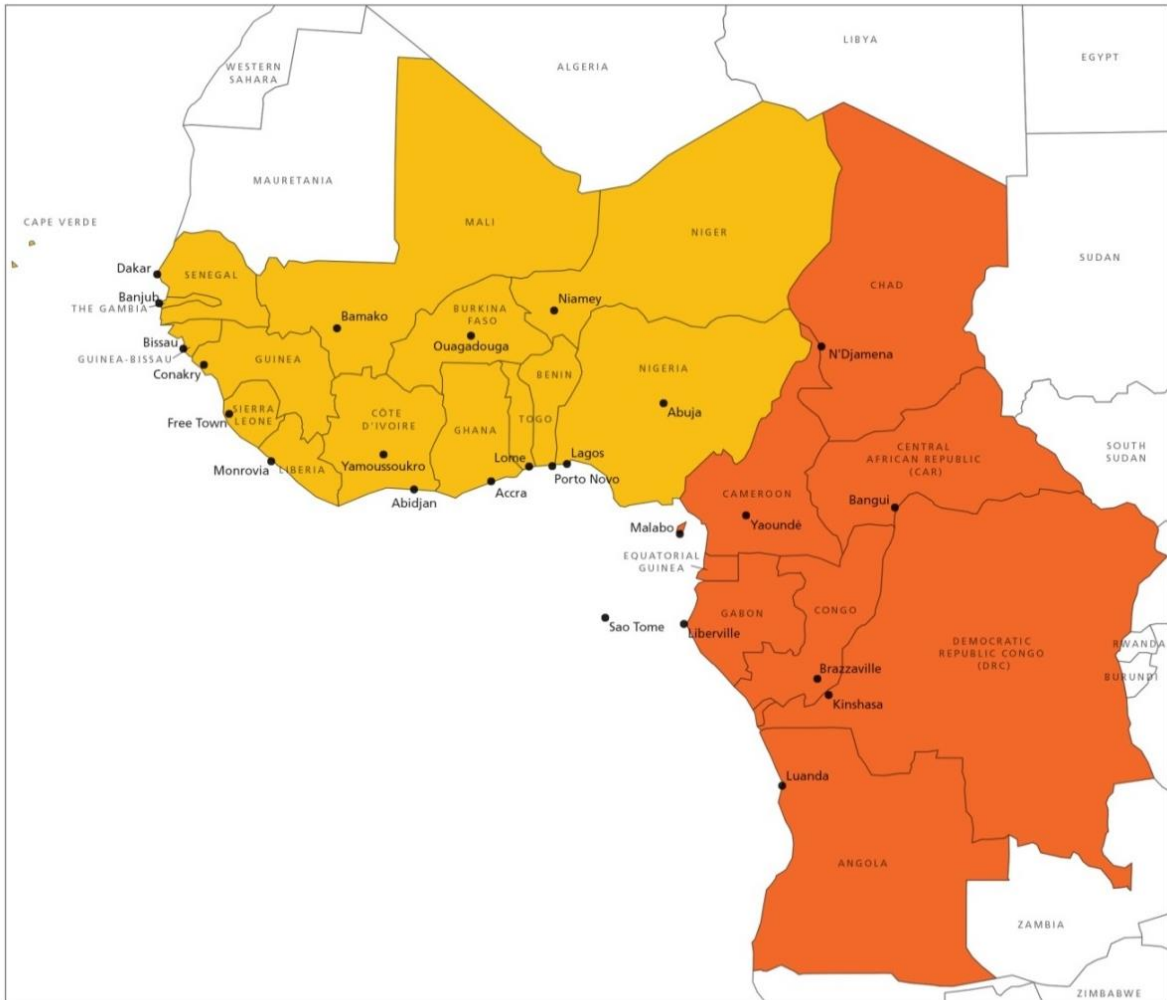




Comprehensive Assessment
of Drug Trafficking
and Organised Crime
in West and Central Africa

JANUARY 2014



Countries of West and Central Africa included in the Study

The study and final publication *Comprehensive Assessment of Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in West and Central Africa* was commissioned by the African Union.

The report was written by a team consisting of Mark Shaw, Tuesday Reitano and Marcena Hunter. Research in three languages was provided by Laura Adal, Andreia Teixeira, and Judith Ulirsch.

Executive Summary

Understanding a New Reality

An exponentially growing body of literature has heralded the expansion of organised crime in Africa. From media articles, to international reports and academic research studies, there is now a substantial library of publications that speak to the extent of the challenges that sub-Saharan Africa is facing in regards to illicit trafficking and organised crime. What was once a narrow debate restricted to specific communities, is now entwined in the continental narrative of state formation, economic development, peace and security.

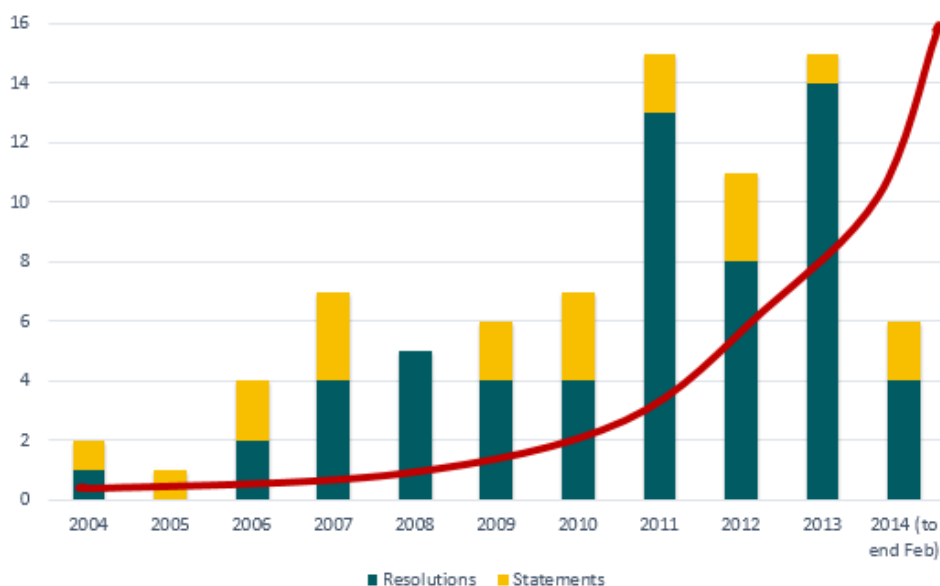
The objective of this study, which was commissioned under the framework of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017), was to assess the impact of organised crime in West and Central Africa; to build a record of the available literature; provide relevant recommendations for developing an effective response; and, identify areas where additional research is required. The study was intended to respond to the urgent need identified in the AU Plan of Action for better research and information collection on drug trafficking and organised crime, and to serve as a baseline assessment and stock-taking of the existing available literature. The findings and conclusions of this report draw from a review of all available documentation, in English, French and German. In total, more than 500 documents or articles were consulted, and 150 of these have been used as foundational material in this report, with the majority of these being drawn from recent academic source material.

A comprehensive review of the available literature on organised crime in West and Central Africa suggests that the two regions are in an important period of change: important political, economic and social shifts are being accompanied by an increase in organised crime and illicit trafficking which are in themselves shaping both on-going trends as well as the emerging nature of governance in the regions concerned. The literature charts the evolution of emerging and entrenched illicit markets with longstanding historical routes, which, under the influence of three overarching global trends and some enabling factors created conditions which facilitated the rapid evolution of new forms of organised crime. This has resulted in the picture we see today. Understanding both their extent and impact are thus crucial elements of analysing broader shifts underway.

Understanding the impact of organised crime

The report concludes at the outset that, while there is growing acceptance of a standardised set of definitions as to what comprises organised crime globally, there remains much less consensus, both by external and internal analysts, as to how the concept should be defined in the African context. That is in part a reflection of the complexity and range of actors engaged in the illicit and grey economy within the two regions. Within the realm of peace and security, however, the United Nations Security Council has seen organised crime issues feature as a progressively prominent aspect in debates and resolutions, and in increasingly varied ways: noting the capacity of everything from small arms proliferation, to illicit mineral extraction and wildlife poaching as a threat to peace and security. Even a cursory analysis of the substance of these resolutions, however shows that in fact organised crime has come to be almost synonymous with debates around peace and security on the African continent. Of the total of 77 Resolutions or Presidential Statements of the Security Council that have mentioned organised crime in the last ten years (2004-2014), or any of the forms of organised crime, the vast majority (83 per cent) relate to countries or regions in Africa. 51 per cent relate to Central or West Africa. Thus, not only is organised crime an increasingly important issue for the peace and security agenda, but it is also a quintessentially African issue.

