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Peer review method: Double-Blind

Date of acceptance: February 28, 2020

Date of publication: May 04, 2020

Original scientific article

UDC 316.774:321.7(049.3)

Scan the QR code:



DRUG TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA BORDERLANDS: FROM GOLD COAST TO COKE COAST

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Abstract: *Drug trafficking has become the new threat to the economic and political stability of the West Africa sub-region; by virtue of its new toga as the new transit hub for drug trafficking. 80% and 13% of seizures in cocaine transshipment annually of 60 – 250 tons to Europe and globally respectively, passes the West African maritime borderlands/coast. The informal economy based on drugs has replaces over \$400 million contribution to the region's GDP from fishing. The impacts of drug trafficking had had a long negative toll on the institutions of the states and state-building infrastructure in the region. Besides, intra-states conflicts, drug money and activities had exacerbated state failure in the region; notably in Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Guinea, etc. The West African Coast Initiative is making crawling impacts. Although, still in its pilot phase, it had enhanced coordination of intelligence in the region on drug trafficking and organized crime. However, it is still short of fundamentally addressing obvious policy gap, due to its lack of clear focus; plus, being only operational in just five West African states. This paper identified absence of comprehensive maritime coordination policy against drug trafficking in West Africa as the bane of the surge. Therefore, a tripartite approach, based on state, regional and global levels policy restructuring in the region is required.*

Keywords: *Drug Trafficking; West Africa; Political and Economic Stability; Maritime Policy Coordination; State Failure; Cocaine*

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the century, drug trafficking had assumed a terrifying dimension in the West Africa (WA) sub-region, leading to its emergence as the new transit hub for drugs trafficking, especially cocaine from South America (production origin) to Europe and other parts (consumers). Drug trafficking has emerged the 21st century dilemma to political and economic stability of the region, who hitherto is struggling with fragility. With a decline in demand in the United States, a better controlled Caribbean route, a rising market in Europe, ungoverned waterways in Gulf of Guinea, South American drug traffickers took advantage of the loose West African region as transit zone (UNODC, 20013). Available data shows over 50% of the non-United States bound drugs transit through the West Africa and making 13% of the global drug trafficking index. The enormity of maritime border in the region cannot be overemphasized; about 80% of the 60 – 250 tons of drugs valued at between \$3 and \$14 billion into the West Africa sub-region comes through the maritime borders (Van Riper; Stephen 2014). The formal economy based in fishing contributing positively to the huge youth unemployment crisis and over \$400 million to the region's GDP is being gradually eroded in place of the informal economy based on drugs trafficking; hence transforming the region 'From a Gold Coast to Coke Coast'.

The maritime waters of Cape Verde, Mauritania, Guinea Bissau, Canary Islands, and other countries along the Gulf of Guinea have contributed to the growth in cocaine shipments via West Africa in the last couple of years. The gravity of the challenge may have been more, weak law enforcement compounded by lack of capacity (human/material resources) and other important factors including weak regional coordination have had significant impact. Available data represents only the seizures, which means, it may not have fully captured the actual trafficking flows via the region. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)'s database reflects this alarming dimension under discuss; the total number of seizures in Europe which came through the Africa region in 2007 was 22%, from 5% and 1% in 2004 and 2000 respectively. An estimated "35% of the cocaine produced and shipped from the coasts of Colombia, Venezuela, the Guyanas, and Brazil is trafficked via the European/African corridor" (Country Report – Colombia 2007, 77-79). The main new trend around various countries on the Gulf of Guinea has been the phenomenal increase in cocaine shipments via West Africa maritime borderlands.

Globally, the issue of drug trafficking, especially cocaine trafficking, the vast bulk of the flow proceeds from the Andean region (Colombia produces half of global flow in 2008 (450 tons), followed by Peru (302 tons) and Bolivia (113 tons) to North America (often via Central America) and Europe (often via West Africa) (TOCTA 2010, 81). The global value is estimated at \$88 billion annually; 43% in North America and 39% in Europe. Incidentally, since the 1980s, the consumption in the United States (the largest global consumer of 10.5 million in 1982) has been on a growing downward trend and further plunged dramatically since 2006.

