

# **Drug Trafficking and its Impact on West Africa**

**By**

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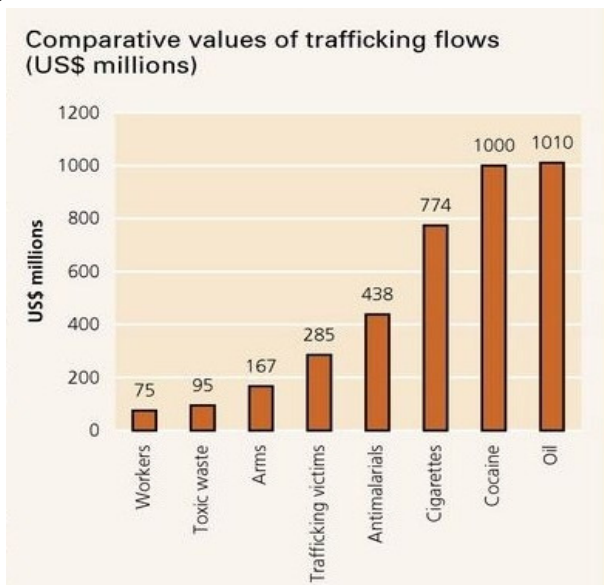
## Introduction

There's nothing new under the sun! Trafficking and West Africa have a long and very interesting common history, dating all the way back to the Moorish and Touareg caravans which have been crossing the Sahara since time immemorial and to the Peul and Dioula traders who have traversed sub-Saharan Africa all the way to Chad and the Sudan, and south to the Congo river for centuries now. Tribal wars also often resulted in the capture of prisoners who would subsequently be exchanged between tribes, or else enslaved, married off or simply killed. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the first Portuguese and Spanish explorers arrived along the West African coast, they also trafficked in gold, precious woods and eventually in human beings in order to enrich themselves and their masters in Iberia. The slave trade in particular represents one of the darkest pages in human history! These foreigners in turn became prey for the Pirates who ruled the waves for decades and who would attack and rob any ship or outpost they felt was vulnerable! For many centuries, in this beautiful and exotic part of the world, violence was the norm and cruelty was omnipresent.

2. Thus, trafficking per se is practically inevitable, since people are willing to pay the price in order to obtain what they wish to have – with minimal delay and maximum ease! It's the law of market forces: if somebody somewhere wants a particular item, then somebody else somewhere will be willing to provide it. Today, we call it supply and demand – but it's all the same thing! Whether legal or illegal, the commodity will be provided, with all due respect to interdiction! In fact, nothing much has really changed since the days of old. Furthermore, in modern times, hard work and delayed gratification are seen as an expression of weakness rather than a sign of integrity and dignity!

3. However, like all forces that exert pressure on our societies, if they cannot be completely eliminated, they can at least be controlled or regulated to some extent. Everything can be “managed” with a view to reducing the negative impact to the greatest possible level. For example, during Prohibition in the United States in the 1920s, the formal banning of alcohol was circumvented by traffickers and bootleggers who found a way around the rules, because there was a very lucrative demand. Today, the sale of alcohol is regulated and abuse is limited. In the same way, in Canada, the very strict regulation of the sale of tobacco products since the 1990s through public awareness campaigns, high taxes, limited access to minors and the gradual elimination of public smoking areas has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of smokers over the last 15 to 20 years. Whereas a majority of adults smoked in 1990, now only 23% of adults consume tobacco.

### Comparing the Flows of Trafficked Commodities Worldwide



## The situation in West Africa

4. Since the mid-1990s, in Central and West Africa, trafficking in hard drugs has become a booming business, with increasingly serious side effects: although the production and consumption of cannabis and other soft drugs has always been present to some extent, the introduction and transshipment of hard drugs (mostly Heroin and Cocaine) from outside the region has required the necessary complicity of local actors and has had a significant detrimental impact on society. Easy money has a corruptive effect on youth, with a get-rich-quick message and a devaluation of traditional values which have always kept these societies cohesive and united. The associated violence increasingly threatens people's daily lives. The exporting and laundering of the resulting dirty money destroys hundreds of legitimate small businesses. Drug abuse and addiction find their way onto the streets of these vulnerable coastal and inland states, taking a terrible toll on families, education and social cohesion. Things become dangerous and scary, and several countries are beginning to be rocked to the core by the tremendous disruption caused by the whole issue of drug trafficking and all of its side effects.

5. By the late 1990s, however, ECOWAS had fully realized the deleterious effects and debilitating impact of this threat to the stability and economic development of the region, especially on its integration programme, and developed a Regional Plan of Action, which aimed at providing the necessary framework for national efforts and actions against the drug problem. The ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, at its 21st Summit on 30-31 October 1998 in Abuja, issued a declaration titled: ***“Community Flame Ceremony – the Fight against Drugs”***. Other Decisions of the Authority on drug control include resolution A/RES.2/8/97 relating to Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse in West Africa; Recommendation C/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control activities in West Africa; Decision A/DEC.8/10/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control activities; and Decision A/DEC.9/12/99 establishing the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). In December 2008, the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the ECOWAS approved a Regional Framework and Action Plan on Combating Drugs and Organized Crime in West Africa. Already, the UNODC, in collaboration with the ECOWAS Commission has produced a project document for action. Despite all this, however, operationally, not much has taken place.

