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COMMITMENT TO DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH REPORT

**COMMISSION ON CRIME PREVENTION AND
CRIMINAL JUSTICE
(CCPCJ)**

**COUNTERING ILLICIT NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING
THROUGH WEST AFRICA**





Basic Overview of the Issue

Following the decolonization process during the Cold War era, West Africa rapidly became a major hub for drug transport and usage. Its location means that it can serve as a hub for drugs coming from Africa, Asia and South America, distributing those drugs to Europe and North America. The comparative lack of political stability in the region means that drug trafficking operations are relatively safe from punishment and can operate freely. Additionally, owing to the climate and the lack of proper policing in rural areas, many countries in West Africa are able to produce large amounts of drugs such as marijuana domestically, making it a center for illegal drug related activity.

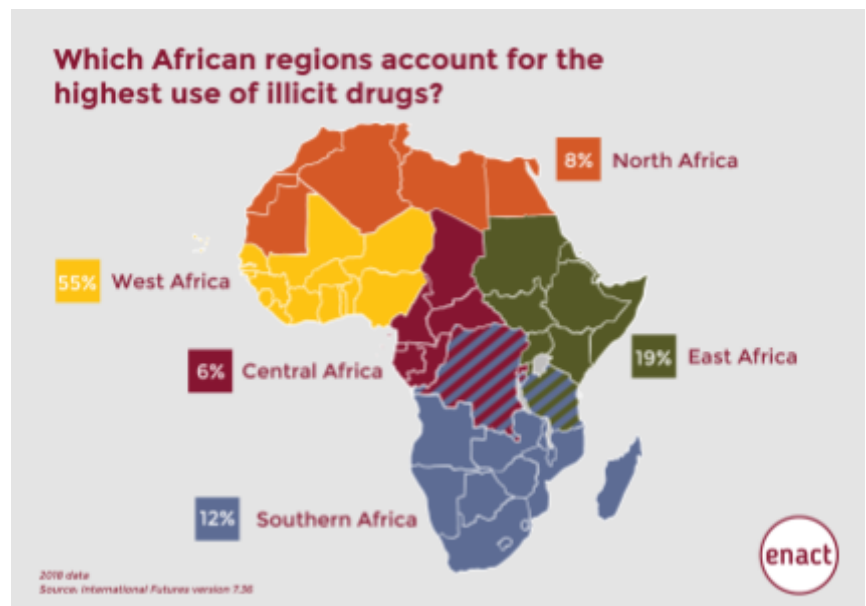


Figure 1: Map of Africa, Enact 2018

The drug trade in West Africa rose to prominence in the 1960s, as demand for drugs within Europe surged due to the rebellious counterculture of the time that spawned a demand for drugs. However, West African governments quickly caught on to this trend and started issuing punishments, such as the Nigerian government which imposed an unconditional ten-year prison sentence on anyone found exporting cannabis. This meant that for a while, the West African drug trade happened mostly outside of West Africa, with Nigerian and other African drug traders going to other regions such as Latin America and Asia to operate from places with an already established criminal drug trading presence. Over time, however, the influence of these drug traders extended to West Africa itself, as more and more drug traders chose not to leave the region personally and instead conduct international operations via intermediaries that were difficult to trace back to them. Demand for cannabis and cocaine in Europe and North America continued to surge, and by the year 2000 there were already



established drug cartels and trafficking routes in West Africa.

The impact of drugs both on individuals and the community cannot be overstated. On a personal level, the addiction caused by drugs leads to health complications and even death, as well as financial problems. This is even more severe in less economically developed countries where many who are already struggling to get by find themselves addicted to expensive drugs and are extorted out of the money they need to live by drug dealers. On a larger scale, criminal activity of any kind within a region makes it less safe for ordinary citizens, and the drug trade is no exception. Cartels attempt to establish unofficial rule over the territories in which they operate, committing crimes such as extortion, bribery and murder to ensure that the local populace complies with their demands and the police does not resist. Mass drug addiction also increases the population of urban poor within a country, setting back its economic development. Finally, many armed insurgent groups finance themselves by selling or shipping drugs, meaning that the drug trade allows them to engage in conflict and commit acts of terrorism against civilians. For these reasons, the issue of illegal narcotics trafficking within West Africa is one that must be addressed urgently and categorically through measures that will ensure reform within law enforcement and anti-corruption initiatives as well as reducing drug use within the population.

