



Combating drug trafficking in the West and Central-African region



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Introduction

The issues of drug abuse and its effects on the human psyché have become increasingly concerning in recent years. With the advent of social media meaning large-scale dealers can order a shipment of drugs via the dark web, and that different methods for hiding and transporting drugs can be shared online, drug abuse is at an all-time high. Coupled with the increasing pay gap between upper-class and lower-class society in nations such as the United States of America, this leads to a devastating effect on the human population's ability to function adequately and sufficiently. Recent research suggests that more than 14% of American citizens have interacted with drugs in the past month. So, with such a rise in drug consumption, there must be a rise in drug production. Who is producing these drugs, and how are they getting to consumer markets? Surprisingly, these answers lie in West and Central Africa. This research report will go into detail to explain this issue, leaving it up to the delegates to form a proper solution for this widespread problem.

Definition of Key Terms

Asset forfeiture

Asset forfeiture or asset seizure occurs when assets that are an association or the product of a crime are taken by state bodies or officials during a seizure of a crime. In the case of drug trafficking in West Africa, officials are more likely to seize drugs in Africa than Europe, Asia, North or South America, as most of the world's drugs pass through West Africa and stay in that location for the longest. Many types of drugs, typically narcotics have been found in seizures of West African airports. These would count as assets.

Counter narcotic strategies

A strategy put in place specifically to counter the effects of narcotics, both on the population's psyche as well as the economy and maritime trade industry. For mental health, this

could include prevention, interdiction and rehabilitation. For the economy, there could be new measures put in place that make it harder to obtain narcotics. For the maritime trade industry, these strategies could mean the revising of maritime borders, security checks and maritime laws.

Drug cartels

A criminal organization usually with an independent drug lord leading the operation. They dominate the illegal drug trade industry by controlling the supply chain and competing against each other to improve their profits. Several cartels are thought to be involved with drug trafficking through Western Africa, most particularly those originating in Mexico.

Drug trade routes

The route taken by the illegal drug trade industry, often taking measures to avoid detection and seizure of assets. The route from producer to consumers goes from cultivation, manufacture, distribution and safety of prohibited drugs. However, an overlooked area of this journey is transportation, and what holes in security are allowing such massive projects to take place under the noses of national and international security.

Drug trafficking

A product of the black market relating to the production, transportation and distribution of illegal drugs. The use of drug prohibition laws prohibits the trade of many harmful drugs via jurisdictions. Drug trafficking concerns how to avoid and evade these laws and jurisdictions, often featuring high levels of corruption and security issues.

Hashish

Hashish and weed are both types of marijuana, with hashish production being considerably harder to produce and having more severe effects on the human body. It was discovered that hashish was being traded with cocaine in order to subvert detection with normal cash exchange operations.

Hashish-cocaine swaps

Hashish and cocaine are being swapped along the West African coast instead of the usual cash-drug exchange involved in traditional drug trafficking. This allows for greater tons of drugs to be shipped as well as greater covertness with cash traceability no longer being an issue.

Interdiction

Concerns the action of forbidding or prohibiting a product or service. In this case, interdiction means intercepting the transportation and movement of prohibited drugs and drug shipments.

Maritime borders and security

Maritime borders are imposed borderlines which denote the ownership of different bodies of water to specific nations. Occasionally these borders overlap or are in dispute. Seeing as the preferred mode of drug shipments in the modern day is via cargo ships, it is vital to maintain effective maritime security.

Narco-terrorism

The overlap between narcotics production and distribution with terrorism. Oftentimes terrorist groups and drug cartels are linked and support each other through funding. Given that this issue concerns a vast variety of nations spanning across the globe, a threat to national security via drug transportation could potentially allude to terrorism down the line.

Narcotics

Narcotics are a specific type of drug that are known to reduce tension and aggression, but also induce drowsiness, an inability to concentrate and apathy. Narcotics are also known as opioids or opium. This includes substances such as heroin, morphine, fentanyl and codeine.

Precursor chemicals

The base substance used to manufacture these drugs in the first place. Many are legal and easily accessible such as fragrances, flavorings and medicines.