6. On the contrary, over the past decade, things have gotten progressively worse. Due to strong anti-drugs and anti-laundering measures taken in other regions of the world (Central America, Andean Countries, Caribbean, Central Asia, the Balkans), traffickers have sought out new routes in order to get their illicit product to market. With saturated markets and ample supply to North America, the South American Cartels have developed new lucrative markets for their Cocaine in Europe, while the demand for Heroin from the East has increased slightly in North America. Heroin is now also being grown and produced in the Americas for export worldwide. However, moving all this produce to market requires reliable midway transit points; after using the less controlled Brazil-southern African routes, essentially via Angola, Namibia, South Africa and the Congo river basin for a while, the traffickers have now taken direct aim at West Africa, where geography, social conditions and weak anti-drug response capacity allow the quasi-free transit of drugs to market. Without going into the details, let me attempt to provide an overview of the drug trafficking problem for you to understand the nature and pattern of the illicit drug trade and its effects on peace, security and political stability in West Africa.



Cocaine from South America to Europe

## COCAINE FROM SOUTH AMERICA TO EUROPE

### Route

Source: *South America (Colombia and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of))*

Vector to West Africa: *Sea, air*

Vector within West Africa: *Land, air*

Destination: *West Europe*

### Value

Volume: *20 tons*

Value at destination: *US\$ 1 billion*

### Traffickers

Groups involved: *Colombian, Nigerian, other West African, European*

Residence of traffickers: *Colombia, Spain, other European countries*

### Threat

Estimated trend: *Declining*

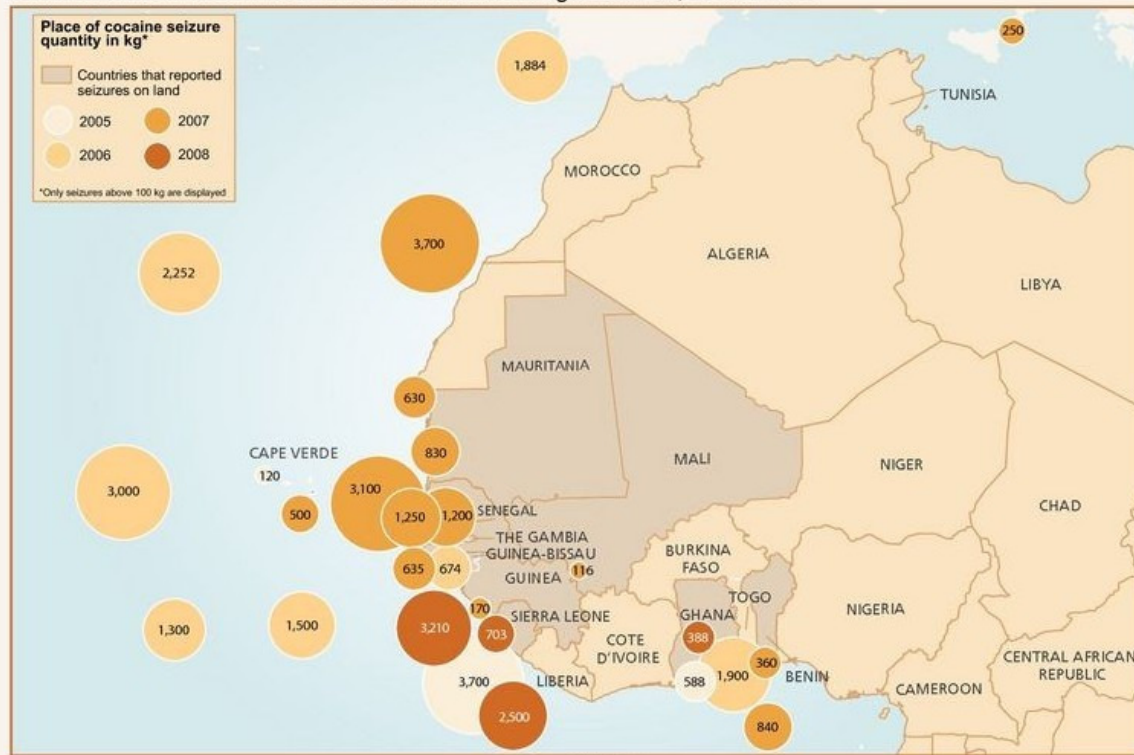
Potential effects in region: *Rising cocaine use, economic destabilization, corruption, violence*

Likelihood of effects being realised: *Unknown*

Potential effects outside region: *Rising cocaine use in Europe*

Likelihood of effects being realised: *High*

Individual seizures linked to cocaine trafficking in Africa, 2005-2008



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.

## Trafficking

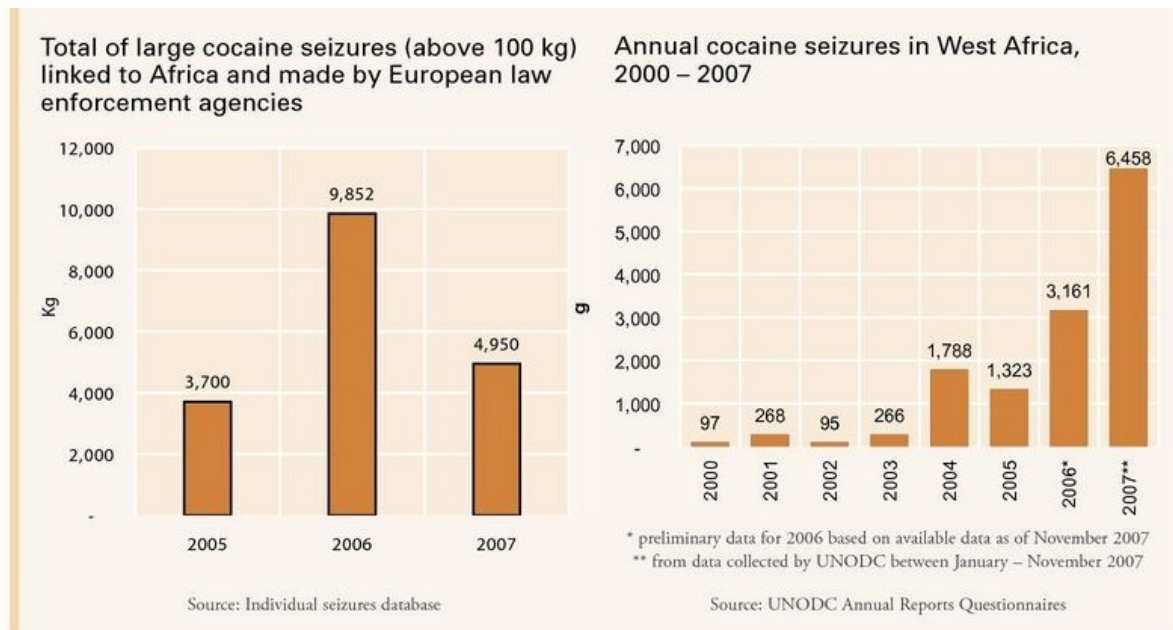
7. We all know how it essentially works: Organized Crime controls the markets and the distribution, including transportation of the drugs to market (North). It also handles the revenue derived from the illegal commerce and repatriates the cash (South). It goes without saying that all transactions are cash based, and thus the funds must somehow be integrated into the formal economy, or laundered, in order to serve their purpose. Most of this used to be done in the so-called “Fiscal Paradies”, such as the Caribbean, certain European countries and some Pacific Islands, although these activities have now moved to more clement abodes, where accomplices are more accommodating. West Africa is now considered a prime location for these activities.

