

Drug Abuse in Africa

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was established in 1997 and currently operates in all regions of the world. 90% of the committee's budget comes from voluntary contributions from various governments. The committee's overall responsibility is to aid member nations in their battle against illicit drug use, drug trafficking, terrorism, and crime.¹ Due to the fact that funding comes from a variety of voluntary contributions, the UNODC is currently struggling to find enough funds for their 2030 agenda. Member nations are needing more and more assistance. Although funding from voluntary governments has increased throughout the years, it is still not enough to properly address the various sources of drugs and crime.²

The UNODC has 17 sustainable development goals including good health, quality education, sustainable cities and communities, and peace and justice. Their 2030 agenda focuses on shifting global thinking to consider how various aspects of governments such as the rule of law and health-oriented responses to drug use enable development and how their absence impedes development.³

History of the Problem

Africa, a continent filled with a rich history, has also had a history of poverty. Throughout the continent, poverty is exacerbated by problems such as political instability and social unrest. Poverty has also been seen to cause an increase in substance use and abuse.⁴ Prior to 1995, it was rare to hear of cocaine and heroin abuse concerns in the continent. Even from the years 1995 to 2006, reported cases of cocaine and heroin abuse were rare, but they were starting to become more common.⁵ Prior to 2006, the most commonly used drugs on the African continent were cannabis and khat. Khat is a type of stimulant that is produced from the khat plant and normally found in the horn of Africa. The drug is often consumed in the same manner as chewing tobacco, and produces an effect of euphoria for the user.⁶

After studying the rates of cannabis production, it was found by the International Narcotics Control Board that countries or areas affected by civil war or armed conflict experienced an increase

¹ "About UNODC." UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/index.html>.

² "UNODC Partnerships and Funding." UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/donors/index.html?ref=me>.

³ "UNODC and the 2030 agenda." UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/sustainable-development-goals/>.

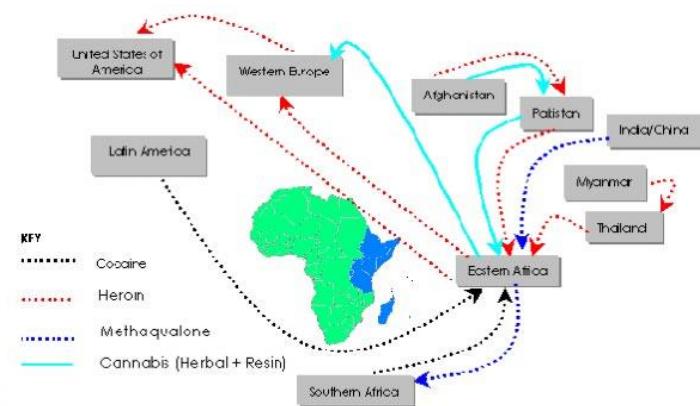
⁴ "Status of Drug Use/Abuse in Africa." American Psychological Association. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2006-20175-005>.

⁵ "United Office on Drugs and Crime." UNODC <https://www.unodc.org/easternafrica/en/illicit-drugs/drug-trafficki>.

⁶ "Why the Herbal Stimulant Khat Was Banned." Live Science. <https://www.livescience.com/37948-what-is-khat-cathinone.html>.

in cannabis production.⁷ It should also be noted that globalization has contributed to the introduction of highly potent drugs such as cocaine and heroin to Africa. Globalization is broadly known as the development of international relationships so relationships between different regions of Africa and other continents such as Europe and South America have aided in the creation of drug trafficking patterns.