General Overview

To this day, the continent of Africa has been exploited in almost every aspect from mines to natural resources. This included many human rights violations, such as the African slave trade. The people of Africa have had to suffer many hardships due to this exploitation, a system of the disease that is colonialism. Countries such as Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Spain, all took part in the colonization of Africa during the "Scramble For Africa". Even before that, Northern Africa

had been subject to the Arab Conquest. Given all of these advances and plunderings, the African economy and job market has been made highly dependent on its previous occupiers. In addition, given these countries' detrimental effects on the African economy, more and more people have been forced to turn to a life of crime, including the black market.

Drug trafficking in the black market is a serious, growing issue on a global scale. With a high demand in North America and Europe, drugs are being made in Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, with the transport of them being through West and East Africa. While their origins may be from Latin America, an often overlooked producing area is the Golden Triangle, being Laos, Myanmar and Thailand.

In recent years, a sharp incline in drug production and distribution has been observed, but drug busts or seizures happening ever so commonly. West, Central and North Africa accounts for roughly 87% of the world's seized pharmaceutical opiates. In the present, methamphetamine is just as likely to be seized as cocaine, evidence that levels of these drug's production and demand are sharply increasing to be equally as desirable. Trafficking of methamphetamine, cocaine and heroin have all been detected in several African airports, including Lagos in Nigeria, Bamako in Mali and Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso.

Many West African nations are vulnerable. Being involved in drug transport, they are susceptible to coercion by both their providers in South America and Asia, and their North American and European consumers. Because of these reasons, the presence of drugs contributes to these nations' instability. More specifically, there is growing evidence that Guinea-Bissau, a particularly vulnerable nation, is involved in a major drug transshipment route, with large tons of cocaine having been seized in West Africa bound for Europe. In the North-West also, Morocco has facilitated European cocaine smuggling through Mexican cartel groups. Both of these nations have been the subject of intense speculation regarding their involvement in human trafficking, which poses great concern regarding human rights violations, peace and international security. The breach caused by drug trafficking in these regions has led to a domino effect of several other major issues, including human trafficking, maritime piracy, smuggling of migrants and money laundering.

By taking a look at specific cases, we can get a better understanding of how this industry has evolved almost exponentially in the past three decades. Morocco's cannabis trafficking network has a long history with Latin America's cocaine trafficking networks. Normally, these dealings would be

stagnated by cash installments and money transfers, presumably through money laundering. Because moving a large amount of money is potentially detectable, these criminal organizations had a limit on how much drugs they could export and produce. However, a typical pattern has emerged. With cocaine shipments coming in, and hashish shipments going out, European criminal organizations seem to be exchanging hashish directly for cocaine via Brazilian networks. The same ship that transports cocaine one way will transport hashish the other. This trade is particularly beneficial for both parties, with Brazil being a top exporter of cocaine and having a large market for hashish. All of these operations and trade happen at the midway point, the West Coast of Africa. Through the introduction of hashish-cocaine swaps, this relationship has evolved.

Rather than having traceable cash payments, these ships deal by trading cocaine for hashish through a barter system. This is the reason for the increase of drug movements that is negatively affecting West Africa's safety, and spills into the Sahel region in the Centre. With an overall increase in drug shipments throughout these regions, it's up to delegates to work towards preventing this exploitation and drug's adverse effects on the local population that it passes through.

Major Parties Involved

Nigeria

Nigeria is both a transit and destination country for drug trafficking, being positioned in the West of Africa. As one of the world's international drug trafficking centers, their authorities have taken great measures to improve their global reputation. This has been felt most severely in the nation's law enforcement. In recent years, there has been a steep increase in the prison population due to arrest rates, focusing more on punishment than rehabilitation and the possible reasons why an individual may enter a life of crime. These strategies are relatively unsuccessful and are leading to a bigger issue of increased violence within prisons due to harsh prison sentences. Nigerian Law enforcement is thought to have been manipulated to imprison individuals deemed unfavorable by the state authorities, by framing them of possessing drugs. This has been prioritized over reduced consumption and trafficking of drugs.

