

COCAINE FROM THE ANDES VIA WEST AFRICA TO EUROPE

What is the nature of the market?

Few transnational contraband flows have generated more alarm than the flow of cocaine through West Africa. Around 2005, it became clear that massive amounts of drugs, worth billions of dollars, were being shipped through one of the least stable regions in the world.² The signs were unmistakable:

- Between 2005 and 2007, a series of more than 20 major seizures were made in the West African region, involving thousands of kilograms of cocaine. Most of the seizures were made at sea, but some involved private aircraft or caches detected on land. These seizures appear to have been the tip of the iceberg: most were made due to the assistance of European navies or foreign tip-offs, and some were stumbled upon by accident.
- At the same time, hundreds of commercial air couriers were detected carrying cocaine on flights from West Africa to Europe.
- There were indications of high-level involvement in the drug trade in a number of countries in West Africa.

The risks were equally clear:

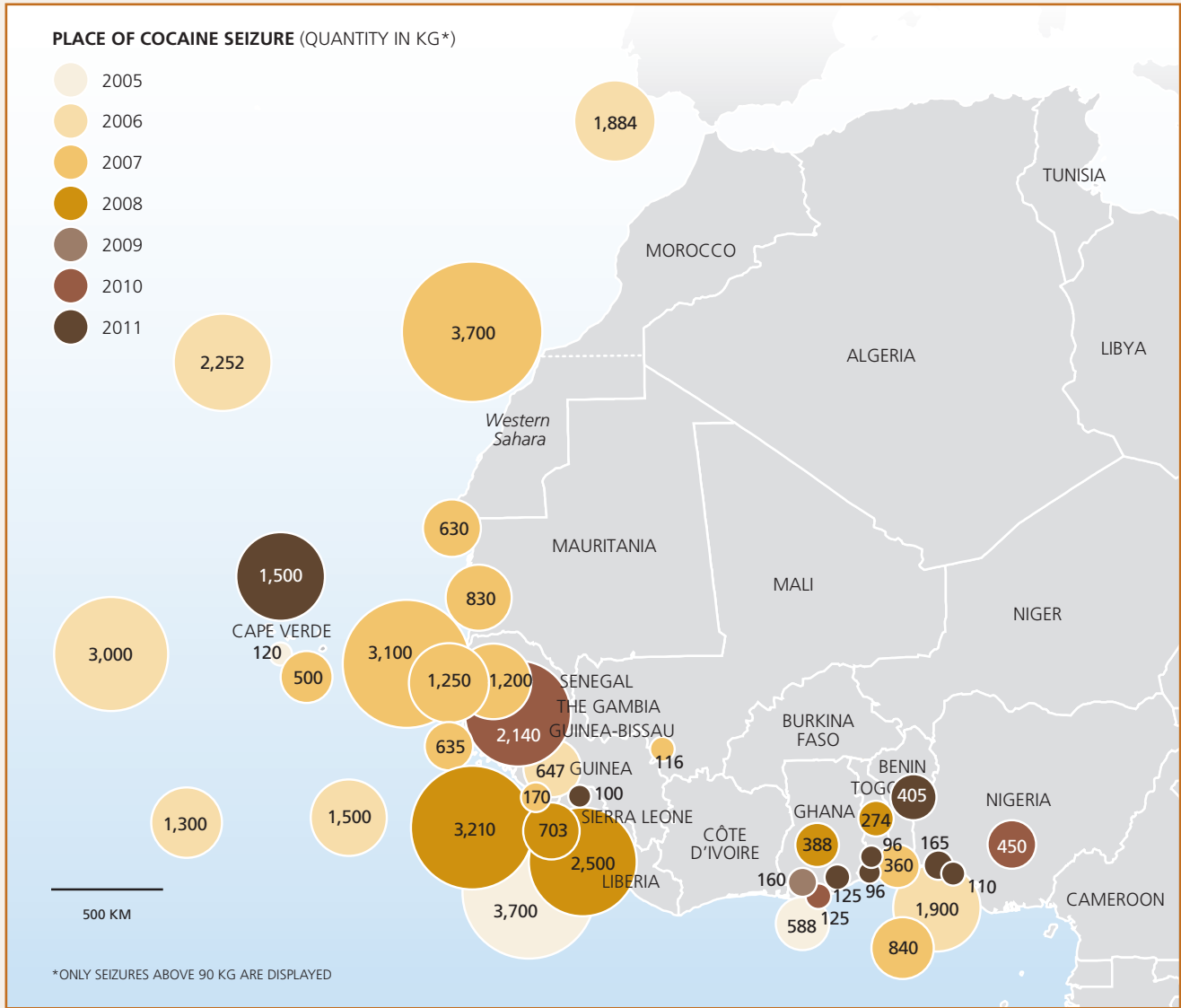
- If the drugs seized had made it to Europe, their retail value would have exceeded the GDP of some of the nations they transited, suggesting criminal organizations with greater resources at their disposal than the affected states.
- Since in some countries no legitimate commercial activity had the potential to generate incomes compa-

parable to the drug trade, it had the potential to “crowd out” other forms of economic activity. A similar risk pertained in the political sphere – pursuit of drug graft threatened governance and stability.

- There was fear that insurgents and extremists throughout the region would be in a position to facilitate trafficking, thus drawing resources to their cause and increasing the potential for violence.
- Unfortunately, it appears some of these risks were realized:

- There have been a series of coups, attempted coups, and other forms of political unrest in Guinea-Bissau, including the assassination of President Vieira in 2009. While the conflict appears to have occurred along well-established political fault lines, competition for cocaine profits raised the stakes and augmented tensions between rival groups.
- When Guinean president Lansana Conté died at the end of 2008, it was revealed that members of his immediate family and elite military units had been involved in drug trafficking, allegedly making use of diplomatic passports and pouches to move cocaine.
- In Mauritania, high-ranking police personnel were convicted on charges relating to cocaine trafficking in 2010, but were released from prison in 2011 and subsequently disappeared.
- In The Gambia in 2010, the president dismissed most of his senior security staff for alleged involvement in drug trafficking, including the national police chief and his deputy, the navy chief, the deputy army chief, the head of the National Drug Enforcement Agency, his deputy, and his chief of operations. Several of these men were convicted of corruption in 2012.