Statements or Resolutions of the Security Council related to Organised Crime 2004-2014



A key finding of the report, however, is that despite the mounting evidence of large scale organised criminal activities and the immense negative impacts it has on the two regions featured in the report, organised crime in all its forms in West and Central Africa is a surprisingly un-analysed phenomena. Much of our current understanding is driven by secondary literature on organised crime and illicit trafficking that is written and published in the West. There are comparatively few African scholars, analysts or experts working in this area. This creates a disproportionate attention on criminal activities with a perceived threat to Europe or North America – for example, cocaine trafficking through West Africa – rather than those crimes or related impacts which most affect local populations. If African states are to confront the issue of organised crime and illicit trafficking and engage in a longer term and more informed policy debate, it is crucial to build the capacity of Africans in this area to better shape the debate and continental response.

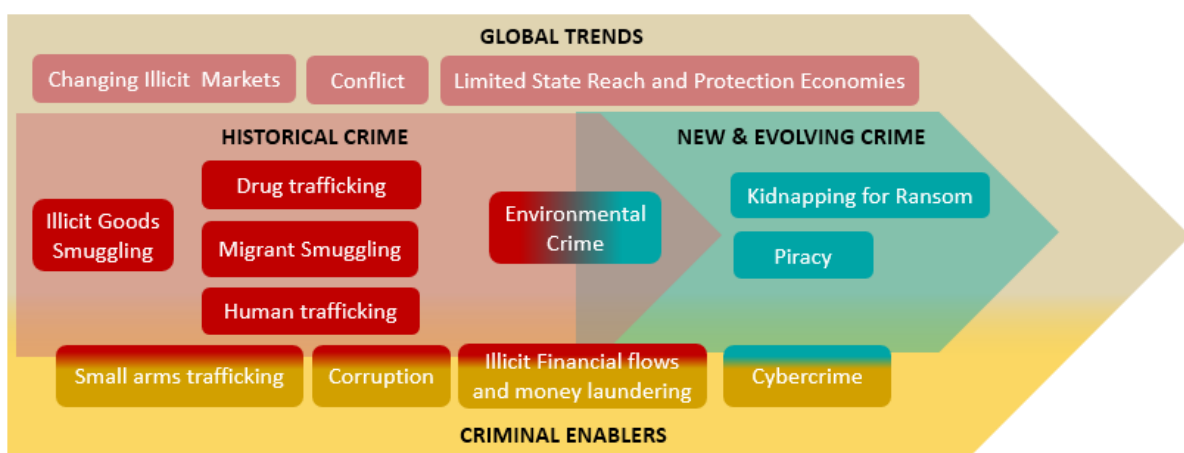
The focus of much of the analysis of illicit trafficking in both regions is on the question of “how much?”, rather than “what is the impact?”. A simple focus on numbers in a context in which state statistical systems and the classic problem of measuring crimes are intertwined mean that actual numbers may provide only a rough guide to what is going on, and not necessarily reflect the extent or changes over time in criminal phenomenon. While several accounts have recently begun to focus on the wider impact on governance of the region, there are few if any studies which examine local level of community implications, including changing levels of wealth, the empowerment of some individuals or groups over others, and the degree to which illicit money has undermined long established principles of social organisation. Recent evidence from the Sahel suggests, for example, that a growth in religious following in some communities is a result of the increased impact of illicit money being seen and felt by ordinary people. It is in the latter area in particular where African analysts have much work to do – and where the real long-term changes being wrought by illicit trafficking and organised crime will be felt.

Interlocking Criminal Markets

Research on the illicit activity taking place in West and Central Africa reveals a diverse array of criminal activity and actors spread across a large geographical expanse. As such, any attempt to build a map of the continuously evolving context of organised crime in the regions involves not only identifying a number of different threads in a vast, transnational web of activity, but also how the threads connect and influence one another within West and Central Africa.

The literature revealed that criminal ventures in West and Central Africa adopt structures, modus operandi and features typical of legitimate traders and business people of the region. The West African approach has made regional criminal groups extremely successful in the global village of modern “disorganised” crime. Paired with a sizeable and well-connected diaspora community, traffickers have established themselves in most parts of the world and provide networks farther afield.

The Evolution and Inter-relationship of Criminal Markets in West and Central Africa



The literature further indicates that illicit or criminal markets have evolved in response to global trends, and that this evolution can be broadly divided into three inter-linked categories:

- **Historical Crime:** Transnational crimes that have taken place in the region for a considerable period of time (at least since the late 1970s) and are well known though still evolving;
- **New and evolving crimes:** criminal markets which may have had longstanding roots but were not transnational in nature; and,
- **Criminal enablers:** which may overlap into each of the above categories and be organised crimes in their own right, but which serve as enablers for more general organised criminal activities.

While there are unavoidable shortcomings of categorising in this way, the exercise provides a valuable framework to better understand the phenomena, which can be employed to inform and understand the potential impacts of policies and initiatives as well as raise awareness and generating political discourse. Furthermore, the classifications allow for the juxtaposition of organised crime as a metric against other state indicators, making dialogues surrounding organised crime and its impacts more accessible and bringing to the table critical development actors who must be part of future responses.

The various criminal markets addressed in the report are examined and structured with this distinction in mind.

Historical Crime: A Criminal Foundation

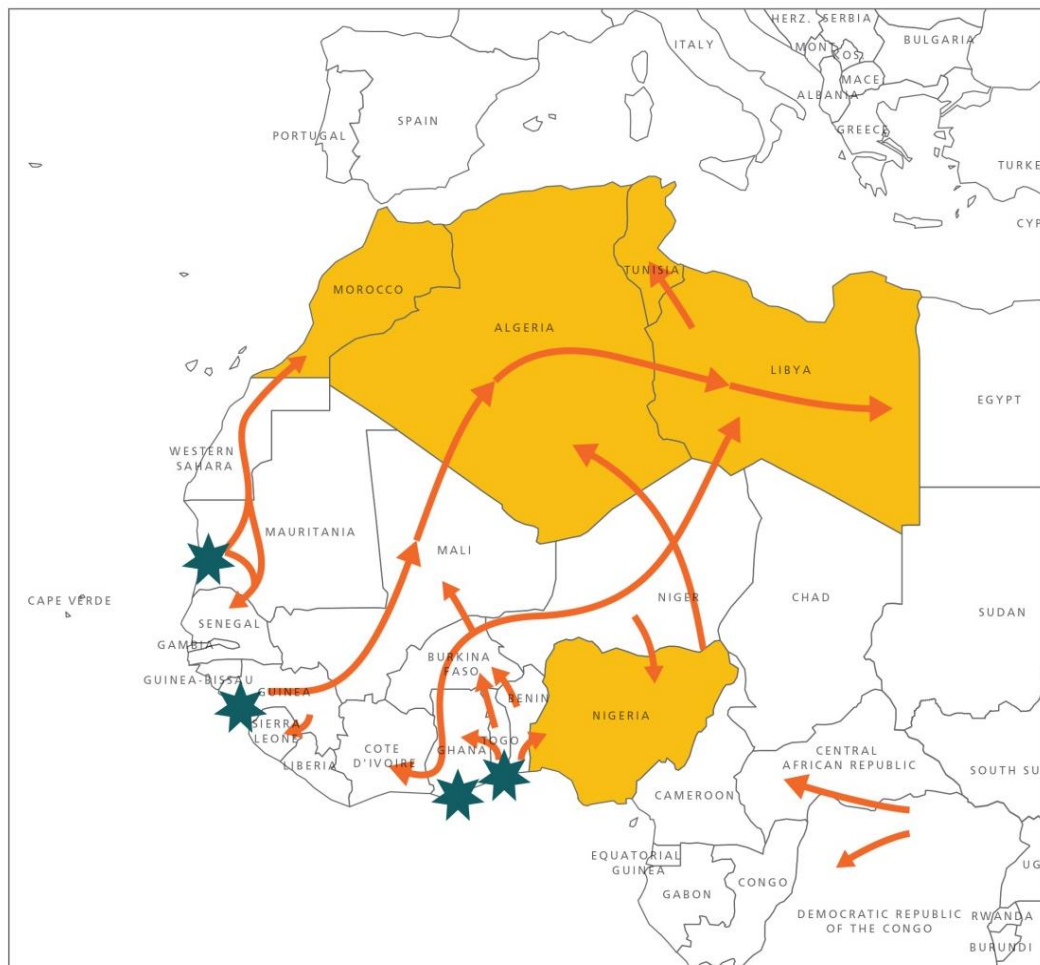
While the crimes in this section: drug trafficking, human trafficking, people smuggling and the trafficking of illicit goods, are referred to as historic or old, this speaks predominantly to their

longevity in the regions, rather than to their modus operandi. In fact, as with all organised crimes, these are quickly evolving and innovating criminal markets, which have significantly developed over the period of study, and continue to do so. Furthermore, their longstanding antecedents have often paved the way for new commodities or criminal acts to evolve.

Smuggling of goods is rarely regarded to be an organised crime in the region, the literature generally concluding that smuggling, both of people and commodities, has long been a way of life for many communities, particularly in the Sahel region. In turn, the longstanding smuggling networks serve as arteries for criminal activity in the region, providing a ready resource for those involved in smuggling commodities and enabling the movement of more high value illicit goods. For example, networks in the Sahel which once solely smuggled cigarettes, have turned first to the higher profits offered by hashish and then cocaine. Moreover, and a reflection of the intermingling of illicit activity, migrants have been documented as being used both to conceal and to transport illicit goods.