Guinea-Bissau

A major hub for drug trafficking, Guinea-Bissau is known for facilitating the transportation of cocaine. They've experienced nine coups and several assassinations of government officials since

1974, when they got their independence from Portugal. These coups have correlations with several drug cartels known for having firm control over Guinea-Bissau. As a vulnerable nation, Guinea-Bissau is extremely susceptible to outside influence in the promise of funding and aid, which only causes them to become reliant and dependent on these cartels instead.

Morocco

Tonnes of hashish were seized from a sailboat near the Canary Islands in July 2023. Having left Portugal, the vessel loaded its cargo off Morocco's port in the northern city of Safi. Its destination was Brazil, an emerging consumer market for hashish. Cocaine trafficking uses cannabis trafficking routes from Morocco through Europe with cocaine shipments via West Africa, soon to return with shipments of Hashish. This hashish is said to travel from Morocco by ship to the West coast of Africa, spanning across the Sahel through Libya to Europe. Due to Italian, Spanish and French security, this convoluted route is more secure for drug trafficking. Morocco is said to be the leading supplier of Hashish. Hashish is trafficked into Senegal by Moroccan criminal networks, who are shielded from detection by dishonest security personnel.

Brazil

Brazil has been known to engage in hashish-cocaine swaps with African countries along the West Coast. Additionally, they are speculated to also serve as a transport country for other South American countries such as Colombia, Peru and Bolivia. They are a major producer of cocaine, and a major consumer of hashish.

The Golden Triangle (Thailand, Laos, Myanmar)

In the early 1990s criminal organizations from West Africa became significant traffickers of heroin, a narcotic, from the Golden Triangle in Southeast Asia. The Golden Triangle consists of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar, and serves as a major hub for drug production. In 1991, an arrest of 660 West Africans was made in the United States for carrying heroin on their personnel. With the issue growing rampant, the Nigerian government introduced a new law necessitating its citizens to acquire an Official Clearance Certificate, showing they had no prior drug-related history or convictions from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency when applying for a Thailand Travel Visa. In the present, rather than trying to smuggle large shipments at once, Nigerian traffickers usually enlisted numerous lower-level, non-Nigerian couriers to transport a few kilograms of heroin via commercial airline routes from the Golden Triangle.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening border and territorial controls

By increasing the surveillance and security checks and seizures of Western and Central Africa, we may be able to gather more intel and prevent further shipments from entering Europe and America. In addition, an in-depth look into the security breaches of the countries affected may detect unknown corrupt officials who are turning a blind eye to drug trafficking in their jurisdiction. This would require foreign involvement which may go against the wishes of certain countries.

Law enforcement

Perhaps a revision of law enforcement could be done through foreign agencies' involvement and an in-depth look at the nation's legal frameworks. By detecting what their laws actively do against organized crime, or what enforcement mechanisms they use, could see these nations' security being restored there the rightful rule of law and power of the state.

Increase funding for the nation's socio-economic development

These nations are all vulnerable and have been taken advantage of by richer countries in the past. By restoring some of these nation's agencies, we can assist them so that their people do not need to rely on illegal drug activities for national development. The development of these nation's societies and economies is a key factor in rebuilding vulnerable nations such as Guinea-Bissau for example. It is important that development aid and funding is provided, and that proper care is ensured so that the assistance reaches solely its intended beneficiaries. This would call for transparency and accountability regarding the allocation of funds and aid.

Reconstruction of Security and Justice Sectors.

In weakened countries throughout Western Africa, economic investments are crucial to restoring their judicial and security sectors. Adding tighter repercussions for breaking these laws, introducing programs that dissuade workers from engaging in the drug trafficking industry and providing proper training and equipment to detect the presence of these drugs on ships are all ways of ensuring these sectors are fully supported. International support is crucial when assisting these

governments in the West and Central African region so as to firmly establish the necessity of justice and security sectors.

Further Reading

As a rule of thumb, we would discourage the use of government-funded broadcast channels as reliable sources, eg. BBC, AlJazeera.

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