Map 1: Major cocaine seizures in West Africa (2005-2011)



Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizure database (IDS) and UNODC Field Offices in the region

- The Minister of Transportation of Sierra Leone was compelled to resign in 2008 when his cousin was found to be associated with a private aircraft containing over 700 kg of cocaine. Subsequent court testimony implicated the Minister himself.
- Many of the large seizures of cocaine made by West African governments later disappeared from police custody, indicating high-level law enforcement corruption.³
- There have been repeated allegations that insurgents and extremists in the Sahel have been gaining income from the trafficking of cocaine across the regions they control. It remains possible that these funds contributed to the recent rebellion in Mali.

But around 2008, there were a number of indications that this flow had begun to abate:

- Large seizures declined drastically. In 2007, there were at least 11 seizures of more than 100 kg of cocaine around West Africa, totaling over 11 tons; in 2009, a single seizure of 160 kg was made.

- The number of couriers emanating from the region also dropped off. In one database of air courier detections, 59% of the cocaine couriers detected in the second quarter of 2007 had originated in West Africa; in the third quarter of 2009, no couriers from the region were detected.

There are a number of possible reasons for this decline:

- For the South American traffickers, one of the virtues of using the West African route was its novelty – law enforcement authorities were not expecting cocaine to come from this region. By 2008, due to the international attention the flow received, much of this novelty had been lost.
- The political turmoil around 2008 and 2009 may have disrupted the channels of corruption that facilitated trafficking through the region.
- Prior to 2009, it appears that most of the cocaine seized was the property of South American traffickers, and that the West Africans were merely being paid for logistic services. When these seizures later disappeared from

police custody, South American partners may have concluded that they had been betrayed by the corrupt officials they were sponsoring, and severed relations.

- Multi-ton losses are painful for the traffickers who owned them. These losses may have led some to return to more traditional routes, or to change techniques for reaching West Africa.

Nevertheless, after 2007, a number of operations driven by West Africans have been detected. Despite the reduction in maritime seizures and detected couriers, it appears that some flow persists. Very large seizures of cocaine are still occasionally made in the region, including seizures of two tons in The Gambia in 2010, 1.5 tons in Cape Verde in 2011, and 1.6 tons in the Canary Islands (destined for Benin) in 2012.

How is the trafficking conducted?

There are several ways of getting cocaine from South America to Europe via West Africa, all of which appear to be operating in parallel, with the favoured technique varying over time in response to enforcement efforts. Both large and small shipments are encountered. Typically, the large shipments are the property of South American trafficking groups, while the smaller ones are owned by West Africans. Over time, Latin American involvement in the region appears to have declined, and so has the average seizure size.

In the past, large maritime shipments were favoured, but the seizures between 2005 and 2007 seem to have greatly reduced this flow, perhaps prompting a move to shipments in private aircraft. The aircraft used have grown progressively more sophisticated over time, from twin-engine propeller planes to commercial jets, capable of carrying multi-ton loads. Most of these have departed from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. At the same time, smaller shipments, within the range of West African groups, have been found secreted in maritime shipping containers. There is also traffic in much smaller amounts via commercial air couriers and the post, much of which appears to proceed from Brazil.

In the past, there have been three main hubs in West Africa for receipt and redistribution of the cocaine shipments:

- The northern hub, radiating from Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, The Gambia, and Senegal.
- The southern hub, centered on Nigeria, including Benin, Togo, and Ghana.
- An eastern hub, encompassing Mali and parts of Mauritania, of particular use in receiving consignments by air.

Once in West Africa, the drugs appear to proceed to Europe along a number of routes. Commercial air couriers can carry only small amounts, but their frequent use can offset this deficiency, and they also allow for great flexibility, moving drugs from any country in the region to any Euro-

The decline in large-scale maritime trafficking

Maritime movement from the West African coast to Europe is rarely detected nowadays. The most recent case was in October 2011, and involved a prominent family based in the Netherlands and in Praia, Cape Verde. The family ran a real estate business as a front and money laundering operation. Mother ships from Brazil and Suriname were met by smaller coastal vessels that ferried the cocaine to one of a number of properties owned by the group. These drugs were then shipped to Europe in a go-fast boat.

pean destination. Cocaine shipments can also be trafficked onward by sea (in containers, fishing boats, and pleasure craft), or by land or air across the Sahara to North Africa, where they are flown to Europe in light aircraft or shuttled across the Mediterranean in go-fast boats. As with the Atlantic routes, all of these approaches are utilized in parallel, with the preferred technique and routing changing in response to enforcement efforts.

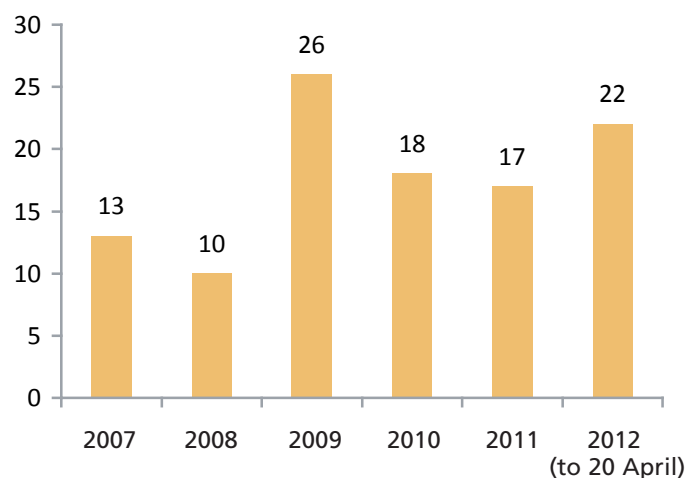
On arrival in Europe, the drugs may be sold to European or South American crime groups, or distributed through the extensive network of West Africans involved in retail cocaine distribution.