The two flows which have garnered the most attention in the literature are the trafficking of illicit cigarettes and fraudulent medicine. (Illicit electronic goods and materials could also be considered an exception, although to a much lesser extent.) Cigarettes, like many illicit commodities enter into the region through West African ports and then are trafficked northeast to North African countries. For example, the cigarette “Illicit Whites” smoked in Libya are known to be imported through West Africa, namely Togo and Benin. Both types of trafficking have generated interest due to the scale of the problem, the immense impacts the crime can have on states and local populations, and the level of private-sector driven interest.

Smuggling Routes of illicit cigarettes



The illicit trade is of especial interest, in that it has been argued the transit routes established for trafficking commodities have then been utilised for the trafficking of higher value illicit commodities, including, the smuggling of migrants and most notably the trafficking of cocaine. Studies undertaken in the Sahel in recent months have charted paths of criminal accumulation along critical routes from North Africa to Europe, noting many actors involved in the trafficking of illicit goods will not distinguish between the commodity they transport. For all commodities, the literature generally agrees that the degree to which criminal organisation and networks now control the smuggling routes has professionalised significantly since the mid-2000s. Prices have been agreed upon for most segments and there is the involvement both of local communities and security, customs and border control officials.

Migrant smuggling from West and Central Africa has been widely covered in the media, most particularly in relation to the conditions in which people transit the Mediterranean by boat. The literature notes that despite this coverage the vast majority of migration (up to an estimated 90%) takes place intra-regionally. The degree to which Libya now provides a relatively free transit area for the movement of people now means that routes from West and central Africa converge in northern Niger before heading northwards. Because of the increasing co-mingling of flows, the dangers to migrants, including extortion by criminals and state actors, remain extreme. Yet there is general agreement that the response to migrant smuggling in the region has been muted, with few prosecutions and weak legislative frameworks in several countries.

In respect of **human trafficking** several articles and reports underscore that the vast majority of activity occurs within the region, with children as victims. The purpose of this trafficking is predominantly for labour and although in the past children were also trafficked for service as child soldiers the latter has declined. Some literature does focus on the trafficking of children for sexual services in the European market, but there appears to be consensus that these numbers are relatively small. There is general agreement that the response to both migrant smuggling and human trafficking in the region has been muted, with few prosecutions and weak legislative frameworks across the regions.

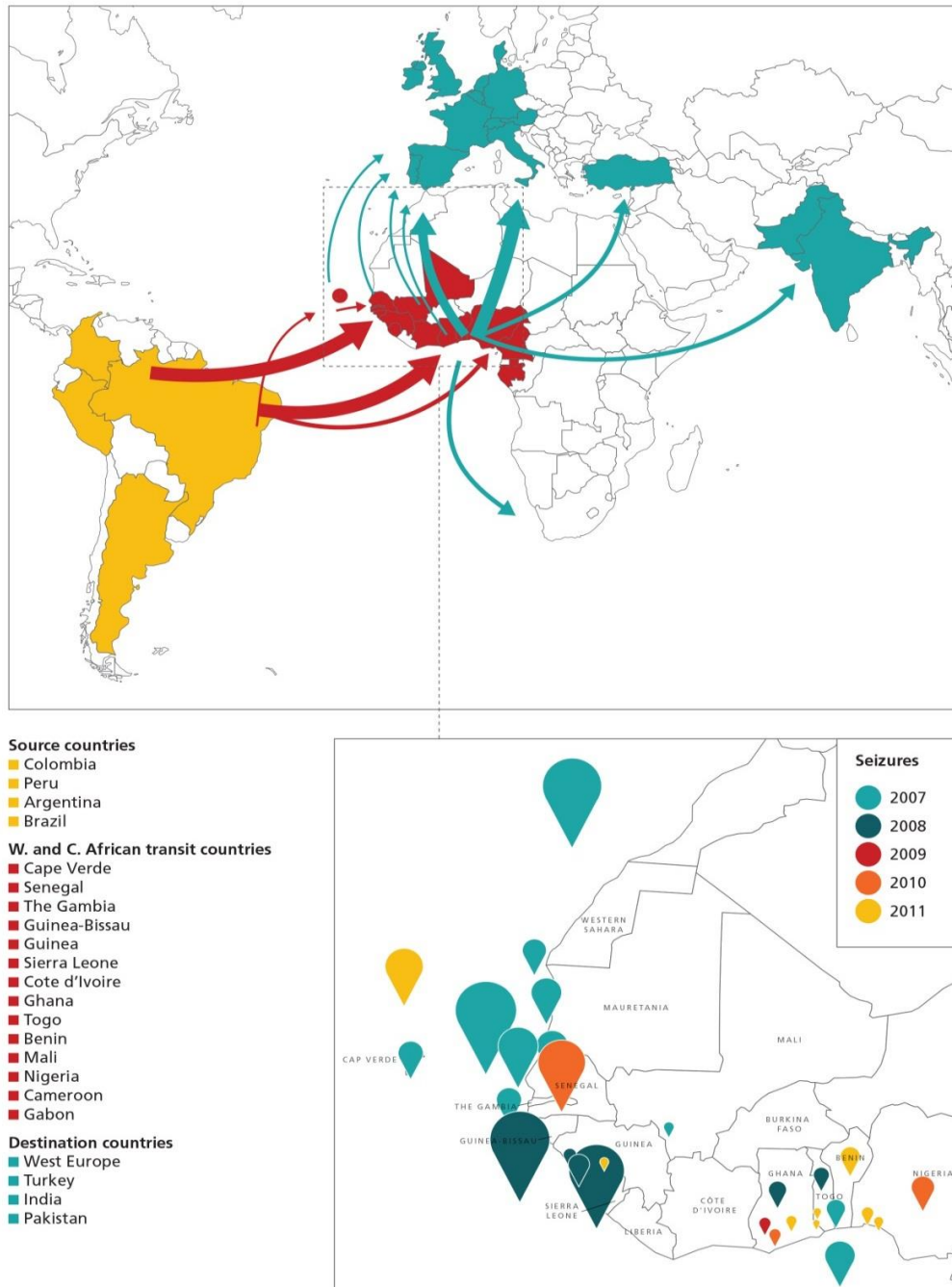
Of the multiple drugs transiting through and within the two regions, the movement of **cocaine** is the most profitable, and this is where the overwhelming focus of the body literature on organised crime in West and Central Africa is concentrated. There has been extensive coverage of the volumes of cocaine transiting the region. Despite the attention, estimates on volume trafficked through the region continue to vary, these are generally based on seizure data, and the academic literature regards the figures with circumspection. What is clear however is that even on conservative estimates a considerable volume of cocaine has flowed through the West Africa since the early 2000s, the value of which easily matches the defence or security budgets of the region's smaller states.

The literature also emphasises the degree to which governments and actors in the security and military establishment have become intricately intertwined with drug trafficking in the region. This appears to be mainly in receiving payments to allow the safe passage of drug consignments, a process that has had important implications for increasing levels of corruption. Furthermore, documentation, including international investigations, have linked the cocaine connection with rebel groups in Columbia who are also trafficking arms.

Importantly, the literature also notes the degree to which West African actors have, since the mid-2000s in particular, become much more active players in the trafficking of drugs. The presence of Latin American nationals in the region appears to have declined, with West African networks being responsible for the reception and onward movement of consignments. This suggests the degree to which drug trafficking has become embedded in the region, in particular in West Africa, replacing heroin as the profit-generating drug of choice for traffickers. Furthermore, there is evidence of

successful trafficking techniques being translated from one illicit commodity to another, highlighting the inter-connected and evolving nature of criminal networks and markets.