8. Let me be clear: we are talking of major cash transactions here, huge amounts of money! A few years ago, it was estimated that the worldwide illegal trades were worth some 800 billion dollars a year! Of that amount, illegal drugs accounted for around 250 billion, of which only some 5 to 7% transited this region. Today, that global amount is probably over one trillion dollars a year – and the West African portion, even at a slightly increased rate of 10 to 12%, still amounts to between \$30 and 40 billion a year in trade. These are huge amounts for such vulnerable and inadequately prepared societies to deal with and to manage.

9. The trafficking routes through West Africa are well known by now. The goal is to reach European shores as quickly and efficiently as possible – which means Iberia, Italy, the Balkans and the Mediterranean coast. However, direct flights and container shipments to major ports of entry make the control of traffickers much more complex. The methods are also very well known: mules, shipping

containers, mixed in with petroleum products (like plastics), hidden in live animals, flown in small aircraft, to name but a few. Furthermore, the disruption caused by the numerous natural disasters over the past few years has also facilitated the traffickers' job, since law enforcement has been otherwise occupied. All West African countries are increasingly being used as transit routes, particularly those closest to the goal, those most defenceless security-wise and those most unstable internally.

10. Once the routes are established, they are used to traffic just about anything. Those people who traffic drugs also traffic arms, plutonium, endangered species, precious stones and jewellery, illegal immigrants, spare parts, young women and stolen cars, to name but a few. It is all very lucrative, too hard to resist for many, and a source of power for most. With infinite amounts of cash at their disposal, these people are able to buy their way into companies, governments, courts and politics, and can influence to their advantage the rule of law and the outcome of crucial decision-making. Society becomes distorted and mentalities become warped. Corruption invades mentalities as a way of life.... And civil society becomes at risk of breaking down totally. There are some worrying signs of that in the region at the present time. It is urgent that ECOWAS act decisively now.



## Impact on West Africa

11. Let us now take a look at some of the tangible effects that trafficking, in particular of drugs, can have on the countries of the region. The impact is far from minor, and the results have been devastating to the extent that in many cases, development has been stunted, stalled or has even regressed in some places. The apparent short term gains are illusory, because the lasting damage far outweighs them all. Drug trafficking is all about money and instant wealth; tracking and seizing that money is by far the best defence against the drug trafficking phenomenon. This is basically what GIABA is focused on at the moment. I shall come back to this shortly.

12. *Economically*, the influx of drug and other dirty monies into the local market can seem like a balm on the poverty and the pain. There may be a building boom, with construction providing needed jobs and better quality accommodation. Certain persons with more available cash may purchase some

big ticket items from local retailers, thus injecting money into the economy. With certain individuals seemingly better off, they will spend more and temporarily stimulate sales in certain sectors, such as real estate. In some ways, the economy looks healthier. But in fact, only those individuals who actually control the cash will benefit. The State itself will not! Over time, a lot of this money begins to leave the country. The people with the cash become suspect, unable to sustain their spending. As for the foreign operators, they remove their cash from the region as quickly as possible. The local traffickers usually then start exporting their own cash to safer climes, and the boom starts to fizzle out! There is also the danger of creating artificial wealth, to the detriment of local honest citizens.

13. For example, a local businessman who provided satellite TV equipment and service in a certain country saw a competitor twice his size establish a business next door to him overnight! Unable to compete, he eventually was forced to sell out at a bargain price to his competitor... who ended up cornering the market. After securing a very large clientele, pocketing large amounts of legitimate money and mixing in the illegal funds to short circuit the vigilance of the authorities, the company folded overnight, just as it had been born – and the owners took their cash somewhere else, leaving the locals with no service at all. As for the original business owner, he was bankrupted and unable to renew activities. The whole market sector was distorted and killed by drug money.

14. **Financially**, the banking system has come under pressure to accept dirty or unsafe money, which builds its net worth, but puts it at risk of prosecution or worse, if monies are withdrawn too fast. The laundering of illegitimate funds through financial institutions is not new, but remains a drawdown on world wealth, which is no longer available for legitimate investments. Thankfully, the banking system has for years now undertaken to police itself, and regulate the transactions it conducts on a daily basis. The same holds true for other financial institutions such as the insurance sector, the larger financial corporations and the credit unions. Both the laws and institutions of the land, and their own internal regulations, make it difficult to introduce dirty money into the legitimate system. However, there are still many rather marginal operations that will attempt to launder funds. The impact on the good name and the credibility of some countries has had a dire effect on their economy. The long term pain is not worth the short term gain!