South America

Cocaine transiting West Africa comes from all three source countries: Colombia, Peru, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Most of the largest air and sea shipments detected recently have originated in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Venezuelan authorities report that all of the cocaine transiting their country comes from Colombia. But smaller containerized shipments have proceeded both directly from Peru and from Ecuador, a transit country for Peruvian cocaine. In addition, there are some containerized shipments (as well as a good deal of air courier and postal traffic) from Brazil. According to forensic testing, about 54% of the cocaine seized in Brazil comes from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 38% from Peru, and only 7.5% from Colombia.⁴

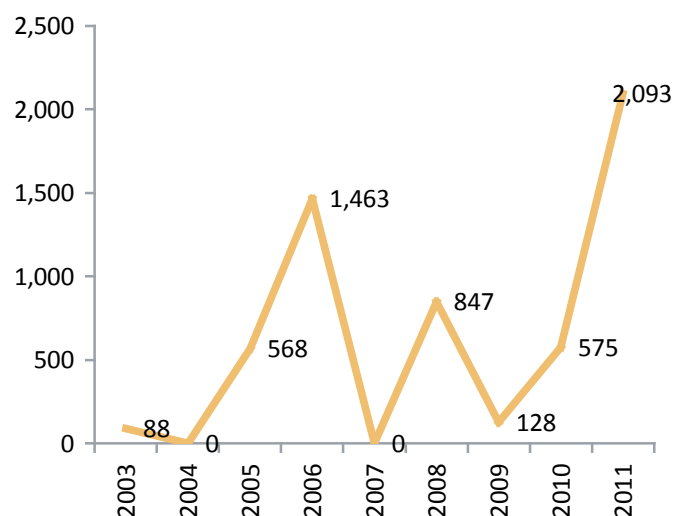
Cocaine is trafficked from the Colombian states of Norte de Santander and Arauca to the Venezuelan states of Zulia, Tachira and Apure. There is extensive coca cultivation and processing in Norte de Santander – labs have been found in Cúcuta, the capital, which sits on the border. Some of the drugs may proceed through areas controlled by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) 10th and 33rd Fronts, as well as areas controlled by other groups. Laboratories are also found just on the other side of the border in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, some with the capacity to produce 500 kilograms of cocaine per week.⁵

Figure 1: Cocaine labs destroyed in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela



Source: National Antidrug Office of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Figure 2: Kilograms of cocaine seized from shipping containers related to West Africa



Source: UNODC Regional Office for West and Central Africa seizure database

In the past, much of this cocaine proceeded by road or air to the east Venezuelan states of Bolivar and Anzoátegui before being flown out on private craft from commercial airports to West Africa. Barcelona, the coastal capital of Anzoátegui, was the primary departure point, although flights had been detected from Maracaibo (the ‘Air Cocaine’ flight) and Margarita Island.

According to the Venezuelan authorities, this path is no longer in use. Instead, most of the cocaine entering the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela appears to be moving north from airstrips in Apure province to destinations in Central America, particularly Honduras and Haiti. Set-backs in West Africa and the opportunities in Honduras after the 2009 coup may have led Venezuela-based traffickers to again shift their attentions to the US market. There have been some exceptions, however, discussed under “air routes” below.

If the flow from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has declined, where is West Africa getting its cocaine? Brazil may be the answer, particularly for West African-owned shipments. Brazil has long been a source for Lusophone Guinea-Bissau, but it has become a source for countries throughout the region. The amount of cocaine trafficked to and through Brazil has increased remarkably in recent years, as reflected in growing seizure statistics. Sao Paulo is home to a large Nigerian community, possibly the largest in the region, and, according to the Brazilian authorities, this group has been progressively taking control of cocaine exports from Brazil, leaving the domestic market to local gangs.

Nigerians have long dominated commercial air couriering from Brazil: close to 90% of the mules arrested at the inter-

national airport in Sao Paulo report obtaining their cocaine from Nigerian groups. Most of these couriers fly to Angola or South Africa. On two flights from Sao Paulo to Luanda in 2011, the Angolan authorities screened every passenger and found more than 20 cocaine couriers on each flight. After providing for consumption in Southern Africa, the remainder is couriered from these countries to West Africa or directly to Europe.⁶

In the past, the Nigerians themselves couriered cocaine from Brazil, and they remain prominent on flights to Lagos or Doha (Qatar), an emerging transit point. But they are making increasing use of Angolan, South African, or European couriers, particularly on flights to the couriers’ home countries. Some of these European couriers are recruited in Europe, often by the European wives of Nigerian traffickers.⁷

More recently, the Nigerian groups have been moving into containerized consignments and even maritime shipping. According to liaison officers in Brazil, Nigerian groups organize up to 30% of the cocaine exports by ship or container from Santos, Brazil’s largest port, up from negligible levels a few years earlier. The Sao Paulo-based Nigerian groups are also responsible for a very large share of the postal shipments of cocaine leaving the country.

Transit to West Africa: containers

In the past, traffickers relied on large mother ships that offloaded cocaine onto smaller coastal craft. Few of these dedicated vessels have been detected in West Africa in recent years, but a growing number of seizures have been made from maritime containers, on both sides of the Atlantic. At least 27 of these seizures have occurred since 2003, including 12 in 2011 alone, totaling almost six metric tons

of cocaine. Some were clearly linked to the owner of the containerized cargo, but in other cases, the cocaine appears to have been added without the knowledge of the cargo owner. The drugs may have been added at the port of departure or anywhere along the route taken by the ship.