Explanation of Important Terms

Cartel

A coalition of organizations that provide the same product or service aimed at establishing a monopoly, which is then used in order to impose unfair prices or other conditions on the trade of the product or service. Note that a cartel is not necessarily related to illegal products, however in this context the subject is illegal drug trafficking cartels.

Drug trafficking

A global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.

Joint Task Force (JTF)

An international cooperative effort comprising several agencies or countries to tackle a



particular problem, such as combating drug trafficking. To accomplish shared goals, law enforcement, the military, and other government agencies may form joint task groups.

Transnational Organized Crime

Cross-border criminal activity that is typically organized by a number of individuals, including drug cartels, criminal networks, and dishonest authorities involved in illegal operations like drug trafficking.

Demand Reduction

Tactics meant to lower the demand for illegal drugs by means of treatment choices, public awareness campaigns, and preventive initiatives; this will lower the profits made by networks involved in the trafficking of drugs.

Detailed Background of the Issue

Impact of Internal Factors and Governance on Drug Flow

It should be recognized that besides the economic and geolocational benefits of the newly formed trade route within West Africa, the routes provided protection, added profits, and easy access to a large and prosperous market mainly because of the crippling governance within the region. Throughout its history, West Africa, especially the Sahel Region, has faced significant issues in establishing its government as a legitimate ruling body with the power and initiative to provide suitable conditions for society. This lack of authority is primarily due to the region's chaotic past. In this section, your states were used as simple tools for political power and monetary gain their colonies. Furthermore, France established trade deals with its past colonies, greatly favoring its interests. After the COVID pandemic hit, the Sahel was left in the worst economic and health conditions they ever faced. This, as a result, caused the widespread influence of terror groups to increase, which offered an alternative to the neo-colonial environment. These movements of radicalization eventually led to an uprising of an entire region through military coups. Most of the coups resulted in success, and new independent government bodies started to form. As little to no financial resources were available within the Sahel Region, the weakened governments had to increasingly rely on extremist militias, monopolies, and drug companies to ensure the flow of



currency necessary for the continuation of basic governmental tasks such as crime prevention and border security. These transactions slowly lead to international cartels getting influence and establishing a foothold within the region, causing many politicians to rule decisions in favor of drug tycoons. Nowadays, Guinea stands out among similar states as an indeed failed “Narcotic State” in which the country seems more of a drug gang with a flag rather than a country containing many drug gangs. Moreover, it should be stated that in the absence of a powerful government capable of providing sufficient payment to its people, many South-based drug monopolies have opened themselves up for new operations within West Africa in other lucrative business areas such as housing and oil. These industries do not just produce illegal monetary gain for armed gangs but also increase the country's dependency on drug firms to have a functioning economy. The situation worsens daily as the Sahel states move from their national sovereignty and get attached to the sub-branches of a multifaceted crime network. It should be directly stated that it is nearly impossible to stop corruption and illegal trade related to international drug hubs. Keeping in mind that experts argue Sahel states need at least a few decades of advancement before they regain their national sovereignty, it seems like unless immediate action is taken against cartels operating within Africa, West Africa will continue to stay as one of the leading routes for drug trade.

The Routes and Hubs of West African Trafficking

Foremost, while talking about the passage of drugs through Africa, it should be emphasized that for much of the last decade, Africa was seen as more of a merger destination than a mere market itself. Still standing, the United States of America is considered the most significant drug market, followed by Europe. Therefore, drugs from major narcotic-producing countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Afghanistan, and Venezuela used to travel in predetermined routes to either the United States or Europe. However, as the United States strongly increased its measures in its “war against drugs,” it eventually became harder for cartels to transport drugs across borders without risk. Europe soon followed with its own “war against drugs,” putting heavy restrictions on all types of transport made between major drug-producing countries and mainland Europe. As cartels were slowly draining away their money and were shrinking profits, they resorted to using Western Africa as a point of intersection where narcotics from drug-producing countries would arrive in underdeveloped



