



Executive Summary

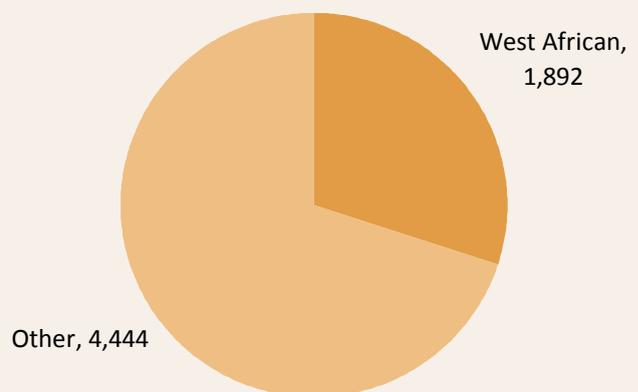
West Africa has long been the focus of United Nations attention, but it is only recently that the international community recognized organized crime as a key issue for the region. This recognition stems primarily from a single contraband flow – cocaine – a flow so large that its wholesale value on arrival in Europe would exceed the national security budgets of many countries in West Africa. While the threat of cocaine is clear, there are many other forms of organized crime that threaten the stability of the region. These threats are both a cause and a consequence of weak governance, a dynamic explored in the present report.

Understanding the cocaine flow requires some historical context. In the last decade, the world cocaine market has undergone a dramatic shift. Cocaine demand in the United States has been in long-term decline, with a particularly acute downturn after Mexico implemented a new national security strategy in 2006. But cocaine demand in Europe has doubled in the last decade, and cocaine is more expensive in Europe than in the United States. As European law enforcement agencies became aware of the threat in the mid-2000s, direct smuggling to the continent became more difficult. Cocaine traffickers in South America began to look for a staging area on the other side of the Atlantic, and found one in West Africa.

West African cocaine traffickers, especially those from southeast Nigeria, have long been active in global cocaine markets, including retail markets in many European countries. In 2011, looking only at four countries where comparable data are available (Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Portugal), 30% of the foreigners arrested for cocaine trafficking were from West Africa. Small-scale transit through the West African region, primarily through commercial air couriers, is not new. But in the mid-2000s, a series of

remarkably large cocaine seizures were made along the West Africa coast, and a large number of cocaine couriers were detected on flights from West Africa to Europe. These suggested a flow of cocaine worth over one billion US dollars on arrival at its destination.

Regional origin of foreign cocaine traffickers arrested in Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Portugal in 2011



Source: UNODC Annual Reports Questionnaire (ARQ)

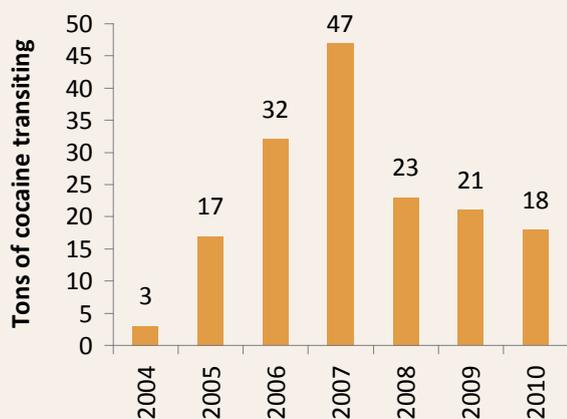
The detection of both maritime shipments and commercial air couriers peaked in 2007 and declined sharply thereafter. There is debate as to whether the flow of cocaine decreased commensurably or whether the traffickers have simply found less detectable ways of moving the drug. Today, it appears that a range of vectors are employed, including a much smaller number of large maritime shipments, private aircraft (including jet aircraft), shipping containers, commercial air couriers, and the post. The preferred method has shifted over time in response to enforcement efforts.