The largest detected seizure from a container, which took place in 2007, is highly disputed. The shipment, allegedly mixed in with a shipment of cement originating in Peru and destined for Nigeria, was originally announced at 14 tons, which would have placed it among the largest cocaine seizures ever. Samples of this seizure sent for forensic testing abroad showed no presence of cocaine, however. It remains unclear what share, if any, of the original seizure was cocaine.

Aside from this, the seizures have been in the low hundreds of kilograms, with an average weight of around 175 kg, much smaller than the large maritime seizures of the past. Only a small share of shipping containers are inspected, even in the most vigilant countries, so this would appear to be an ideal vector for smuggling drugs. But seizures from containers are relatively rare, suggesting that traffickers do not favour this technique for reasons of their own. Traffickers seem to dislike having large volumes of drugs out of their custody for an extended period of time. If losses occur, it is not clear who should be deemed liable. The process is also slow – containers can take weeks to cross between ports, and traffickers may rely on continuous turnover to remain viable. Finally, the fact that seizures have been made indicates that the process is not foolproof, and it is not clear that the rate of success offsets the logistical inconvenience of using containers.

Transit to West Africa: private aircraft

For the larger consignments handled by South American organizations, there appears to have been a period where maritime trafficking was traded for air trafficking. Probably the best known detection was the so-called “Air Cocaine” case in 2009, which involved a Boeing 727 found burned in the Malian desert, believed to have been carrying tons of cocaine. Subsequent investigations suggest this was not an isolated incident. In 2010, a Malian police commissioner was convicted in connection with a scheme to build an airstrip in the desert for future landings. According to the UK Serious Organized Crime Agency (SOCA), a Beechcraft BE 300 from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela landed in Mali, near the Mauritanian border, in January 2010. The cargo was unloaded and moved by 4x4 vehicles in the direction of Timbuktu before authorities lost track of the convoy. In August 2012, a Bombardier BD-700 jet was seized after traveling from Valencia (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) to Benin with 1.6 tons of cocaine aboard. When denied entry in Benin, the plane landed in the Canary Islands, where an international crew was arrested by the Spanish authorities.

A number of air trafficking organizations have been investigated, including those under the leadership of:

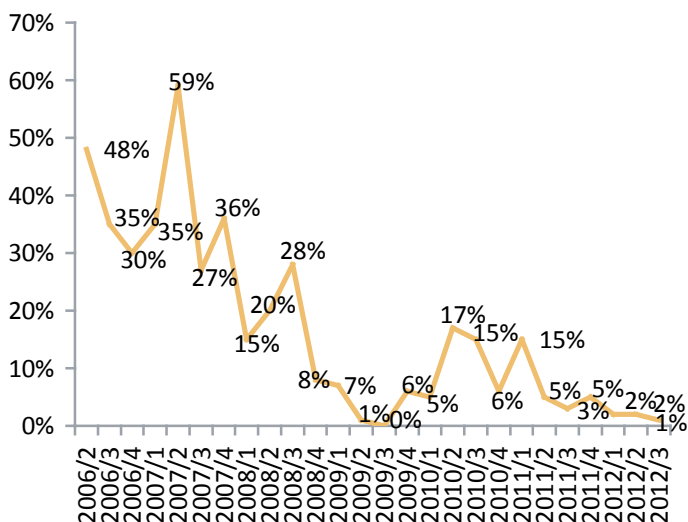
- *Jorge Solano Cortés*, a former member of the Cali Cartel, one of the first South American drug traffickers to use the West African route. He was detained in Togo in October 2008 and extradited to the United States. He was arrested alongside six other Colombians, one South African, one Ghanaian and two Togolese while planning to smuggle 500 kg of cocaine by air from South America to a landing strip in the northern part of Togo (Niamtougou). The cocaine was supposed to be sent by air to Lomé and then on to Europe in shipping containers.⁸
- *Jesus Eduardo Valencia-Arbelaez*, connected to the landmark seizure of 600 kg from a plane that landed in Sierra Leone in 2008, was arrested in Romania in 2009 while trying to buy more aircraft for his fleet, with the intent of flying multi-ton loads to West Africa. In recorded conversations with undercover agents, he claimed to have use of a military airfield in Guinea, and to have flown shipments to Guinea-Bissau and Liberia.
- *Walid Makled-Garcia* (“*The Turk*”), who was, according to the Venezuelan authorities, responsible for the majority of the cocaine trafficking by air from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to West Africa between 2007 and 2009.⁹ He was the part owner of a major airline company (*Aeropostal*) and a transport company (*Transgar*). He also owned several warehouses at Puerto Cabello. He was arrested in Colombia in 2011 and extradited to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to face trial for drug trafficking, money laundering and murder. He has claimed high-level corruption facilitated his cocaine business.

Despite all this history and the recent seizure in the Canary Islands, both the Venezuelan and the Brazilian authorities say that there is very little private air traffic from their countries to West Africa today.

West Africa

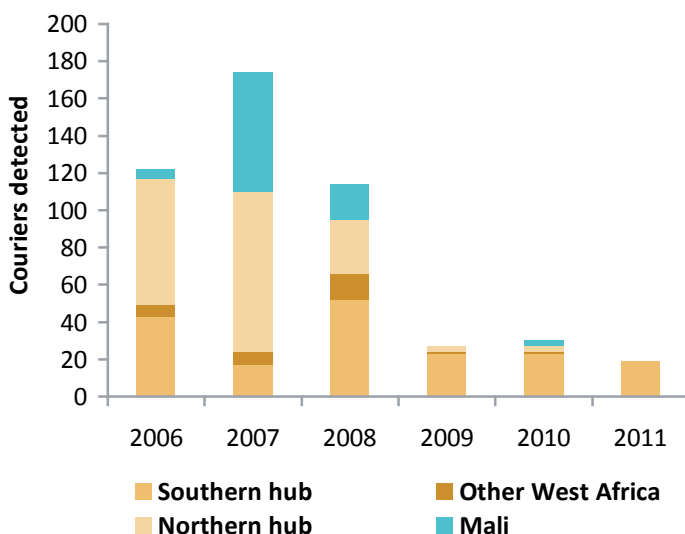
Due to the free movement of people and goods throughout the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region, drugs entering any West African country could, in theory, exit from any other one without passing through border controls. In practice, limited roads in Sierra Leone and Liberia break the region in two. In the south, the drive from Lagos (Nigeria) through Cotonou (Benin) and Lome (Togo) to Accra (Ghana) is less than 500 km and can be completed in one day. In the north, the cluster is linked not by proximity but by necessity. Guinea-Bissau, one of the primary countries of ingress for cocaine, lacks commercial air links to the destination markets, and connections from Banjul (The Gambia) are not much better. As a result, most air couriers in the north depart from Dakar (Senegal) or Conakry (Guinea). A third hub, particularly servicing air flights landing inland, emerged in Bamako (Mali) during the height of the trafficking.