states without much trouble and interrogation. The group drugs could later be distributed around the World much more easily either by cars, boats, or planes. The newly established trafficking route allowed cartels to maximize their profits once again as the chance of getting caught smuggling drugs from Africa to Europe is far less likely than just transporting the drugs from the original country it was harvested. As we can observe, we see a large influx of drugs from Venezuela to Guinea and Guinea New Bissau, which all are countries that can efficiently be labeled as narcotic states due to their systematic corruption and illegally fueled gross domestic products. Other cities such as Lagos in Nigeria and Dakar in Senegal have also recently gained importance in the region due to their strategic location as large port cities and high population, which also creates market demand for drugs within Africa. It is believed that with the rapid modernization of Africa, many people have gained access to drugs, opening a brand new region for drug consumption. Even though, as of currently, only a tiny amount of people are using drugs in Africa, experts argue that the numbers could increase exponentially as more people migrate to larger cities within Africa where drugs are easily accessible. Seeing the surge in drug usage within Africa, many local cartels emerged, which, similar to other international cartels, buy or produce their drugs within the Sahel Region. After production, the produce is usually transferred to major cities in different parts of Africa, including Pretoria (South Africa), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), and Cairo (Egypt), opening other corners of Africa to illegal drug usage and crime related to illicit businesses. The usage of the hubs above within Africa ensures that the drugs get distributed evenly among African states, keeping drug concentration low enough to avoid any significant suspicion from governmental authorities. Finally, the drugs, after staying in circulation within West Africa for a time from only a few days to many months, get shipped out to mainland Europe by the Canary Islands and the Iberian Peninsula. An alternative route also flows through Libya and Algeria to Italy, replicating the movement of immigrants from Africa to Europe. Transportation of drugs to the United States is most often done by private airplanes from Sahel states to remote airfields located on the East Coast. A small number of drugs are also transported to Oceania. This continent had largely been unaffected by the drug crisis as no major supplier was able to reach the remote content. The increasing drug traffic inside Oceania goes on to demonstrate that the passage of drugs through Africa affects not only regional countries but also all members of the international community as the increased trade eases the opportunity



for individuals to buy such drugs, something that previously was not possible.

International Response

The international response has varied from state to state after West Africa became a central hub for drug passage and transport. It should be noted, unfortunately, that the actions taken by states individually can be considered selfish acts. Even though many countries have increased regulations and have invested in their anti-drug use programs, these efforts are only meant to retaliate against the results of the creation of a central drug cartel within Africa with the aim to limit drug flow within their respective countries. These sets of solutions are not only meant to decrease the adverse outcomes of the crisis locally but also are ineffective when preventing the further establishment of drug states within Sahel Africa. Experts have noted that for West Africa to recover from the drug epidemic, urgent measures should be established to enhance government authority and economic freedom. Without proper funding and help, West African states are bound to stay under the influence of drug cartels and be used as hubs for international drug trade. The European Union has made collaborative efforts to prevent drug flow to Europe through the enhancement and funding of Frontex, a border security agency between the members of the European Union. Currently, Frontex still operates within the Mediterranean Sea, patrolling for both refugees and drugs that come in significant influx from Africa. Frontex has been relatively successful in its attempt to counter illicit drug trade to Europe but has failed to eliminate the flow. Little effort can be seen inside West Africa, with only some countries from the European Union and the United States promising funding and the deployment of expert personnel to the countries that aim to establish counterintuitive measures against the rise of drug trafficking. Most of the work done within West Africa can be linked to the United Nations. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has made attempts to reach civilians who have been facing the dire consequences of the ever-increasing drug presence in the region. These efforts aim to re-establish societal elements by restricting the effect of drugs that are on individuals, whether that be direct consumption of drugs or violence that is related to drug presence. Professionals on the matter have also been deployed by the UN, which works in collaboration with local governments to partake in missions aimed at capturing drugs and members of cartels as well as increasing intel efficiency within prevalent drug routes.