15. **Socially and Health-wise**, of course, the transiting of drugs through any given country means that some of it inevitably stays there, either as payment for services rendered or as a source of profit for the traffickers. Drugs will thus be consumed locally, with the dire effects on consumers that we all know. In a poor country, the disruptive effect on family and society is multiplied and magnified. Addiction sets in and the afflicted persons become a huge burden in all respects. They will steal to feed their habit, often from other family members. They will resell drugs at extremely low prices to earn their fix, thus contaminating their surroundings. They will use violence if necessary to obtain cash, or simply because they become frustrated and angry. A cycle of dependency, distress, poverty and crime sets in. It becomes a major internal Security issue. It becomes a major general Public Health issue. It is definitely a no-win situation.

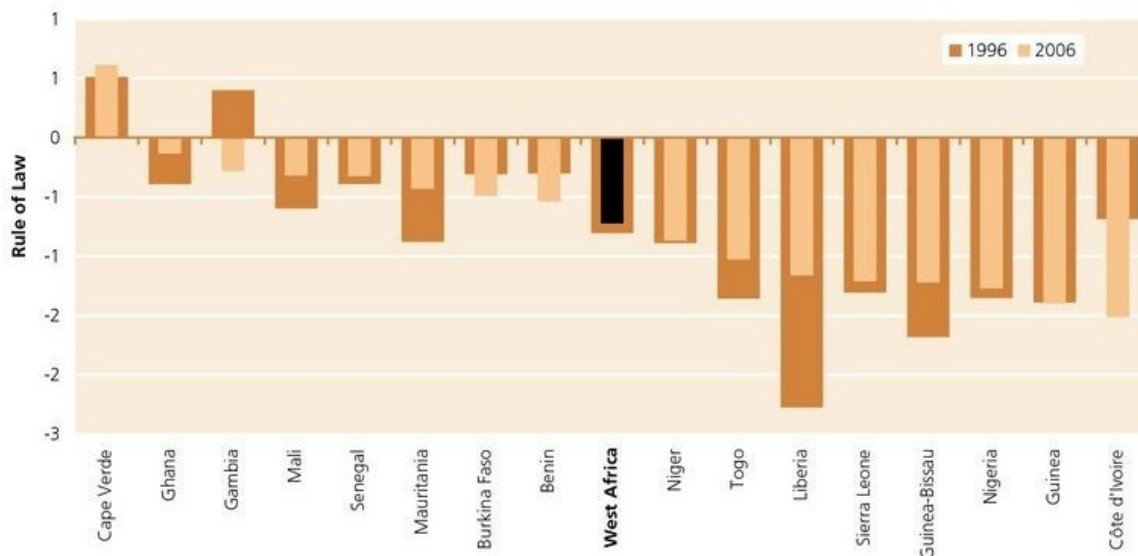
16. In **Education**, school attendance rates go down, and already high dropout rates soar. Young people believe that they can get rich quick; they avoid school and end up as unskilled, unemployed and unproductive citizens, a burden to the whole collectivity. They may even become pushers. Once the “ride” is over, however, they don’t have the necessary preparation to get proper jobs, and they remain uneducated victims of their own illusions. The illiteracy rates for young persons, and particularly for males in West Africa remain excessively high, and the drug culture amplifies it even more. Unemployable young men become angry, aggressive and violent. In the end, they repeat the cycle

through their own children. This is a cycle which needs to be broken anyway, so the drug culture just makes things worse.

17. The **Legal system** becomes overburdened with court cases related to drugs in one way or another. Backlogs increase, prisons fill up, resources offering help and rehab are insufficient or not up to par, and the whole attitude of fear in society seeks retribution and punishment rather than rehabilitation and reintegration. Police forces cannot cope, judges cannot cope, re-education services cannot cope... Serious strife eventually makes life miserable for everyone. Apathy and violence become common phenomena. Traditional values are lost, replaced by imported or false values. These poor countries may begin a cycle of irreversible change.

### The Threat to Rule of Law

Rule of law in West African countries (0 = world average)



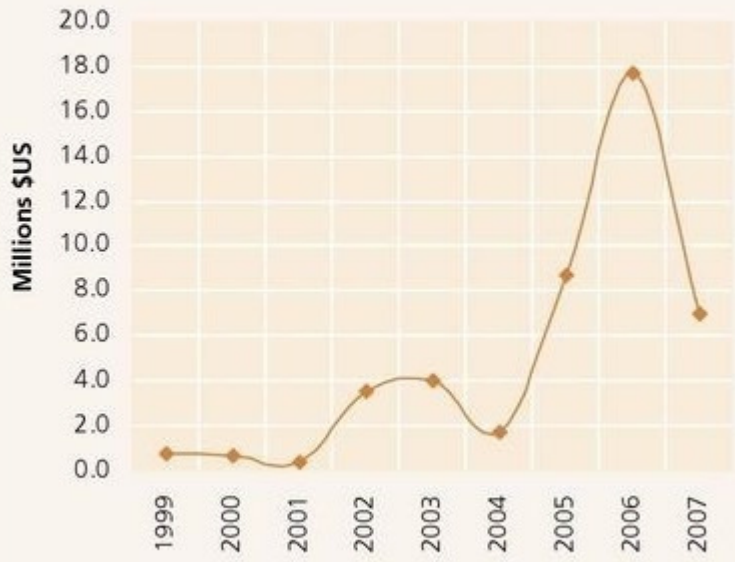
Source: World Bank, Governance Indicators 2007

18. Eventually, the **Tourism** and **Business** sectors start to suffer too. Crime and violence give a bad name to some countries, and investment falls sharply, thus depriving the population of much needed jobs and foreign exchange. Small, poor countries with few resources can ill afford to jeopardize one of their main income earners. Even large, wealthy and powerful States become completely vulnerable to the dictates of international criminals and foreigners who care only for their short term personal gain.