Figure 3: Share of cocaine couriers detected in European airports that originated in West Africa



Source: IDEAS database¹⁰

Figure 4: Hub of origin of detected cocaine couriers on flights from West Africa



Source: UNODC

In all of these hubs, with the exception of Guinea-Bissau itself, Nigerian traffickers dominate the market. Most are resident in the countries where they operate, and make use of local partners, but the methods they use are typical of Nigerian traffickers globally. This includes a predilection for the use of commercial air couriers.

Transit to Europe: commercial air couriers

In the boom years of 2005 to 2007, West Africans were paid in cocaine for their services in facilitating shipments, and then trafficked these drugs onward to Europe on their own behalf. Most of this traffic appears to have occurred via commercial air couriers. But about halfway through 2007, the number of commercial air couriers departing from West African airports declined sharply. It now appears that less than one fifth of the cocaine couriers arriving in Europe are coming from West Africa: most are flying directly from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to an overall decline, the profile of the couriers has changed over time.

A declining share of commercial air couriers are departing from the northern hub (Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, The Gambia, and Senegal), while a rising share are emanating from the southern hub (Nigeria, Benin, and Togo). There has also been a clear shift from Togo to Benin within the southern hub.

Transit to Europe: Sahel-Sahara

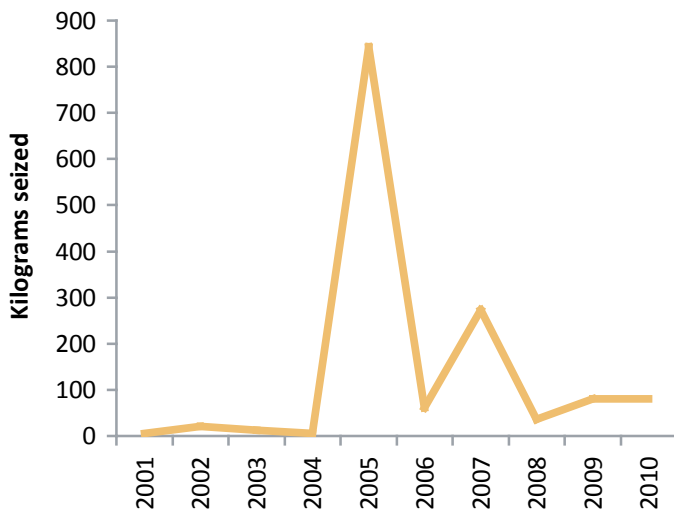
Some maritime traffic from West Africa to Europe has been detected, including some containerized shipments, but there has been very little recent evidence of this. Likewise, it does not appear that private aircraft are used to fly cocaine

directly from West Africa to Europe. There is clear, but diminished, air courier traffic. This leaves one possible additional route: across the Sahara Desert by land or by air to North Africa, and then by sea or by air across the Mediterranean.

On its face, the land route across the Sahara seems unlikely. The terrain is extremely harsh. Roads and refueling stops are limited. The route passes through politically unstable areas, the realm of violent extremists, insurgents, and bandits. Multiple borders must be crossed, meaning multiple security structures must be negotiated. And even upon reaching the Mediterranean coast, crossing into Europe means evading some very tight controls.

Still, the Sahara has been crossed by merchants for centuries, and it is clear that both migrants and all manner of contraband make the journey in great volumes every year. Though no large cocaine seizure has ever been made in the Sahara itself, and the largest seizure ever made in Mali was later declared to be hashish, there have been a number of peripheral indicators that the route is in use:

- There have been a number of documented air flights into the Sahel, some of which had the capacity to carry large volumes of cocaine. These drugs could have been moved back to the coast for onward transport, but then the advantage of an inland landing would be unclear. It is possible that the drugs from these flights were to be flown onward to North Africa in private planes, but even though Bamako was once a major source of couriers detected in Europe, it is unlikely that all these drugs could be moved through commercial flights alone.
- A few seizures have been made of cocaine moving northward into Mali by land, including 116 kg from Guinea and 49 kg from Burkina Faso in 2007.

Figure 5: Cocaine seizures in Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt

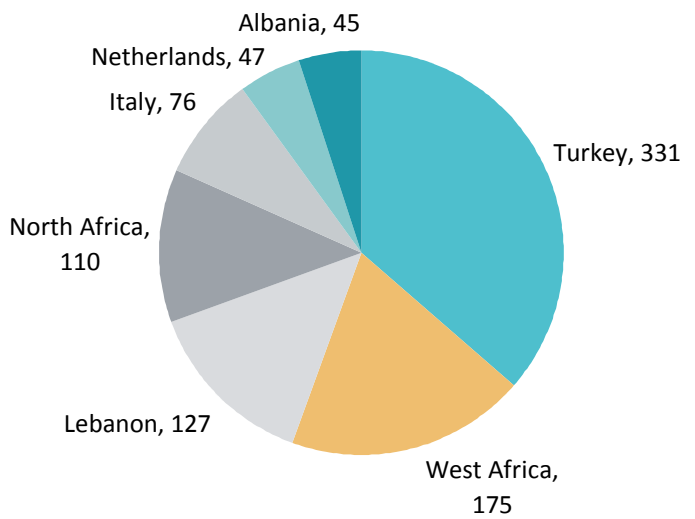
Source: UNODC ARQs

Seizures of cocaine in North Africa have been extremely limited, and this is not due to a lack of enforcement capacity. In 2010, Morocco seized 119 tons of hashish, but only 73 kilograms of cocaine. Of course, hashish production is concentrated in one small area of the country, and authorities understand the market very well, but similar ratios between hashish and cocaine seizures are found in other North African countries. If cocaine is proceeding through North Africa in large quantities, this flow has somehow managed to evade detection in a way that hashish has not.