This has been attributed to various factors, ranging from: effective enforcement efforts in the US and counter-trafficking measures in Latin America, disruption in trafficking routes, etc. Similarly, International attention and intervention, as well as political changes, appear to have substantially reduced trafficking through West Africa after 2007 (UNODC 2010). Europe occupies the world's second largest cocaine market besides North America; that is, the 27 countries of the European Union (EU) and the four countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). By 2007/2008, the United Kingdom (UK) stars as the single largest cocaine market in Europe, followed by Spain, Italy, Germany and France. The number of users in the Europe has doubled over the years; from 2 million in 1998 to 4.1 million in 2007/08. This increase means more pressure to create additional route for the expanded demand, according to TOCTA report (2010). Most of the drug trafficking to Europe is done through the maritime waters/sea (as depicted in figure 1.), usually by container shipments.

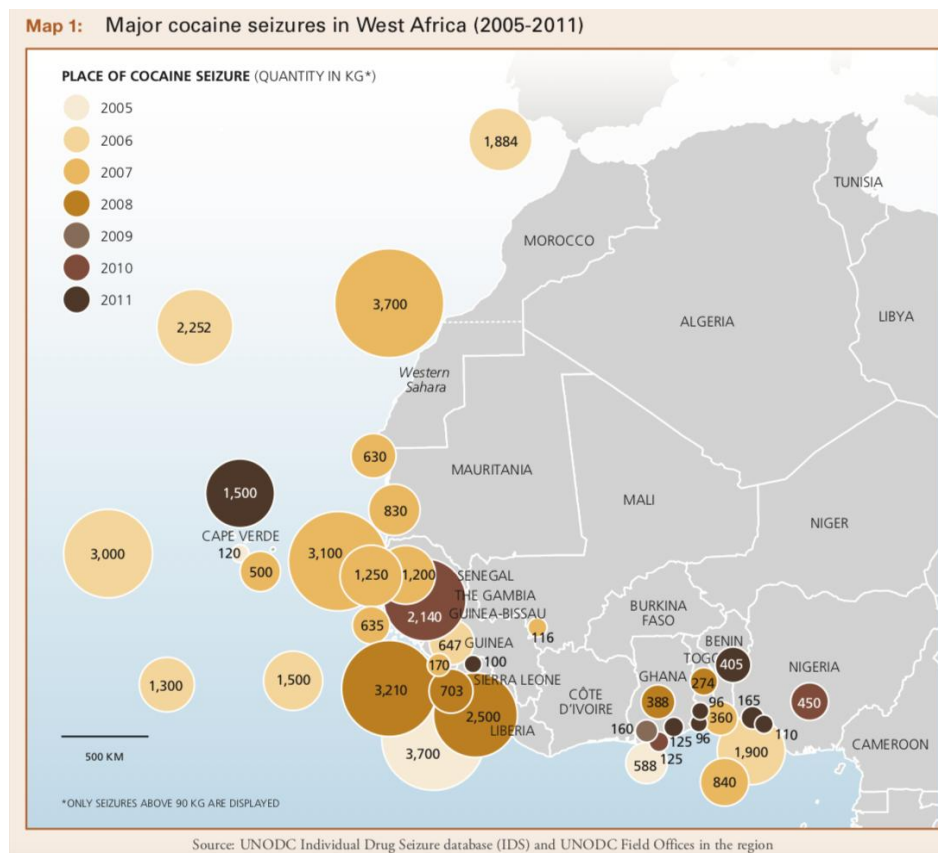


Figure 1: Drug Seizures via Maritime Transshipment in West Africa Coast (Source: UNODC 2013).

However, other means, such as deliveries by small aircrafts/air and cross-border movement or postal services are equally rampant. According to the World Customs Organization (WCO), 69% of the total volume of cocaine seized en route to Western Europe was detected on board boats or vessels, concealed in freight or in the vessels' structure.

The data reveal that, while a large number of smaller shipments are detected at airports and by post, the bulk of drug shipments to Europe are mainly by sea (UNODC 2009). This is where West Africa becomes pivotal to the drug transit to Europe.

The rising demands in Europe and containment/decline usage in North America has shifted the paradigm and necessitated alternative routes to Europe in recent years. Also, the increasing difficulties for direct transshipment from Andean region to Europe, due to high investments in maritime patrol and technology by the European Union (EU); opens the idea for available vulnerable alternative routes, hence, West Africa. Secondly, the absence of unsupervised expanse of maritime waters between the Andean coasts and the West African coast is a dimension susceptible to easy drug trafficking or illicit commodity movements, en-route other destinations. Since the 2000s, two main drugs trans-shipment hubs have emerged in West Africa: one around Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, and the other along the borderlands stretching between Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, etc. corridors. More often than not, the drugs shipments by to the West African coast don't get to mainland before offloaded from mother ships into smaller vessels; which proceeds to Europe through Spain and Portugal, and sometimes by land and air, not just to Europe but Asia and North America. (SOCA 2009) For example, West Africa traffickers have gained prominence in France since 2004, because, Nigerians became top amongst the nationalities of foreign cocaine traffickers; they consist of a third of all arrests among foreign traffickers in 2006 (TOCTA 2010).