19. A **get-rich-quick Mentality** sets in, which despises hard work, effort and challenge. It is in fact an illusion, but people love to believe in magic and that their dreams will come true! Such attitudes are hard to combat, especially in societies which do not place sufficient value on knowledge and do not encourage everybody to get a good education. Good jobs are scarce anyhow; so many young people are totally demotivated as regards school. This is a vicious circle which must be broken at some point by forward thinking persons with decision-making authority. In some of the regional states, education has been neglected for decades, and the results of this are sadly only too visible today. These countries are far less protected from the impact of the trade than others. Basically, knowledge is power.

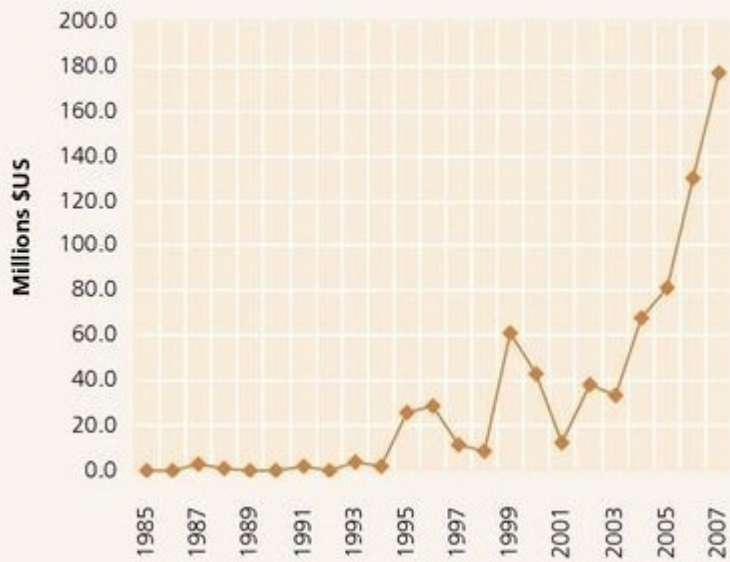


Foreign direct investment inflows into Guinea Bissau (US\$ millions)

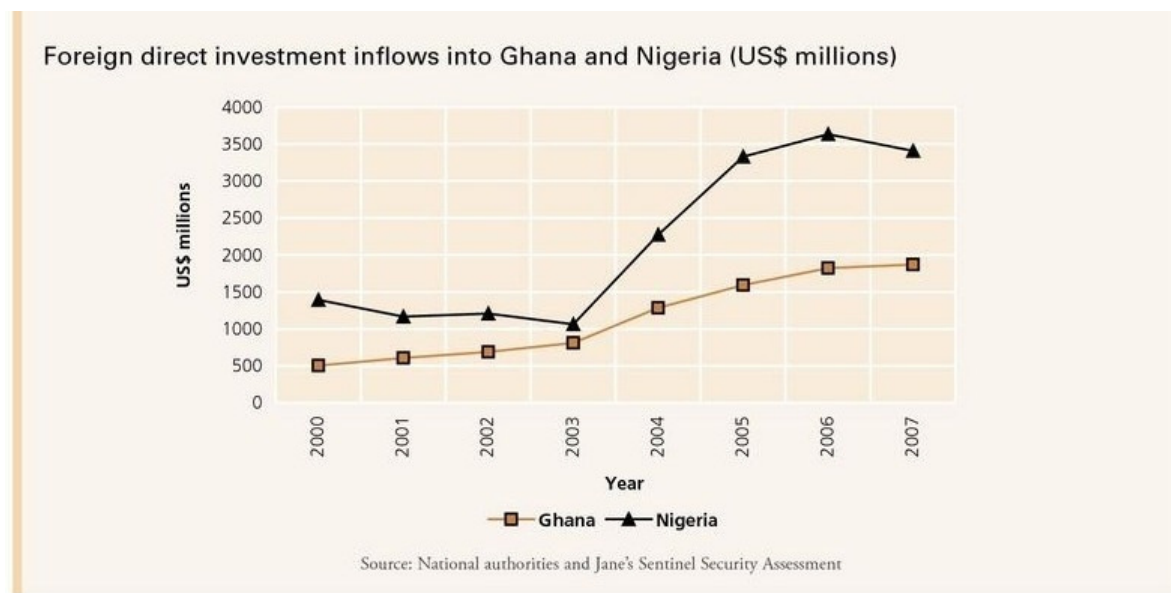


Source: UNCTAD

Foreign direct investment inflows into Cape Verde (US\$ millions)



Source: UNCTAD



20. **Corruption** in every sense of the word compromises the future of any country. In the case of poor and vulnerable states, it is even more damaging. Suffice to say that the loss of home grown values, the lack of formal education, the angry and violent attitude of young males (and some females!), the reign of the 'almighty dollar' as a source of pride or power, the often compromised law enforcement bodies, the waste and the loss of funds for direct and indirect investment in the country – particularly in education – are all sad results of the disruption of social fabric due to trafficking and laundering, and an indication of the serious lack of maturity among many members of society. Whole generations are in fact lost in development terms. It is as if too many people didn't care about the future at all. Corruption is by far the greatest enemy of development. No investors would like to do business where there is additional tax in the form of bribes, nor would they be attracted to where there is high level of crime. We must fight corruption in all its manifestations and wherever it exists.

