



UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

COCAINE TRAFFICKING IN WESTERN AFRICA

SITUATION REPORT

October 2007

Acknowledgements

This situation report on cocaine trafficking in Africa was prepared by Denis Destrebecq in the context of "Data For Africa", the segment of UNODC's Trends Monitoring and Analysis Programme dedicated to Africa and funded by France and Sweden. Comments and feedbacks can be addressed to ras@unodc.org.

UNODC reiterates its appreciation to the African Member States who responded to the UNODC Annual Report Questionnaire on drugs. This questionnaire, together with the UNODC data base on individual drug seizures, constitutes the core source of information on which this situation report was built.

The boundaries, names and designations used in all maps in this report do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

This report has not been formally edited

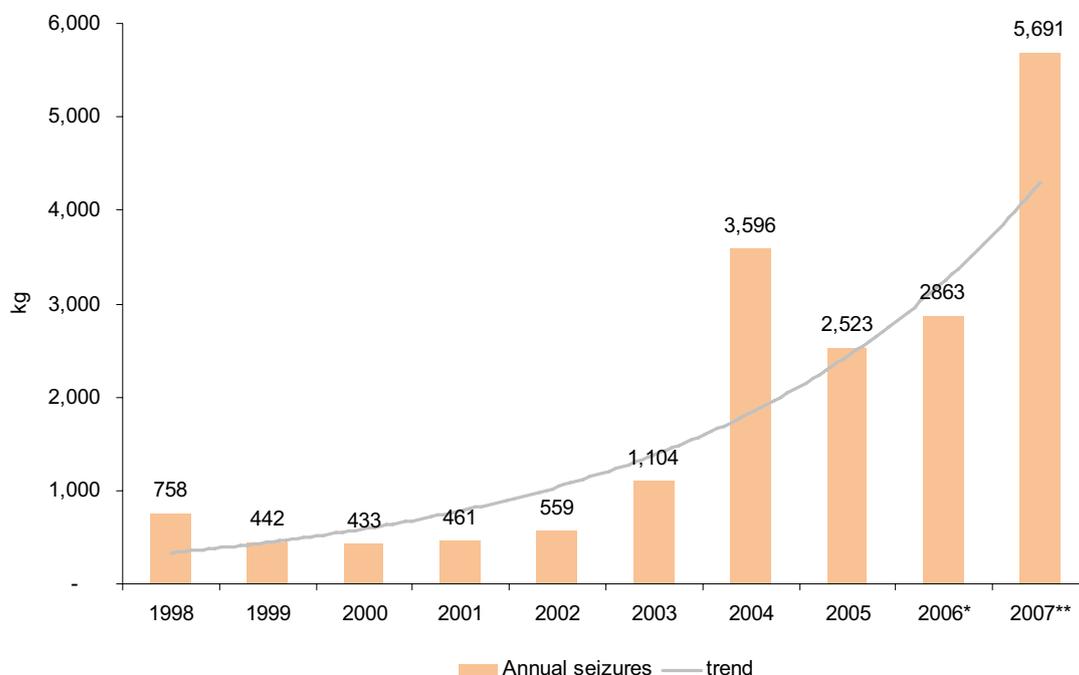
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Although cocaine is not produced in Africa, the rapid increase in seizures suggests that the continent, and in particular its Western region, is growing in importance as a transit area for cocaine trafficking between Latin American countries and Europe. This note reviews recent cocaine seizures in African countries, as well as cocaine seizures originating from African countries and reported by European countries. Most data comes from official law enforcements agencies. In addition to providing annual seizures data, some Member States also provides UNODC with information on individual drug seizures. Both, annual and individual drug seizures data, were the main materials for this analysis.

Between 1998 and 2003, for the continent as a whole, the annual cocaine seizures in Africa averaged about 0.6 mt¹. This represented only a minute portion of the global seizures of cocaine. However, since 2004, African seizures have been above 2.5 mt, almost five times more than before and preliminary data for the first nine months of 2007 indicate a record level of 5.7 mt of cocaine seized in African countries, with a street value in Western Europe of around US\$ 480 millions. The 5.7 mt recorded for the first nine months of 2007 represented an increase of 50% compared to 2.8 mt seized in 2006.