The West Africa sub-region is in constant battle with several problems, ranging from poverty, diseases, unemployment, piracy, desertification, etc. Also, among the Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) are: natural resources (including crude oil theft, illegal mining), cigarettes, fake/counterfeit medication, human trafficking (women and children), small arms, toxic waste, and migrant workers. While each of the TOCs affects each country differently, and are serious, but they do not concentrate quick money or financial capital (as cocaine) into hands of a few local lords thereby posing a real challenge to the state. Recent time has seen drug trafficking and illegal dealings in natural/mineral resources dominated West Africa instability discuss (TOCTA 2010). Therefore, the focus of this paper is drug trafficking, more especially, the flow through the maritime borderlands; because of its financial involvement and how it has affected this poor region negatively.

Drug trafficking through the region was earlier detected in large-scale quantity in 2004, signaling a shift in the centre of gravity of the global market from the USA to Europe. However, from 2008, there was declining situation due primarily to international awareness and an increase global focus on the region in order to stem the tide. One of such results led the discovery of states-drug lord's collaborations e.g. the former president of Guinean-

Bissau's sons and senior military chiefs are involved in drug trade, according to West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD). Drug money had been assumed to be used to prosecute elections in Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and other countries within the region.

Since the focus of this paper is the examination of policy failure, especially in addressing drug trafficking through the maritime coast of the region, where over 69% of drugs (according to WCO seizures) into Europe passes through; greater emphasis will therefore be directed at identifying the real policy problem and raising strategic policy options to tackle them. Fundamental to the problem identified is the absence or lack of clear-cut maritime policy that focuses on drug trafficking in the region. However, in the course the research, a few militating factors was contributing to this problem; they include: rampant intra-state conflict and poverty in the region leading to weak/underdeveloped maritime security capacity; the problem of piracy; and non-availability of policy direction on maritime security against drug traffic. In view of these, the paper developed a three-prong policy options focusing on state-level capacity improvement/support; regional-level policy reviews to accommodate maritime aspect; and global-level of leadership. Therefore, the recommendations border on how these three approaches are combined into structural frameworks that can address the policy problem.

IMPACTS OF DRUG TRAFFICKING ON THE WEST AFRICAN STATE-BUILDING

The threat of destruction in local states structure by drug trafficking is enormous and cannot be easily quantify or measured. The deadliest so far witnessed in the region is the destruction or compromising of already weakened institutions and symbols that protect statehood. Drug traffickers are able to penetrate the highest levels of military commands and also install favorite politicians into office through financing of elections. Law enforcement personnel are offered more than they could earn in a lifetime, to just looking away. These control guarantees drug trafficking operations with very little resistance from the state actors. According to the UNODC 2011 Research Paper, the multiplier effect of drug trafficking in the region had frustrated states-building efforts and further complicated the political process (UNODC 2011). Guinea-Bissau provides the first example. A country with GDP of \$532 million (2010) (UN Data: Guinea Bissau.), and one of the worst in the region most affected by the drug trade economically and politically. There is no secret that the hierarchy of her military and the political elites are enmeshed in the trade. The country's Chief of the Army (Tagme na Wai) had once accused President João Vieira of involvement in drug trafficking prior to the 2008 elections. Due to rivalry and trade control among the classes, led to the death in 2009 of Tagme na Wai; a reprisal which also claimed the life of the president. This further plunged the already unstable country into much deeper crisis.