21. **Politically**, even with evidence to illustrate the impact of narco trade on the political systems in this region, examples from other jurisdictions would suffice. For example, the 'political-criminal nexus in Colombia', drug production and (mis)use of political power placed Colombia in what is referred to as 'state-capture', especially under President Samper in 1994. For such a nexus to constitute a threat and to fully understand the effect on society, it is necessary to first of all understand the conditions which created the nexus and criminality as a whole. Drug production and the exercise of political power in Colombia, especially during the 'controversial' Samper's presidential election in 1994, is a good example of how this nexus operates by influencing state policy and governance. In Colombia, narco-traffickers exercised considerable political influences at all levels of government. Because of the weakened capacity of the state and its criminal justice institutions, authorities in the Gaviria and Samper administrations felt compelled to make various legislative and judicial concessions to the traffickers in order to purchase a modicum of social peace. It is further alleged that in the Cali Cartels, every drug 'King ping' contributed \$200,000 per month to maintain a joint intelligence-gathering network, much of this going on bribery. Traffickers like the Rodriguez-Oreguela brothers, Jose Santa Cruz Londono and a host of others established a common fund of about US\$8 million in a special account in the Banco de Columbia in Cali to buy influence over the 1994 presidential and Congress elections.

22. Furthermore, this narco-violence (the war of traffickers against the political and economic elites) weakened the state and widened the opportunities for corruption in Colombia. The Medellin

'king pin', Pablo Escobar, levied what he termed 'war taxes' of between \$100,000 and \$200,000 on Medellin shippers each month to support the cartel's military activities against the state between 1989 and 1993. This conflict led to the death of over 1500 Colombians. The activities of this network had a catastrophic and lasting effect on the political system and stability in Colombia. The conspiracy between politicians and criminal networks led to the imprisonment of about 12 legislators, an attorney-general and a defense minister for accepting bribes from the Cali traffickers in the 1994 elections. It was found that at least seven congressmen were elected with funds provided by the cartel.

23. Pablo Escobar, who controlled the Colombian Medellin and Cali cartels from the mid-1980s until his death in 1993, bought his election into the Colombian Congress as an alternative candidate, which gave him the opportunity to protect his criminal network as well as providing him with immunity from arrest. When he was indicted in November 1986 for racketeering and smuggling of over 60 tons of cocaine into Miami, Colombian judges, after receiving a series of threats from his associates, 'refused' to extradite him; the charges against him were dismissed and he went free. Similarly, he was arrested earlier in 1976 and charged with possession of 18 kg of cocaine but was never tried. The officer who arrested him was killed, and this sent fear into law enforcement and the judiciary. Nine judges declined to hear the case and all the evidence or records disappeared from the court files. Apparently Escobar became popular because of the largesse he gave to people both in authority and outside government. He was known to have rendered many community services, such as the construction of hospitals, low-cost houses and many other community services in Colombia. Here, organized crime simply exploited the vacuum created by government's inability to provide certain services and protection for the citizenry.

24. Violence is one of main weapons of these organized crime groups. The Medellin cartel was alleged to be responsible for the assassination of 15 Colombian judges and some US DEA informants. Sometimes, however, bribes are paid even when force was used. For instance, in Mexico, the Tijuana cartel, in addition to their extensive use of force, pay more than \$1 million in bribes to Mexican judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement, including the Army and Customs officials. The Mexican Attorney-General was reported to have admitted in one of the extradition cases in a US court that about 90% of Mexican judges and prosecutors were on the cartel's payroll. Whereas the Medellin were more violent in their activities, the Cali cartel were more 'circumspect', using their political contacts in government to study and know what governments were planning in response to crime. Sometimes they even used their lawyers and friends to collect information on law enforcement activities and law-making regarding their activities.

25. Apart from influencing political decisions, criminal networks could also influence the process of law-making typical of a 'state capture'. For example, it was alleged that the constitutional Assembly in Colombia passed the anti-extradition law in 1991 as a result of pressure from the narco-traffickers.

26. The above mentioned areas are the most obvious drawbacks stemming from unhindered trafficking, but are by no means exhaustive. The ramifications are tremendous, and the damage inflicted can last for generations. The pain and the sorrow, the anger and the violent frustration, the aggravation and the despair are a few by-products of the greed generated by and through the drug trade and other forms of trafficking and corruption. Drug traffickers do not only peddle drugs, they sell illusions as well. They play upon the innocence of people and lead them to believe in miracles! People actually believe that they will benefit and thrive! But people can never cope with illusions because they are not real. They are thus left with no defence, totally vulnerable and more often than not destitute. Rebuilding confidence in these people's hearts and by extension in an entire society is a long, lonely

and very difficult process. It is by far wiser never to go there in the first place! Prevention trumps counteraction every time - more effective and cheaper!!

### **Overview of the Regional Efforts on Drug Control**

27. Before 2001, drug law enforcement departments in West Africa did not have appreciable collaboration with one another. Drug traffickers have taken advantage of this communication gap between them to establish cells across the region and move along the West African corridor with relative impunity. Indeed, where intelligence is to be shared with neighboring countries, one Agency would find it difficult to release the information because of the uncertainty of the preservation of confidentiality of the information in the destination country. This situation led to the founding of the West African Joint Operations initiative (WAJO). The WAJO initiative commenced as a collaborative effort between Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Regional Office in Lagos. The focus of WAJO was to contain the exploding illicit drug trafficking problem across the region. This, in turn, would create the opportunity for harmonization of the core activities of policing agencies within the region, and help to expand the collective drug law enforcement scope, capacity and effectiveness for improved social security and well-being of the people of the Region. However, this initiative still remains weak.