Figure 1: Trends in Annual Cocaine Seizures in Africa, 1998 – 2007 in kg



Source: UNODC World Drug Report 2007, and UNODC 'Data for Africa' for 2006 and 2007 statistics

* preliminary data for 2006 based on available data as of 31st September 2007

** from data collected by UNODC between January – September 2007

¹ Metric tons (mt)

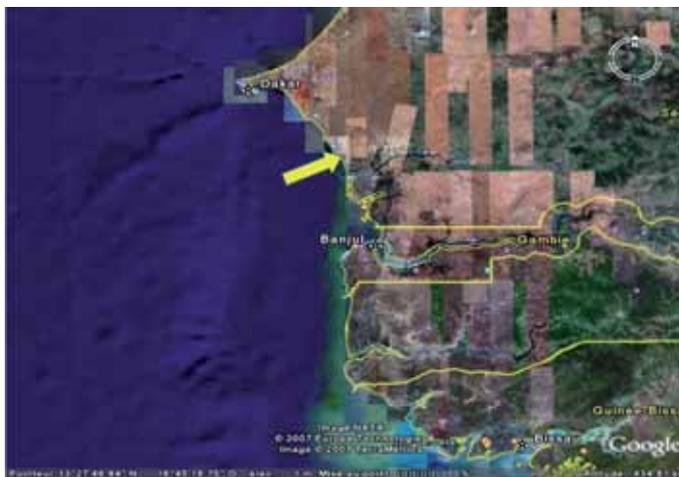
Picture 1: Record seizure of 2.4 mt of cocaine in Senegal in June 2007



The cocaine was wrapped in large woven plastic bags. 51 bags were seized.



1.2 mt of cocaine was hidden in a cellar concealed under a large concrete lid.



On 27th June 2007, the Senegalese Gendarmerie seized 1.2 mt of cocaine on the beach in M'bour, 100 km South of Dakar. On 30th June 2007, another 1.2 mt of cocaine was seized from a house close to the first seizure. Seven persons were arrested.



In each plastic bag were smaller bricks sealed in transparent plastic bags.



Under the transparent plastic bag each brick was wrapped in a balloon enhancing its water resistance.

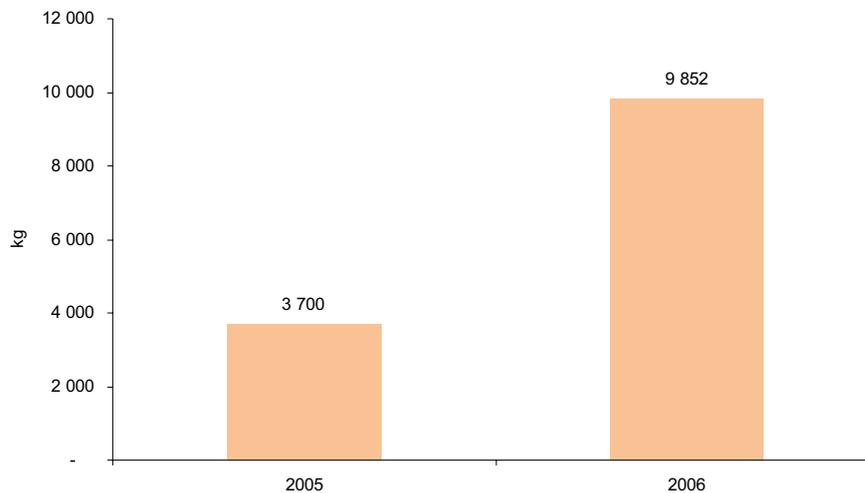
Pictures: UNODC Law Enforcement Unit for Africa, UNODC ROSEN

Out of the 5.7 mt of cocaine seized so far in 2007, 99% were reported from Western African countries: 2.4 mt were seized in Senegal in June, almost 1.5 mt were seized in Mauritania between May and August, 0.6 mt in Guinea-Bissau in April, 0.5 mt in Cape Verde in March, 0.4 mt in Benin in August and 0.2 mt in Guinea. In 2006, two seizures in Western Africa, one made in Ghana (1.9 mt) and one Guinea-Bissau (0.6 mt), accounted for 90% of all seizures reported so far on the continent. And this is probably only the tip of the iceberg because the lack of seizure reports from neighboring Western African countries does not necessarily mean the absence of trafficking in these countries, but more likely the deficiency of law enforcement capacities.

The growing use of Western Africa as a large cocaine stockpiling location is further confirmed by recent seizures made by European and Latin American countries of cocaine shipments bound to Africa.

