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Current issues on illicit networks and challenges related to the combat of corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing in West Africa.

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**** (All opinion expressed in this paper are mine and should not be attributed to my employers) •***

Introduction

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- West Africa is a region surrounded in the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean, and in the north by a long stretch of desert and a semi-desert zone in between known as the “Sahel”.
- It is made up of 15 Member States namely - Benin, Burkinafaso, Cape Verde, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, The Gambia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.
- It is a highly volatile region – civil conflicts have been recorded between 1998 and 2005 in 9 West African Countries namely Cote d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

Introduction

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- The effect of war and civil conflicts have left so many displaced, and without homes or access to basic living needs.
- Many people from the region live below the poverty line of 1USD per day.
- The average GDP for Sub-Saharan Africa is \$1,946USD
- Small arms proliferation continues to threaten peace and security in the region.
- Governments are under-resourced in most cases and are not able to control armed groups.
- Security personnel are underpaid and are vulnerable to corruption.
- Same is true of the criminal justice systems and the judicial sector.

Trends in Drug Trafficking in Africa

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- Africa is gaining **notoriety** as a transit route for cocaine trafficking between South American drug cartels (Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) and European consumers.
- UNODC 2007 & 2008 reports on drug trafficking in West Africa indicate increase in seizures in West African Coasts and the European axis, indicating a shift away from the traditional route.
- In addition, law enforcement officials in West Africa report increased seizures in 2007.

Trends in Africa

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The statistics below show a significant increase in seizures:

- 1998 to 2003: 0,6 metric tons (mt)
- 2004 - 2,5mt (five times more than earlier recorded)
- 2005 – 2,523mt
- 2006 – 2,863mt
- 2007 – 5,691mt (representing an increase of 50% from previous year and a street value in Europe of \$480million)

Trends in West Africa

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Records of seizures from 2006 to 2007 were reported as follows:

2006 - 1.5mt (representing 90% of seizures in Africa)

2007 - 5.7mt (99% of seizures in Africa)

Why West Africa?

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- Generally, research have shown that countries with weak law enforcement system, weak judiciary, and weak maritime policing mechanism are often vulnerable to organized crime
- Most of the drugs seized were found either already stockpiled in countries along the West African Coasts or enroute to Europe either by air (conveyed by couriers) or by sea.
- Transit countries include Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Benin, Senegal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

Why West Africa?

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- Additionally, the free movement of persons and goods in the West African region as a result of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional policy to liberalize trade has made it possible for drug traffickers and other organized criminals to move across the countries without control either by road or by sea.
- It is easy for traffickers to travel undetected by road from Guinea Bissau to Senegal and then cross over to Mauritania to Morocco. In the same vein, it is easy to travel from Nigeria by road to Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. Even when detected, chances of arrest are rare since police officers are willing to be paid off to permit the trafficker passage into the next country.

Why West Africa?

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- Language is also an asset as most of the countries are band together as a result of their language links to France, Portugal, and United Kingdom – thus making it easier for traffickers to move undetected either within the region or internationally.
- Increased success in the enforcement measures put in place by European and Caribbean authorities thus leading to the search for alternative routes.
- The geographical position of West Africa renders it vulnerable to drug cartels from South America.
- Drug traffickers see West Africa as a low-risk environment due to lack of strong enforcement structure, widespread corruption, and lack of equipment to control the influx of organized criminal networks into the coastal villages
- Almost all the countries in West Africa still operate cash based economy.

Why West Africa?

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- The complicity of law enforcement officials and high-level officials in some of these countries have made it increasingly possible for drug cartels from South America to have unrestrained access into West Africa.
- Guinea Bissau is a case in point. The political instability and poverty in that country has made it very vulnerable to drug traffickers who have been using the unmanned airstrips to move drugs in and out of West Africa.
- The landing of unidentified aircrafts in clandestine airstrips in Guinea Bissau have been a source of concern to the international community.

Why West Africa?