Cocaine flows and seizures

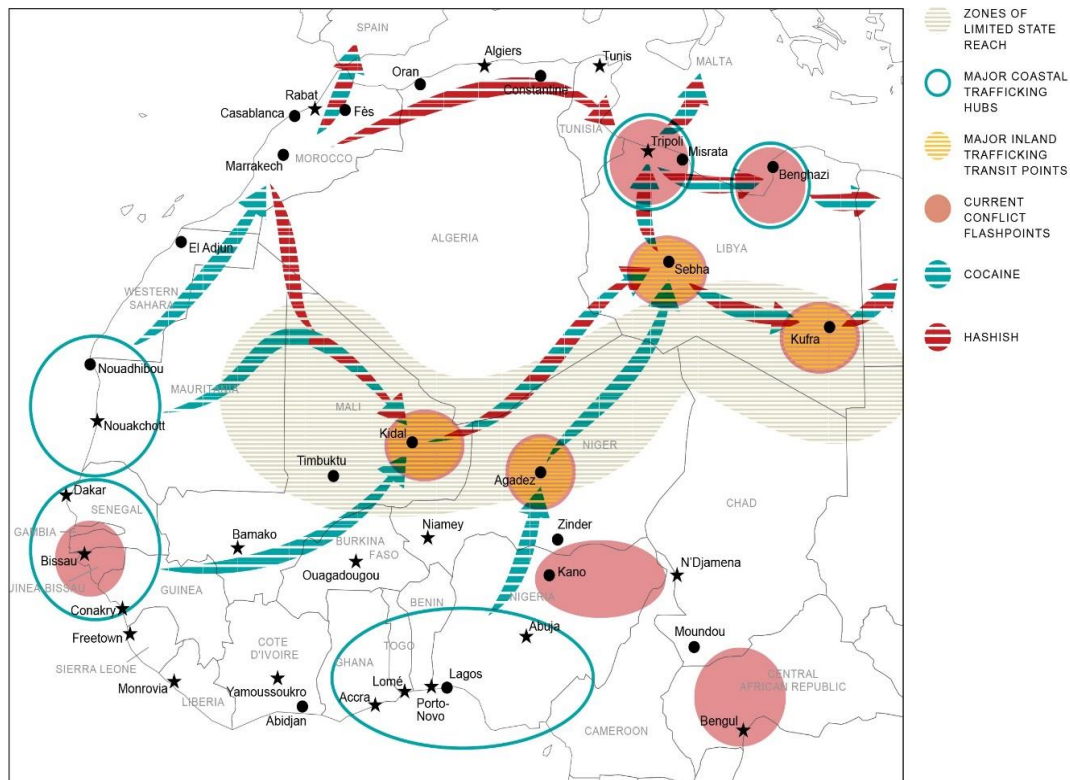


Although now displaced by cocaine, **heroin** trafficking through West Africa is regarded as having more historical roots. West African criminal groups having used the region as a transit point since the 1980s. Continued heroin trafficking through the region has created an intersection between cocaine and heroin routes, as both trafficking routes seek to penetrate Europe’s southern borders.

While **cannabis** (hashish) is relatively widely available in both regions, there is very little literature that focuses on production, trafficking, sale and use. The one exception is the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where the role of both military and rebel groups in cannabis production

has been documented. In the Sahel, hashish is a major source of profit, with the routes running through Mauritania and West to East across the Sahel. There appears to be some intersection between the movement of hashish from west to east towards the Middle East, and the movement of cocaine, which transits from Libya, moving either northwards, or eastwards, on its way to the Middle East and the Balkan transit route.

Interlocking flows of cannabis and cocaine



There is growing evidence of methamphetamine production in West Africa, although further regional expansion faces the challenge of East Asian producers who have a comparative advantage in terms of proximity to markets and lower production costs. However, the growth of a longer term Asian market for all drugs, as well as other illicit goods – in particular in wildlife, may also see a wider number of states being used as points of transit – with central African states being most vulnerable.

Trends in meth manufacture in West Africa

May 2009	2010	July 2011	February 2012	January 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •First indications of meth manufacture found in Guinea. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Plans for manufacture of meth in Liberia uncovered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •In Nigeria the first seizure of a meth lab took place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A second meth lab was seized near Lagos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •A third large-scale meth lab is seized near Lagos

The criminal markets for these historic flows should broadly be understood as the foundation of criminal activity in the two regions. The routes, networks and protection economies that have grown around the transit of commodities, smuggling of persons and the trafficking of drugs underpin the whole of the illicit economy in West and Central Africa.

New and Evolving Crime: Evolution and Accumulation

Apart from the case of cybercrime, which is clearly only as old as the technology that enabled it, it is perhaps a misnomer to describe the crimes in this section: environmental crime, maritime piracy, kidnapping for ransom and cybercrime, as being “new”. Certainly, environmental crime and piracy have existed for centuries in the regions in question and have longstanding historical antecedents, and much like those in the previous category, they are evolving rapidly.

The reason for distinguishing them from the historical crimes is that that the crimes depicted in this category were previously much more restricted in scope and scale. Before the last decade, environmental crimes such as illegal logging and poaching, or even illicit mining were not transnational flows and had minimal impacts beyond their own immediate borders. Piracy too was concentrated predominantly off the coast of Nigeria and was a crime closely associated with national political dynamics and the oil industry.

In the last decade, however, the baseline network of criminal actors and transnational routes that have flourished upon the escalation of historic trafficking routes and the protection economies that have developed around them are being employed to move a much wider range of illicit goods into global markets. Wildlife trafficking, for example, has reached unprecedented levels as local groups poaching key species are able to move these through established international networks. As such, organised crime and state dynamics have evolved in the regions, facilitating the emergence these crimes now receiving prominent mention in the literature.

Environmental crimes, while longstanding crimes in many cases, have grown exponentially with greater international and transnational connections than in the past. A great diversity of activities fall under the category of environmental crime: from illicit mineral extraction and trafficking, to illegal fishing, logging, dumping of toxic waste, and wildlife poaching. These crimes, while incredibly diverse, are all linked to the environment in some form or another, and consequently they have a detrimental impact on West and Central Africa’s environments and communities. In many ways it could be argued the impacts of environmental crime are the harms felt most acutely and directly by communities. From villages in Central Africa being directly threatened by poachers to communities along the West African shoreline seeing their fishing hauls and livelihoods drastically declining. The available evidence, reflected in part by increases in attention to the issue in the literature, suggests a growth in cases of crimes against the environment, although the coverage of such cases is relatively localised, without a broader assessment of the impact on the region/s.

Mapping organised environmental crime in West and Central Africa reveals a complex web of actors, which range from armed groups to government officials both at local level and high in government, as well as private businesses. The private sector is regularly undertaking activity that would be illegal - tax avoidance, labour exploitation, toxic waste dumping, mineral exploitation licenses, etc. – but for the granting of licenses or rights by corrupt officials.

What is interesting about the examination of the evolution of environmental crimes, in their many and varied forms, is that it clearly illustrates the evolution and criminal accumulation that is characterising many organised crimes in the region. Criminal acts that were once motivated by a desire to finance a livelihood or an ideological movement are now increasingly becoming an end in themselves, with supply chains professionalising significantly, and sophisticated protection economies developing around the illicit trade.

Maritime piracy in West and Central Africa has assumed greater prominence in both the media and secondary literature as attacks in the Gulf of Guinea have increased. There appears to have been some “learning” from the use of piracy off the Horn of Africa, although evidence to this effect is scanty, and the two forms of piracy show important different – not least of which is the fact that

cases off the West African coast are often described as “armed robbery”, implying a different objective and a swifter completion.

Instances of Maritime Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea¹



Beginning in the mid 2000’s, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea was initially confined to the Niger Delta region, tied directly to conflicts over the oil industry. However, in the past few years there has been an increase in maritime attacks, both in frequency and geographic scope. So much so, in 2012, for the first time, the reported number of ships attacked by West African pirates surpassed those attacked by Somali pirates. Comparatively, there is more data and comprehensive data on piracy than other forms of organised crime. However, despite the fact piracy in the Gulf of Guinea is a relatively well informed area, it is difficult to paint an accurate picture of the scale of piracy as data on pirate attacks is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, and reporting rates are low.

In parallel, the nature of the attacks themselves is evolving. Originally carried out by organised Nigerian militant groups with political aims related to oil exploration in the Niger delta, most acts of piracy within the Gulf of Guinea are now perpetrated by purely organised criminal groups, motivated by the low risk-high yield nature of piracy operations. While piracy in the Gulf of Guinea used to be limited to oil siphoning and bunkering by groups with low-level capacity, it is becoming increasingly consists of well-coordinated, professional and often violent attacks targeting commercial shipping vessels and their crews. With political pretence lost, pirates no longer limit themselves to politically significant areas, a development which helps to explain the rapid expansion of piracy into the territorial waters of Nigeria’s neighbours: Benin, Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea, Togo and Gabon.

Maritime piracy has severely tested the capacity for regional coordination, and has highlighted the urgent need for countries along the West African coast to work together to quell the threat, as piracy has been characterised by its ease of displacement. Incidents of piracy have now spread from the Niger Delta to other coastal waters as well as out to sea, in line with a general shift away from political motivations for piracy to the purely criminal. Unlike piracy off the coast of Somalia, the value derives not from the kidnapping for ransoms of victims, but in seizing the cargo – most notably oil – being carried by ships off the West African coast.

On land one of the newest crimes linked to criminal groups in the region is that of **kidnapping for ransom**, with significant increases in incidents since the early 2000s. As in the case of maritime piracy, cases of kidnapping are regarded to have shifted from a largely political motivation, most notably in the taking of Westerners in the Sahel, to a purely criminal one – for profit. While kidnapping has increased in the Sahel as the region experienced greater destabilisation, the greatest recorded increase in cases of kidnapping globally is said to be that of Nigeria. The latter trend appears in part to be the growth of wealthy families targeted because of their ability to pay ransoms.