In 2006, the Spanish and the British navies operating in international waters seized a record volume of cocaine departing from African ports, with a total of 9,852 kg seized on 5 ships, compared to 3,700 kg on one ship in 2005 (+ 166%). All seizures took place in international waters close to the Western African coasts, as shown on the map on the next page.

Figure 2: Maritime seizures made by European Navies off the African coasts in 2005 and 2006



Sources: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures Database and Data for Africa

More recently, in June 2007, the Venezuelans authorities seized 2.5 mt of cocaine on a private plane that was about to take off for Sierra Leone, and the Spanish authorities seized 800 kg of cocaine on a plane that had taken off in the Sahara desert, close to Mauritania and the Western Sahara. The same month, a cocaine trafficking network was dismantled at Brussels airport. The network had been active for some 18 months, trafficking cocaine from Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Three reasons explain the importance of Western Africa as a transit point for cocaine trafficking to Europe.

First, there have been increased law enforcement successes in the Caribbean and in Europe which may have played a part in the development of alternative routes for traffickers. Spain is the main entry point of cocaine into Europe and traffickers exploit Spain's historic and linguistic ties with Latin America, as well as its long coastline. In 2005, Spain's seizures of 48 metric mt of cocaine accounted for 45 per cent of all cocaine seizures made in Europe, and rose by almost half from 2004 to 2005 after Spanish enforcement agencies intensified their control along the northern coast (Galicia). It is worth mentioning here that the bulk (66%) of Spanish cocaine seizures is made at sea. Netherlands is another traditional entry point for cocaine into Europe. In recent years the Dutch authorities enforced a 100% controls policy on flights from specific Latin American countries, a procedure that may have prompted some traffickers to find different channels, notably through Africa.

The second reason is that the geographical position of Western Africa makes it an ideal staging post from South America to the growing cocaine market in Europe. Cocaine shipment destined to Europe frequently transit through Venezuela and Brazil. The shortest distances between these countries and Western African countries are around 10 degrees of latitude north and it is exactly where most cocaine seizures with a link to Africa have been made by the Spanish and British Navies. So many cocaine seizures destined to Africa have been made in this Atlantic band that the European law enforcement agencies now refer to it as "highway 10'".

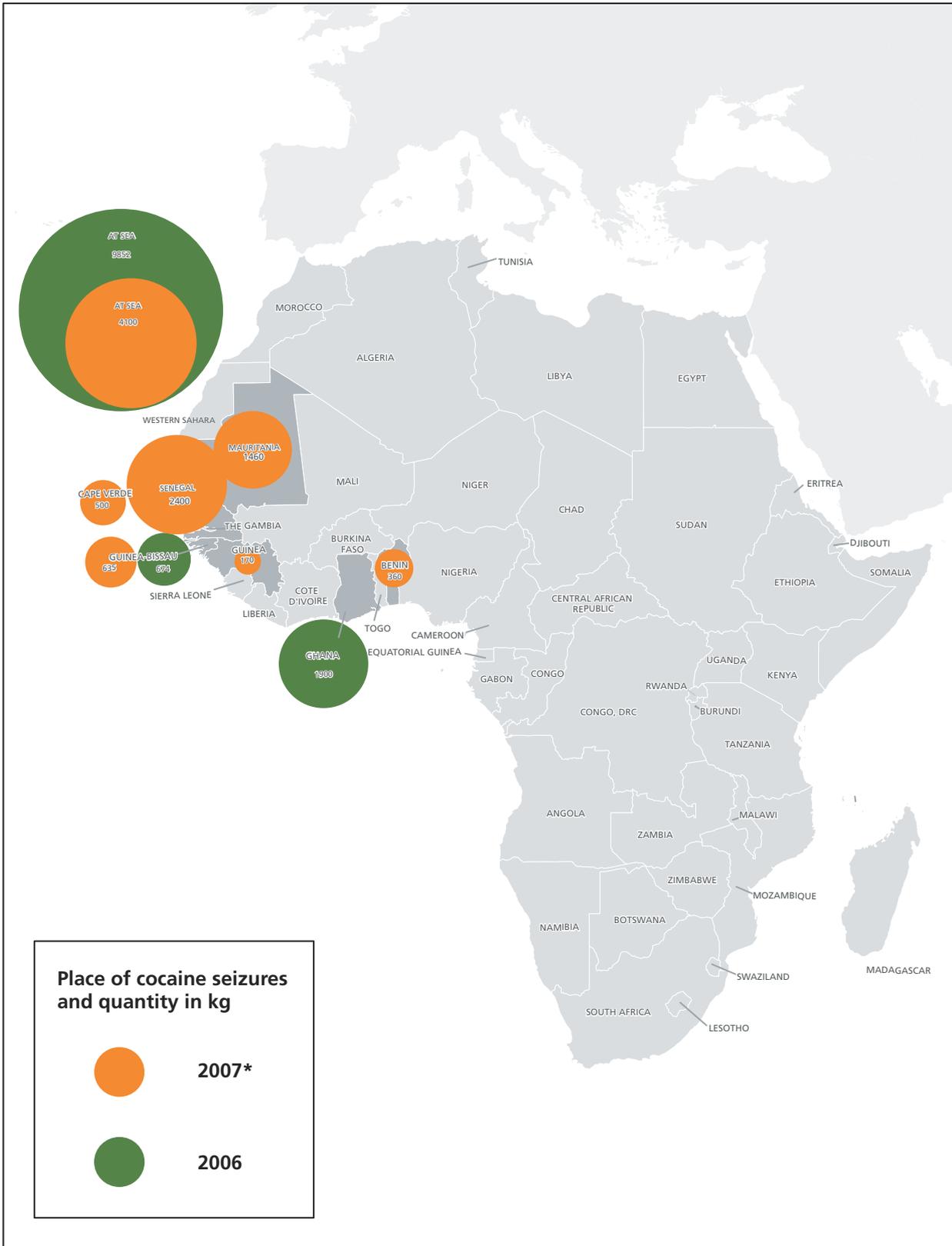
Finally, Western African countries are perceived as having a permissive working environment for drug traffickers due to widespread corruption and poor law enforcement structure. Many countries in the region face difficulties in controlling their territory, to administering justice, and are plagued by corruption.