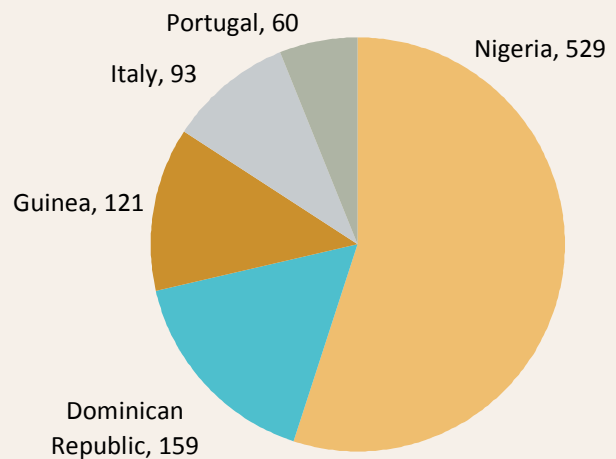
Retail in Europe

The largest European markets for cocaine remain the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy, which collectively account for almost two-thirds of the cocaine users in Europe. Adding in France and Germany brings the total to more than three-quarters. These are the destinations West African traffickers are trying to reach. To get there, though, they may pass through a large number of transit countries, including those with good air links to West Africa.

Neither the United Kingdom nor France publish data on the nationality of the traffickers they arrest, but Spain, Italy, and Germany do, as do the authorities of the smaller markets of Switzerland and Portugal. West Africans, and specifically Nigerians, appear prominently in all of these markets. Looking at the latest data on Spain, Italy, and Germany, Switzerland, and Portugal, just under 2,000 West Africans were arrested for cocaine trafficking in recent years (either 2010 or 2011). If one in 10 of the active traffickers were arrested, this would suggest some 20,000 West African cocaine traffickers in just these five countries.

Figure 6: Foreigners arrested for cocaine trafficking in Germany in 2011¹¹

Source: UNODC ARQ

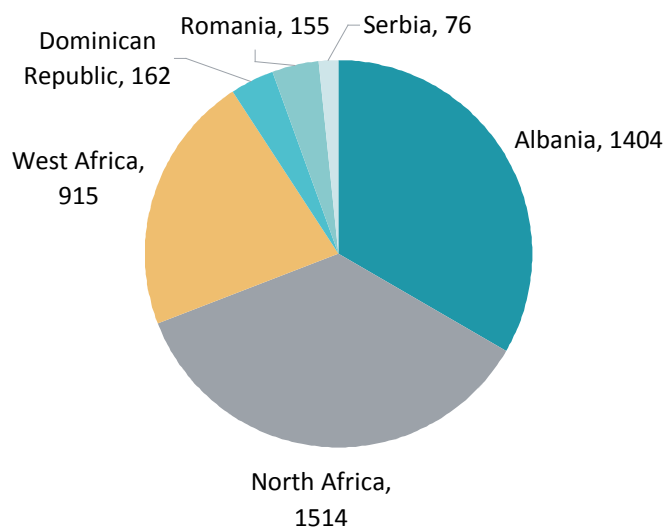
Figure 7: Foreigners arrested for cocaine trafficking in Switzerland in 2011

Source: UNODC ARQ

Who is doing the trafficking?

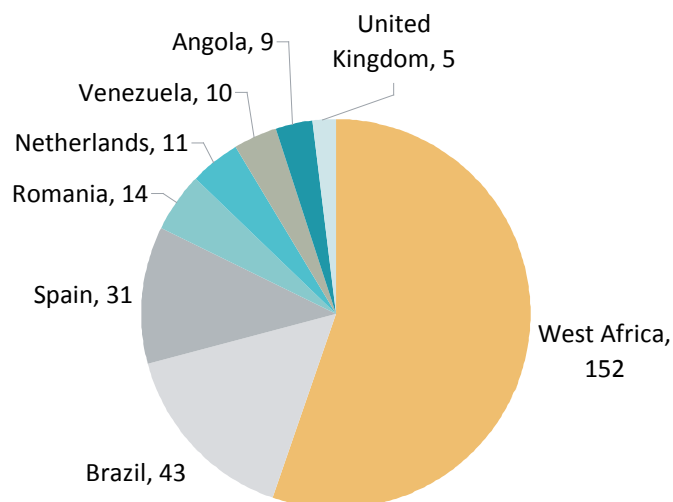
The trafficking is clearly a result of a confluence of interests between South American (Colombian and Venezuelan), West African (primarily Nigerian), and European groups. There are small West African communities in both Colombia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, but the nerve center of Nigerians in South America is clearly Sao Paulo (Brazil). Colombians and Venezuelans have been arrested in a number of West African countries.¹² Europeans, including Europeans of West and North African ancestry, are also prominent in several West African countries, and West Africans dominate cocaine retail markets in several European countries.

Figure 8: Foreigners arrested for cocaine trafficking in Italy in 2010¹³



Source: UNODC ARQ

Figure 9: Foreigners arrested for cocaine trafficking in Portugal in 2010¹⁴



Source: UNODC ARQ

In South America, the most successful traffickers command considerable resources, and may have investments in a wide range of businesses. Some have close ties to the Colombian FARC. The traffickers themselves have credited their success to high-level corruption, so their networks could be said to include political and military officials.