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- Several high profile officials working with the former Prime Minister of Guinea Bissau, including military personnel were relieved of their positions in 2007 and are currently under investigation for alleged complicity with drug cartels.
- However, the risk of prosecution and conviction is low because of the loopholes in national legal regimes that prevent international judicial cooperation.

Regional trends in the combat of corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing

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- The emerging trends in the fight against corruption and money laundering in the region show increased political will to deal with these issues in a more strategic manner.
- While the traditional source of laundered funds and properties in West Africa has been organized crime and illicit trafficking in drugs, corruption has emerged over the years as a more threatening source.

Regional trends in the combat of corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing

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- Most countries in the region are struggling with how to deal with the issue of the link between corruption, illicit trafficking in drugs and money laundering.
- In recent times, we have seen an increased momentum towards legislative measures leading to the enactment of anti-corruption and anti-money laundering laws to stem the tide and take away profit from crime and corrupt officials.
- Most of the ECOWAS Members have also ratified international conventions in relation to anti-corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing.

Ratification of relevant international conventions

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- 2005 Anti-Corruption Convention – 9 countries
- UN 1988 Vienna Conventions (Drugs) – 15 countries.
- 2000 Palermo Convention (Transnational Organized Crimes) – 12 countries
- Terrorist Financing Convention – 5 countries

Public perception of the level of corruption in the region



- Rating of West African countries in the Transparency International Corruption Index – show them ranking between CPI score of 3.9 (Ghana) to 1.6 (Guinea) in 2008.
- It is interesting to note that Ghana has remained consistent in its CPI score since 2005 when it scored 3.5.
- We have seen significant improvement in countries that used to be rated amongst the most corrupt in the region. A good example is Nigeria, that has moved from CPI score of 1.9 to 2.7.
- Guinea seemed to have taken over from Nigeria with CPI score of 1.6 (lowest in the region) down from 2.3 in 2005.

Current regional strategy

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- The West African States are aggressively implementing the measures set by the Financial Action Task Force in the 40 + 9 Recommendations against money laundering and terrorist financing.
- The ECOWAS Commission issued a directive in 2000 to set up the Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering (GIABA – for the French acronym –Groupe intergouvernemental d’action contre le blanchiment d’argent en afrique).

Current regional strategy

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- In 2006, the ECOWAS Commission issued a directive on terrorist financing and expanded the mandate of GIABA to develop policies for the effective implementation of anti-money laundering and combating of terrorist financing measures in the region.
- GIABA is a FATF-Styled Regional Body (FSRB) and applies the FATF Methodology in the evaluation of Member States' compliance with international money laundering and combating of financing of terrorism standards.

Current regional strategy

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- So far GIABA has conducted 8 mutual evaluations either on its own or in collaboration with international financial institutions such as World Bank and International Monetary Fund.
- Several technical assistance programs are being provided to the countries in the region including training for law enforcement officials, judicial officers, and financial institution regulators.
- Training and equipment has also been provided to newly established Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs).
- There are at least 7 FIUs in the ECOWAS region.

Challenges of fighting organized crime in West Africa

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- Obsolete laws and judicial procedures that do not reflect international standards.
- Lack of “political will” in some countries to follow through their pledges to fight organized crime and corruption.
- Cultural and political ties tend to serve personal interests rather than national interests.
- Weak law enforcement institutions –often compromised by the cartels, including public officials or politically exposed persons (PEPs).
- Inadequate resources for investigators, prosecutors and judicial officers.
- Low capacity across all sectors.

Recommendations for future actions

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- A regional strategic plan against organized crime – driven in part by the ECOWAS Commission with support from the international community.
- International pressure on the countries in the region to act for national interest as opposed to personal interest.
- Review of the capacity of law enforcement and judicial officers and development of a training plan to address the gaps.
- Provision of investigation equipment to law enforcement officials and FIUs
- Ratification of international conventions and effective implementation at the national level in order to enhance international cooperation.

THANK YOU
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