The case of Guinea-Bissau provides examples of the consequences of the difficulties for weak states to enforce the law. In September 2006, the authorities of Guinea-Bissau seized 670 kg of cocaine. Two Latin American persons were arrested, but soon after freed, while the drug consignment disappeared and the case was filed. It is only in early September 2007 that investigations resumed into the alleged involvement of several high-level officials of the Government of the former Prime Minister in the disappearance of the drug.

In April 2007, the police in Guinea-Bissau seized another consignment of cocaine of 635 kg, but traffickers escaped with the remainder of a consignment believed to total around 2.5 mt of cocaine (which had been flown into a military airstrip) because police did not have the manpower or vehicles to give chase.

Another striking evidence of the weak law enforcement capacities in Africa can be derived from the comparison of volumes of cocaine seized by African authorities with the volumes seized by European navies off the coast of Africa offers. In 2005, the total cocaine seizures for all 53 African countries amounted to about 2.5 mt, while in July 2005, in a single catch, the Spanish navy seized 3.t mt in a Ghanaian ship, representing almost 40% more than the cocaine seizures on the entire continent. In 2006, the Spanish navy seized a total of 9.8 mt of cocaine off the coast of Africa, more than three times the seizures on the entire continent amounting to about 2.9 mt.

Cocaine seizures of more than 100 kg in Africa, 2006 - 2007*



* As of September 2007

Source: UNODC

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

How does cocaine arrive in Western Africa and how is it trafficked to Europe?

According to law enforcement agencies, cocaine is mostly shipped to Western Africa on fishing boats and freighters. The drug is usually concealed in concealment areas built especially for that purpose in the frame of the boat, such as a modified oil tank. These concealment areas make it very difficult to detect the drug without specific intelligence as to its location. Cocaine seizures have also been made on smaller private yachts.

Picture 2: Cocaine seizures on high seas



Interception of the vessel « Master Endeavour » by the French Navy



Cocaine found in the frame of the vessel

Pictures : France, Marine Nationale, www.premar-atlantique.gouv.fr/galleries/Inspection-Master-Endeavour

Seizures made on the high seas require long preparations and the search can only be done after authorization is received from the authorities of the ship's flag. Spain is the European country that has made most of the seizures on the high seas. In 2006, of the 27 inspections requested by Spain on foreign boats, 20 inspections were related to cocaine and seven to cannabis resin. Eventually, 18 inspections were positive.