Psychoactive substances are those that alter brain function and, although they were not once very present on the African continent, there has been an increase in the movement and prevalence of these substances across African nations. An increase in the availability of psychoactive substances in Africa has been linked to the introduction of prescription drugs to Africa.⁸ As a result, the increase in psychoactive substances was linked to an increase in violence as well. Increasing violence is directly related to detrimental effects on a society and its wellbeing. A chain reaction can be seen in that



selling and distributing drugs is a crime and also leads to crimes of violence; crime rates in general go up and make society more dangerous for its inhabitants. According to a study conducted in a maximum-security prison in Nigeria, 60% of the inmates used illegal drugs and alcohol before their offense.⁹ Previous attempts to halt the detrimental effects that drugs have caused on African nations have included

implementing drug abuse control programs. However, a lack of funds and a shortage of adequately trained personnel have made the implementation of these programs nearly impossible.¹⁰

Drug trade occurs not only within the African continent, but also with other countries globally. The figure above shows how different types of drugs travel from country to country and end up in East Africa. The recent introduction of prescription drugs in Africa has caused a crisis with the abuse and overuse of controlled substances. These substances are often imported or produced locally for legitimate reasons but are not regulated as well as they should be, which leads to the abuse of opioids, narcotics, and other controls. According to a report from the INCB, pharmaceuticals containing psychotropic substances are more readily being sold without a prescription and over the counter in Africa.¹¹ West Africa, specifically, is susceptible to drug trafficking which has contributed

⁷ "Report of the International Narcotics Control Board for 2002." INCB. <https://www.incb.org/incb/en/publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2002.html>.

⁸ "About UNODC." UNODC. <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/index.html>.

⁹ "Drug Abuse and Crime in West Africa." OSIWA. http://www.osiwa.org/wai_drugs/drug-abuse-crime-west-africa/.

¹⁰ "UNODC Drug abuse in Africa." UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1.

¹¹ "Why the Herbal Stimulant Khat Was Banned." Live Science. <https://www.livescience.com/37948-what-is-khat-cathinone.html>.

to increasing usage of drugs. Furthermore, the drugs that are not trafficked are produced in the region itself.¹²

Drug Types in Africa

South Africa has a variety of opioid and other types of psychoactive substances. Some of the most commonly found drugs specifically in South Africa are Nyaope and Tik. Nyaope is a drug that is starting to become more popular. It is made of a mixture of different drugs such as low-grade heroin, marijuana, rat poison, powder from flat screen TVs and AIDS drugs, inducing a zombie-like sleepiness. Nyaope can be liquidized and injected or laced with marijuana and smoked.¹³ Since it is mixed with a variety of other substances, it is a relatively cheap street drug and highly addictive. Tik is a type of crystal methamphetamine. Tramadol and codeine are most often found in Nigeria and, although Nigeria banned cough syrup with codeine in April of 2018, it is still an extremely common drug in the region.¹⁴ Khat is most commonly cultivated in Ethiopia and Kenya and is legal in these countries due to the economic benefits experienced by farmers who grow the crop. Cocaine use is high in West, Southern, and Central Africa. Heroin, on the other hand, seems to be particularly concentrated on the East African Coast. Recall, however, that drug routes run between the African nations so a variety of drugs are present everywhere, but most concentrated in the previously mentioned regions.¹⁵

Case Study: South Africa and Narcotics

South Africa, specifically, has been having major issues with the overuse of narcotics such as codeine. For example, in a single hospital, 2.5% of the admissions were due to the misuse of codeine.¹⁶ The issue at hand is not just the rate of substance abuse but, also, the effects it has on behavior. When substance abuse was studied in South Africa, it was found to be linked to more risky sexual behavior. Considering South Africa is also part of a route that transports cocaine to Europe and South Asia, it has exacerbated the existing drug epidemic in the region and the surge of drug abuse has become more radical. In June 2017 alone, South African police seized \$36 million worth of cocaine and \$7.7 million worth of heroin during several raids in the Western Cape Province.¹⁷ The South African National Youth Behavior Survey has found that 15% of youth admitted to getting high from over-the-counter drugs and 11.5% of pupils have admitted to using a psychoactive substance such as heroin.¹⁸ South Africa also has the highest rate of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in the world, at a rate of 111.1 per 1000.¹⁹

¹² “Drug consumption and trafficking in West Africa.” UNODC. <https://bit.ly/2kxz5jz>.

¹³ “Desperate for next fix: South Africa in grip of heroin-based ‘nyaope’.” Business Times. <https://bit.ly/2kkFZsj>.

¹⁴ “Africa’s desperate youth are getting high on opioids and anything they can get their hands on.” Quartz Africa. <https://bit.ly/2mgpTAv>.