Major Parties Involved

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was founded in 1997 to tackle the issues of international criminal activity, more specifically crimes such as drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism. So far, its operations in West Africa as related to drugs have mainly focused on preventing and addressing the effects of drug usage within the region, rather than the trafficking of drugs through the region. That said, addressing the international drug trade is also within the scope of the UNODC's responsibilities, and the anti-corruption and government transparency policies it already promotes can help reduce involvement of government officials in the drug trade.

Nigeria

Since the 1980s, owing to the decline and volatility of Nigeria's oil trade, criminal organizations in the country have been increasingly turning to drug trafficking as their source of income. Increased civil conflict in the region led to greater political instability that made drug trafficking more reliable and profitable than oil-related crimes. By the 1980s over 15 thousand Nigerians were arrested for involvement with the drug trade. The Nigerian drug trade consists almost entirely of large-scale operations, led by drug barons who stay anonymous by employing various intermediaries to manage transport and foreign relations. Their "foreign relations" are very advanced, as they collaborate with various cartels in countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as South American countries to source their drugs. Notably, Nigeria also sees a lot of cultivation of drugs domestically, as its land and climate is well-suited to that purpose. That said, despite the corruption plaguing its government, Nigeria also has one of the most effective drug enforcement agencies in West Africa and it has been the leader of many international anti-drug trafficking operations. For example, in September 2022, the agency seized over 1.8 tonnes of drugs from a warehouse in Lagos, Nigeria.

Ghana

Ghana is a popular transit and destination country within the West African drug trade. In particular, drug shipments from Afghanistan, Pakistan and South America are very common. While a portion of these drugs is consumed within Ghana, a more significant part is



shipped to the US for sale and illegal use. Other critical drug shipment routes include import from India and shipping from Nigeria to South Africa. Despite the fact that seizures of drugs, reported cases and media coverage of drug cases has decreased, it is unknown whether the actual amount of drug trafficking has decreased or it has simply become less visible. A suspected reason for the decrease in visibility is under-the-table government protection and toleration of the drug trade.

Chronology of Important Events

Date	Description of Event
1952	The first recorded case of international shipping of drugs through West Africa, as a Lebanese trafficking group was found hiding cocaine in the region for distribution purposes.
Late 1950s	The beginning of the modern West African drug trade, as a result of the increase in demand for drugs in a post-world war culture.
June 17, 1971	US President Richard Nixon gives a press conference in which he declares the “war on drugs”, a US-led worldwide initiative that aims to restrict the usage and distribution of drugs. Although the policy has been criticized as overly restrictive and can ultimately be considered a failure, it did result in the stagnation of West African drug smuggling for a period of time in the 1970s and 1980s.
1997	The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is formed, with the mission of combating drug abuse, drug trafficking and other criminal issues worldwide.



May 26, 2001	The African Union(AU) is formed, a coalition of African nations that aims to address all manners of issues within the region and foster collaboration. Since then, it has been a leading force in introducing effective anti-drug measures to West Africa.
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Relevant International Documents

- [Report on Illicit Drug Trafficking in West Africa](#) United States Army War College, 22/03/2012
- [Narcotic Trafficking in West Africa](#) Boston University, March 2010
- [Cross-Border Criminal Activities in West Africa: Options for Effective Responses](#) The African Union, 12 May 2006
- [Resolution 1949 \(2010\) / adopted by the Security Council at its 6428th meeting](#) The United Nations, 23 November 2010, S/RES/1949(2010)
- [Message from the UN Secretary General to the Economic Community of West African States regarding international community to support West African countries in combat against "alarming surge" in drug trafficking](#) The United Nations, 28 October 2008, [ST/DPI/PRESS/JS/SG/SM/11889
- [Draft Resolution on Strengthening international support for States in West Africa](#) The United Nations, 12 March 2008, E/CN.7/2008/L.25
- [THE WEST AFRICAN EPIDEMIOLOGY NETWORK ON DRUG USE \(WENDU\) REPORT](#) ECOWAS, 2018-2019
- [PLAN OF ACTION ON DRUG CONTROL](#) The African Union, 2013-2017, CAMDC/EXP/2(V)

