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A TRIANGLE OF VULNERABILITY

Changing patterns of illicit
trafficking off the Swahili coast



ALASTAIR NELSON

JUNE 2020



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is based on knowledge, understanding and personal experiences from numerous people who shared their time and insights with us during the research and writing. Some of these were dispassionate, some deeply personal and based on incredible lived histories. Profound thanks are due to everyone who gave their time, insights and reflections.

Thanks are due to 'field researcher #1' who undertook independent field-work, accompanied the author in the field, and used prior connections to some of the illicit networks to develop our understanding of the illicit flows in this triangle. Thanks to Simone Haysom for support in the field and numerous discussions to guide the work all the way through, also to Julian Rademeyer for input and critical motivation towards the end. Mark Shaw and Julia Stanyard gave crucial intellectual input and transformed the structure of the report. Thanks to Tuesday Reitano and Monique de Graaff for making things happen. Also, to Mark Ronan, Pete Bosman and Jacqui Cochrane of the GI editorial and production team for producing the maps and the final report.

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Cover photograph: A beach on the western edge of Stonetown, Zanzibar.

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Cover design: Flame Design

Cartography: Liezel Bohdanowicz

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ACRONYMS

ASWJ	Ahlu Sunna wa Jamma
ASCOBEF	Comorian Association for the Wellbeing of Families
CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CJI	Centro de Jornalismo Investigativo
CUF	Civic United Front
DEA	United States Drugs Enforcement Administration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EIA	Environmental Investigation Agency
EU	European Union
FDS	Mozambique Defence and Security Forces
FRELIMO	Frente de Libertação de Moçambique
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
MP	Member of Parliament
MZN	Mozambican metical
PWUD	people who use drugs
RENAMO	Resistência Nacional Moçambicana
RMIFC	Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre
SERNIC	National Criminal Investigation Service
TZS	Tanzanian shilling
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

The wildlife markets of Zanzibar, Comoros and northern Mozambique are inter-dependent. Zanzibar maintained its role as a major centre for the illegal ivory trade until 2016, when law-enforcement pressure on the mainland forced major syndicates to relocate their operations. ►

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A triangle of vulnerability for illicit trafficking is emerging as a key geographic space along Africa's eastern seaboard – the Swahili coast. At one apex of this triangle is Zanzibar, a major hub for illicit trade for decades, but one that is currently assuming greater importance. Further south, another apex is northern Mozambique. This area is experiencing significant conflict and instability, and is increasingly a key through route for the illicit trafficking of heroin into the continent and wildlife products from the interior. The final apex of the triangle is out to sea: the Comoros islands, lying 290 kilometres offshore from northern Mozambique and north-east of Madagascar. Comoros is not yet a major trafficking hub, but perennial political instability and its connections into the wider sub-regional trafficking economy make it uniquely vulnerable as illicit trade continues to evolve along the wider Swahili coastal region. These three apexes are linked by illicit economies and trade routes which take little heed of modern political boundaries.

Two main factors underlie the illicit markets that form the primary focus of this study. First, the powerful market demand for illicit wildlife products from Asia (and China in particular), and second, the steady growth in the volumes of heroin moving down the coast, with landings being made further and further south. The Indian Ocean islands themselves have long had serious challenges with heroin trafficking and use, and these are being exacerbated. Developments in Zanzibar, northern Mozambique and Comoros will have a crucial impact on wider patterns of trafficking and trade across the Swahili coast as a whole. For example, as we document the trade in endangered species from Madagascar which flows to Zanzibar and Comoros, Madagascar is also seen as a potential risk area for an increase in heroin trafficking.

At the time of writing, the impact of COVID-19 in the wider region was just becoming clearer as countries entered lockdown and began to restrict some forms of trade. The effect of these developments on the illicit political economy will still unfold in time to come.

- ◀ **People wait for dhows to land fish in Stonetown, Zanzibar. The island has a long history as a trade centre, starting with spices, ivory and other products in the 16th century.**