Cybercrime is a third in the category of new and emerging crimes. The advent of internet-enabled crime has changed the game for criminal behaviour and for law enforcement responses globally by removing the physical linkage between criminal and crime, providing unparalleled capacity to disguise the identity of perpetrators and criminal transactions, and by facilitating communication the internet as proved itself to be the steroid of organised crime. It has both allowed for new forms of criminality, and has increased the potency of traditional crimes. West African countries have lead the field in the growth and innovation of cybercrime, and have gained notorious reputations for such.

While cybercrime manifests itself in a wide array of forms, in the West and Central African context it can largely be broken down into three categories: traditional criminal activity enabled by technological advances, first generation cybercrime (“Nigerian Letter”), and second generation cybercrime. What the three different types of crime illustrate is that not only is improved technology increasing the efficiency at which criminals can commit crimes they have been committing for decades, but it also opens up a whole new host of criminal options. Moreover, as regional capacity grows and more individuals have access to the internet, an increasing number of individuals will have access to the tools necessary to commit cybercrime. For example, the sprawl of first generation cybercrime has already become so pronounced the scam traditionally called the “Nigerian Letter” is now being called the “West African Letter.” As such, the categorisations not only help to explain cybercrime, but also offer an illustration of broader trends and the quickly evolving and adaptable nature of organised crime in West and Central Africa.

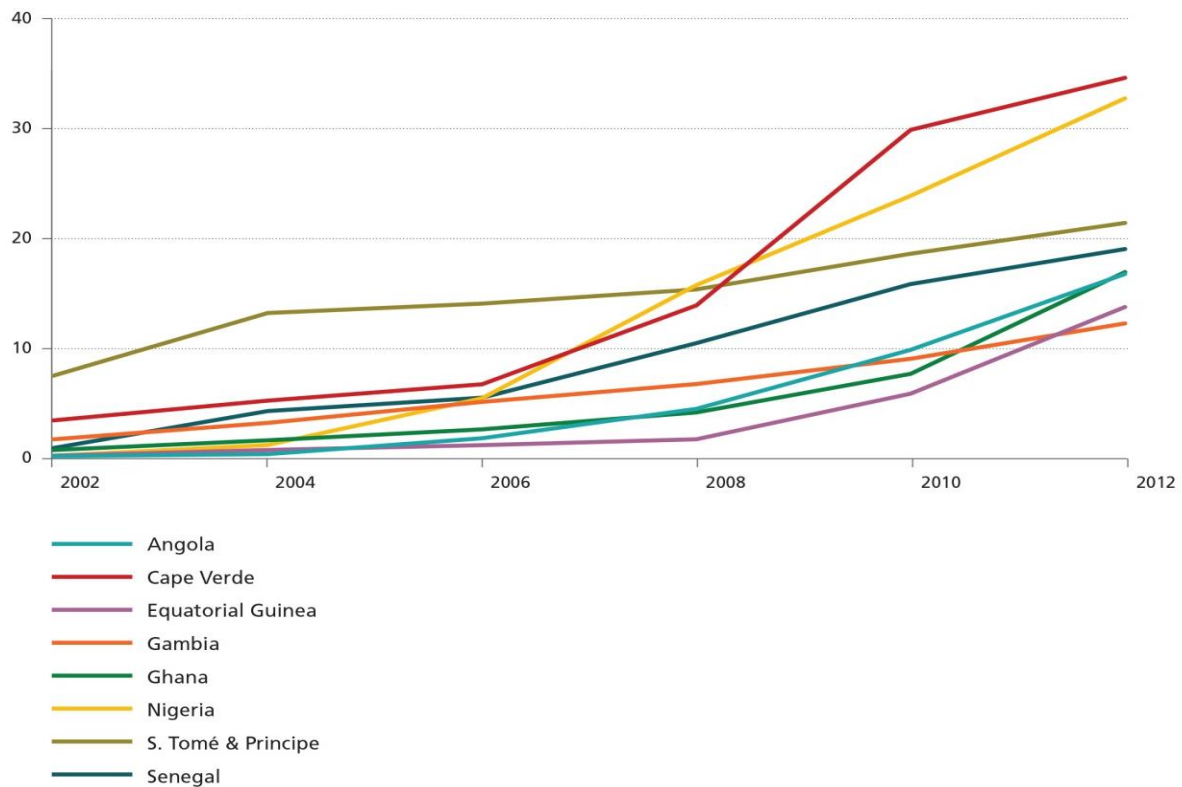
Middle income countries and emerging economies are proving themselves to be the most fertile ground for electronic crimes. A feature of West and Central African technological advancements that makes the regions especially attractive for cybercriminal activity is the “leapfrogging” of information and communication technology. Africa is investing more in Internet and communications technology than any other continent and exhibiting striking advances in the use of mobile phone technology and as such, cybercriminals in the regions are on the frontline of information and communication technology advancements and retain a first-mover advantage. For example, the arrival of broadband service in West Africa makes the region a close neighbour in the virtual world, allowing criminals to attack anyone while making it difficult to identify criminal networks or individuals involved. As early as 2008, a report on cyber security in Cote d’Ivoire noted that cybercrime in Africa is growing faster than on any other continent.

As cybercrime tools become more readily available, cybercriminals perpetrators will no longer require high levels of technical skill. The ‘artificial’ acquisition of technical skills will enable a shift away from the highly-skilled digital criminal, to a much wider pool of individuals. Cybercrime is evolving from a crime based on unsolicited letters is evolving into a more sophisticated Internet-based criminal activity supported by document falsification, identity theft and money laundering. Second generation cybercrime requires much less time than first generation cybercrime and requires more advanced skills to execute phishing, hacking, website cloning and identity theft. Cybercrime firms are now providing stolen identification, credit card numbers, hacking and code-breaking software and encryption devices now provide hotlines and live chat product support. The products

allow individuals with even basic technological expertise to execute cybercrimes that even a few years ago would have been impossible.

These innovations in technology are providing opportunity for the growth of both transnational and home-grown criminal groups, and groups are able to employ their expertise of choice. Once perpetrated by single individuals in cybercafés, cybercrime has metamorphosed into one operated by loosely organised networks who are active across several state boundaries and nationalities. Now, upwards of 80 per cent of cybercrime acts are estimated to originate in some form of organised activity. Skill levels may become a variable which may play a role in cybercrime group structures and hierarchies.

Countries with more than 10 per cent of individuals using the internet²



Criminal Enablers

A number of organised crimes, whilst also substantial crimes in their own right, are of particular significance for the way in which they serve as a multiplier to other criminal behaviours. Cybercrime, money laundering, small arms trafficking and corruption could be considered the “steroids” of organised crime – a criminal activity that makes organised crime as a whole much more potent than it otherwise would be.

The crimes here are by no means unique to Africa – in fact many are equally pressing challenges globally. But because of their capacity to enhance criminality and exacerbate its negative impacts, addressing these criminal markets will be a crucial part of any effective response to organised crime.

Cybercrime features again, as technological advances that have eased communications between people have been crucial in facilitating criminal networks across West Africa in particular and partly contributed to their flat and relatively dynamic structures. The advent of internet-enabled crime has changed the game for criminal behaviour and for law enforcement responses globally by removing the physical linkage between criminal and crime, providing unparalleled capacity to disguise the

identity of perpetrators and criminal transactions, and by facilitating communication the internet proved itself to be the steroid of organised crime. It has both allowed for new forms of criminality, and has increased the potency of traditional crimes.

Putting global cybercrime in context ³		
Criminal Action	Estimated Cost	Per Cent of GDP
Piracy	US\$1 billion - US\$16 billion	.008% - .02%
Drug Trafficking	US\$600 billion	5%
Global cybercrime	US\$300 billion - US\$1 trillion	0.4% - 1.4%

The internet has changed crime fundamentally and completely by allowing people to connect in ways they were not able to before, facilitating all forms of crime from drug markets, to human trafficking, and creates a greater anonymity which makes detection more challenging. Cybercrime has put organised crime on steroids: technological advances that have eased communications between people have been crucial in facilitating criminal networks across West Africa in particular and partly contributed to their flat and relatively dynamic structures. It has improved communication with cohorts abroad and the growth of virtual currency have removed physical links between criminal and crime, and reduced detection and identification by law enforcement. Anonymity is not absolute, but technologies in place now are stronger than traditional electronic payment systems and discretion is guaranteed by pseudonymous ownership.