Transshipping cocaine from mother-boats originating from Latin America to other boats not far from the coasts of Western Africa enables the traffickers to lure Spanish authorities by loading the drug in a vessel that does not fit the risk criteria for cocaine smuggling. But after a number of successful police operations in high seas conducted at the time of transshipment of the cocaine, traffickers started to make increasing use of Africa as a storage place. The cocaine seized in Ghana in May 2006 in a small coastal village provided a good example of countries along the Gulf of Guinea being used by traffickers for stockpiling.

Picture 3: Seizure of 1,900 kg of cocaine in the small coastal village of Phrampan in May 2006, Ghana



Picture: Ghanaian authorities

The importance of Africa for cocaine trafficking is also evidenced by the growing sophistication of the means used by traffickers for shipping the drug. The traffickers have successfully managed to organized and set up direct flight connections with small planes between Latin America and Western Africa. On 1st May 2007, traffickers were found unloading 630 kg of cocaine from a Cessna plane at the airport of Nouhabidou, a small coastal town in Mauritania near the Moroccan border, better known so far as a departing point for illegal migration to Europe. Several persons were arrested in connection with this case, including Mauritians officials, two French and one Moroccan nationals. The record of the on-board GPS instrument revealed that the plane had left from a small airstrip in Venezuela.

Picture 4: The 2-engine Cessna 441 aircraft used to fly cocaine from Venezuela to Mauritania on 1st May 2007



Picture: Interpol IRT mission to Mauritania

In June 2007, one month after the first evidence of a direct air connection between South America and Western Africa for cocaine trafficking mentioned above, a private aircraft bound to Sierra Leone was intercepted in Venezuela with 2.5 mt of cocaine on board. The same month, the Spanish authorities seized 800 kg of cocaine on a small aircraft stranded in the Canary Island. The plane had left from an unknown place in the Sahara region, close to Mauritania and the Western Sahara.

The presence of clandestine airstrips in Guinea-Bissau had already been noted by several law enforcement agencies. In August 2007, in response to increasing reports on the landing of unidentified aircraft suspected of transporting cocaine, Guinea-Bissau announced the deployment of anti-aircraft artillery to the archipelago of Bijagos, 50 km off the coast.

The transfer of the cocaine from Western Africa to Europe is less documented, but it is likely that boats are also often used. Fishing boats and freighters leaving African ports can easily make their trip unnoticed to Europe among the heavy maritime traffic off the coasts of Western Africa. But recently, traffickers have been caught using powerful go-fast boats to link Africa to Europe. On 30th December 2006, the Spanish Navy intercepted a go-fast boat off the coast of Galicia. The boat had left Casablanca, in Morocco, a few days earlier and rallied with a boat coming from Latin America. Some 3 mt of cocaine were transferred to the go-fast boat, but most of it was dumped into the sea when the boat was spotted by the Spanish authorities. Eventually, the operation led to the seizure of 1.8 mt of cocaine and the arrests of 28 persons in Galicia. During the investigation, the Spanish Police established that Moroccan traffickers, specialized in smuggling by sea, were involved. The use of go-fast boats has also been mentioned, though not confirmed, in Mauritania.

Picture 5: Interception of the go-fast boat “Zenith” by the Spanish Navy on 30th December 2006



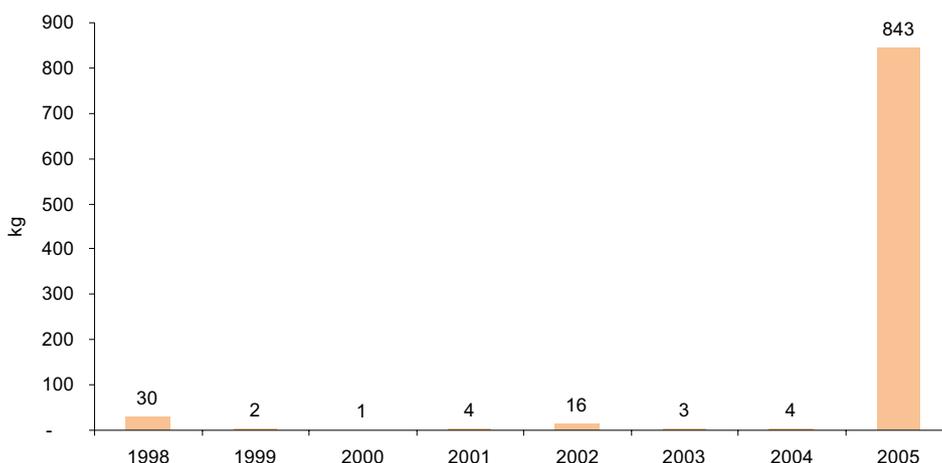
(Picture: ‘El Mundo’, a video is also available on:
<http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2007/01/06/espana/1168079004.html>)