© Lee Frost/Robertharding via Getty Images

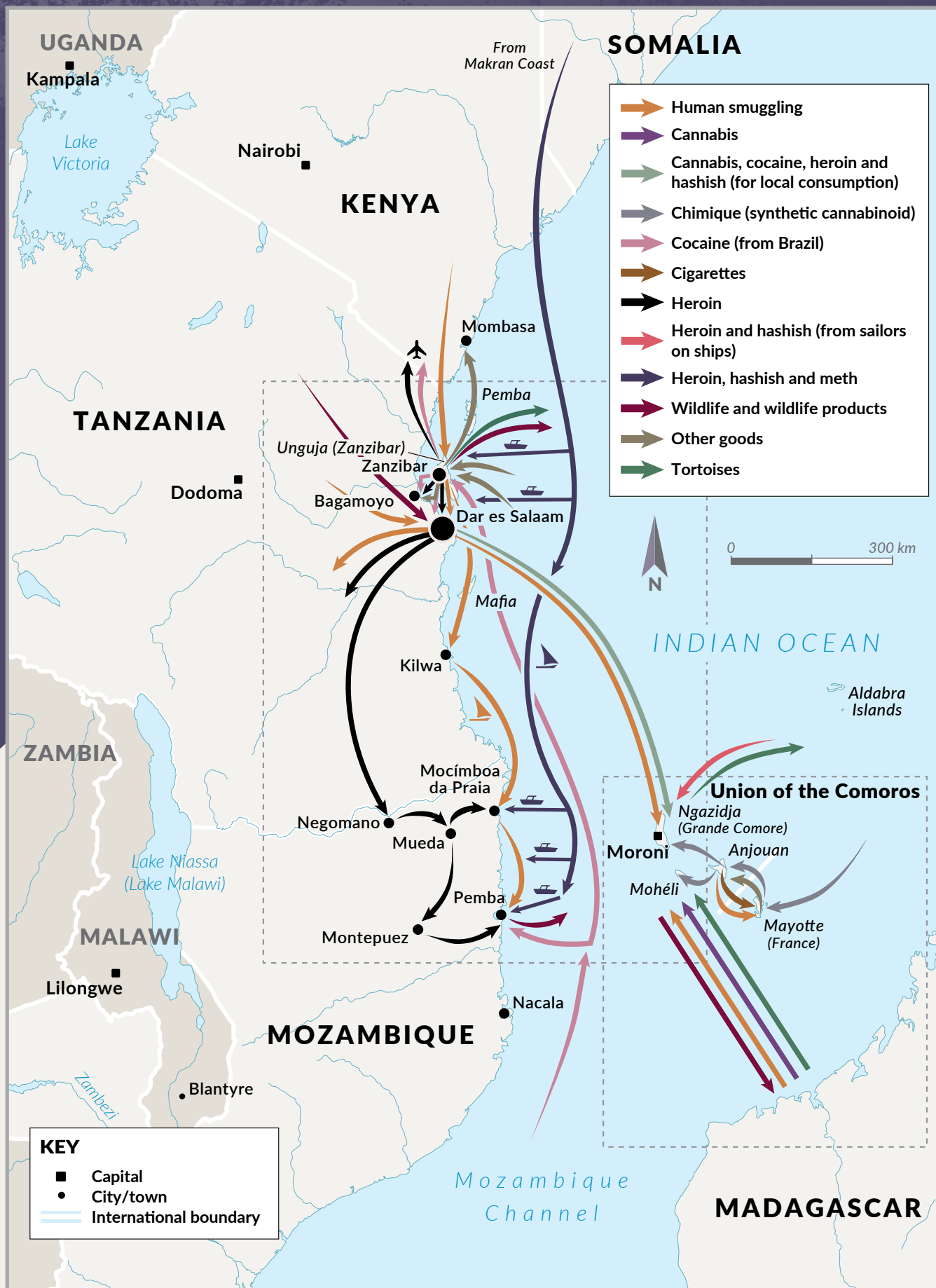


FIGURE 1 A plethora of illicit drugs, wildlife products and other goods are traded along the Swahili coast, with a triangle of vulnerability for illicit trafficking emerging between northern Mozambique, Zanzibar and Comoros.

Modern trade shaped by historical routes

The Swahili coast – stretching from Somalia to northern Mozambique, and including Comoros – has a 2 000-year history of trade that has resulted in a shared culture and language. The politics of this region has, for centuries, centred around the control of trade: both locally and within a broader Afro-Arabian network that spans the Makran coast (in what is now Iran and Pakistan) down to contemporary Mozambique, in which Zanzibar has historically functioned as a political and economic centre.

The arrival of European influence, from the 16th century onwards, reduced the Swahili trading control on some parts of this coast, but left other significant political and trading centres to maintain their role within this Afro-Arabian trade route. This included Lamu, Zanzibar, Kilwa, Ibo and Ilha de Moçambique. During the 18th and 19th centuries these sites largely fell under Omani control, under the sultan of Zanzibar, and became key centres for slave and ivory trading. Prohibition of the slave trade led to the demise of Omani influence, and in the early 20th century the colonial powers consolidated their control. Nevertheless, the established coastal trading patterns are maintained to this day, in both legal and illegal trades.

Since independence in the 1960s and 1970s, the political dynamics across this region have influenced where illicit trafficking occurs and have also shaped local vulnerability to organized crime and extremist violence. For example, as the politics of northern Mozambique have developed along a somewhat different trajectory to Mozambique's other regions, the north remains uniquely vulnerable to organized crime and is experiencing an onslaught of violent insurgency.

The political economies of the three apexes that frame the 'triangle of vulnerability' are interconnected across modern borders. As this study shows – with a particular focus on drug and wildlife trafficking – illegal trade routes are shaped as much by historical connections as by modern boundaries.