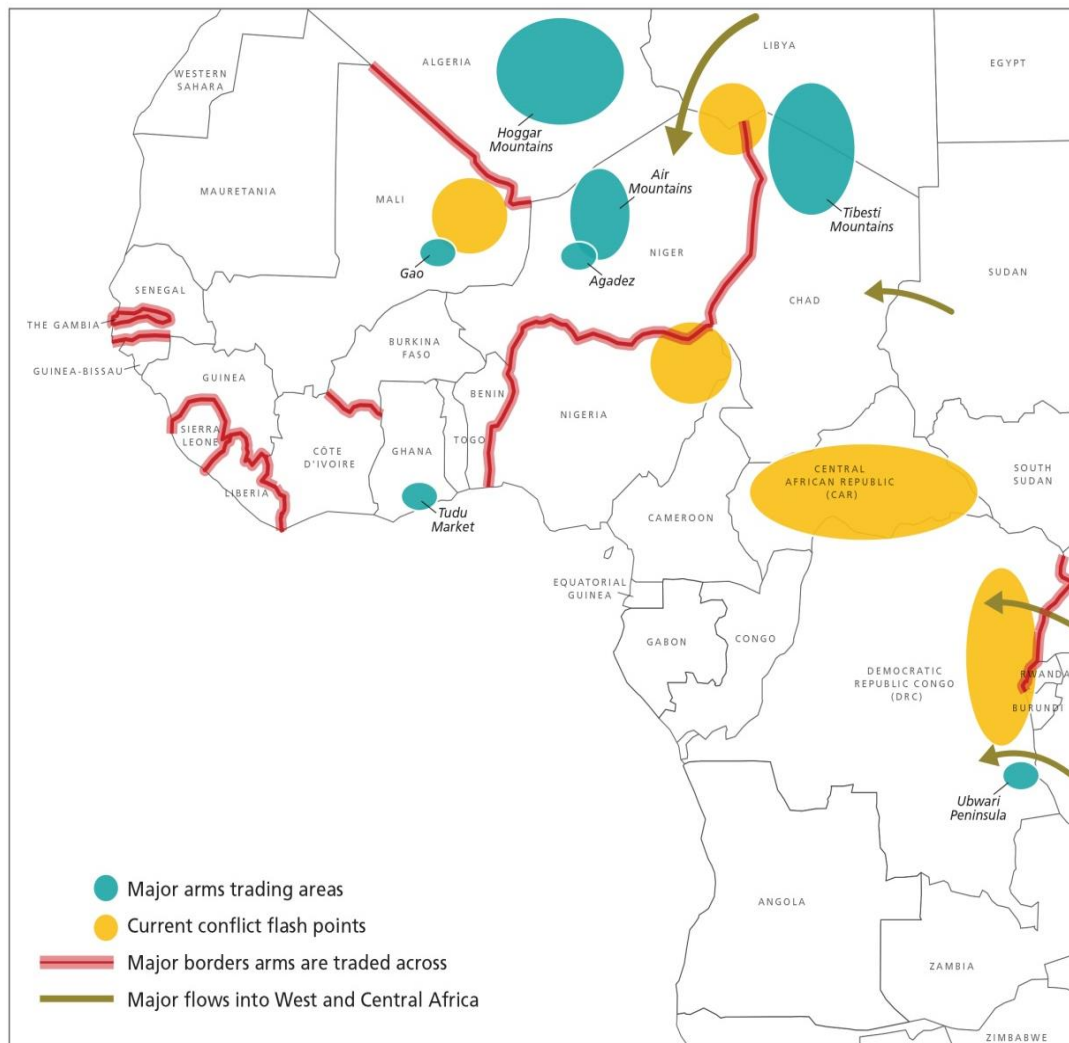
The fight against cyber-enabled crime is an uphill battle for which few, if any states are well positioned to respond. But it is one which all states urgently need to grapple with. There is a need to enhance both the capacity of law enforcement to investigate, as well strengthening regulatory frameworks, legal protocols and raising awareness in the general public to strengthen their own cyber security.

The crime of **money laundering** has a unique relationship with other forms of organised crime as nearly all forms of illicit activity involve the laundering of money at some point. Money-laundering is the method by which criminals disguise the illegal origins of their wealth and protect their assets, so as to avoid the suspicion of law enforcement agencies and prevent leaving a trail of incriminating evidence. As such, the majority of criminals launder their profits in order to take advantage of their wealth in the formal economy.

While the crime in all its forms is a serious threat, the focus here is on the laundering of funds linked to other forms of transnational organised crime. Financial crimes, such as tax evasion and embezzlement, are harmful in their own right, depriving governments of much needed funds, to discuss every form of money laundering would open a Pandora's Box of issues requiring the examination of individual nations' tax and financial regulations. By concentrating on money laundering within the regional context, discussion illuminates the relationship between money laundering and other organised criminal activity in West and Central Africa including how criminal proceeds are impacting local governments and distorting local economies.

There are numerous methods in which money can be laundered, but notable methods in West and Central Africa revolve around the real estate market and trade-based money laundering, specifically the importation and sale of used vehicles. Additional laundering methods include the establishment of shell or front companies and illegal dealings in the mineral resources trade, and the use of legitimate companies to launder illicit funds.

Small arms flows, trading hubs, and current conflict flash points



While the **trafficking of firearms** in the region is a criminal market in its own right, it is also an important facilitator of wider patterns of organised crime. The most recent literature suggests that flows of weapons into the region (most recently from Libya) have slowed or stopped and that the main illicit flows of arms are internal, with local demand being largely satisfied by what is currently available. Of concern, evidence indicates that one source of arms is from within the region itself, with government stockpiles being robbed, or with security officials ‘renting out’ weapons to criminal groups.

Nevertheless, the ease at which arms are available has transformed the protection economy around trafficking, most notably in the Sahel where many of the weapons from Libya have ended up. Recent interviews in the region demonstrate that the result of the wide availability of arms is that it is now virtually impossible to engage in any form of movement of illicit goods without paying, in some form, for protection.

The availability of weapons has also served as an important stimulant to those criminal activities, apart from illicit trafficking, where armed violence, or the threat thereof, is a feature. The example most cited in the literature is that of the increase in piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, where the availability of weapons has opened the market to a wider number of groups.

An additional enabling crime for organised criminal activities in the regions is that of **money laundering**. At least in the publicly available literature the extent of money laundering is not well documented. It is however reported that illicit proceeds from criminal activities in both regions are laundered through investments in banking, insurance, real estate, automotive and general import businesses, as well as donations to religious organisations. The overall amounts of money involved are difficult to quantify. The literature also does not quantify the volumes of illicit funds that leave the region for other jurisdictions. Some evidence in fact suggests that a surprising proportion remains within the region itself, although money from Central Africa (Angola and DRC in particular) finds its way to Europe or South Africa. Given weak bank regulation as well as bank secrecy rules the region remains vulnerable to money laundering.

In respect of money laundering it can be concluded that while conceded to be a problem, there is remarkably little hard data on the extent of the challenge. Distinguishing money laundered from specific forms of organised crime and that as a result of corruption or other illicit transfers appears to be difficult if not impossible.

Corruption plays an instrumental role in perpetuating and enabling organised criminal activity across West and Central Africa. Not limited to small-time bribes paid at border crossings, corruption has infiltrated the highest ranks of governments and military institutions. The growth in drug trafficking, particularly in West Africa, has considerably increased illicit funds to support corrupt practices. Drug trafficking related corruption in West Africa and the Sahel appears to have permeated key institutions and political processes in many states, hollowing out institutions and weakening government capacities. Engaging in organised crime can be extremely attractive at all income levels in West and Central Africa due to large discrepancies in national income and profits generated by organised crime, but the failure of national justice systems to mount an effective response to corruption and criminality results in a sense of impunity, which in turn further facilitates the recruitment and perpetuation of organised crime at the community level.

One often un-considered impact of corruption is that it ironically leads to an undercount of the extent of trafficking, which is based on seizure data. Historically seizure rates have been the main instrument used to gauge the scale and direction of illicit flows as well as the success of counter-narcotics operations. However, seizures and the resulting data are subject to high levels of variability and can be heavily influenced by corruption. A decrease in seizures over time can occur either because the enforcement agency becomes more effective and deters suppliers from trafficking drugs in their jurisdiction or because the enforcement agency has become less effective and organised criminals more adept at avoiding detection. Corrupt law enforcement officers are less likely to seize illicit commodities such as drugs, and more likely to return them to organised criminal groups in response for payment.

The Impact of Organised Crime: Inter-related cycles of harm

Countries in West and Central Africa languish at the very bottom of the global human development and governance indices, and efforts to promote stability, development and human security in all its forms are being undermined and diverted by organised crime. Arguably, organised crime can be seen as one of the principle threats to the capacity of the people of these sub-regions to achieve fundamental development and human rights targets and sustain productive livelihoods.

The complex inter-relationship between different criminal markets and the crimes that enable them, raise the critical issue about the impact in the two regions of the phenomenon. Indeed, as noted above, it could be argued that while the literature devotes considerable attention in an attempt to quantify the extent of the flows through the regions concerned, the issue of impact is not well understood and warrants much greater attention.

While the impact of organised crime in the regions overlap and often reinforce each other, a reading of the available literature suggests that organised crime triggers harm in following spheres: state fragility; violence and security; and social, economic and environmental harm.

The harms of organised crime



In many cases the determination of the impacts of organised crime remains a subjective process; the lack of hard data makes it difficult to measure exactly what is at stake. At the same, however, considerable evidence suggests that the impact of organised crime in both regions is decisive and is increasing. Even the relatively swift overview presented here confirms that organised crime poses a threat to peace and stability, distorts the political processes, initiates and perpetuates instability, undermines the licit economy, destroys communities and spreads disease, amongst a plethora of other harms.