28. More recently, it has become obvious that the situation has taken a dramatic turn for the worse, especially in some specific countries. In Guinea Bissau for example, several seizures of Cocaine have taken place, one of which was for 674 kgs and one for over 300 kgs (with several arrests made). In mid-2007, police from Dakar seized over 2 metric tons of Cocaine on a yacht drifting off the coast and in a safe-house at a resort south of the City. They also seized over 44 kgs at the International Airport during the year and arrested some 30 individuals. Early this year, following investigations into drug offences, about 46 persons: 14 police officials; 10 army personnel; 6 Navy personnel; 16 traders and businessmen (including 4 foreigners) were charged with drug related offences in Guinea. Buildings, cars and other assets suspected to be proceeds from drug trafficking were confiscated. Persons transporting Cocaine have been arrested in Nigeria, the Gambia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Niger and other countries on a regular basis, indicating a very worrying trend, since it is widely estimated that only about 10 to 12% of product is in fact intercepted worldwide (probably less than 5% in Africa). This means that industrial quantities of hard drugs are making their way through the region with almost total impunity.

29. In June 2007, at its 32<sup>nd</sup> Ordinary Session, the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government expressed serious concerns about the upsurge of drug trafficking in the region and mandated the ECOWAS Commission to take urgent action and report to the Authority on efforts to stem the tide. The Commission, realizing the inadequate capacity in-house, requested GIABA, one of the Specialized Institutions of the ECOWAS that has some expertise in this area, to prepare and present a provisional, short-term Plan of Action for Drugs Control in the region before the end of the year. This was effectively done. Some modest technical assistance was also been extended to some vulnerable states. Together with GIABA's regular AML/CFT work plan, this quantified initiative should represent a positive step in the ECOWAS response to the deteriorating drug situation in the region and to the request by several Governments for immediate assistance in this regard. West Africa is increasingly under siege, being used and abused by International Organized Crime syndicates in order to traffic a plethora of goods, from guns to diamonds to human beings to drugs and other valuable goods. It must respond immediately and seriously to this threat to its overall security, public health and reputation in the world.

30. The UN has in the past few years, passed certain resolutions on the drug situation in West Africa. In those resolutions, the ECOWAS is being called upon to take urgent steps to reduce the incidence of drug trafficking through some countries in the region. Consequently, a Ministerial Meeting was held in Praia, Cape Verde in October 2008, which produced a Political Declaration and the Plan of Action, which were adopted by the Heads of State in December 2008. The ECOWAS Commission is expected to strengthen its drug control unit and commence the implementation of the Action Plan without further delay.

## Looking Forward

31. Well, much has already been done! The picture painted here may seem somewhat gloomy and distressing, but in actual fact, there is much to be proud of and grateful for. In most countries within the West African Community, the situation is at least being addressed, if not yet resolved. Some societies seem to be more in denial than others as to their own reality, but none is as yet a lost cause! Some have ceded a lot of ground and wasted precious time, but none have yet gone over the brink! But there is still a lot that can be done as of now to help stop the bleeding and heal the wounds left by so many years of criminal abuse.

32. *First*, it is essential for our leaders to become conscious of the severity of the situation. For example, a European Commission Study Report on Drugs in the Caribbean (1996) repeated the claim made by a Commonwealth Expert Group studying the region's needs in the early 1990s that drugs trafficking was "**the single greatest threat to stability and democracy in the Caribbean.**" This is also true for West Africa. It is a fact that has been reiterated time and again, but many persons in positions of leadership do not take it seriously enough. Many countries are thus paying a very heavy price for their obstinacy or worse, their complicity. However, it is never too late to become truly conscious of the destructive role that drugs play within the social fabric of all countries, and in particular the most vulnerable and poor developing states. It is all a matter of political will.

33. *Second*, there must be a joint coordinated response to the threat. The enemy is very powerful, extremely wealthy and knows no borders. Therefore, in order to fight back realistically and responsibly, it is essential to undertake concerted action with all other concerned partners, particularly those at the country level. There is strength in unity, and confronting the menace individually is in fact a waste of time and a lost cause. The Plan of Action to combat drugs in West Africa proposes a holistic response to the problem. It seeks to bring together both local governments and international donors in a common and coordinated approach, which includes a number of actions to be undertaken in logical sequence by various partners. The total cost is provisional, as is the overall focus of the Action Plan. It is nevertheless a first step on the complicated road to dealing with a very complex and multifaceted problem. Furthermore, an essential sense of solidarity needs to be reinforced and common bonds created for a successful outcome to become reality.

34. *Third*, a strong public awareness has to be created which empowers the citizens of the various countries to resist a threat which they don't want but which they fear is greater than them. This empowerment in many instances forces governments to act, and to share information, technology and even personnel in a common cause. This is what must take place under the Plan of Action, and the effects of that endeavour will still be felt in years to come. People will no longer fear the drug barons, and will want to get involved in their own defence, in their own communities. A parallel effort by Governments to show transparency in their actions against drugs trafficking and to gain solid public trust is paramount. Without public support and trust, all efforts will fail.

35. **Fourth**, any respectable programme requires adequate funding. The Plan of Action must be funded jointly by all participating entities, according to their capacity to pay. Many activities require little or no funding; only a fundamental and public will to act. But other activities are more cost intensive to carry out the provisional Work Plan. All activities are coordinated and sequenced so that they would be mutually reinforcing. However, they remain incomplete until such a time as an on-going study of the situation on the ground can be completed, thus providing a more coherent and true reading of the drugs control realities in the region. This will inevitably lead to an expansion of the Work Plan into other areas of intervention, beyond mere law enforcement interdiction, which in and of itself will have no tangible impact.