Methodology

Researching illicit activities can be challenging, as many of these activities are hidden and there are few incentives for participants to engage. It requires cross-referencing information obtained and seeking out key actors, including those in the criminal economy who may be willing to discuss their business with an outside researcher.

This report is based on fieldwork conducted in Zanzibar, northern Mozambique and Comoros. It drew on a network of local field researchers who acted as interlocutors. Interviews were conducted with government officials, including politicians, law-enforcement officers and civil servants; international law-enforcement agencies; civil-society groups, including international and national NGOs and associations that focus on substance use;

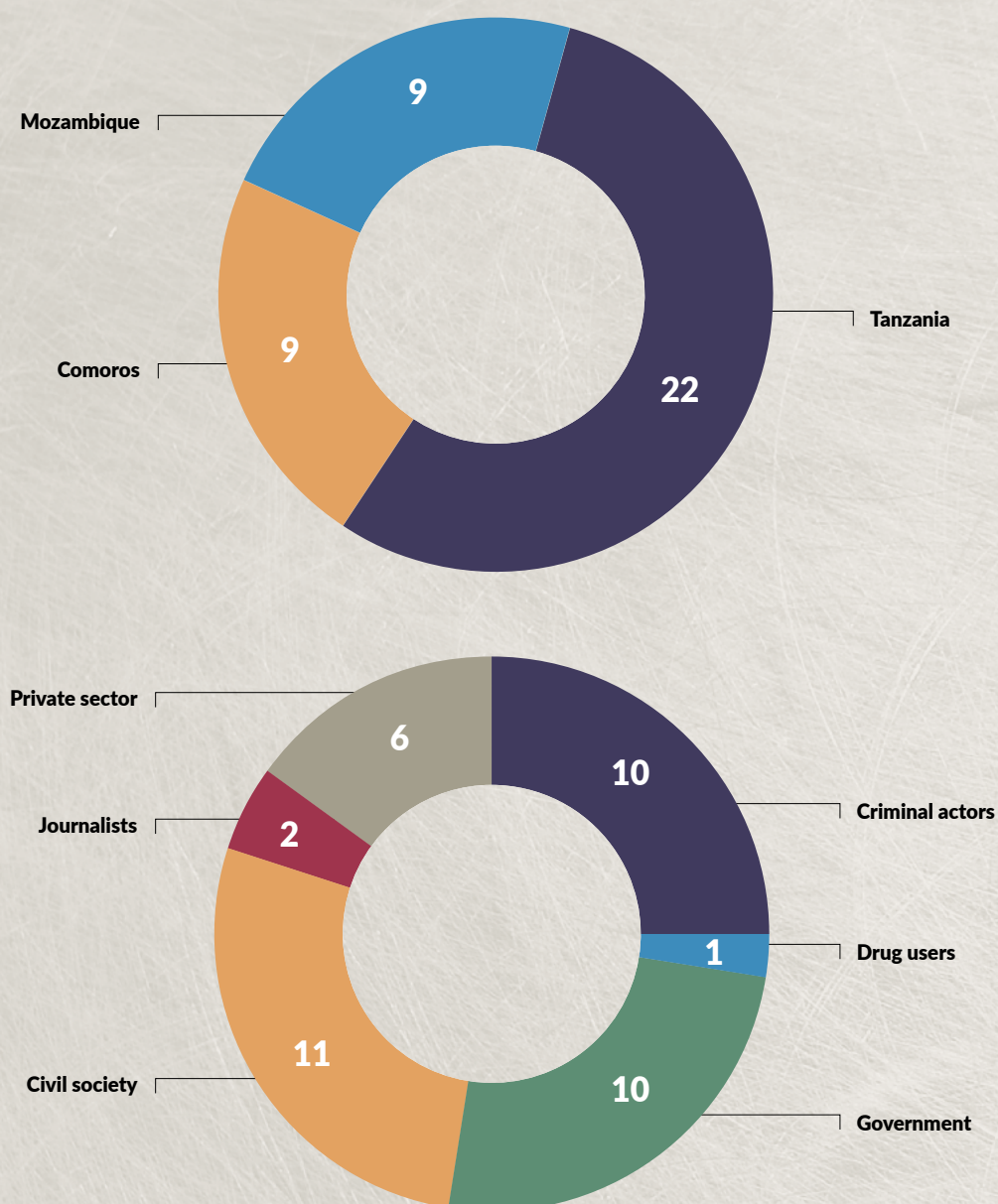


FIGURE 2 Number of interviewees by country (top) and sector (bottom).

journalists; private-sector representatives; drug users; and members of criminal networks. In total, 40 people were interviewed across the three research locations.¹ Key informants were sometimes interviewed multiple times to cross-reference and ensure the veracity of the information. This was especially the case with criminal actors.

The retail purchase-price information for local drug markets was collected by people who use drugs (PWUD) research partners. Price metrics were collected from PWUD, and this data was cross-referenced with similar price data collected from interviews with local dealers and mid-level suppliers.