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

West Africa Commission on Drugs

The West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) was founded in 2014 by the Switzerland-based Kofi Annan Foundation. It is currently chaired by Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria. WACD does not directly intervene in West African countries, but



instead aims to be an international body for gathering information and proposing legislation. Many prominent journalists, researchers and other leading experts have published reports and articles under the WACD. Perhaps most notably, in July 2014 it published a report on the state of drug trafficking and usage in West Africa, considered to be authoritative in the field. More recently, in 2018, the WACD published the Model Drug Law, a hypothetical proposal for drug-related laws that has served as the foundation for drug reform campaigns in West African countries, such as Ghana which has made efforts to reform its drug policies based on this proposal. Somewhat controversially, the proposal advocates for the removal of many criminal penalties for personal drug use and possession, instead choosing to only criminally penalize drug trafficking and distribution.

Independent Corrupt Practices Commission in Nigeria

The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, founded in 2000 in Nigeria by president Olusegun Obasanjo, is an example of how not to approach the issue of corruption in the drug trade. The stated purpose of the commission is to receive and examine reports of corruption within the countries and punish government officials found guilty of the act. However, in its first three years of operation, despite receiving and “examining” over 900 reports of corruption, the commission failed to convict a single government official. As of 2015, the commission has only been responsible for 267 criminal cases and 142 civil cases, many of which did not result in convictions. The commission has since made several arrests of prominent politicians, however none of these have been related to the drug trade and their crimes have paled in comparison to other cases of corruption that the commission failed to address.

The commission is hindered by multiple factors. Firstly, it is severely underfunded and not given enough emphasis in government budgeting. Secondly, it is forbidden for the commission to persecute cases where the alleged crime occurred before the commission was founded, meaning that many instances of corruption have to be left unresolved. Third, it does not possess enough investigative power. Governors, some of the people with the most power and incentive to commit corruption, legally cannot be investigated by the commission. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the commission itself is plagued by corrupt or incompetent management and public relations, such as its chairman Ekpo Nta who



controversially declared that “Stealing is erroneously reported as corruption.”, causing much confusion about the purpose of the commission. When creating proposals for commissions, organizations and similar bodies, delegates are heavily encouraged to consider how to avoid such structural flaws so that their clauses are more effective than the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission was.

Solution Alternatives

It has been proven that progress within the specified agenda item is nearly impossible without substantive measures being put in place that provide autonomy to individual states within West Africa. The main contributor to increased drug traffic within West Africa is the need for monetary control and authority of governments. Cartels can easily replace governmental bodies if given the freedom to operate in the region; therefore, all states must aim to establish measures to increase the control and power of West African states. Furthermore, to prevent a new drug market from forming within Africa, states should ideally put measures to restrict drug-related commerce through individuals, just like the comprehensive measures in Europe and the United States. Finally, West Africa is seen as a hub for drug transport as it is relatively easy to reach big markets safely. Therefore, actions aimed at increasing security within land and sea to stop drugs from reaching other continents could be beneficial.

Additionally, the corruption that weakens West African governments and opens them up to criminal activity must be addressed. Different methods must be found for addressing corruption on local levels, which could be prevented by higher authorities within the national government, and corruption at the highest levels of a government, which will need to be addressed by international organs. Delegates must be careful to strike a balance between effective measures and preserving government sovereignty, however it should be ensured that this should not compromise the effectiveness of the resolution. Another important point to touch on is the drug laws and punishments given out for various crimes. Delegates must represent their country’s policy on drugs, reform versus punishment and legalization versus criminalization while also adapting these policies to the specifics of the African landscape so as not to create unrest within the local population.



Useful Links

- <https://africa.ocindex.net/> - The Organized Crime Index, an overview of criminal activity by country.
- <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/index.html> - an outline of the UNODC's efforts in Central Africa
- <https://www.globalcommissionondrugs.org/> - the website of the Global Commission on Drugs, an organization focused on combating the negative results of drug usage and illegal drug trafficking worldwide.
- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/> - the CIA World Factbook, a general resource for finding data about countries.
- <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/world-drug-report-2023.html> - the UNODC's 2023 World Drug Report, a website containing information on the state of affairs worldwide regarding drug usage.
- <https://globaldrugpolicyindex.net/> - The Global Drug Policy Index, a website detailing each country's policy on drugs.

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