In West Africa, the traffickers appear to be primarily Nigerian, although they may hold residence or citizenship in any West African country. Nigerians from the southeast of the country, particularly of the Igbo ethnic group, are especially implicated. Some of the reasons for this association are

historic: it was the southeast that attempted to secede during the 1967-1970 conflict. As a result, the Igbo diaspora is large and widespread. Ghanaians, Guineans, and Gambians are also prominently represented but with nowhere near the dominance of the Nigerians. Nigerian traffickers tend to move into less hazardous areas of business once they have accumulated a start-up stake, although there are exceptions. As a result, the individuals involved today may have moved on tomorrow, and it is difficult to identify stable centralized organizations. But as in South America, if corrupt officials are included, some very prominent personalities can be identified.

The impact of cocaine trafficking in Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau has been severely affected by the cocaine trade. Soldiers and politicians have been drawing revenue from cocaine. Journalists, police, judges, military officers, and even the highest elected officials have been kidnapped, killed, or cowed if they dared to challenge the traffickers. Traffickers too have fallen prey to their rivals. Among the casualties of the drug conflicts are then-President Vieira, General Tagme Na Wai, General Ansumane Mané, General Verissimo Correia Seabra, Commodore Lamine Sanhá, Deputy Hélder Proença, Governor Baciro Dabó and Colonel Samba Djaló.¹⁵

In a statement before the Security Council on 19 April 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Guinea-Bissau, Mamadú Saliu Djaló Pires, directly blamed the recent coup on the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, Lieutenant General Antonio Indjai. He said the reason for the coup was to allow Indjai to “under-

mine the ongoing process of reform and assure his continuing collaboration with organized crime and drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau.”¹⁶

He recounted the incident in which Indjai rose to his present position:

*On 1 April 2010, ... Lieutenant General Antonio Indjai invaded the premises of the United Nations in Bissau to “liberate” Rear Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto. He subsequently kidnapped the Army Chief of Staff, General Jose Zamora Induta, and imprisoned Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior for several hours, in order to later put pressure on the Government and President Bacai Sanhá to appoint him and Bubo Na Tchuto chiefs of staff of the army and navy, respectively. They were confirmed in office through coercion and threats to the country’s civil authorities, the Prime Minister and President of the Republic.*¹⁷

He went on to describe a country where drug suspects were released by the military, where drug flights land on public roads with the protection of the army, and where soldiers beat and humiliate the police publicly.

Further down the chain still, air couriers can be of any nationality, but are generally run by Nigerian groups. For example, Africans arrested for cocaine trafficking in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are generally Igbo Nigerians or South Africans, who are often recruited as couriers by Nigerian syndicates.

How big is the flow?

Determining the amount of cocaine transiting the region involves a process of triangulation. There are several sources of varying quality that can be compared in creating an estimate.

First, UNODC surveys of cocaine production in Colombia, Peru, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia give some sense of total supply. Less than 1,000 tons of pure cocaine have been manufactured in recent years. The rough amount available for European consumption can be calculated by subtracting seizures and consumption elsewhere in the world. Hundreds of tons are seized in South America, and a large share of the remainder is dispatched for the North American market.

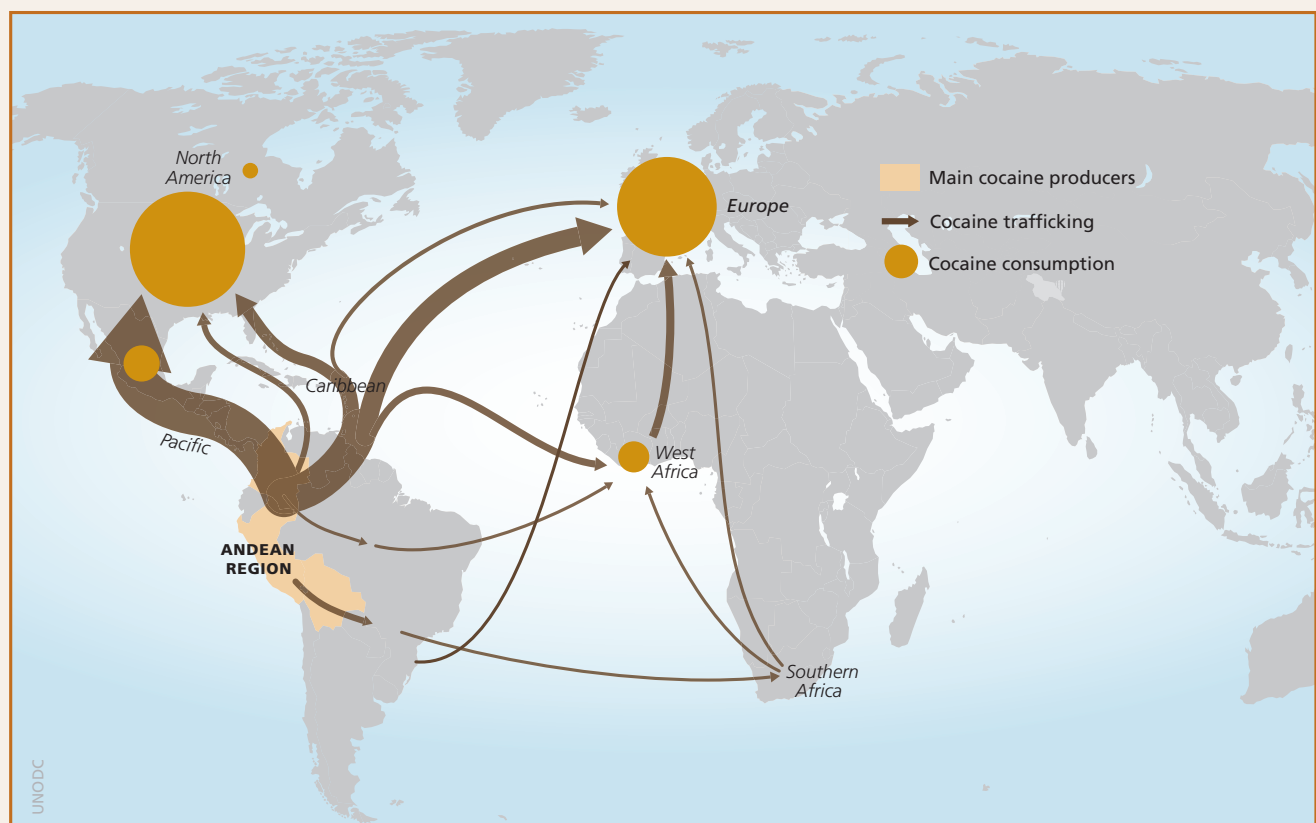
There is also good information on cocaine demand in Europe. Many countries conduct regular household surveys on drug use, and reinforce this information with school surveys and studies aimed at hard-to-access populations. Less is known about the amounts of drugs consumed by individual users, and price data are also problematic. But while no research is perfect, European knowledge on drug