An aerial photograph of a coastal town, likely in Haiti, showing a dense cluster of buildings with corrugated metal roofs and stone walls. A prominent lighthouse stands on a hill overlooking the ocean. The sky is blue with scattered clouds. A large, bold title is overlaid on the image.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF VULNERABILITY



Each of the three apexes of the 'triangle of vulnerability' is currently experiencing some form of political and social turmoil. This gives power to wealthy local traders or power-brokers and undermines the rule of law. As a result, these regions are all showing signs of increased vulnerability to illicit trafficking and organized crime, and in northern Mozambique, to violent extremism as well. In the case of Zanzibar and Pemba in northern Mozambique, trafficking has increased across a variety of illicit markets. While this is not so clear-cut for Comoros, there are signs of increasing vulnerability, and its social and political weaknesses could see the country become a key site for illicit trafficking in the near future. These three sites are brought together both by centuries of shared history and current parallel political upheaval. They are linked by shared language among the traders, cultural ties and trade routes. Political and economic changes at each site have repercussions throughout the region.

Zanzibar: old patterns and new conflicts

Zanzibar is particularly vulnerable to organized crime, in part as a result of its political history. The island has a centuries-old history as a trade centre, starting with spices,² slaves,³ ivory⁴ and other products in the 16th century. The history of illicit trade is equally ancient. Slavery, for example, was declared illegal in 1876 but continued illegally until 1897, much as the private ivory trade was declared illegal in 1970 but continues to this day.⁵

The current economy is based on tourism, agriculture (the commercial spice trade and food for local markets), fisheries and some local manufacturing.⁶ The illicit economy includes drug trafficking, local drug markets, the trafficking of wildlife products, human smuggling, and the smuggling of products to the mainland to avoid duties and taxes. Of these, the drug trade is undoubtedly the most important and has been increasing steadily since the 1980s.⁷ In 2015, the island's drug commission coordinator estimated that 7% to 10% of Zanzibar's population of one million was 'involved' in the drug economy in some way.⁸

- ◀ The central business district of Mutsamudu, the capital of Anjouan island, Comoros. Social and political weaknesses could see Comoros become a key site for illicit trafficking in the near future. © Gianluigi Guercia/AFP via Getty Images



The island has fallen under varied external control since 1498. The Portuguese era lasted from approximately 1500–1698 and Omani rule from 1698–1890. Zanzibar was a British protectorate from 1890–1963, until it merged with Tanganyika in April 1964 to form the United Republic of Tanzania.

Since the re-introduction of multi-party politics to Tanzania in 1992, Zanzibar has been extremely politically divided with power struggles and occasional outbreaks of violence between members of the mainland's ruling party (Chama Cha Mapinduzi, or CCM) and the main opposition party on Zanzibar (the Civic United Front, or CUF). The CCM party maintained control until a government of national unity was formed in 2010.⁹ However, this dissolved after CCM's contested election victory in 2016, which resulted in tensions between the government and a significant proportion of the population. Elections scheduled for October 2020 appear to be headed towards another bitter contest.¹⁰ This difficult political situation results in weak governance and poor rule of law, and makes it difficult to achieve consensus on policy to counter organized crime. Weak technical and financial capacity means that many government departments are unable to monitor illegal activities, let alone start acting to reduce illegal activities. Corruption is also endemic in many sectors of Zanzibari society.

The police and other key law-enforcement agencies are controlled by the union government on the mainland. The police are perceived to be cautious not to provoke disturbance, and thus do not get involved in major investigations.¹¹

Throughout its various governance regimes, Zanzibar's economy has been underpinned by free trade.¹² The main port in Zanzibar City is still maintained as a free port, with a reputation as a two-tier system¹³ whereby containers and goods are released without inspection – for a payment.¹⁴ Globally, free ports are recognized as having high incidences of corruption, tax evasion and criminal activity, and are linked

In the main port in Zanzibar City, containers and goods are released without inspection – for a payment.