Situated close to Western Africa, Morocco is used by traffickers on their way to Europe, as evidenced by the surge in cocaine seizures in Morocco in 2005 (843 kg that year compared to four in 2004) or involving Morocco at some point of the journey. In April 2006, 253 kg of cocaine were seized in a controlled delivery involving Peru, Holland and Morocco (Operation Honey). In May 2006, 28 kg cocaine was seized in Morocco from a French citizen. The drug was concealed in a four-wheel drive vehicle, which the perpetrator had driven from Senegal via Mauritania to Morocco. The vehicle was registered in Guinea Bissau.

In July 2007, the Moroccan Narcotic Control Board reported the seizures of cocaine bricks believed to be identical to those seized by Mauritanian police in May 2007 on board the Cessna aircraft from Venezuela. One seizure took place in Agadir in southwest Morocco and another in the city of Laayoune in the Western Sahara.

The Moroccan territory being the main source of cannabis resin to Europe, it is possible that cocaine traffickers would seek to use traditional cannabis trafficking routes into Europe. However, information in this regard is limited.

Figure 3: Annual cocaine seizures in Morocco, 1998 – 2005



Source: UNODC Annual Report Questionnaires

Cocaine is also trafficked from Western African countries to Europe by air, and this modus operandi is most notably used by Nigerians groups which send many couriers with small quantities (typically about 0.8 kg) in the same flight. This shotgun approach overwhelms law enforcement agencies at departure and at destination. For example, in December 2006, the Dutch authorities arrested 32 couriers on the same plane at Amsterdam airport. The couriers had left Guinea-Bissau, transited through Casablanca in Morocco and landed at Schiphol airport. Two of the couriers transported the drug in their luggage; the rest had ingested the drug. Out of the 32 couriers, 28 were Nigerians. More recently, in July 2007, 16 couriers were arrested in the weekly flight between the Gambia and the Netherlands. 8 couriers were arrested at Banjul airport before departure and 8 other persons were arrested at Schiphol airport on arrival. The couriers were mostly Nigerians with residency in Europe (Spain, but also Italy and Greece).

Possibly due the limitations of control capacities, but probably also due to the small quantities involved, the total volume of cocaine ingested represented only 7% of all cocaine seizures made at selected EU airports in 2006.

The analysis of selected EU airport cocaine seizures also highlighted the importance of Western Africa in cocaine trafficking. In 2006, out of the 822 reports to UNODC of cocaine seizures in European airports, 122, or 13%, were made from flight originating from Africa. Of the 122 cases of cocaine seizures from African countries, 117, or 96%, originated from Western African countries.

Table 1: Origin of airport cocaine seizures in Europe in 2006

Origin	Kg	% of total kg	Number of cocaine seizures reported to UNODC	% of seizures	Average quantity seized (in kg)
America	3,225	87%	738	84%	4.4
Western Africa	455	12%	117	13%	3.9
Europe	19	1%	18	2%	1.1
Non-specified	15	0%	4	0%	3.9
Other African regions	11	0%	5	1%	2.2
Total	3,726	100%	882	100%	4.2

Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures database

Based on 117 cases reported to UNODC, the average quantity of cocaine seized in European airports from flights originating in Western African countries was 3.9 kg per incident in 2006. In 42 cases the drug was concealed in the luggage (with the average of 5.3 kg) and in 30 cases, cocaine had been ingested (with an average of 0.8 kg).

Table 2: Concealment methods from the airport cocaine seizures in Europe in 2006, from flights coming from African countries (from a sample of 117 seizures reported to UNODC)

Concealment	Kg	% of kg	Nr of cases	% of cases	mean quantity in kg
Luggage	223	49%	42	37%	5.3
Ingested	30	7%	37	30%	0.8
Other	203	45%	38	33%	5.3
Total	455	100%	117	100%	3.9

Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures database

The importance of Western Africa in trafficking cocaine to Europe is also evidenced by the nationalities of the persons arrested for drug trafficking at European airport. In 2006, UNODC recorded the arrests of 442 persons for cocaine trafficking from European airports. Holders of African passports accounted for 16% of the cases, and West Africa alone represented 14% of all cases, and 90% of the Africans arrested.