¹⁵ “Sub-Saharan Africa.” IDPC. <https://bit.ly/2mgpKgr>.

¹⁶ “Codeine misuse and dependence in South Africa.” National Center for Biotechnology Information. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26428980>.

¹⁷ “Interdiction Efforts Adapt as Drug Trafficking in Africa Modernizes.” Africa Center for Strategic Studies. <https://bit.ly/2lRG0cn>.

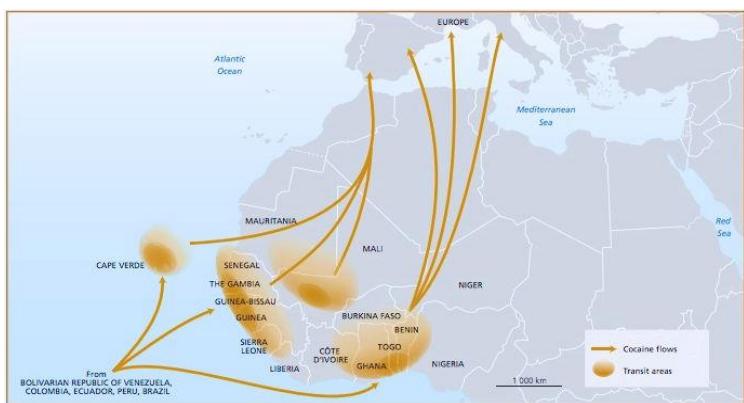
¹⁸ “Drug Abuse is Growing in SA.” The Citizen. <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1179509/drug-abuse-is-growing-in-south-africa>.

¹⁹ “SA has world’s highest rate of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.” Sunday Times. FASD <https://bit.ly/2lUtWCa>.

The Current Issue



South-East Asia. Once heroin enters East Africa, it is usually smuggled from that point and moved to West Africa.²⁰ Routes through which drugs travel through West Africa vary, some pass-through Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Morocco and then on to southern Europe. Others cross the Atlantic bound for the United States. While this is further discussed below, this essentially means that drug trafficking in Africa is having effects on nations throughout the world. Furthermore, South Africa has been known as a transit country for drugs headed towards Europe. Specific routes, such as the



other routes exist that are creating a major drug smuggling problem specifically on the coast of African nations. The map to the right demonstrates how the flow of drugs to coast nations is more concentrated as cities are closer to the nearby ocean and how different countries have specific destinations for the drugs that flow through them.

Societal Impacts

Drug Trafficking

It is important to recognize and consider that drug trafficking differs between different parts of Africa. For example, there is a major difference in transportation and trafficking in Eastern and Western Africa. In Eastern Africa, drugs generally enter from

“southern route” have also been observed. In the Southern route, Heroin enters East Africa through the sea from Iran and Pakistan.²¹ The entire Southern route stretches from Afghanistan and Pakistan, through Iran and across the Indian Ocean until it reaches Africa.²¹ A map of common drug routes is shown above. In addition to the Southern Route, several

²⁰ “Transnational Organized Crime in East Africa.” UNODC <https://bit.ly/2mgqthF>.

²¹ “Interdiction Efforts Adapt as Drug Trafficking in Africa Modernizes.” Africa Center for Strategic Studies. <https://bit.ly/2IRGOcn>.

Although incoming drugs to neighborhoods and populations has a clear impact on citizens, secondary effects due to drug trafficking and trade also exist. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa has a rate of HIV/AIDS that reaches 27.20% in Swaziland. There are also severe economic impacts associated with drug abuse and trafficking that can continuously impact citizens' lives. For example, the more money that goes towards funding programs that counteract drug trafficking leaves less money to go towards public funding and pertinent public health issues.²²