Similarly, in Guinea (2009), following the ouster of the long-time country's former dictator through a military *coup d'état*, several senior public officials and the president's sons were discovered to be involved in rings of drug trafficking using diplomatic pouches and passports to move drugs. In 2010, the president of the Gambia busted a ring of drug traffickers comprising high-level public officials and consequently ordered their arrests and prosecution. They include: the National Police Chief and his deputy, Minister of Fisheries, deputy chief of the army, chief of the navy, and chief of the National Drug Enforcement Agency, his deputy and his head of operations. In Sierra Leone, the Minister of Transportation resigned after his brother was implicated in the country's largest cocaine seizure. Since state's actor's involvement in drug trafficking is predominant in West Africa, violence report or occurrences have been very minimal. Scanty evidence exists on dealings of insurgent's groups in drugs. However, the lack of reports could also be associated with absence of empirical or reliable data on homicide in West Africa. Emerging concerns have therefore been the risk of access by some of the dormant militant groups in West Africa; as this will somehow be a game changer. While there has not been a verifiable proof of insurgent groups' involvement, the 2012 political conflict in Mali had linked drug finance to the Tuareg and the Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) back Islamist groups.

The Absence of Clear Regional Maritime Coordination Policy against Drug Trafficking

The absence of clear and coherent maritime coordination policy against drug trafficking in the region is foundational to the current maritime drug crisis. Despite maritime coast contributing to the majority (according to WCU (69%) and Riper 2014 (80%)) of means used to transport drugs from Latin America into the West Africa region en-route Europe, a conclusion supported by the UNODC data/map shown above; there has not been a visibly clear-cut maritime policy direction against drug trafficking either by individual states or at the regional level. This is worrisome and ironical in view of other several policy initiatives targeted at drug trafficking via the air and land. There seems a misplacement of priorities and/or deliberate attempt to shy away from confronting the real issue. Better still; the maritime policies are not synchronized to work together at addressing many challenges from one front. Of course, this is not to say; there are no enough handicaps, some of which are attributed to three main factors:

Weak Maritime Security Capacity due to Inland Political Conflict and Finance

Firstly, undeveloped maritime security capacity due to perverse inland political conflict and poverty; leaving the ungoverned waters at the mercy of drug lords. Virtually all West African states are either in active conflict or recovering/in a post-conflict state-building phase. Greater portion of the state's resources (human and material) are deployed towards inland

armed conflicts management, thereby relegating the maritime security and waterways to the background. Similarly, the Guinea Bissau coup d'état of April 2012 accentuated the notion of thinking of the criminal networks; that, in order to firmly control the drug trafficking access, controlling the state institutions is pivotal (Shaw 2012). In many ways, the TOC networks frustrate state institutions and instigate their underdevelopment in order to provide little or no resistance to their operations. West Africa is famous for being one of the poorest and politically unstable regions in the world. Out of the 16 countries in this region, only three are not on the list of the United Nations least developed countries; meanwhile five of the countries are at the lowest bottom of United Nations Human Development Index. More than half the countries are currently experiencing some forms of instability (LDC Report 2014). It possesses one of the world's current deadliest insurgent group known as Boko Haram (in Nigeria); killing over 13,000 persons since 2009: according to Amnesty International. Perennial insurgent groups exist in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Mali, Niger, etc. The region is still recovering from the memories of brutal civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Since independence, West Africa has experienced at least 58 coups and countercoups; some as recent as March 2012 in Mali. Nine countries in West Africa sub-region featured, according to a recent rating of the 25 countries with the highest risks of instability globally: Niger, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin (Hewitt *et al.* 2010).

These weights portend a real burden on the ability of the West African states to adequately stand a better chance or develop naval capacity at responding to drug trafficking, especially on the maritime front. Since several of efforts are land-related; only the Army in most West Africa countries is fairly developed. Others don't have the navy personnel or coast guards let alone the equipment (gunboats and others) to patrol and provide some offences/deterrence on the maritime coasts. An assessment of the law enforcement personnel (maritime) responsible for the entire maritime security in 10 of the West Africa coastal states is a little above 200,000: Nigeria having 162,000 (IISS 2015). The figure below represents the enormity of the challenge faced on maritime borderlands, hence, the helplessness.