Table 3: Breakdown of cocaine traffickers arrested at European airports in 2006, by region

Region	Number of person arrested	% of total
Europe	191	43%
Americas	144	32%
Africa	71	16%
Not specified	25	6%
Asia	15	3%
Grand Total	446	100%

Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures database

Table 4: Breakdown of cocaine traffickers from Africa arrested at European airports, by African regions

Region	Number of person arrested	% of total
West and Central Africa	64	90%
East Africa	3	4%
Southern Africa	3	4%
North Africa	1	1%
Total	71	100%

Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures database

Based on the data received by UNODC, most of the Western African arrested at European airports in 2006 were holders of Nigerian passports (44% of all Western African arrested), followed by nationals of Cape Verde (25%) and Ghanaians (8%).

Table 5: Nationalities of Western African traffickers arrested at European airports in 2006

Nationalities	Number of person arrested	% of total
Nigeria	28	44%
Cape Verde	16	25%
Ghana	5	8%
Benin	4	6%
Guinea-Bissau	2	3%
Liberia	2	3%
Mali	2	3%
Sao Tome and Principe	2	3%
Togo	2	3%
Sierra Leone	1	2%
Total	64	100%

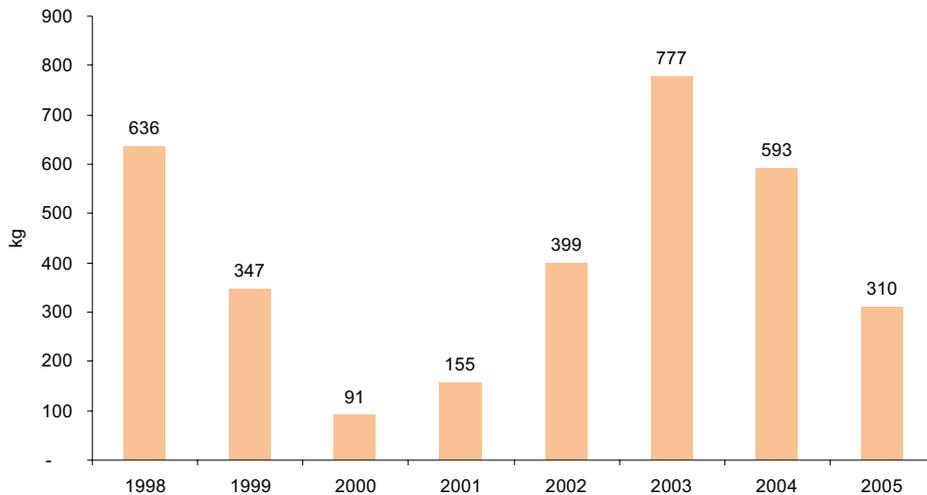
Source: UNODC Individual Drug Seizures database

And elsewhere in Africa?

Outside Western Africa, Kenya reported 2 large seizures totaling 890 kg in 2004. It seems however that the network operating from Kenya has been dismantled. Since 2005, large annual cocaine seizures have only been reported from South Africa.

South Africa is the only African country reporting relatively high and regular annual cocaine seizures. This specific pattern might be due to the local demand for cocaine as indeed South Africa is probably the only country in Africa where traffickers find a demand for high-price cocaine.

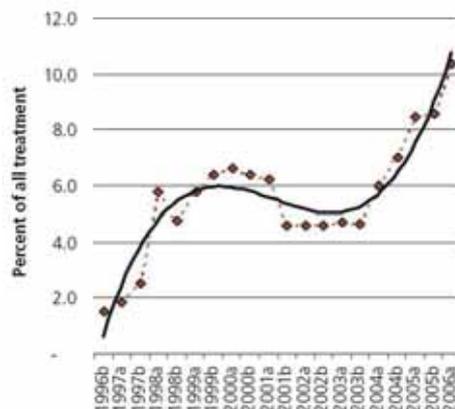
Figure 4: Annual seizures of cocaine in South Africa, 1998 – 2005, in kg



Source: UNODC – Annual Report Questionnaires

South Africa is also the only country in Africa with documented increases of cocaine abuse, with data collected for the past 10 years by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU). Data from treatment centers in six locations indicate that cocaine abuse is increasing rapidly across the country. Cocaine-related treatment demand as a percentage of all treatment demand (including alcohol) – expressed as an unweighted average of the six cities – rose from less than two per cent in 1996 to more than 10 per cent in 2006.

