

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

A: Alarming new trends on drug trafficking in West and Central Africa

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention merged; such event ended up creating the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UNODC battles against illicit drugs and international crime; it confides on voluntary contributions from governments of any nation. It relies on three pillars. The first one focuses on battling against illicit drugs and armed groups; the second one is based on the research and analysis of drugs, as well as their relationship with crime; finally, the third one encourages Member States to join international treaties to solve any matter regarding drugs, crimes, and belligerent acts. (UNODC, n.d.)

The alarming trends on drug trafficking in West and Central Africa are a controversial issue around

the world. Drug trafficking is a global problem with international repercussions; therefore it is crucial to solve it as soon as possible. UNODC defines drug trafficking as the “global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws” (n.d.). For the last three years, people involved in drug trafficking have established strong systems and networks which help with the production, transportation and sales of these illicit substances.

In Africa, the main substances being trafficked are cocaine, methamphetamine and medicine derived from opium poppies. (UN News, 2018). Drug trafficking has been increasing in West and Central Africa since 2013. Such actions are not only affecting the security and health of the population, but also the government and economic growth.

The routes of transportation that are in Africa, started transporting drugs across the West and Central regions of Africa; especially to Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Kenya, Mozambique, among other nations. A small part of Asia, North America and some parts of Europe are involved in drug trafficking and their marketing. The

area that is more involved in this issue is the southern route that starts in Afghanistan and finishes in Africa, with the sale and consumption of these products. This area is also known for its support given to the Islamic state. The principal settings of drug sale in Africa are rich nightclubs, where drugs like heroin, cocaine and amphetamine are consumed. (UNODC, 2017)

This problem impacts the population in Africa in different ways. On one hand, health, in Africa there are more than 30 million of cannabis and opium users, but only half of those users have access to medical treatment. Most of the consumers are between 13 and 22 years. In other words, it's becoming an epidemic for society. On the other hand, drug trafficking has also risked the security of the population, since crime is increasing with money laundry, human, arms and maritime trafficking. (UN News, 2018)

The UN is trying to support and fight with many actions. The most important ones are the plans for regulation of trafficking, drugs and organized crime. These were carried out with the Regional Action Plan, the AIRCOP, the Container Control Program, the West African Coast Initiative and the Network of West Africa

Coast Initiative. All of them are collaborating in order to decrease these problem.

In different congresses of the UN, with more than 40 speakers, the benefits of the solution to this problem have been emphasized. These talks have also included countries in Latin America, with alternative solutions and development programs. One of the most important actions is the increment of resources available to the Africa Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders by the UN, as well as the creation of a sustainable anti-drug strategy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Drugs have existed for many years. However, in recent years a greater use of these substances has been noticed. There is not a register of what was the first drug used, but it is thought that one of the first ones was alcohol. This is because, long time ago, when the honey was fermented, it transformed into a substance similar to wine. Since then, alcohol has taken a very important role in the world consumption.

It is known that in the past, drugs were occupied in

daily lives. This was done since they were had different uses, either as medicines or anesthesia. In some cases, for example, some types of oil and relaxants were used to anesthetize. During several conflicts, drugs were an essential element so that several countries could have a victory; just as they were occupied to save the lives of the soldiers. Among the uses of these substances during armed conflicts were the following: medication and anesthetics, in the case of the Second World War, where they were used to reduce hunger, depression, tiredness and the time asleep of the military. Similarly, in several conflicts, drugs like opium were used to make the soldiers stronger and turn them into “belic machines”. This was done because drugs altered the brain functions of the soldiers, increasing the probability of becoming more aggressive.

In Africa, from 2004 to 2007, several transshipment centers were found. These were in different areas of Africa, as far as the western zone. There was one in Guinea-Bissau and another one in Bay of Benin, the latter extending from Ghana to Nigeria. All these began to get illegal substances such as cocaine from Colombia. Initially, they arrived to the coast of Western

Africa in mother boats, and later they went to smaller ships. To get to Africa, this merchandise went through Spain and Portugal. Given that Africa allowed the goods to pass, they were paid with it and the distribution began there.

Mr. Yury Fedotov, UNODC Executive Director, stated “The trafficking of cocaine remains a serious challenge and there has been an increase in the amount of heroin trafficked into the region, especially since 2010” (UNODC, n.d.)

There have been many consequences because of the increase of these substances, one of them being that the level of unemployment and poverty has increased. This is because people, especially young ones, have considered and opted to enter the well-paid drug trafficking business. Another aspect important to consider is that the health levels have decreased, due that the use of these harmful substances has continued. In fact, their intravenous consumption has increased in the past years by 3.7%; causing HIV, hepatitis C and B. (UNODC, 2017)

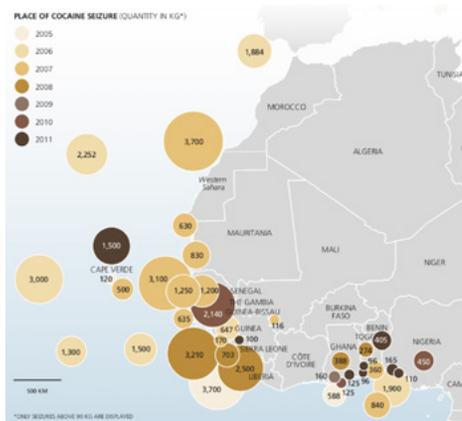


Figure 1

Figure 1. Major cocaine seizures in West Africa (2005-2011). Adapted from "UNODC", by UNODC, UNODC. Retrieved on July 8t, 2019 from https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_COCAINE.pdf Copyright 2019 by UNODC.