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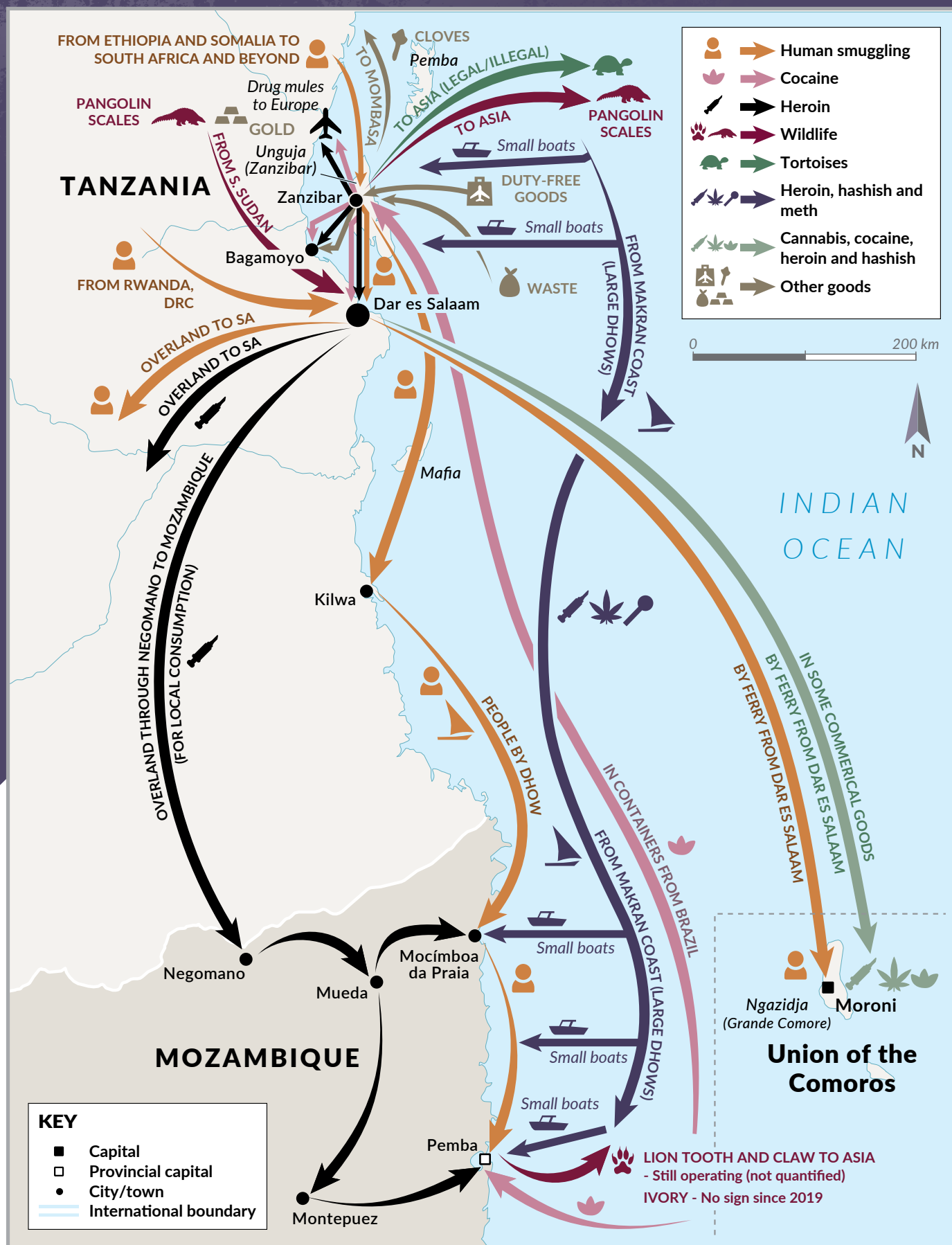


FIGURE 3 The routes and modalities of various illicit-trafficking flows that occur between and via Zanzibar, northern Mozambique and the Comoros.

to narcotics trafficking, the illegal wildlife trade, human smuggling and money laundering.¹⁵ Thus, it is no surprise that Zanzibar maintains a general trading culture that is potentially open to both licit and illicit products.

Trading families have historically held political as well as economic power in Zanzibar. They give patronage and support to politicians, and in some cases enter politics themselves to broaden their power base. The current political instability in Zanzibar – brought on by the mainland government trying to exert political control over the island – weakens overall governance. It also results in economically and socially powerful individuals (some of whom are directly involved in trafficking) being solicited for their support. This gives them power and impunity.

As mentioned, the most important illicit trade is in drugs – particularly heroin, and more recently also larger volumes of cocaine. Some of the major drug traffickers are alleged to be either close allies of standing Members of Parliament (MPs) or, in some reported cases, are standing MPs themselves. Other illicit trades include wildlife and timber trafficking, human smuggling, smuggling of high-value commodities to evade taxes, duties or fixed prices, and more recently the illicit importation of waste products.

Generations-old family ties and trading networks exist between Zanzibar, the coastal mainland and the Comoros islands. People from Comoros make use of these connections to move to the mainland to study (especially for skilled tertiary education) and for jobs, especially with the depressed economy in Comoros. Traders from Tanzania – and from Zanzibar in particular – who have access to goods needed in Comoros, set up links with retailers there. Some of these traders, especially those with some capital behind them, establish their own businesses and retail outlets in Comoros.

Northern Mozambique: a combination of historical vulnerabilities

The history of Mozambique's northern coast sets the region apart from the rest of the country, and contributes to its vulnerability. Before European arrival on the east coast of Africa, trade along the Mozambican seaboard was linked to Zanzibar and Arabic traders. When the Portuguese arrived in Mozambique in 1498, they took control of the southern and central coast, but allowed 'Swahili' control of the key ports (and thus trade) to continue in northern Mozambique, as far south as Angoche.¹⁶ This area fell under Omani control, under the umbrella of the sultan of Zanzibar, during the 18th and 19th centuries, with significant trade in ivory and slaves. During the early 20th century, the Portuguese centralized control over this area and consolidated their authority over the whole area of what is now Mozambique.