Figure 5: South Africa: cocaine as primary drug of abuse in treatment demand



Unweighted average of treatment (incl. alcohol) in 6 provinces. Source: SACENDU, Research Brief, Vol. 9(2), 2006

Excerpt from the UNODC World Drug Report 2007

Conclusion

This note on the growing phenomenon of cocaine trafficking through Africa showed the vulnerability of African states confronted with organized crime groups. In 2005, official cocaine seizures reported by African countries accounted for only 0.3% of global seizures of 756 mt². This very low percentage was probably more indicative of the low capacities of African law enforcement agencies to tackle cocaine trafficking on their territories than of the real extent of cocaine trafficking through Africa.

Preliminary data for 2007 clearly show that Western Africa is emerging as an important staging post along the route from South America to the growing cocaine market in Europe. The phenomenon is growing not only in volume, but also in sophistication, with traffickers having established air connections between Latin America and Africa. Speed boats until recently used only for cocaine trafficking between Latin America and the United States, are now also used between Africa and Europe.

² 2007 World Drug Report, UNODC

Annex 1: List of cocaine seizures above 100 kg in Africa, 2005 – 2007

Country of seizure	Date	Place of seizure	Kg	Source
Mauritania	13/08/2007	Nouakchott	830	Mauritanian authorities
Benin	07/08/2007	Ouidah	360	Media
Guinea	09/07/2007	Conakry	170	Police of Guinea
Senegal	27/06/2007	M'Bour	1,200	Gendarmerie Senegal
Senegal	30/06/2007	Near M'Bour	1,200	Gendarmerie Senegal
Mauritania	01/05/2007	Nouadhibou	630	Apa news
Guinea-Bissau	03/04/2007	Bissau	635	Guinea-Bissau Judicial Police
Cape Verde	17/03/2007	Praia	500	Capo Verde Police
Guinea-Bissau	26/09/2006	Bissau	674	Guinea-Bissau Judicial Police
Ghana	21/05/2006	Phrampram	1,900	Ghana authorities
Ghana	26/11/2005	Accra	588	Ghana Narcotic Control Board
Capo Verde	13/07/2005	São Vicente	120	Capo Verde authorities

Source: UNODC – Individual Drug Seizures database and Data for Africa

Annex 2: List of important cocaine seizures (above 100 kg) by Non-African countries, destined to or originating from Africa, 2005 – 2007

Country of Seizure	Date	Place of seizures	Kg	Note
Venezuela	10/07/2007	Venezuela	2,500	The traffickers were preparing to load the drug in a private plane bound for Sierra Leone.
Spain	21/06/2007	Canary Island	800	Found in an seaplane stranded in Gran Canarias island
France	10/06/2007	Gulf of Guinea	800	Interception: French Navy
Italy	04/05/2007	Italy	250	Drug shipped from Senegal among the vehicles returning from the rally 'Paris-Dakar'. The drug originated from Brasil.
Spain	30/12/2006	High sea, "Go fast" Zenith	1 800	Departure from Casablanca. The drug was transshipped on the Zenith off the coast of Galicia. Interception: Spanish Navy.
Spain	04/11/2006	High sea, fishing boat "Orca II"	1 300	5 arrests: 1 German, 1 Austrian, 2 Capo Verde, 1 Ghanaian. The drug was transshipped in high sea. The boat had left from Dakar. Interception: Spanish and British Navies.
Spain	03/10/2006	High sea, 200 miles off the coast of Liberia. Fishing boat "Ster II"	1 500	6 arrests": 5 Senegalese, 1 Guinean (Bissau). The drug was transshipped in high sea. The boat had left from Dakar and had previously spent a long time in Gambia. Interception: Spanish and British Navies.
Spain	21/02/2006	High sea, fishing boat "Bahia Azul",	3 000	23 arrests, of which 6 Ghanaians, Ghanaian flag. Traffickers related to this case were localized in Guinea-Bissau and Capo Verde. Interception: Spanish Navy.
Spain	21/02/2006	High sea, fishing boat "Mars"	2 252	23 arrests. The boat had left from Canary Islands and the drug was transshipped in high sea. The drug was probably stored in Guinea-Bissau. Interception: Spanish Navy.
Spain	25/07/2005	High sea, fishing boat Fishing boat "Ceres II"	3 700	Ghanaian flag. Interception: Spanish Navy

Source: UNODC – Individual Drug Seizures database and Data for Africa