**Latin America Program: Presidential Portfolio Review of Drug Policy**

**Feb. 24, 2014**

**Outcomes Summary**

**Present:** Chris Stone, Pedro Abramovay, Andres Velasco (board chair), David Holiday, Kasia Malinowska-Sempruch, Daniel Wolfe, Catherine Ross, Sandra Dunsmore, Heloisa Griggs, Catesby Holmes, Andy Ko, Jamie Wood, Daniel Sershen, Daphne Panayotatos

Following a brief intro by Chris Stone, David Holiday began by noting changes in the field since work was first funded in 2007. At the beginning, LAP sought to build the field and was reactive to promoting new areas of work and organizations. Today, there is a more or less coherent, albeit still small, movement with many young actors and organizations that come from a variety of backgrounds that is driving the field. He cautioned that one should not interpret the recent OAS report as indicative of the salience of the issue in Latin America, or that a new wave of reform is coming, because this essentially came out of the Secretary General’s office – not from the member states. Kasia added that the public understands more the issue of decriminalization, but less so for legalization – so questions where to focus our efforts. Daniel Wolfe added that IHRD/PHP’s focus has been on human rights documentation within drug policy, and noted that many policy reforms driven by citizen security concerns rather than health.

**Organized Crime:** In response to a question from Chris as to what happened to the original focus on organized crime, David noted LAP initially responded by supporting academics – which turned out to be a small group of experts that didn’t not have the kind of policy impact. Support for independent journalism was more important in this regard, and the support for the SSRC fellows program was meant to broaden the field of engaged public intellectuals over the medium- to long-term.

**Uruguay:** Chris questioned the importance of the Uruguay experiment with marijuana legalization. David responded that, although marijuana consumption has not been penalized, what is new is the government regulation of production and sale. The circumstances in Uruguay are propitious because it is a small, progressive country. The person likely to be elected president at end of 2014 is a doctor and will likely be interested in a strong regulatory structure, similar to what he did with tobacco in his first term. This has led to an unprecedented decline in tobacco use by youth. The public health results of this experiment will be important, and perhaps more progressive, since Uruguay (unlike Colorado and Washington) can limit advertising and has a stronger role for the state. Pedro argued that Uruguay will show that one country can make a change, and that there could be a big backlash if Uruguay fails – but many positive implications if it is successful. Kasia agreed that the impact may be greater internationally than nationally.

**Drug policy constituencies:**  Chris noticed that LAP was not supporting associations of producers and users. David noted that this pertained more to GDPP’s strategy, related to a few small projects that LAP sometimes co-funded. Sandra Dunsmore, in her capacity as former Latin America director, noted that these networks are weak, and that she had discouraged funding very local, grassroots organizations since we did not have the capacity to make a careful, on-the-ground assessment.

**OSF and other donors:**  Chris asked whether it was our goal to be the only donor, or what was our strategy to engage others? David argued that it is hard at the PO level to change fellow donor strategies, and that drug policy continues to be marginal within the foundation community. However, as the drug policy debate becomes more mainstream we may see more donors moving into the field. OSF has pressed groups to find other donors, but much depends on the country-level context and the nature of local organizations. Kasia noted that many groups have a variety of very small donations, but nothing big, while Daniel said that wealthy individuals might be useful in bringing in other wealthy individuals.

**Public Opinion**: Chris asked about the dangers of supporting legalization when public opinion is 2/3 against this. Andres Velasco said that, nonetheless, in 2008 no one would have expected that we would be where we are today. Public opinion is changing slowly, very much depending on age cohorts, and in ways that are hard to predict. Later David noted that the strategy in Uruguay, apparently based on past political developments, is for public opinion to follow implementation.

Andres noted the potential exists to reverse the idea that drugs are a criminal issue. Public opinion in Latin America is very malleable, and it depends on how questions are phrased – but you can still see changes in the last ten years. A key question is whether public opinion is against because of a lack of knowledge (in which case government leadership can make a difference), or whether there is something more fundamental at work.

**Collaboration with US programs:**  Andy Ko asked about the challenges of collaborating with an entity like US Programs, which tends to be pretty insular. David acknowledged that knowledge exchanges have been very important, and that changes in Colorado and Washington have huge implications for the US and internationally.

**Strategies of Grantees:** Chris noted in Mexico we seemed to rely more on specific spokespersons, while in Brazil we funded a broader advocacy campaign – two quite different strategies. Heloisa commented that this was more about what grantees were proposing than any intentionality on the part of OSF. In the Brazil case, Kasia noted that the lack of traction at the governmental level led to an interest at working at a more popular level. In Mexico or other places, David noted, it is often about betting on particular actors who we think can be effective.

Chris asked what lessons were derived from the fact that we were supporting two organizations in Brazil with competing campaign messages, and asked whether we were equipped to evaluate the impact of these? David noted that change is often more spontaneous than a planned campaign, but that he did feel we were not ill-equipped to evaluate. Pedro noted that, while the campaign in Brazil failed, it was good to have engaged with the police; beyond the immediate objectives of the campaign, it is good to have secondary objectives.

At the end of the session, various participants noted other issues that deserved greater exploration, including:

* The public health angle on drug policy – is discrimination a lens here?
* The Colombian peace process and how drug policy will evolve there
* The issue of how to encourage other funders, what are the risks, is there a new argument to be made to get other funders into the picture
* The challenges of transforming rhetoric into action (e.g., Guatemala & Colombia)
* What should we do on public opinion research
* With whom, how and when do we engage – moderate sectors (evangelical groups), grass roots, elites.
* What further capacity development is needed among institutions?