The threats from this flow in the region are manifold. Since no methodologically-sound drug use studies have been conducted since the advent of the cocaine flow, it remains unclear how being a transit region has affected local drug use. Cocaine-related corruption has clearly undermined governance in places like Guinea-Bissau. Of particular concern is the possibility that trafficking through the region could provide income to non-state armed groups, especially the various rebel forces in the Sahel and the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

Based on an assessment of cocaine seizures in Europe, the flow of cocaine through the region appears to have declined to an estimated 18 tons, down from a peak in 2007 of an estimated 47 tons. While this is good news, it does not take a lot of cocaine to cause trouble in a region with poverty and governance problems. The entire military budget of many West African countries is less than the wholesale price of a ton of cocaine in Europe.

In the end, the gross volume of drugs transiting the region is less relevant than the way West Africa interacts with it. It appears a growing share is not merely the property of South Americans making use of West African logistic services, but that West Africans are playing an increasingly independent role in bringing the drugs into their region. One manifestation of this trend is the smaller size of shipments detected in recent years.

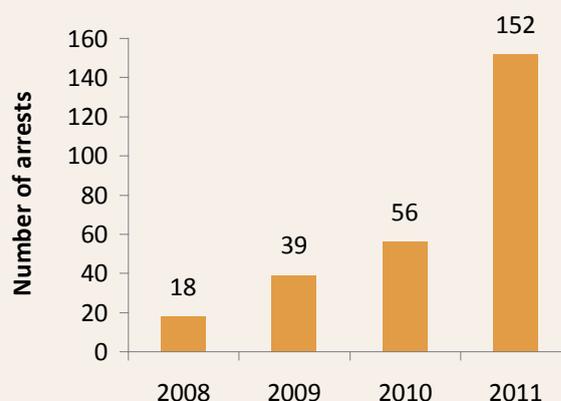
Tons of pure cocaine transiting West Africa on their way to Europe



Source: UNODC estimates

Another worrisome development is the emergence of drug production in the region. Two methamphetamine labs were detected in Nigeria in 2011-2012, and an estimated 3000 methamphetamine couriers traveled from West Africa (including Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal) to Asia (primarily Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Thailand) in 2010. The drugs carried by these couriers sold for about US\$360 million, a sizeable income for such a young flow. Unlike the cocaine flow, the bulk of the profits accrued to West African traffickers, and may ultimately find its way back to West Africa. West

Nigerian couriers arrested for methamphetamine trafficking in Malaysia, 2008-2011



Source: Royal Malaysian Police

Africa is also supplying methamphetamine to South Africa, a major consumer of the drug. Heroin is also detected with increasing regularity and in growing volumes, another indicator that groups based in West Africa are playing a growing role in the global drug trade.

Illicit drugs are generally smuggled in, but also problematic are pharmaceutical drugs transported through mainstream commercial channels. Some of these are themselves drugs of abuse, such as synthetic opiates. In the last year, at least 37 tons of illicitly imported painkillers have been seized in West Africa, mostly in Benin and Togo, most likely destined for markets in the Middle East. Others are fraudulent medicines: drugs that are not what they purport to be. In addition to the harm they inflict on users, some fraudulent medicines foster the growth of drug-resistant pathogens, which pose a global health threat. It is estimated that at least 10% of all essential medicines circulating in West Africa are fraudulent. But despite the damage they do to public health, there is no evidence at present that this flow is promoting instability.

In addition to drugs, there is great concern about the security implications of weapons trafficking in the region. Many weapons continue to circulate from past conflicts, and diversion from official weapons stocks is common. As a result, there is generally very little need to import large numbers of weapons into West Africa. But the recent flood of perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 firearms from Libya represents a serious threat to stability, a threat that appears to have been realized in northern Mali. It remains unclear whether drug trafficking enabled the current conflict, but there can be little doubt that firearms trafficking did.

In the last year, an old crime problem in the region received renewed attention: maritime piracy. In the past, most of the piracy in West Africa was confined to Nigerian waters, and much of this was related to the conflict over oil in the Niger Delta. But in 2011, 22 pirate attacks were executed off the coast of Benin, many of them aimed at vessels transporting

petroleum products. These attacks caused maritime insurance assessors to re-categorize Beninese waters as “high-risk,” increasing the cost of shipping to the country. As a result, port traffic declined by 70%. Taxes on trade account for half of Benin’s government revenues, and 80% of these are derived from the port of Cotonou. Thankfully, these attacks subsided as quickly as they began, but in 2012, Togo became the new hotspot for attacks on tankers carrying petroleum products, with 18 attacks by mid-year.