Violence and Radical Groups

Currently, radical groups are present throughout much of the African continent. A major radical group is Boko Haram, a jihadist terrorist organization based mostly in northeast Nigeria. It is unsurprising that Boko Haram has invested time and members into drug trafficking, as it is a major source of revenue for the organization.²³¹² Several northeast Nigerian cities have suffered from an insurgency campaign orchestrated by Boko Haram and their presence has been correlated with heavy drug usage in the areas which they occupy. For example, Nigerians, on average, have twice the rate of drug use as the global average. More specifically, one out of seven Nigerians uses drugs.²⁴ The insurgency has also impacted child health through various aspects; as funds are drawn away from social services and health facilities, the population becomes exposed to poor water quality, substandard housing, inadequate food supply, and exposure to deadly viruses and diseases. In late 2015, a trial of ten Boko Haram members in Chad found that "considerable quantities of psychotropic substances had been recovered during the search of the home of one of the Boko Haram defendants."²⁵ This confirmed the suspicions of many; that Boko Haram members are regularly bringing harmful substances into not only Nigeria, but surrounding nations as well.

The drug that is most commonly used by the terrorist organization is Tramadol, a controlled substance meant to be used for pain but can have effects similar to heroin when used in great amounts. Tramadol is not only being brought to the citizens of areas occupied by Boko Haram but it is also being used as a method by the group in order to drug their fighters. A previous fighter for Boko Haram has stated that "it was impossible to go on a mission without taking it [Tramadol]."²⁶ As previously mentioned, detrimental effects on populations such as overdosing and increased crime rates have been directly correlated with an increase in drugs in the region.

Boko Haram is not the only radical group present in the region that has used drugs for funding. Al Qaeda, for example, has also used drug smuggling to finance its operations. AQIM is a subset of Al Qaeda that is mostly present in West and Central Africa. In early 2015, nine members of this group were found in northern Libya smuggling drugs to be sold in various parts of Libya and other countries.²⁷

²² "Economic Consequences of Drug Abuse" INCB. <https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReport>

²³ "Drug consumption and trafficking in West Africa." UNODC. <https://bit.ly/2kxz5jz>

²⁴ "Drug Use in Nigeria." UNODC. <https://bit.ly/2DEmdyF>.

²⁵ "The Drug Problem and Organized Crime, Illicit Financial Flows, Corruption and Terror." UNODC. <https://bit.ly/2J0Y8SJ>.

²⁶ "If you take Tramadol away you make Boko Haram weak." African Arguments. <https://bit.ly/2ugHh96>.

²⁷ "Terrorist Financing in West and Central Africa." FATF. <https://bit.ly/2IRHBtR>.

Regional Efforts

Considering the flow of drugs through the African continent is quick and fluid, it is crucial to establish regional efforts in order to stop those who are bringing drugs into the region. In 2008, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), along with the support of the UNODC, engaged in a regional action plan so that they can address the growing problem of drug trafficking, organized crime, and drug abuse in Western Africa in an integrated fashion.²⁸ The overall plan requires a joint effort of various nations in the area in terms of law enforcement, criminal justice, and data collection and collaboration. Although this plan was put into place, little to no effort has been put into international cooperation in order to make a significant impact. It is important to consider how pre-existing plans and programs can be bettered in order to make a serious impact rather than simply considering the establishment of new programs.

Another plan that involves more African states is known as the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control. While previous plans solely focused on reduction of the supply of drugs, this action plan decided to split efforts to equally address supply reduction, demand reduction, and harm reduction measures. This plan, similarly to the one constructed by ECOWAS, has had minimal impact. It is a non-binding agreement but has potential to make an impactful difference on the African continent.

Questions to Consider

- There are 53 countries in Africa, how will this committee determine interventions that will be effective across all affected countries?
- Boko Haram is still at large in West Africa, specifically Nigeria, so how will tackling the drug problem in this region intertwine with existing efforts to halt the actions of the Boko Haram?
- Where should efforts be concentrated in order to prevent entry from common ports in different parts of Africa?
- With limited resources, should effort to halt the entry of drugs to African nations be mostly concentrated in the East, West, or Southern part of the continent?
- According to the 2017 UN World Drug Report, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cocaine that is smuggled between South America and Europe passes through West Africa, meaning that other countries throughout the world are clearly impacted by African drug trade. How will this committee also address the dire implications this has on other nations?

²⁸ “Transnational Organized Crime In West Africa: A Threat Assessment.” UNODC. <https://bit.ly/2nGv88J>.