These networks became important again when Portuguese colonial rule crumbled. Traders from the Swahili coast with quick access to capital and goods filled the gaps left by the Portuguese business owners who fled in 1974, and during the 18-year civil war that rocked Mozambique after independence in 1975. This allowed certain families to capture economic opportunity across Mozambique, particularly in the north.

Trading families have historically held political as well as economic power in Zanzibar.

Criminal networks have become socially, economically and politically embedded in northern Mozambique.

The war economy allowed smuggling, a certain amount of illicit trafficking and corrupt networks to develop and thrive. The north has also developed an important place in the history and mythology of the liberation struggle as the site where the first shots in the liberation war were fired, and where some of the liberation heroes came from. This has resulted in some of the anointed 'liberation families' being able to capture key resources over time.¹⁷

The weak state left behind by the Portuguese colonial government and the period of civil war combined to create a vacuum in governance, which has allowed illicit trade and organized crime to flourish.¹⁸ During the conflict, both political parties engaged in organized crime to meet their wartime needs. For instance, RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, or the Mozambican National Resistance party) smuggled ivory and rhino horn to South African security forces in exchange for support.¹⁹ In the immediate post-conflict phase, an opportunity arose for government officials to use their positions to foster links with organized crime to advance their political and economic interests.²⁰

Mozambique continues to experience major governance challenges that affect its ability to tackle organized crime. These include numerous cases of grand corruption with no consequences;²¹ increasing criminality driven largely by organized crime;²² weak rule of law; and the subjugation of the executive, legislature and judiciary to the needs of FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, or the Mozambique Liberation Front – the ruling party since independence).²³ These challenges are compounded by weak state resilience to tackling organized crime²⁴ and increasing inequality.²⁵

Criminal networks have become socially, economically and politically embedded in northern Mozambique. Since 2010 there has been a major uptick in various forms of illicit trafficking in the north (including timber, ivory, rubies and human

smuggling) as well as an increase in corruption associated with these organized crime networks.

By the late 1990s²⁶ and early 2000s, Mozambique was already a recognized centre for heroin and cocaine trafficking.²⁷ By 2011, alleged links between drug trafficking and FRELIMO politicians were well documented.²⁸ In 2013, an investigation by the Environmental Investigation Agency into timber trafficking in northern Mozambique captured first-hand the apparent links between the traffickers and a serving Mozambican government minister at the time, as well as a former minister.²⁹

Northern Mozambique is at the forefront of this governance breakdown – and the province of Cabo Delgado in particular. Here, underlying inequity, insecure land rights and distrust of authorities have created social, political and economic vulnerabilities that are now playing out through a breakdown in rule of law and a concomitant increase in organized crime,³⁰ corruption and an outbreak of violent extremism.³¹

The recent natural resource finds in northern Mozambique, such as rubies around Montepuez and offshore gas in Palma, have highlighted the extent of the capture of associated benefits by the political and economic elite.

Prime land in both areas has been awarded as concessions to elite families,³² and key national and international ruby-mining companies have the sons of political elite families on their boards.³³ This higher-level corruption, and local government corruption in Cabo Delgado in particular, is now rife, and is leading to a major breakdown in law and order.

Corrupt access to residency permits in Montepuez, for example, has resulted in foreign nationals (including from Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC], Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Thailand) capturing the various secondary and illicit economies associated with the ruby mining: from market stalls selling wheelbarrows and spades, to buying rubies on the black market and the local heroin market. Suspected Tanzanian ivory trafficker Chupi Mateso apparently maintained several corrupt networks that allowed him to acquire Mozambican

residency, and then operate with impunity from 2013 until his arrest in 2017. His alleged network of corruption was considered so strong that he was deliberately only held on an immigration offence in

Mozambique and then deported to Tanzania, where he is currently on trial for ivory poaching and trafficking offences committed in Tanzania from 2011 onwards.³⁴

Insurgency in northern Mozambique

The insurgent group, Ahlu Sunna wa Jamma (ASWJ, which is also known by other names), shot to prominence in early October 2017 with its successful attack on Mocímboa da Praia, when it held the town for a day before retreating in the face of a government counter-attack.

From a relatively disorganized group armed mostly with machetes in late 2017, they had become strategically and militarily more competent by late 2018.³⁵

The group had acquired weapons by ambushing Mozambique Defence and Security Forces (FDS) patrols and conducting raids on FDS outposts. By the end of 2018, the FDS had resorted to defending major sites, leaving the militants to move freely in rural areas, get food from local farmers and attract new recruits – often helped by some heavy-handed FDS tactics. After a brief respite in the aftermath of Cyclone Kenneth, which hit northern Mozambique in late April 2019, the frequency of attacks rose again.