36. **Fifth**, the necessary technologies must be made available. For example, intelligence gathering and analysis is at the heart of detection and interdiction. This requires the use of the latest technology in satellite surveillance and secure data transmission. Another example is the latest container scanning equipment which allows detection of drugs and other illegal shipments within unopened containers. This is a powerful tool as a deterrent to would be traffickers. Other more basic tools are needed, in larger quantities, to allow the stakeholders to intervene, with professionalism and real impact, in their respective areas of intervention.

37. **Sixth**, adequate and pertinent training is a prerequisite to efficient intervention in combating the trade in illegal drugs. In law enforcement, forensics, rehabilitation, money laundering, information technology, etc..., personnel who do not have the necessary skills cannot win the fight they are engaged in. The programmes set in place are only as good as the people involved in them. If the persons cannot cope, then all the planning and equipment in the world won't make much difference. Qualified, educated and dedicated people are what make everything work. That is the bottom line. Before I conclude, let me address albeit briefly, the role of Parliamentarians in this regard.

### **The Role of ECOWAS Parliamentarians**

38. In the context of democracy and separation of powers, the legislature plays a crucial role in national and regional development. In regard to drug control and crime prevention, I urge you to consider the following issues, among others:

1. Effective rule of law is a function of the quality of law in any given society. Drugs control and crime prevention legislation are derived from international conventions and best practices. As ECOWAS Parliamentarians, this meeting should enable you understand your role in the domestication of these conventions in your respective national legislation. Annex 'A' below is a summary of the ECOWAS member States' status with regard to these conventions.
2. Whilst most countries in the region have some legislation against drug offences, a number of these pieces of legislation require regular update to conform to acceptable international standards. Distinguished Parliamentarians may consider sponsoring and or supporting bills in their respective Parliaments to address these deficiencies.
3. I am happy to note that all ECOWAS member States, except Guinea, have also enacted laws against money laundering. Nevertheless, I should also add that many of the laws require some amendments. In the area of terrorist financing, a snapshot of the status is that section 15 of the EFCC Act of Nigeria does criminalize some elements of terrorist financing, but it still remains inadequate in meeting the standards contemplated in international instruments and the FATF Special Recommendation II. Following the adoption of the draft uniform law on terrorist financing by the WAEMU Council of Ministers in 2008, only Senegal has passed this law among other members. Consequently, we expect our Parliamentarians to take action in this regard. The Republic of Guinea is far behind in developing legislation on money laundering

and terrorist financing. The reported cases and investigations and prosecutions of drug related offences in Guinea further expose the risks and threats of money laundering and terrorist financing that country. This needs urgent action.

4. The establishment of a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) is one of the major Recommendations of the FATF for the prevention of money laundering. So far, all countries in the region, except Ghana and Guinea, have established this important unit. In Ghana, the law has been passed by Parliament but the institution is yet to be created.

## Conclusion

39. In a nutshell then, let me say that the impact of illegal drugs trafficking in the West African region is potentially greater than in other regions throughout the world at this point in time. I have briefly discussed the workings of the drug trade, its impact on the ECOWAS states and what can be done to alleviate the situation. Much has already been done; much more can still be done. However, it all boils down to a consciousness of the situation, an acceptance of the facts as they are and a desire to respond in a targeted, intelligent manner, through a coordinated approach.

40. This requires addressing the crisis head-on, with immediate effect, and asking for specific assistance from friends and allies in order to come to grips with the situation. Before the end of the decade, a number of West African and foreign Governments must have united their efforts to respond in a comprehensive and coordinated manner to the serious menace to the very survival of several West African countries. In no time, every single country in the region, and every important donor country with interest in West Africa, should have banded together to establish a concerted **medium term Plan of Action** for countering the drug threat. Within 2 to 3 years, this Plan will have been funded, formulated, approved and become operational; it is in fact the only feasible way forward in order to attain the necessary concrete results expected within the prescribed timeframe.

41. The Cartels have now elected to reroute a large portion of their cargo via West Africa, since it is far easier and cheaper to get it through to the markets in the populated and rich North. In response, a concerted and coordinated action, the upgrading of skills and knowledge, the provision of high quality equipment, the computerization of information sharing, the better exchange of intelligence and the active support of civil society are all required in order to initiate a real decline in the trafficking, consumption and rerouting of illegal drugs, and the laundering of the illegal proceeds of their sale.

42. Much of what can be achieved is a matter of the political will to do so. Much of what is done today will remain valid for years to come. However, a misunderstanding of the true situation in the region, a false sense of immunity and a lowering of the guard can only lead to a reinforcing of the trafficking routes and the ills that accompany the drugs trade. The cartels know that, they exploit it and several West African countries are at extremely high risk of being submerged by the same old tidal wave, which has destabilized so many countries in the world, has seen them regress to a state of unthinkable poverty and teeter on the brink of disintegration. One has but to think of Somalia, Darfur or Zimbabwe to witness what an absence of vision can lead to. West Africa still remains strong and, for the sake of our children, must become stronger yet. This is the time to act!

## Legislative annex: parties to United Nations drugs and crime conventions

Country	Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961 <sup>a</sup>	Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971	Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988	Convention against Corruption	Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
Benin	*	*	*	*	*
Burkina Faso	*	*	*	*	*
Cape Verde	*	*	*	*	*
Côte d'Ivoire	*	*	*		
Gambia	*	*	*		*
Ghana	*	*	*	*	
Guinea	*	*	*		*
Guinea-Bissau	*	*	*	*	*
Liberia	*		*	*	*
Mali	*	*	*	*	*
Mauritania	*	*	*	*	*
Niger	*	*	*	*	*
Nigeria	*	*	*	*	*
Senegal	*	*	*	*	*
Sierra Leone	*	*	*	*	
Togo	*	*	*	*	*

<sup>a</sup> States parties to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 or as amended by the 1972 Protocol.