Available literature on the various impacts varies according to harm. While there is a substantial body of literature and media reporting on certain security aspects and on corruption, health and developmental harms stemming from organised criminal activity are largely ignored. Looking specifically at drug trafficking, experts have highlighted the security threats and responses have been centred on stemming the supply of drugs through law enforcement efforts. Limited focus has been placed on the health and developmental aspects of the spill over effects of drug trafficking, which over time could constitute a greater security threat to West and Central Africa than currently acknowledged.

When assessing the impacts of organised crime, there is the potential for conflicting sentiment over the issue by West and Central African communities. In the short term, organised criminal activities may seem to bring about positive results. Communities may benefit from wildlife crime when they are able to sell ivory and horns for large sums; artisanal miners may see greater profits from partnering with larger scale criminal operations; smuggled migrants may view criminal networks as a pathway to a new and better life. However, what may appear as a benefit at an individual level

rarely translates into a long-term benefit to the longer term stability and development of the community.

Understanding the impacts and level of harm the illicit activity causes is critical. It offers an alternative avenue to assess that scale or organised crime as well as allows relevant stakeholders to understand the costs of doing nothing, of preventing harm from occurring, and of decreasing the vulnerability and increasing the resilience of people being harmed.

State Fragility

Organised crime promotes **state fragility**, which undercuts the ability of society to build state institutions and develop legitimate markets and economic structures. Failure to address the problem of organised crime at an early stage (particularly in post-conflict situations) can empower armed groups and make it more difficult to deal with them later on. Moreover, crime-related instability in one country can spill over into the surrounding region, expanding opportunities for transnational organised crime, and increasing the threat to peace and security, not only impacting immediately affected regions but also on communities along trafficking routes and people thousands of miles away.

Today organised crime and corruption are highly interdependent at the highest levels. Individuals at every level of the political, military and business establishments have been implicated in organised crime and the degree of social entrenchment and identity these phenomena have in communities is unprecedented. For example, legal entities are engaging in behaviours and activity that once was illegal, and only became legal through the actions of corrupt officials. Rampant corruption makes it difficult to distinguish corruption and organised crime and when an official is a tool of an organised crime groups and when they are a proactive member. As such, addressing organised crime in the future will necessitate addressing the criminalisation of governments in definitions.

Violence and Insecurity

Organised crime increases **violence and insecurity**. In the first place, while the evidence suggests that unlike in other regions, such as Central America and Latin America more generally, where drug trafficking in particular has led to direct and dramatic declines in individual security, in West and Central Africa the position is more complex. Individuals or communities have not been for the most part subjected to drug related violence. In this context, declines in security are more related to the general break down of state functions and the growth of armed groups contesting political power, rather than from criminal groups targeting each other, the state or the community as is the case for example in Mexico or Central America (although admittedly the volumes of drugs trafficked are higher).

Second, there is evidence that the presence of organised crime promotes insecurity, particularly where state institutions are weak or non-existent. Key to understanding this phenomenon is that where the state is weak or compromised, a market for protection emerges. This is particularly the case for high profit but vulnerable activities such as drug smuggling. The growth of a paid protection market empowers those well positioned to exploit the opportunity it provides and fosters the growth of new centres of armed and/or localised power. The most pronounced case of this is in the Sahel, where the protection of trafficking routes has been a key source of income for some groups, including elements within the state security apparatus. It is submitted that the study of the market for protection, as a commodity in itself, is an area that merits much greater attention in the context of the two regions.

Third, and related to the above point, is a literature that examines the connections between terrorist and organised crime groups. Much has been written on this of late, with a focus on the Sahel in particular. Recent work suggests that the connections between terrorist and organised crime groups may have been exaggerated; those engaged in illicit trafficking have been shown to be highly

resilient to changes in both local and national political power, finding a (financial) accommodation with those who can provide protection. The result is that terrorist or insurgency groups may not directly engaged in trafficking but are provided payment for the provision of protection.

Taken together, the particular nature of the insecurity generated by illicit trafficking in the two regions can be summarised as follows: individual insecurity is only indirectly impacted, although given that this takes the form of a compromising of state institutions, it has serious consequences; the growth of a protection market, involving both state and non-state actors, or a combination of both, provides an important route to diverting state security resources away from their real functions as well as empowering non-state (including terrorist or armed groups) in a position to provide protection for illicit activities.

Social and Economic Harm

At the same time, organised crime serves to undermine human security and restrict individual life chances. While the literature implies (there are too few studies to draw clear conclusions) that insecurity at the individual level may not be directly influenced by organised crime, the influence does suggest that the wider impact of organised criminal activity has a series of critical impacts on the **social and economic** milieu in which ordinary people carry out their lives – the result being a reduction in their overall life chances.

Most prominently, the available literature (and it is still very limited) suggests that organised crime causes **economic harm** by exacerbating poverty and increasing inequality in the two regions. That is in part a feature of the fact that those already in powerful positions may benefit from illicit activities by protecting them. More specifically, the laundering of criminal money into licit markets is seldom used for productive activities, such as investing in businesses, and is liable to inflate the prices of important commodities such as housing or cattle as well as increasing such social expenses as bride prices. Again, it must be emphasised, that such social impacts of the introduction of illicit money into local economies remains critical under-explored in the literature.

In the long term the potential for a greater number of drug users in both regions, but particularly West Africa, holds the prospect of significant higher health costs. What is missing is a set of viable indicators to capture economic and social harms caused by illicit activities in a way that impacts can be properly measured. Given the likely inclusion of the general theme of the impact of insecurity on development in the post-2015 UN agenda, work by the African Union in this respect may hold some importance.

Conclusion

The report has shown the evolution, extent and impact of organised crime and illicit trafficking in Africa. It is based on a review of a wide range of secondary material in several languages, but one of its most important initial conclusions is in fact that too little of this material is sourced from Africa or written by Africans. Thus, the debate on organised crime in the African context is too often driven by outsiders and – no matter how concerned they are or how good their motives – requires more engagement by African scholars and analysts, particularly those working on issues of governance, the state and development.

A greater focus on the issue by Africans themselves is an critical step to building more political will and focus on the issue by African leaders. It should be noted here that while there has been a series of important responses to organised crime in both regions, for the most part these remain strategies whose implementation has not been comprehensively conducted or assessed. Furthermore, while work around them has been ongoing the rapid nature of the challenge has resulted in new consequences. The overall ability of government and other stakeholders on the continent to act in a proactive way has often been restricted by a lack of credible strategic information and the fast moving nature of events.

Against this backdrop, defining these criminal actors in the African context remains a key challenge; they cross both the legitimate and illegitimate spheres of activity and they may have strong connections with state actors, political formation and/or armed groups. There is some danger in focusing too much on the definitional issues, splitting hairs as to what is organised crime and what is not, in a context in which significant damage is being wrought. There does seem to be increased consensus by African scholars working on the issue of what is being experienced should in fact be defined as “organised crime”, although with the clear recognition that some of its characteristics have important African dimensions.

One of the most important of these, the report has suggested, is a growing connection between the consideration of organised crime in the African context as a peace and security issue in a way that is not being confronted elsewhere. Of note, a remarkable 80 per cent of all pronouncements of the Security Council on organised crime relate to conflicts in Africa. This suggests that understanding and responding to criminal groups and networks in Africa remain one of the key challenges which, if successful, will contribute to a broader peace making, peace building and developmental agenda. Yet, significant conceptual, data and practical challenges remain to be overcome.

Apart from the definitional issues already touched on, organised crime in central and West Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon, becoming a serious concern only from the late 1990s. The report has made the argument that a set of historic crimes, most prominently, but not exclusively, the trafficking in drugs, have had important long-term consequences for West and Central Africa. Changes in global illicit markets as well as developments within Africa itself have impacted upon each other to create new sets of illicit networks and actors well placed to trade or traffic in a wide variety of illicit commodities.

The result has been that a set of longstanding criminal markets – drugs, human beings and illicit goods – have, in combination with changes in the global economy and the growth in particular of Asian markets, created new demand for illicit environmental products. This has been followed, most specifically in West Africa, by significant new criminal markets for kidnapping and maritime piracy. A series of enabling crimes have been key to these developments: the trafficking of arms and the crimes of corruption and money laundering have all provided a conducive environment for the building of regional illicit economies.

In short, the position now is that illicit markets are intertwined with each other and that cause and effect are closely related. For example, illicit trafficking has resulted in the empowering and resourcing of local political and criminal actors who have the freedom to operate because of the limited reach of African states; and these actors in turn have little incentive to allow central state control. In fact, it is in their interests to maintain positions of instability and to restrict the reach of the state. The result is a vicious cycle where the consequences of illicit trafficking undermine attempts to respond to it by weakening states and creating new beneficiaries, including in many local communities.