Having sought assistance from the Russian government, the Mozambican government (with Russian deployment)³⁶ launched a counter-offensive against the insurgents from September to October 2019. It took place against the backdrop of Mozambique's elections (which went ahead on 15 October as insurgent activity was slowed), and threats to the government from a breakaway group of RENAMO, the main opposition party.

The counter-offensive ended after insurgents ambushed an FDS convoy, killing around 20 Mozambican soldiers and five Russian operatives.³⁷ Thereafter, FDS returned to its defensive approach, and November and December 2019 again saw a high frequency of insurgent attacks.³⁸

January 2020 saw a few important changes in control. First, it recorded 24 attacks: the second-highest frequency of insurgent-related incidents ever to

occur in one month. Second, insurgents attacked an important town around 100 kilometres from Pemba, but there was no military response. Insurgents remained in the area for a few days interacting with local people and attacking neighbouring towns. Third, ASWJ seemed to have taken control of certain remote stretches of strategic roads, attacking at will. This level of attacks continued in February and into March 2020.

Seeming to take advantage of the Mozambican government being distracted by the COVID-19 epidemic and an outbreak of violence in the centre of the country related to the RENAMO offshoot, ASWJ launched two major attacks on 23 March and 25 March 2020.

On 23 March, ASWJ militants attacked and held Mocímboa da Praia. They put up defensive positions at key entry sites to ambush counter-attacking forces. On 25 March, they attacked and took the district administrative centre of Quissanga. As in Mocímboa da Praia, they first took the police post, then ransacked and burnt government infrastructure, looted the armoury and banks and distributed food to local people. The second attack was also accompanied by the release of a video in Portuguese that dehumanized government forces by describing them as 'pigs' and stooges of the corrupt elite, and said that they wanted to impose Islamic law in northern Mozambique. There was no effective FDS response to either of these attacks.

At time of going to press, it appears that ASWJ have carved out an area of influence in Cabo Delgado that includes key landing sites for illicit trafficking on the coast, and an important section of the main north-south tar road. This will allow them to either enter the illicit economies or at the very least derive benefits from taxing both illicit and licit economies.

Comoros: islands of instability

East of northern Mozambique, the Union of the Comoros is made up of three main islands – Grande Comore,³⁹ Mohéli and Anjouan – and numerous smaller islands. The archipelago includes Mayotte, which, at independence in 1975 voted to remain part of France and is now classified as a French department. This has resulted in significant social, economic and political differences between the Union of the Comoros and Mayotte, which plays out in patterns of illicit trafficking.

The three main Comoros islands share a language but differ ethnically and politically. This lack of cohesion has resulted in a history of political turmoil, and there have been 20 attempted coups – four successful – since 1975. In 2009, a constitutional amendment was agreed, limiting the presidency to one term of five years, and requiring that the office be rotated around the three islands. However, in 2018, the current president, Azali Assoumani, from Grand Comore oversaw a referendum.⁴⁰ Despite being boycotted by the opposition, the referendum resulted in the constitution being amended to end the mandatory rotation and allow the president to stand in the 2019 election, which he won. Parliamentary elections were held in January 2020, which the opposition again boycotted, leading to further political instability.⁴¹

Comoros is one of the world's poorest and smallest economies, and scores exceptionally low in key World Bank Governance Indicators. In 2018, it was ranked at the 3.85th percentile for government effectiveness and the 12th percentile for rule of law.⁴² Government service delivery is extremely poor. While the garbage that lies everywhere as a result of ineffectual refuse collection is particularly noticeable, this inadequacy permeates all government services.

Despite its small economy, which is largely dependent on subsistence agriculture and remittances,⁴³ Comoros has a relatively large government wage bill. Research has found that civil-service recruitment is made up largely of low-level officials, and this fluctuates geographically between the islands depending on the balance of power. It thus seems related to political clientelism.⁴⁴ The result is that the majority of civil servants are only paid for three to six months of the year, and this can vary depending on the political need.⁴⁵

This exacerbates the islands' vulnerability to illicit trafficking, as civil servants are then left in search of their own money-making schemes during unpaid months, which can be licit (e.g. selling their technical skills), or illicit (e.g. arresting newcomers from Tanzania trying to find entry into the local drug market, in order to extract corrupt payments from them to allow their release).

On each island, social networks at the village or neighbourhood-level remain strong. They form the primary mechanisms used to deal with increasing social ills – such as environmental degradation (tackled through village groups), and increasing drug use among the youth (addressed through family support). This also points to the weakness of the state and people's distrust in the ability of the state to offer them sufficient support services.