CURRENT RELEVANCE

Every year, the UNODC makes a World Drug Report, such document provides statistics and crucial data about drug trends and the international use of such substances. According to the World Drug Report of 2017, in Africa there is minimum of 40,000 drug related trends, mostly overdoses and opioid related. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime made a World Drug Report in 2018. Such document shows how West and Central Africa accounts for 87% of opioids seized globally. Also, the largest seizures are registered in Africa; with cocaine appropriations, heroin rising seizures at airports, as well as methamphetamine that is also reaching the same level of usage as cocaine.

Cannabis is still the most commonly used illicit substance in the African Region, and the one with the highest increase reported specifically in West and

Central Africa. It had increment rates of between 5.2% and 13.5%; concurrently, amphetamine-type stimulants (ecstasy and methamphetamine) now rank as Africa's second most abused drug group. Other type of substance used by children and young people is the one that includes benzodiazepines and different inhalants, meanwhile 3.7% are injected drugs.

UNODC has been registering new trends on drug trafficking. These ones destabilize and disrupt the government, security, economic growth and public health. As stated in the UNODC research, West Africa is the most frequently mentioned transit country of opiates produced in Afghanistan. Throughout the years until 2016, the percentage of distribution of heroin and morphine in the southern route, (South Asia, Gulf Countries, Africa and Middle East), as a main trafficking route, is in constant variance; having as a result a little bit over 80% of the proportion of global seizures.

Another aspect is methamphetamine, which due to the huge amount of flow that Western and Central Africa carry to manage, has a rising demand in some regions. Therefore, its growing use is a concern for the international community. In the majority of the countries

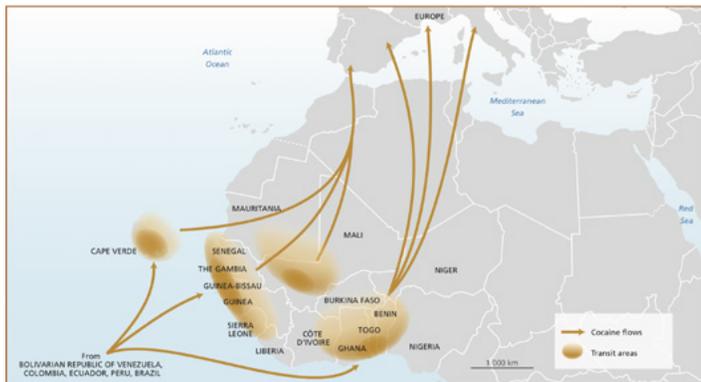


Figure 2

that are part of the United Nations of Drugs and Crime Africa region, there is control and monitoring of the national drug supply; although, distribution channels are inefficient.

This report also shows that Ghana and Nigeria are among the most frequent countries of origin in Africa for cocaine trafficking. Regarding opiates, nations such as Tanzania, Kenya and Nigeria are some of the countries with the highest trafficking rates. Boko Haram, an Islamic belligerent group, has also showed being involved in trafficking heroin and cocaine across West Africa.

Figure 2. Cocaine from the Andes via West Africa to Europe. Adapted from "UNODC", by UNODC, UNODC. Retrieved on July 8, 2019, from https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_COCAINE.pdf Copyright 2019 by UNODC.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

One of the countries that is helping to solve drug trafficking is the Bolivian government. UNODC and the Bolivian government signed a treatment called "The

Peace" (CRIMJUST). This project will take place from 2016 to 2020. It talks about a collaboration project in investigation, where the principal object is the cocaine route that covers Latin America, the Caribbean and West Africa.

The second country that is working to stop drug trafficking is the United States. The US counts with their specific anti-drug department, known as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Such department of US army is helping West Africa with approximately 50 million dollars per year to fight against the drug trafficking; especially in the entrance of drug to Europe and corruption in the government, acting by their law. (UNODC, 2019)

The European Union is supporting the economic aspect and Bolivia (UNODC). The EU is implementing criminal investigations and justice in the countries involved (Latin America,, Caribbean, and west Africa). All this is done to stop corruption and organized crime.

UN ACTIONS

In general, the United Nations, specifically the

UNODC Committee, has had a great participation in stopping drug trafficking around the world. Focusing on the current problem in Africa, in terms of the large consumption of drugs, the UNODC decided to sign the treaty called "The Peace", as already mentioned. This treaty consisted in reducing the traffic of drugs that went from countries of the Caribbean and Latin America to Europe.

These trafficking networks have used Western Africa and Central Africa as routes and targets; this has produced a greater flow of drugs in all Africa. This is why a network was created, in order to connect the authorities of 14 participating countries. In such project, research on parallel networks of drug trafficking in West Africa was encouraged. The countries of West Africa that participated were Cape Verde, Ghana, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Togo. In Latin America, the nations that participated were Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Bolivia. Finally, the countries in the Caribbean that were also part of this project were Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. The entire project

was financed by the European Commission and UNODC. (UNODC, 2018)

POINTS TO DISCUSS

- . What are some possible solutions? Which countries can share its expertise on the topic? How can security in borders be improved to decrease this problem? Will blue helmets be needed?
- . Sometimes drug trafficking leads to increasing money laundering, human trafficking, and illegal arms trade. How can these side effects be reduced?
- . How can these criminal networks be vanished?
- . How can the UN help people that become addicted to these substances?
- . How can other countries help diminish the problem?

RECOMMENDED LINKS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

. https://www.unodc.org/documents/toc/Reports/TOCTAWestAfrica/West_Africa_TOC_COCAINE.pdf

. <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/newrosenwebsite/TOC/drug-trafficking.html>

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Other links:

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