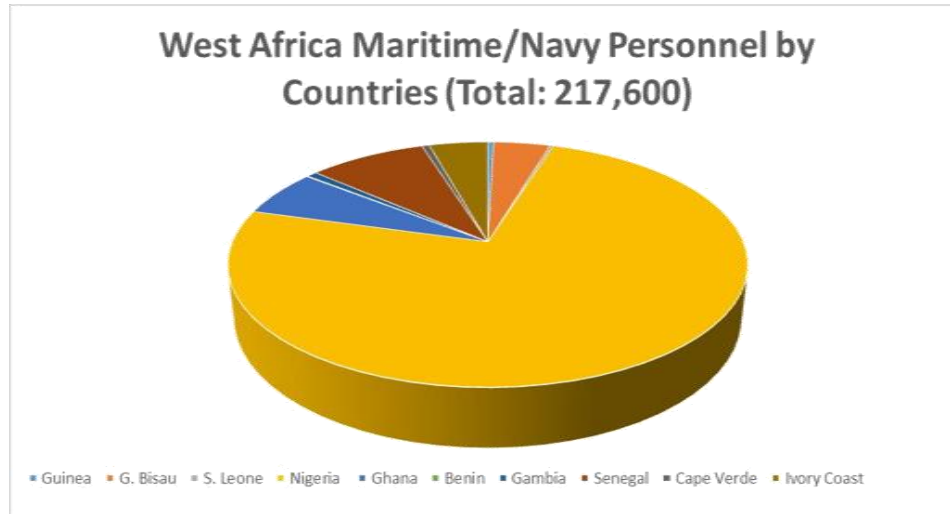


Figure 2: Capacity of Regional Law Enforcement in West Africa
(Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies 2015).

Piracy

The second factor that hinders a coherent maritime policy against drug trafficking is piracy. Piracy is one of the main threats to economic survival of the states. The main focus of the region/states on the maritime borders had been fighting obstacles (commodity seizures, kidnapping for ransom, oil bunkering and armed robbery at sea) on the Gulf of Guinea and the entire West Africa coast; which threatens the economic main stay of the region's export/import. According to the industry magazine *Maritime Executive*, pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea increased by 33% in 2013. The region is the second most dangerous area in the world for maritime transport, as it accounted for nearly 30% of attacks in African waters between 2003 and 2011, according to *Maritime First*. Therefore, the limited capacity these countries could muster, relating to maritime coast, was directed at fighting piracy for their economic survival. According to UNODC, while piracy is on the decline in the Somalia's Gulf of Aden, it may have shifts in spread to West Africa. While most of the attacks are concentrated around Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Togo, among others; majority in this region take place in Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta region (Ben-Ari 2013). For example, In Benin, 80% of state revenue comes from imports through the Cotonou seaport. In 2013, due to increased pirate attacks in West Africa, Lloyd's Market Association (umbrella group of maritime insurers) lists Nigeria, Benin and nearby waters in the same risk category as Somalia. This phenomenon has led to a significant 28% decline in the Benin revenue and decrease in maritime traffic; and by implication affected the livelihoods of the country's citizens (UNODC 2013).

Choosing to focus their maritime aggression more on piracy than drug trafficking seems logical, but, a one coherent policy on the maritime waters could have been more effective and efficient. Unfortunately, despite the alarming increase in incidences (49 in 2011 and 58 in 2012, while 28 alone in Nigeria in 2013) (The International Maritime Bureau), piracy in West Africa is yet to attract the needed global attention as was in Somalia (June 2008) through the platform of the UN Security Council. Therefore, West African regional and individual state's efforts to fight the problem, reduces the resources (human and material) and focus needed to tackle drug trafficking in the region's maritime sphere.

Maritime Policy against Drug Trafficking

The third challenge inhibiting the policy problem is absence of a wholly maritime policy against drug trafficking in West Africa. In view of the enormity of the impact of drug trafficking on the region, it is surprising to discover no policy; either at state, regional or international level entirely dedicated to confronting the menace via the maritime borders. Closest to it was the West African Coast Initiative (WACI). However, WACI is not entirely coastal initiative, but incorporates other components of land and air means through the Transnational Crime Unit (TCU). This is more so surprising because, despite contributing 80% to the entire trafficking network, little attention is given to maritime compare to other trafficking means. While most states have established drug laws and control agencies, the laws and agencies have little consideration for maritime approach. Regionally, beside efforts being pursued through WACI, there is very little clear policy coordination among the states on drug control on maritime borderlands. Other factors are: official corruption, weak state institutions, language barriers, old states rivalries, lack of maritime technical communication means, etc. (UNODC).