In areas of weak state reach, it has also been noted, that protection of illicit activities has become a commodity in itself. It is supplied by criminal actors, terrorist or insurgency groups, and sometimes state actors themselves. Payments for protection are little understood, yet they bolster new centres of local power and add incentives for corruption with state actors.

The overall position is thus more challenging and harder to respond to than was the case even a few years ago, particular in the context of protracted conflicts in the Sahel and the eastern Congo. Most particularly, it is increasingly clear that organised crime in the context of West and Central Africa will require much more than a series of limited law enforcement actions (although these are also of course critical), but a wider and more considered multi-sectoral approach based on a sound conceptual understanding.

The discussion on the impact of organised crime, although the data remains limited, suggests all too often that organised crime has an undervalued impact on the lives of ordinary Africans, by undercutting their access to basic services, such as health, education and security provision, and that the issue is often ignored in discussions on development, both because it is not well understood, but also given the real policy challenges involved. There remains also very limited understanding of the effect of organised crime or illicit trafficking on local communities, particularly vulnerable groups like women, children or the elderly.

Recommendations

This short summary of the argument begs the question as to what can be done. The report concludes with five broad recommendations to readjust and refocus efforts to confront the challenge. While it has become standard fair to make the argument that “better law enforcement” or “less corruption” hold the key to reducing both organised crime and trafficking and their impacts, it is suggested that a series of more strategic and longer-term interventions will be required in both regions. The recommendations presented here reinforce the four key priority areas of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control, which has shown its cognisance of the magnitude and complexity of new trends in organized crime, and the resultant health, social, economic and security impact. As such, the Plan places a strong emphasis on the need for research, information collection and the development of nuanced monitoring systems with a view to better monitor and analyse changing and emerging trends. Recommendations such as these are in part aimed at changing the contours of the debate, building more effective African capacity to engage and respond, and importantly shifting from a state centric and national response, to evidenced based, prioritised responses that are community orientated and predicated upon nuanced local understanding.

Recommendation 1: Make this an African driven debate

As noted above, the vast majority of the material on organised crime and illicit trafficking in West and Central Africa are not written by Africans. As the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-17) also notes, it is critical to build capacity for research and data collection, and to stimulate a discussion amongst African analysts as to the causes and consequences of organised crime. As the report of the West Africa Commission on Drugs emphasised, the argument that Central, and particularly, West Africa are simply conduits for illicit markets in the West or Asia cannot be sustained. Drug trafficking and environmental crimes, amongst others, are causing considerable harm. This is not only to individuals and the resources of countries and communities, but also because of the degree to which they have undercut already weakened state institutions.

What is required is to build a multi-sectoral network of West and Central African stakeholders, encompassing researchers, law enforcement officials, civil society representatives and policy makers, who are able to regularly discuss advances, challenges and strategies on combatting organised crime, with a focus on local impacts, and to collectively respond to the challenges posed by illicit drugs and organised crime.

Recommendation 2: Effectively monitor trends and impacts

There is currently no mechanism in which to effectively monitor and report on trends in illicit trafficking and organised crime in either region. The result is that analysis and policy are driven by individual reports or the release of isolated data, such as of drug seizures. There is a requirement to consolidate available information and present it regularly and as a considered output for policy makers, in order to allow an evidence basis on which services can be scaled up to address the health and social impact of drug use, illicit trafficking and organised crime. The report has shown how the issue of illicit trafficking has grown in size and seriousness over only a short period of time. There is little indication that the phenomenon will be short term in scope, and so building capacity to report on and promote policy discussion will be key.

One option in this regard is to seek to build an African regional or sub-regional “observatory” on organised crime in order to ensure an objective and consistent source of reporting. Such an observatory should be overseen by, but be independent of state actors, located if possible within a relevant regional organization. As further proposed in Outcome C of the AU Plan of Action on Drug Control, this kind of strategic information should then be fed into the legal and policy debates of AU Member States.

Recommendation 3: Organised crime must be put on the development agenda

Organised crime has for too long been considered as solely an issue which is the responsibility of law enforcement. Its complexity, multiple causes and the fact that many law enforcement agencies lack the skills or commitment to confront it, requires a more comprehensive response. Western development actors have been historically reluctant to engage in programmes that respond to the causes and impact of illicit trafficking. Indeed, there has not been enough debate as to how such programmes should be designed and implemented. More recently, as the scope of the challenge has become clearer, there is an attempt to think how development actors can design more effective responses. However, this debate is taking place largely within the development community. It is an urgent requirement that actors from Western and Central Africa bring their own perspectives and views to the table.

One concrete way forward in this regard would be for the AU or regional commissions to host a dialogue with development actors as to how development interventions can impact upon reducing organised crime, particularly by supporting or changing the incentives for the involvement of local stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: Promote civil society and local responses

The focus of responses to organised crime in both West and Central Africa have been on the state. In a context however where state actors may be weak, and in some cases compromised, there are strong arguments for shifting the discussion to include two sets of parties who have played little role in thinking about responses to organised crime – civil society and local constituencies. Civil society groups, including the media, have a crucial role in building knowledge and action against organised crime. They have played important roles in other debates in the African context, most notably in relation to health, education and development. They should be encouraged to play a greater role in this discussion too, including through ensuring more localized intervention to the challenges.

To urgently mitigate the health and social impact of organised crime, and most pertinently drug trafficking, a broader range of stakeholders needs to be engaged. As envisaged in the AU Plan of Action under Outcome B, information must be disseminated to policy makers, professional bodies, civil society organisation, vulnerable groups and to the general public through advocacy, mass media campaigns and awareness raising activities.

The available evidence suggests that national and state driven responses may have little impact at local level. What is required is to bolster the position of local actors who seek to develop their communities outside of the influence of criminal interests. While there is little experience to go on, the available evidence suggests that local level initiatives (for example in Somalia in response to piracy) have been crucial in building effective coalitions against organised crime. This includes ensuring that local leaders who speak out against organised crime are protected and that the economic incentives for engaging in legitimate economic activities are increased.

Recommendation 5: Change the logic of protection markets

The report has suggested that in almost all criminal markets in both regions that illicit activities are possible because protection is provided – and paid for – by criminal actors. The report noted at the outset that in cases where the state is weak, protection of illicit economic activities becomes a commodity in itself. This includes corruption and the use of state resources to ensure that illicit

activities are not interfered with. What is required in many places is to reverse this logic. Responding to organised crime in such contexts requires more than just investigating and prosecuting suspects, it requires re-establishing an economy of protection which protects those engaged in legitimate as opposed to illegitimate activities.

To do so requires more sophisticated analysis of the market for protection in many places – this includes understanding the payments that are made to ensure the movement of illicit goods, and intervening to ensure that the costs for doing so are raised.

At heart, this requires law enforcement and external responses that take place with a sophisticated understanding of protection markets, and thus interventions targeted at individuals, groups or specific trafficking flows may increase the costs of the movement of illegal commodities. In a context where illicit trafficking is relatively widespread and much of it takes places through zones of limited state reach, more innovative approaches are needed.

Issues for further research and analysis

The report has presented the available research and data on organised crime and trafficking in West and Central Africa. The review has exposed several areas where new thinking and new data and research are a key requirement for policy. Of these, the following are the most critical:

- Indicators for defining and measuring the strength of organised crime in an African context;
- A more sophisticated understanding of changes in global illicit markets, most notably new demands from expanding Asian economies, and the degree to which Africa may be both a source or transit point for illicit commodities;
- The impact of organised crime on the community, health and livelihoods has not been sufficiently examined.
- While the focus of this report has been on West And Central Africa it is clear that a wider set of regional interactions with East and Southern Africa are present – sub-regional criminal economies in Africa are not easily isolated and a wider continental analysis of connection and implications is needed;
- Far too little is known about drug use in the two regions, most notably in West Africa where initial evidence suggests a growth in cocaine addiction. There is an urgent need to further the evidence-basis with reliable information;
- A greater focus on learning lessons from local community interventions to respond to illicit activities is required, including how local actors who wish to oppose the growth of illegal markets can be protected and incentivized; and,
- Finally, much more work is required to understand protection as a commodity in itself in African criminal markets, including pricing the provision of protection and understanding how the costs for moving illicit goods can be raised.

¹ *IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Map*. (2013). Retrieved November 12, 2013, from ICC International Maritime Bureau: <http://www.icc-ccs.org/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-map>. **Figure 20:** Hurlburt, K., & Seyle, C. (2013). *The Human Cost of Maritime Piracy 2012*. Oceans Beyond Piracy, p. 12; *IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Map*, 2013.

² International Telecommunications Union. (2013). *Percentage of individuals using the internet*. Retrieved from Statistics: <http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>

³ Lewis, J. (July 2013). *The Economic Impact of Cybercrime and Cyber Espionage*. Center for Strategic and International Studies, McAfee, p. 5. Retrieved from <http://www.globalinitiative.net/download/cybercrime/global/CSIS%20-%20The%20impact%20of%20cybercrime%20and%20cyber%20espionage%20July%202013.pdf>: