort to support research and evaluation of the two US statewide experiments. I would differ from Zoltan's comments on the value of evidence, at least in this instance. If we don't have a consistent and nuanced (and possibly critical) narrative based on evidence about what these experiments mean, then we risk that gap being filled by either frequently sensationalist anecdotal tales (as some of us witness recently at the Police Executive Research Forum meeting in DC) or half-baked, mediocre analysis from the likes of Kevin Sabet (probably funded from official sources). NIDA has a call out for proposals, and those will be important, but only in the longer term; WOLA has leveraged some new funding, most of which will be implemented by Brookings, but that will mostly look at what needs to be done in terms of evaluation; Washington

state has a funding stream written into the legislation to support evaluation, but only once taxes are collected from marijuana sales, which will only start this summer. Baseline studies were not planned, and are not funded. LAP has planned exchanges between evaluators in Uruguay and the two states, but it is actually hard to find people or institutions who are actually carrying out evaluations in Washington and Colorado!

This week in Washington some of us attended the bi-annual meeting of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the OAS. In the past year, we've seen a real debate take place among some member states in the region. Countries are starting to utter the phrase "harm reduction" when speaking about health policies, and everyone has their eyes on Colorado, Washington and Uruguay. The existence of these real-life changes necessitates a more serious debate, but it is one that I don't think we're prepared to engage in at the moment without more dedicated resources toward evaluation.

My second point is that we need to give great thought, should this move forward, to coordination - not just among ourselves, but with our civil society counterparts. Where is it important for OSF to be in the limelight, and where is it important for us to be in the background? What does our current (and, in my opinion, unwarranted) reputation on drug policy as "legalizers" mean for how we move forward in the public sphere?

Third, implicit in what many have said is that, with the shift in US and intl discourse toward a public health approach, it feels that we should go to battle in the war of ideas over what constitutes a good public health approach. Does continued discussion of the "failed drug war" play into the Administration's framing of the issue (we're not drug warriors, nor legalizers, but rather in the middle and favor a public health approach). Rather than let that kind of frame structure the debate, perhaps we should avoid the rhetoric and tackle head-on the positives and negatives of current public health approaches. I think that's what we're doing in many cases, but I'm not sure we're being explicit about it.

Looking forward to further discussion.

Posted by [Ken Zimmerman](#) on Thursday, May 08 2014 17:52

On behalf of USP, I want to add to the conversation to say that I support the development of a shared framework around OSF engagement in the 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session on global drug policy, although with a few questions that probably have to do more with the what, who, and how than the central premise behind the proposal. Certainly, as Scott Bernstein has eloquently described, there is ample reason to become engaged in UNGASS 2016 for OSF, even if we are skeptical about reversal of UN (and US) policy in this regard. The opportunity to concentrate attention, build coherence among core partners, organize a set of needed activities around a common frame all support the development of a shared framework.

While we are supportive, several of our questions concern how USP might best engage with it. As Steve noted in his comment (which we endorse), some of the core focus regarding US policy will be in the foreign policy realm that falls more naturally within the realm of OSI-DC than USP. Beyond this capacity point, we believe the next several years are a remarkably important and ripe opportunity for drug policy reform within the United States, as reflected not only in the marijuana legalization steps in Colorado and Washington, but the significance of the ACA (mostly, but not entirely positive), the potential of LEAD to be a leading local model that can engage and broaden alternative approaches, and, more broadly, strong advances in criminal justice reform efforts (such as a deep engagement we have made in

California), to name but a few. Especially in a world of limited resources (financial and human), one question is the extent to which UNGASS 2016 offers the most important or valuable organizing basis for domestic constituencies, especially given the limited interest and value UN-based policies have for most US constituencies. In many respects, these observations are a reflection of the success of recent years, in that issues are now joined that we wish to influence in a diverse array of settings. This goes to the best role for USP, not about the value of the shared framework for OSF as a whole.

I want to emphasize that we are interested in exploring ways we can be supportive and involved consistent with the above question. These might include expanding the ways in which core grantees of USP outside of the drug reform world (e.g., the Center for American Progress, or the mainstream civil rights groups) might engage, or helping connect the international efforts with U.S. constituencies currently uninformed by their efforts, or helping determine ways in which existing USP assets and networks can help raise attention and profile on something that is taking place (after all) right in our backyard. There are multiple others as well that I am sure would emerge in the context of shared framework development.

In addition to this question about USP role, other questions or observations we have include the following (even as I encourage my USP colleagues to offer others):

What, specifically, can OSF realistically aspire to achieve by engaging with the UN process? Within USP, we are thinking of the UNGASS not just as a reconsideration of the formal global drug control regime (which we hope it will be), but also as a gathering of policy makers and opinion shapers from around the world to share ideas that they will bring back to their home countries, adapt to their national needs, and pursue in practical ways to reduce drug related harm in a more humane and rational manner – all of which will accelerate the process toward a future reform of the global drug policy framework. There may be ways in which our U.S. based grantees and collaborators can both learn and contribute by participating in the forum presented by the 2016 UNGASS.

How would this shared framework help achieve our purpose during the UN process and, beyond 2016, especially knowing the complexities of policy development processes in the UNGASS context? We do believe that effectively influencing the course of the UNGASS on global drug policy is appropriate for a shared framework, since no single program has the capacity or coverage to address all of the variables and stakeholder interests at play. While USP has made a strategic, resource driven decision not to fund research concerning the emerging Washington and Colorado marijuana production and distribution systems (beyond our substantial support to DPA), we note that we believe the U.S. domestic debate is being driven significantly by politics. That in no way diminishes the importance of research regarding U.S. marijuana legalization in global drug policy debates, but it does highlight the need for a shared framework that links work occurring in one place with its significance to reform elsewhere.

We also specifically ascribe to Steve's point that we win in this effort by demonstrating that there is no longer monolithic support for punitive drug policies. Finally, we agree with Jasmine's point that OSF can't afford to not engage in this process. We should do so in as strategic and impactful a way as we can.

We look forward to further conversation.

Posted by [Kima Joy Taylor](#) on Sunday, May 11 2014 20:15

I agree with Ken's earlier comments about USP's capacity and role. I also think this shared framework offers an opportunity for OSF programs to establish a more coherent shared vision of the foundation's drug policy goals and a more comprehensive approach to OSF's current and future drug policy work. With the 2016 UNGASS as a focal point, this work with each other, our grantees and other partners could become much better aligned, relevant and impactful. I share Ken's concerns about the type of engagement that USP can promise financially, but we could work with grantees and others who are engaged.

I hope that we can proactively discuss three areas of concern during this process – two general and one specific:

1. The definition of drug policy and what constitutes a "drug policy advocate"

The field and we often define the scope of drug policy narrowly, which acts to limit the number and diversity of participants working to change the current paradigm. Regarding groups that do not self-identify as drug policy organizations, the field tends to engage only with people who use the same language and have the exact same views. This results in missed opportunities, hinders forward progress, and creates a self-made barrier to the field's achieving its ultimate goals. Outsider views are often not understood or embraced simply because people with the same goals are speaking different languages. The Souk and charrette will allow OSF to model what we hope to see in the broader world by inviting and sharing the ideas of people who are not formally in and have never thought of themselves as working in drug policy. Their views can help us shape the work to be more effective with diverse communities and stakeholders.

2. The breath of health-centered alternative policies that constitute meaningful drug police reform.

Often the field limits itself to condemnation of the current drug policy, offering no solutions or only partial solutions – which are much the same thing. I hope this conversation can help us support and advocate for a breath of comprehensive alternatives that encompass both non-punitive *public* health responses and *individual* health responses. While engagement of the medical system to meet drug user needs is one component, I would argue that we need to establish a much broader definition of "health" in relation to drug use, including: health as housing, education, and health care services inside and outside of formal health structures, community development and more. Similarly, a narrow focus on "public health" fails to acknowledge the full breath of services needed to protect and improve individual health. One strength of some harm reduction approaches – e.g., sterile syringe distribution – is that they offer practical solutions that bridge public and individual health to address human needs in both realms. In addition, easy access to community based pneumonia care is also a form of harm reduction which can bridge these realms but which in the US has not been easily accessible for drug users. I think the broader drug policy reform field needs to expand its ability to provide positive solutions that address the full the range of drugs (i.e., not just particular high profile drugs), all methods of drug use and the full range of individual and public health impacts.

3. The harm caused by punitive drug policies to pregnant and parenting women who use drugs:

Finally, as many of you know, I hope we can touch base on a key lightning rod in drug policy: women of childbearing age who use substances. Punitive responses to drug use by this population often go unchallenged, whether because of the intensely politicized issue of reproductive freedom or because this population faces intensified stigmatization even in comparison to other drug users. But, even when these women are not being dragged into the formal criminal justice system, they can face a range of extreme civil, social and other consequences that lead to the destruction of their lives and negative outcomes for their families and child.

I look forward to a productive conversation!

Posted by [Abdul Tejan-Cole](#) on Monday, May 12 2014 11:24

Drug trafficking constitutes a serious security threat in West Africa given the wide range of its implications on governance and human security. Over the past few years, the coastal states of West Africa (particularly Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Cape Verde, Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia and Senegal) have become major transit routes used by drug barons shipping their loads to southern Europe. Since the mid-1990s, in Central and West Africa, trafficking in hard drugs has become a booming business, with increasingly serious side effects: although the production and consumption of cannabis and other soft drugs has always been present to some extent, the introduction and trans-shipment of hard drugs from outside the region has required the necessary complicity of local actors and has had a significant detrimental impact on society. Its effects on peace, governance, security, political stability and development in West Africa has been well documented.

OSIWA has been working with the GDDP to provide support for the West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) - Commission on the Impact of Drug Trafficking on Governance, Security, and Development in West Africa. Chaired by the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, the WACD seeks to inter alia examine ways and means to enhance the political priority accorded to drug trafficking and its impact on West Africa; developing evidence based policy recommendations and to promote regional ownership, engage with existing initiatives and build on and support the valuable work of regional and other partners. The Commission will launch its report in Dakar, Senegal, on June 12. The launch of the report and a planned meeting of civil society activists will provide an opportunity to galvanize CSOs in order to mobilize a critical mass of actors, facilitate public dialogue and educate the public on the impact of drugs in the sub-region.

West Africa alone cannot address the challenges posed by the drugs trade. There is a need to go beyond a regional approach. In an interconnected world, there is a need to seek a global response. A shared framework provides a unique opportunity for OSF to think globally about this issue. It will provide a great opportunity for OSF's programs and foundations to share their knowledge and benefit from their respective experiences. OSIWA is fully supportive of this shared framework.

Posted by [Patrick Gallahue](#) on Wednesday, May 14 2014 16:05

I also wanted to add on behalf of the Communications Office, there has always been a willingness and interest here to promote evidence-based drug policies through events, media and the web.

Communications will be a critical component of the UN General Assembly Special Session on drugs as it is all too easy for the debates to be obscured by the density of international processes. With respect to the concerns already voiced in earlier comments, some clarification during the charrette or planning process might include: (i) the change being sought; (ii) the audiences we're trying to reach; (iii) the tools being used to reach them; (iv) the action we're asking these audiences to take.

There have been many thoughtful comments here about how realistic change can be at the United Nations. Engaging the UN may be most effectively carried out by working in certain countries' capitals in order to mobilize Member States. If it is expected that Uruguay, for instance, would be a potential "champion", then what activities could we support in Montevideo to mobilize the government to be an outspoken advocate in the lead-up to 2016? Alternately, if Canada is a potential antagonist, what could we do in Ottawa and elsewhere to hold the government to account?

The Communications Office is prepared to support a Shared Framework on drug policy. However, to have the greatest result, it might be helpful to identify the following:

- Priority media markets: With respect to media on UNGASS, the Communications Department has so far led an "aerial attack" (for lack of a better term). We have engaged high-level press likely to disperse attention as widely as possible (Economist, Financial Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera). While this kind of press will get the attention of high-level policymakers based in New York, Vienna and Geneva, it will not necessarily penetrate local markets as successfully to put pressure on governments in capitals. If there are priority governments that can be UNGASS champions (or villains that need to be confronted), then a "ground game" may be necessary. If that is the case, then engaging the media in those priority countries will be critical. To do that we would need to (a) identify those countries (b) if language is a barrier, produce cost estimates for media consultants in said countries (c) identify local partners in priority countries to carry out certain visibility actions. If OSF is leading on this, and our work is intended to be primarily public-facing, we may even consider hiring temporary field organizers in these countries. They could carry out activities such as (a) organizing town halls about drug policy reform (b) lining up endorsements (c) asking government representatives questions at public events (d) organizing meetings with editorial boards; etc.
- Protagonists: Are there leaders we want to promote? For example, Mexican Poet Javier Sicilia, whose son was murdered by drug traffickers, has been a powerful voice for the victims of drug-related violence. In Washington State, former US Attorneys Kate Pflaumer and John McKay were important advocates for reform. Communications can help potentially promote these voices through op-eds, events and publicity. These protagonists would ideally have some national prominence or legitimacy in their priority countries (see point a) and have the ability to humanize an otherwise cold UN process.
- Desired products: Communications has traditionally identified products and producers with a track record of making high quality materials. These may include video animations, short documentaries or booklets. In addition, Communications can work to ensure these products are placed on desirable platforms (see for example ["Everyone Has the Right to Be Recognized Before the Law"](#) which was placed in BuzzFeed or "Meet the Somalis" which got picked up by BBC and other media). It does, however, help to know which kind of products would be mostly likely to engage audiences for the Special Session.

- **Events:** It would be helpful to know if there are any events that are linked to planned advocacy such as, days of action, town halls, marches, flash mobs, etc. These could be driven by OSF or choreographed with external parties (such as a City Council resolution calling for an end to the drug war). Either way, Communications would need to know the major events and milestones leading up to 2016. We would ideally be brought in upstream to gauge the likelihood of generating media coverage for plans and whether they can be amended or scheduled to maximize impact.

It is certain that the behind-the-scenes advocacy will absorb a great deal of time and energy from movements focused on criminal justice, public health and security. However, an effective communications strategy can radiate some of this energy to the public and shape how the momentum of drug policy reform is perceived.

To some degree, a narrative is already emerging around the Special Session, which reflects the beginning of a withdrawal from the “war on drugs”. We have worked over the last year to promote this narrative and illustrate the divisions that are prevalent in the drug control system. This work has crossed many OSF jurisdictions. At various times our press releases and story pitches have included staff from the Latin American Program, International Harm Reduction Development Program and US Programs, as well as GDPP.

Through these efforts, media are recognizing that the special session is more than ‘just another UN meeting’ and have thus far treated it as a transformative moment. So far, we have managed to get UNGASS-related pieces on the front pages of two editions of The Guardian and another page-one piece in The Financial Times.

A strong press strategy can set the background music for the event and highlight some of the internal divisions on drug policy, which could embolden governments to pursue alternative strategies regardless of the outcome of UN General Assembly Special Session.

In addition, the Communications Office has worked with the Global Drug Policy Program to host events for UN missions and media. There are currently plans to run an event with a UN General Assembly angle every two to three months.

Drug policy is a hot topic for media at the moment (whether focused on health, security, human rights or governance) and tends to perform well online. We routinely utilize the web department’s mailing lists to update subscribers to major drug policy developments.

We look forward to future collaborations and look forward to discussions about how a coordinated Shared Framework might be structured for UNGASS.

Posted by [Gregg Gonsalves](#) on Tuesday, May 27 2014 10:14

One of the reasons the UNGASS on HIV/AIDS was successful, and, as Daniel Wolfe says above, seen as a turning point for many of us in the struggle to secure AIDS treatment for people around the world, was that we saw it as a mobilizing and community organizing opportunity.

If the UNGASS on drugs in 2016 is to be a potent political moment for us, we have to start seeing this as a campaign, which starts now and builds towards the event in two years' time.

OSF isn't great at supporting organizing and mobilization--you like reports, meetings, trainings, tend to micro-manage and see yourselves as "the leaders", which is antithetical to supporting grassroots advocacy and mobilization.

So, we can have the best policy recommendations in the world, a great group of academics and NGO partners, but never make a difference.

I say this out of love, but I really do feel like it's vital for a re-think and to shape the next two years as a political project.

I'd suggest setting up "war rooms" of sorts (sorry for the metaphor, but you know what I mean), to plot out strategy at national, regional and international levels and hiring people with specific skills that academic and NGO partners may not offer in terms of influencing political discussions locally, developing campaigns, making sure we have not a symbolic march on UNGASS but 100,000+ people marching on the UN in 2016. Considering the number of people in NYC alone who are victims of the drug war, this seems more than doable.

Gregg Gonsalves
Global Health Justice Partnership
Yale Law School/Yale School of Public Health
former OSF fellow

Posted by [Mary Miller Flowers](#) on Wednesday, May 28 2014 14:47

In many places, a significant proportion of the prison population is incarcerated on drug-related offenses. Drug laws have often fueled policies of mass incarceration and have had a disproportionate impact on the poor. In Brazil, for instance, nearly 25 percent of the prison population is incarcerated for drug-related offenses, with that number rising to almost 70 percent in the case of women. Users, transporters, and microtraffickers are usually the victims of repressive drug policies which result in disproportionately harsh and lengthy sentences and often result in prolonged pretrial detention. Conditions can amount to torture if drug users are denied access to substitute treatment in detention, another area of work important for the Human Rights Initiative.

The effect of drug policies on women is particularly concerning in some parts of the world such as Latin America where their rates of incarceration are growing quickly. Colleta Youngers, a member of the International Drug Policy Consortium sums up the reality for many of these women: "We have big machinery to fight drug-trafficking but we are filling up jails with people who have never had any opportunity at all. Their first contact with the state is usually when they end up in prison." Research from grantees and various stakeholders indicates that changes in drug and criminal justice policy would reduce prison populations. These include reducing the prosecution of drug-related activities or the implementation of non-custodial measures for use, possession and microtrafficking, among others.

A growing number of human rights organizations are engaging at the intersection of drug policy and access to justice, resulting in opportunities to support alternative law enforcement and justice sector

approaches to drug control. There are also important developments in the global drug policy debate that hold promise for decriminalizing some drug use. The Human Rights Initiative is supporting a number of projects in Asia (Indonesia), Europe (Russia, Montenegro, Romania), and Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico) which are generating data, advocacy experience, and litigation in support of more progressive drug policies to reduce incarceration. We agree with many of the comments here about the value of advocacy around UNGASS. While we may not see substantial changes in conventions, the space for advocacy around UNGASS, particularly at the country level, can further crack the war on drugs mentality and provide new opportunities for us to highlight states and stakeholders who take a lead on this work. Our grantees are well-placed to organize a number of side events and sessions leading up to and following UNGASS, garnering media attention and sparking debate.

We see this as a critical area of work for access to justice globally and look forward to being a part of this discussion.

Posted by [Balazs Denes](#) on Monday, June 02 2014 06:44

The OSIFE is excited about this shared framework idea and interested to be part of it if the initiative takes off.

While I can be critical about the quality and relevance of CND/UN discussions, I agree with the following point raised before by others: the 2016 UNGASS will happen anyway, and we have to try to maximize the power of the drug reform movement during (and prior to) the meeting. And while the ever-searched consensus at UN meetings usually prevents any meaningful reform efforts to succeed, with good preparation work this could be a changing momentum. I think the following areas should get attention while formulating the proposal:

1. Coordinating the voice of “friendly governments” prior to the meeting and also at the UNGASS itself. Occasionally some delegations are dare to speak with a different tone than the usual anti-drug rhetoric, it is common from pro-reform governments to be silent at the CND. As the number of countries which are willing to turn towards alternatives of prohibition increases, we – through civil society partners, the Global Commission or other potential initiatives – should try to united these voices and help their ad-hoc coalition to take a strong position at the UNGASS together.
2. The role of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). The INCB does not have a strong power, but it was and still is used by the UNODC and hardliners to name and shame reform actions of different governments. The INCB operates in muddy waters, and transparency is not their strongest side. To put the organization under heavy scrutiny would be helpful if we want to shed some light to this obscure player of the international drug control architecture.
3. Help civil society players in a) divert attention to the UNGASS and the role national governments play in the process, b) unite reform voices and show their real power in the meeting. Pro-prohibition civil society organizations in play a crucial role to “balance” civil society voices at CND meetings, and I am sure the 2016 UNGASS won’t be different in this sense. However, with good preparation and targeted funding we could help the reform players to act much stronger at the NGO events organized before and during the UNGASS. This is not only needed because of the UNGASS but because in Europe civil society organizations are traditionally weak in mobilizing the public. Europe is leading the way in research and while things are not black and white, the region scores well in advocacy, but CSOs are not strong in building large

constituencies. The UNGASS could and should provide a window to challenge that. Encouraging NGOs to be part of the Vienna NGO committee could also help.

4. The role of the EU before and during the UNGASS. A common European drug policy is very far from reality (as neither public health approaches nor penal law are harmonized in the EU), but the joint voice of the EU could be stronger at the UNGASS. In March 2016, when the High Level Segment of the CND will be organized in Vienna, the Netherlands will give the Presidency of the EU, and thus it will have an important role in representing the EU at the meeting. And while this sounds better than it is in reality (I am sure the Dutch have had enough because of named as the drug policy black sheep), with strong influence from other EU countries, the EU's voice could be different this time.

Balazs (ECLP) on behalf of OSIFE

Posted by [Scott Bernstein](#) on Monday, June 02 2014 15:04

Firstly, I wanted to share something that Damon Barrett, Director of the International Centre on Human Rights and Drug Policy, [posted in the Huffington Post last week](#). Damon's well-written piece notes that the phrase, "*Eliminate narcotic drug and substance abuse*" is now part of the working draft for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As Damon states, no one knows how the phrase made it in there, but there it is.

As he articulates, the real questions around drugs and sustainable development are not about the consumption of drugs, but rather around the effects that the war on drugs has had on health, poverty, peace, and human rights. In his article, Damon links to the illuminating work of [Count the Costs](#), which has documented the harms of the war on drugs in seven areas:

- Undermining development and security, fuelling conflict;
- Threatening public health, spreading disease and death;
- Undermining human rights;
- Promoting stigma and discrimination;
- Creating crime, enriching criminals;
- Deforestation and pollution; and
- Wasting billions on drug law enforcement

Secondly, thank you to everyone who has submitted these well thought-out comments about the proposed shared framework. It is really inspiring to read these ideas and thoughts about engagement with drug policy and the UNGASS throughout OSF. These comments have been exceedingly helpful to us in thinking about the shared framework and a larger strategy for the UN Special Session in 2016.

Posted by [Israel Butler](#) on Tuesday, June 03 2014 10:23

OSEPI is very supportive of the initiative to shift policy away from repression and more towards harm reduction. However, what can be achieved at EU level (that is, with the EU institutions) is relatively limited. Drugs policy is an area where the EU has maintained a very light touch. There isn't really a shared understanding among governments across the EU of how to approach drugs. Most are

repressive. A few are more interested in harm reduction. Governments have used the EU to regulate certain aspects of drug policy, like exchanging information on and updating lists of legal highs, or law enforcement cooperation on smuggling and organised crime. But the EU hasn't really been used as a vehicle for drugs policy. There is an EU drugs strategy and action plan, but this is not a legally binding document and it's very vague. Broadly speaking, it just sets out a range of measures that member-states can take, if they want.

Because of this I don't think it's possible to imagine the EU taking a position itself at the UN on drugs. The EU simply wouldn't be able to speak on behalf of its member-states because the governments have different opinions and are very sensitive about their freedom to do what they want. Even with sympathetic Dutch government holding the EU presidency, we won't see different rhetoric coming from the EU. The presidency can't present an EU position on something unless there is consensus among the 28. And that consensus can't be forged from the EU down.

The review committee might therefore encourage foundations and programmes working in Europe to focus their advocacy on national government positions. It would be important to ensure that there is coordination and a division of labour between OSF entities and grantees to ensure full coverage of EU member-states. It's only once national governments are on board that we will see them working together through the EU to implement policies that require regional cooperation to implement.

Israel (on behalf of OSEPI)

Posted by [Marguerite Angelari](#) on Thursday, June 05 2014 10:57

UNGASS offers an unprecedented opportunity to shape global drug policy. While JI is not working directly on drug policy, punitive drug laws drive negative policies and violations of rights in the criminal justice arena which, in turn, impacts our work on pretrial detention and racial and ethnic profiling. There is also a potential interface with our emerging project on economic justice. Out of the avenues that we are currently considering, one of these--the criminalization of poverty--clearly falls under the purview of drug policy. Lastly, two of the tools that we develop, university law clinics and community based justice centers, could help ensure that the voices of those most affected by punitive drug laws are heard and enable them to play a leadership role in the shaping of the policy debate in their countries. While the Justice Initiative currently has limited capacity to take on substantial new work, we look forward to participating in the unfolding discussion