These illicit flows can affect stability and development in a range of ways. As suggested above, trafficking can benefit those non-state armed groups that control territory useful for smuggling. These groups can use the profits to purchase weapons or to promote corruption. Competition for trafficking routes can lead to conflict between groups. Illicit profits can also generate friction within groups, leading to splintering, in-fighting, and succession struggles. Rebels who make more money by participating in illicit markets than they possibly could in civilian life may be difficult to attract to the negotiating table. If military officials are also involved, parties on both sides of the struggle may prefer to maintain the status quo rather than pursue peace.

Smuggling is often accomplished not by stealth, but by corruption. The profits gained in some trafficking flows are sufficient to buy cooperation from high levels of government in some poor countries, thus undermining governance. In extreme cases, this can destabilize governments, as competing factions of officials seek to displace one another. Arguably the most affected country in this regard is Guinea-Bissau, a country whose annual economic output is less than the value of some of the cocaine seizures made in the region. The country has experienced several abrupt changes of government since the cocaine flows began, and senior officials in the military have been suspected of complicity in cocaine trafficking.

Transnational trafficking can also affect economic development. Under-served communities, particularly those in border areas, may profit from the flow of contraband, leading them further and further from the reach of the state. These livelihoods, being based on international crime, are not sustainable, but they may be seen as preferable to poverty, and may be violently defended when challenged. It may become difficult for legitimate commerce to compete with the facilitation of trafficking. The long-term prospects of this development model are bleak.

Transnational criminals are more likely to invest their profits in stable economies and hard currencies abroad than in transit countries. Some construction may be fostered, but often the object is a front for money laundering, such as unneeded hotels and casinos. Traffickers have little incentive to maintain these premises, and their attention shifts with unpredictable dynamics of transnational organized crime.

The violence and political instability associated with transnational trafficking may deter legitimate investment outside the extractive industries. Armed groups that have profited from trafficking may turn to predatory activities when this easy money dries up. Criminal activity is inherently unpredictable, and even domestic investors may look abroad when seeking investment opportunities. In the end, many professionals may seek to relocate to safer countries, eroding the human capital needed for sustainable development.

Solving these ills requires international cooperation. An essential step is to ensure the complete implementation of the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols. This will facilitate the mutual legal assistance, the extradition, and the technical cooperation needed to tackle these problems cooperatively. Given the limited capacity of local law enforcement institutions, every effort should be made to ensure that contraband never makes it to West African shores. The local demand for illicit drugs should be monitored closely and emerging problems must be nipped in the bud. Local efforts to screen out fraudulent medicines and destroy illicit arms should be supported. Technical assistance and legal advice are particularly needed in the effort to bring order to the local petrochemical industry. These efforts could pay great dividends in reducing corruption, promoting equity, resolving conflict, and undercutting maritime piracy.

Key Recommendations

- Mobilize States of the region to provide valid and reliable data, in order to better assess and analyze drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse problems affecting the region.
- Improve regional and international coordination efforts in dealing with the drug problem, as well as with respect to all related organized crimes in the region, through facilitating the exchange of criminal intelligence.
- Fight impunity through the harmonization of national legislation and strengthen current legal frameworks in order to effectively sentence identified criminals.
- Create, strengthen and mobilize synergies between relevant law enforcement structures to better respond to the threat of drug trafficking and TOC.
- Develop integrated programmes to combat drug trafficking and organized crime at the national and regional levels in full coherence with existing international standards.
- Focus on financial flows related to drug trafficking and transnational organized crime in order to cut off sources of funding.
- Facilitate quality drug treatment and rehabilitation services to contribute to the reduction of demand for illicit drugs, HIV transmission amongst drug users, drug-related crimes, incarceration and recidivism.