CURRENT MARITIME RESPONSES TO DRUG TRAFFICKING IN WEST AFRICA

Despite the rising number of strategies, policies, initiatives and mechanisms developed at different levels (international, regional, sub-regional and national), they appear to suffer from a lack of comprehensive and integrated strategic framework that puts the round pegs in the square holes. There is no clear-cut response to drug trafficking through the maritime borderlands; however, the WACI initiative incorporated all forms of drug trafficking. West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI), a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder approach to strengthen human and institutional capacity of law enforcement officials, initially in four post-conflict countries to support the implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan. West African Coast Initiative (WACI) is arguably the only well-intended coordinated policy response in the region. Launched officially in 2009 and being piloted in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea- Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and priority to Guinea eventually. West African Coast Initiative

(WACI): a policy initiative of ECOWAS Regional Action Plan jointly instituted by ECOWAS, UNODC, UNOWA/DPA, DPKO and INTERPOL. Still in its pilot phase, and through Transitional Crime Unit (TCU), had enhanced coordination of intelligence in the region on drug issues. In view of the enormity of the challenges, WACI along with other inland mechanisms helped halt the rising tides; reducing the trafficking rates from 47 tons to 19 (about 60%) between 2005 and 2010 respectively. It has provided an operational avenue upon which actions on drug trafficking can be collective in the region. Also, increased cooperation across borders among the pilot countries and creating some state-level institutional changes linking actors from different law enforcement agencies within a country (Annan 2013).

WACI's main impact is the creation of Transnational Crime Units (TCU), meant to enhance national and international coordination, as well as to enable intelligence-based information dissemination. The TCU in each country are to improve law enforcement cooperation and intelligence gathering. They are expected to be each country's elite inter-agency units, trained and equipped to fight transnational organized crime and to coordinate their activities under an international framework (WACI 2013). Through the collaboration of WACI, tremendous progress has been achieved; especially in intercepting transshipments of drugs into the West Africa region; as indicated by Figure 1. Close examination of the data reveals majority of the transshipments (numbers and quantity) and interceptions had happened on the sea and at seaports. WACI is a combine technical assistance initiative to help states address criminal networks and illicit activities by strengthening national and regional legal capacities. It leverages on partner's resourcefulness to mitigate and diminishing the threat of organized crime in the region and globally (Peace Operation Review, 2015).

While, WACI had been partly credited with the recent downward trend (successes) in the seizures recorded since its creation, I believe, the reduction may have strong connection with the invigorated intelligence provided by WACI and/or a discovery of new trafficking routes. This initiative is very problematic in many fronts. First, it only bears the name 'coastal initiative'; meanwhile little of its operations have anything to do with maritime. Secondly, it suffers from funding and currently only in pilot phase; operational (TCUs) in five countries out the 16-member states of ECOWAS. Third, the WACI policy initiative does not have coastal security component or capacity for patrol and cannot empower the states for same. Fourth, Both ECOWAS and the AU Action Plans, and some other interventions are not synchronized; they seem to be working at cross purposes.

POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy response to the current gap in the existing framework: lack of clear-cut or absence of a maritime coordination policy against drug trafficking in the region must be handled from: improvement/amendments on existing plan or creation of fresh policy build-up; especially for maritime affairs in view of its relevance as seen in Figure 1. A triangular synergy must be built using bottom-top approach through multi-level collaboration and resources leveraging.

State Level

West African states are not exception with respect to basic laws (some of which are regarded as very harsh) that deal with drug trafficking and even consumption (UN Treaty Collection 2013). Many have drug law enforcement legislation dating as far back as the 1930s. They are members of most of the UN Conventions; a few are: UN Drug Convention (1988), UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971), UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961), UN Convention against Transnational Crime, among others. However, internal strives and lack of enablement (funds) to develop a formidable coastal security apparatus hinders all. An overhauling of the state system will make a huge difference. West African countries must develop a strong coastal security agency, with adequate equipment (gun boats and surveillance gadgets) and personnel, if their effort must be complementary with regional and global efforts. Each state should be able to patrol if not up until the international waters, but at least 100 nautical miles offshore and adequately be available at each borderland to its neighbors. A five-year development plan in this regard with funding from African Development Bank/World Bank/EU financing will be appropriate starting from 2016. In the same vein, political stability is critical to success of any new initiatives; West African states needs to evolve an inclusive political process and consultation with relevant actors in order to forge internal peace-building and state-building; thereby reducing its investments in prosecution of war. Similarly, since drug money is used to sponsor politicians in some states and corrupt the military hierarchies, there is concern that some states have been saboteurs or reluctant to work with the regional teams/action plan on the fight. In this light, the civil society organizations in these states should be strengthened to be the watch dog of the society and demand accountability from their government (internal monitors). The limitation in this policy option is that, states in this region are some of the poorest in the world; 13 out of the 16-member states of ECOWAS are in the UN Least Developed Countries, at least five of them are within the 25 poorest countries in the world. Singlehandedly developing maritime capability will be near impossible without outside help. Secondly, since corruption/drug money has permeated the military, purging the institutions is required but might also plunge the country into instability if pushed too hard.

Regional Level

The bulk of this problem is at best handled at regional collaborative level, because, it is a regional threat. However, fundamental to all steps moving forward is the political declaration needed to galvanize and sustain a regional maritime policy process in order to inspire consensus to a common threat. Regional political consensus is a necessary ingredient that allows for mobilizing and sharing of resources. Also, it enhances promotion of an enabling environment required to combat senior state official's involvement in the cocaine trade (UNODC, 2011). To this extent, a wholly independent maritime policy against drug trafficking will suffice. The current WACI or TCU should be divided into two components or departments, or at best separated: one specifically focusing on Inland drug trafficking and the other on maritime. Dedicating an entire structure to maritime waterways will enhance efficient utilization of resources and provide concise policy direction to address the biggest contributor to the region's drug trafficking problem. This will also enable WACI or TCU develop sea patrol capabilities to support the state's inadequacies. The inland will primarily be limited to land and air trafficking means, while both still gather intelligence to compliment the enhanced enforcement ability of member states. According to John Kerry (US Secretary of State), "the security of any region cannot be guaranteed without an effective law enforcement on its territorial waters" (SAMLEI 2015). Similar to the Southern Asia Maritime Initiative, a wholly established robust maritime policy will engender maritime law enforcement capacity and training in areas such as communication, intelligence gathering and monitoring and surveillance.

Secondly, since greater percent of the drugs trafficked through the region are destined for Europe, collaboration is inevitable between ECOWAS maritime framework (to be developed within WACI or TCU as suggested) and EU sea patrol agencies (Frontex); especially for intelligence sharing and interceptions. Establishment of regional security force like the Frontex on the Gulf of Guinea and working in collaboration will be strategic. More so that, the bigger vessels from South America sometime mid-way off-load their drug content into smaller boats and head for Europe from the international waters. The partnership will help close loose ends between the two regions. The Praia Initiative promoted by ECOWAS and supported by UNODC and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) to combat the serious security threat posed by drug trafficking in the region; in partnership with the European Union (EU) should be revisited for an amendment. The omission of maritime security architecture against drug trafficking in the Praia conference was a big oversight on the path of the Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS who endorsed the Regional Action Plan in Abuja in 2008. While the process is a home-grown response strategy, its neglected or deliberately excluded plan to cover maritime domain; which contributes the largest avenue for drug trafficking access to the region, making the initiative not only very weak, but unserious. Maritime component must be built into it to enable a comprehensive

policy approach easy to coordinate by air, sea and land. This revision can be done through setting up a specific committee and its recommendations submitted for endorsement by the ECOWAS highest organ. On the other hand, the maritime initiatives in the region could be harmonized to achieve different purposes from one standpoint. E.g. the fight against piracy could be combined with that of drug trafficking, thereby saving duplication of resources and crowding security management on the West African waterways and Gulf of Guinea. The two main regional policies against drugs could play the lead role in this direction. That is, the new AU Plan of Action which is designed to reduce drug harm, supply and demand in the region (IDPC Advocacy Note 2012) and ECOWAS Regional Action Plan, which consists of five thematic focuses: political leadership, national/regional cooperation, strengthening of legal frameworks, confronting drug abuse and associated health and security problems, and data generation.

Unfortunately, while there are specific policy initiatives on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, besides the general initiatives against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), there is no policy with specific aim at addressing drug trafficking on the maritime coast of the region (yet contributes 80% to trafficking means into the region). Therefore, this lacuna could provide the window for a single coordinated maritime policy for breaching the two biggest threats (piracy and drug trafficking) to the region's waterways, and economic and political survival.

The constraints of the regional-level policy options are: it might take time to build a maritime force and requires a huge capital investment, which might be heavy for the poor states. Bureaucratic bottlenecks might delay policy initiative, especially when it is government led. The role of spoilers (state agents/narco states), who benefits from proceeds of drug trafficking.

Global Level

Given the reality of the contribution of drug money to armed groups, state fragility, erosion of state legitimacy, corruption of political and security elites, and emergence of drug states (e.g. Guinea-Bissau) in the region; the global community (United Nations and G8) should declare the fight against drug trafficking in the region an emergency.


The international waters directly linking South America and West Africa should be monitored through enhanced collaboration facilitated by UNODC and the international maritime policies dealing with drug trafficking. Something similar achieved in 2006 by the Spanish and British Navy, who intercepted a record 9,853 tons of cocaine on five ships off the coast of West Africa. In order to achieve its goals towards supporting West Africa response to drug trafficking, the EU funded Cocaine Route Programme (CRP) should be repositioned to complement whatever maritime department is created out of WACI or TCU. While the EU Cocaine Route Programme is expected to support West Africa Police Information Systems (WAPIS), Airport Cooperation Programme (AIRCOP), Seaport Cooperation Programme

(SEACOP), and an AML (European Union 2008), this policy paper considers the vagueness as unnecessary distractions. Rather, the programme should concentrate its support on the region's most vulnerable aspect: help to build maritime capabilities to fight drug trafficking. Most relevant and helpful in West African case against drug trafficking is the SEACOP's creation of Joint Maritime Control Units, which will share intelligence with units in targeted West African seaports. This strategy if incorporated into a single maritime coordination policy against drug trafficking as proposed by this policy paper, it will improve interdiction through coordination, information sharing and technical skills; beside the support to the general fight against drug trafficking in the region (Kofi Annan Foundation 2013).

Giving the extent to which corruption induced by drug trafficking has permeated the highest hierarchy of the states in West Africa, according to the World Development Report (2011), the international community through relevant United Nations agencies and G8 (with such capabilities) should assist in efforts to trace illicit financial flows in order to identify involvement, name and shame persons whose income is perceived to be drug-related (World Bank, 2011). Besides South America, the West Africa region remain an area seriously affected by trafficking and corruption, coupled with weak national capacity needed to gather and process information on sophisticated financial transactions, or to investigate and prosecute offenders. The United Nations Security Council should urgently officially recognize drug trafficking, especially on West African maritime waterways as a high-level threat within the TOC family, capable of further undermining the development, stability and security of the region; and provide safe haven for terrorist organizations. The recognition is expected to classify fight against drug trafficking on the region's maritime waters as a conflict prevention strategy that requires UN member states increased cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Office on West Africa (UNOWA) (UNSC, 2009) Finally, the international community must help restore political stability in West Africa region and state-building efforts at strengthening institutions vital to development. The risk of this policy option is that, whereas the situation in the region requires urgent action, global responses are sometimes very slow, political and bureaucratic.

CONCLUSION

The maritime waterways constitute a life-wire to the West Africa region's economic survival and development. A region which emerged in the 1960s following independence wave as one of the most endowed with human and mineral resources. But wars and internal unrest, and lately drug trafficking have negatively impacted its abilities. Since the 2000s, drug trafficking has reduced the region to a safe haven for transnational criminal activities; empowering elements that threatens its stability. Despite several interventions to stem the tide, a fundamental policy error (lack of formidable maritime policy on drug trafficking) had transformed the region from its original good old gold coast region to now cocaine (coke) coast. Due to under-performance of the WACI initiative, collaborations at the states, regional and global levels is capable of extensively curbing the menace and restoring the region on a path of economic and political stability. All mechanisms other than blocking or investing heavily on the source of drug trafficking means into the region (maritime), it will mean, only the symptoms and not the cure is being treated. As inferred in the policy options recommended above, the problem can best be adequately addressed using holistic three-ways methods, incorporating all stakeholders; although at different levels and creating roles for each actor's involvement. For example, at the state-level, we need to quench the fire promoting political instability from inside (via inclusive governance ... including minority protection) and equally develop a standing maritime structure or agency responsible for fighting drug trafficking on the country's waterways; at least 100 nautical miles into the Atlantic Ocean and at border points between West African states. At the regional level, it is expected to set the maritime policy direction against drug trafficking in region, incorporating all needed support from bottom (states) and top (global community/resources). While the global-level intervention, both at the Gulf of Guinea and on the international maritime waters connecting South America to West Africa to Europe will provide complimentary support to the regional and individual states efforts; beside training/technical and equipment.

Finally, another catastrophe (to watch out for) that may further compound the already dire situation in the region, if attention is not swift, is brewing local consumption of drugs. There is a massive growing concern over drug use in the region; leading the UN Secretary General to raise alarm that "West Africa is no longer just a transit route for drug traffickers but a growing destination, with more than a million users of illicit drugs. Rising consumption aggravates an already challenging public health environment and threatens socio-economic development" (UNSG/SM 2013). 

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