use is among the best in the world. Based on UNODC estimates of the number of cocaine users and the amounts consumed per user, it can be deduced that about 130 tons of pure cocaine were consumed Europe in 2010.¹⁸

There are also comprehensive data on drug seizures in Europe stretching back for decades, and the European law enforcement agencies maintain consistently strong capacity to detect and seize drugs. In 2010, seizures in Europe amounted to some 62 tons. The bulk of these seizures took place at the wholesale level, where purity is around 68%, so around 42 tons of pure cocaine were seized that year. With domestic demand at 130 tons and seizures of 42 tons, the total amount of pure cocaine entering Europe can be estimated at some 172 tons.

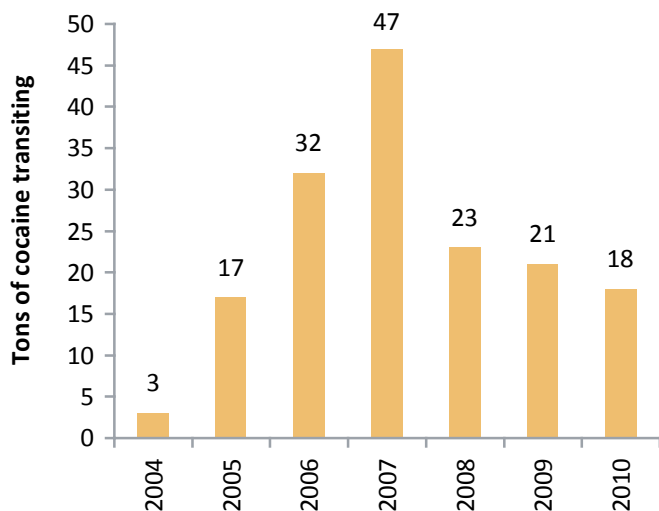
Estimating the share of this supply that transits West Africa is more difficult, and involves looking at various databases when the origin of individual cocaine seizures are recorded, including UNODC's Individual Drug Seizure Database. Based on different sources, the share of European seizures transiting Africa varied between 8% and 13% in 2010. At 10%, this would suggest 18 tons of pure cocaine crossed West Africa on its way Europe in that year. One kilogram of cocaine at wholesale purity of around 65% was priced at an average of around US\$53,000 in 2010, meaning these 18 pure tons would have been worth about US\$1.25 billion. Not all of this money is profit, of course, and the share that accrues to West African criminals remains unclear. But this figure gives a sense of the immense resources available

Map 2: Main global cocaine flows 2010



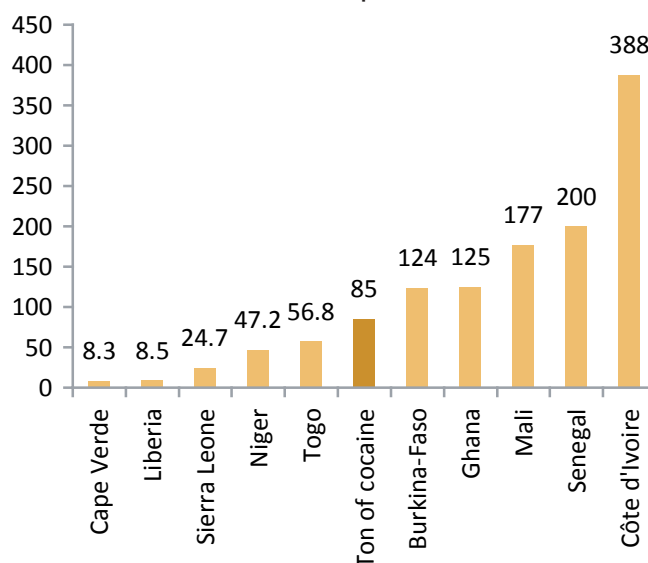
Source: UNODC

Figure 10: Tons of pure cocaine transiting West Africa on their way to Europe



Source: UNODC estimates

Figure 11: National military budgets in 2010 versus the value of one ton of pure cocaine in Europe



Source: Elaborated from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

to traffickers to sow corruption and support violent groups in the region.

Implications for policy

It appears that international attention, including a series of remarkable seizures, has reduced the flow of cocaine through West Africa by more than half since 2007, but this reduction must be kept in perspective. How much illicit money is required to induce instability? The entire military budget of some West African countries is less than the wholesale value of a single ton of cocaine in Europe.

So, it does not require much cocaine to produce a lot of trouble in West Africa. As enforcement successes in one country may simply divert the flow to a weaker neighbour, the problem must be approached regionally, and the goal must be to make the region inhospitable to drug traffickers.

Given the fact that high-level public and military officials have been implicated, building local capacity must be viewed as a long-term solution to an acute crisis. Rather than demand too much of local partners, the international community will have to act to ensure that it is no longer advantageous for traffickers to make a detour through West Africa to reach the European market. International cooperation and information sharing will be key to protecting this vulnerable region.