As a result of its geographic position, as well as these political, economic and social circumstances, Comoros does not play a major role in transnational illicit trafficking networks. Rather, illicit trafficking is made up of small amounts of illegal goods being brought to Comoros from its neighbours (such as drugs and stolen goods); goods moving through Comoros to other markets (e.g. tortoises, but also human smuggling) and occasionally goods moving from Comoros to neighbours (such as cigarettes to Mayotte, and human smuggling of Comoran citizens). This illicit trafficking uses a combination of old networks (e.g. the old trading networks with the Swahili coast, Madagascar and Mayotte) and new (e.g. links to France and drugs coming from China).

Our field research raised major concerns regarding the ability of the Comoran state to withstand a concerted effort by transnational traffickers to establish a logistics base here. The weakness of the state at all levels suggests that Comoros is extremely vulnerable to exploitation by organized-crime networks. It is not impossible to imagine a scenario where dhows carrying heroin from the Makran coast are able to seek refuge here before accessing specific sites on the Swahili coast, or where heroin is offloaded here and sent to Europe by mules travelling on international flights from Moroni and possibly Mayotte. Nor does it seem far-fetched to imagine *chimique* (a synthetic

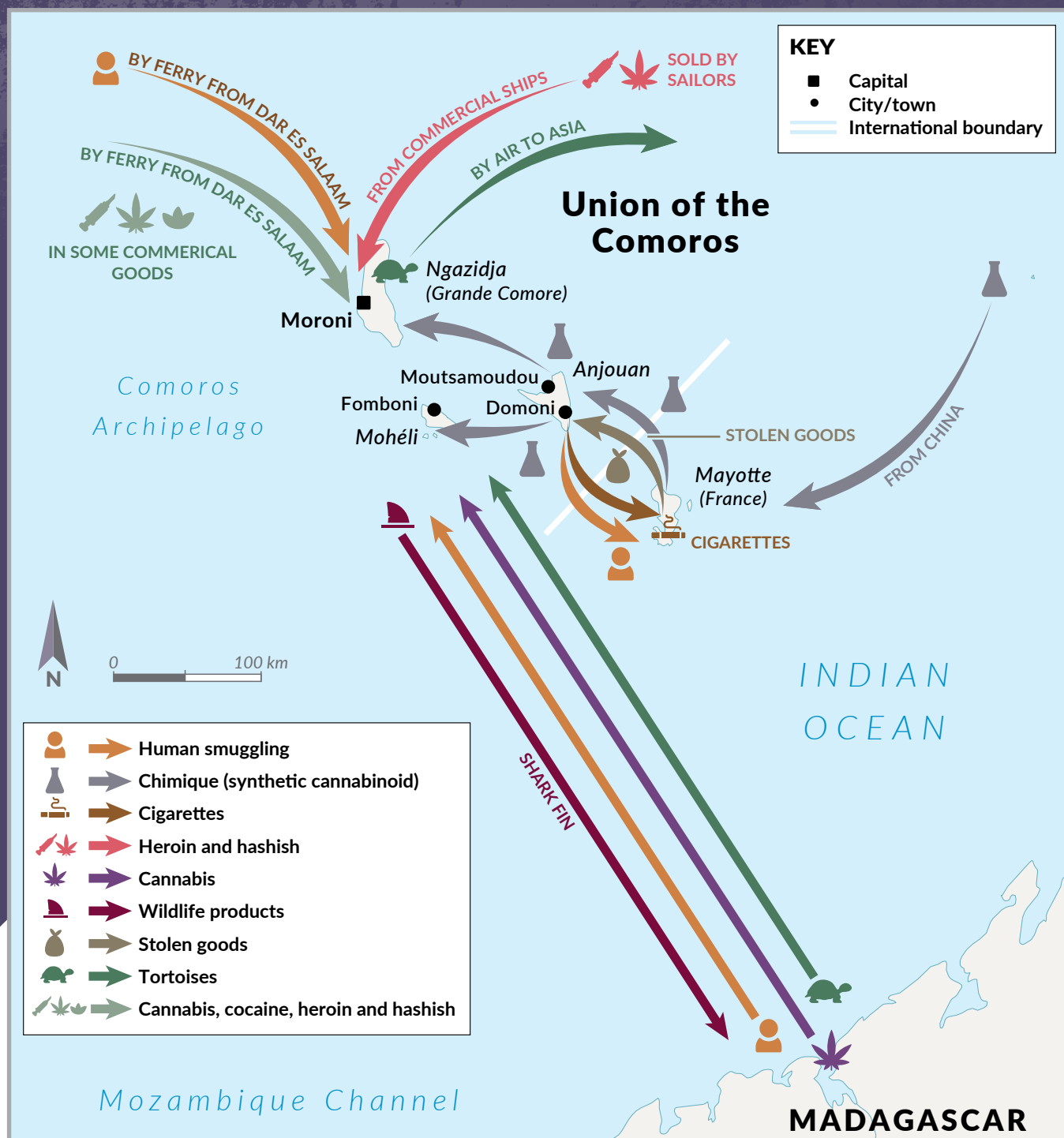
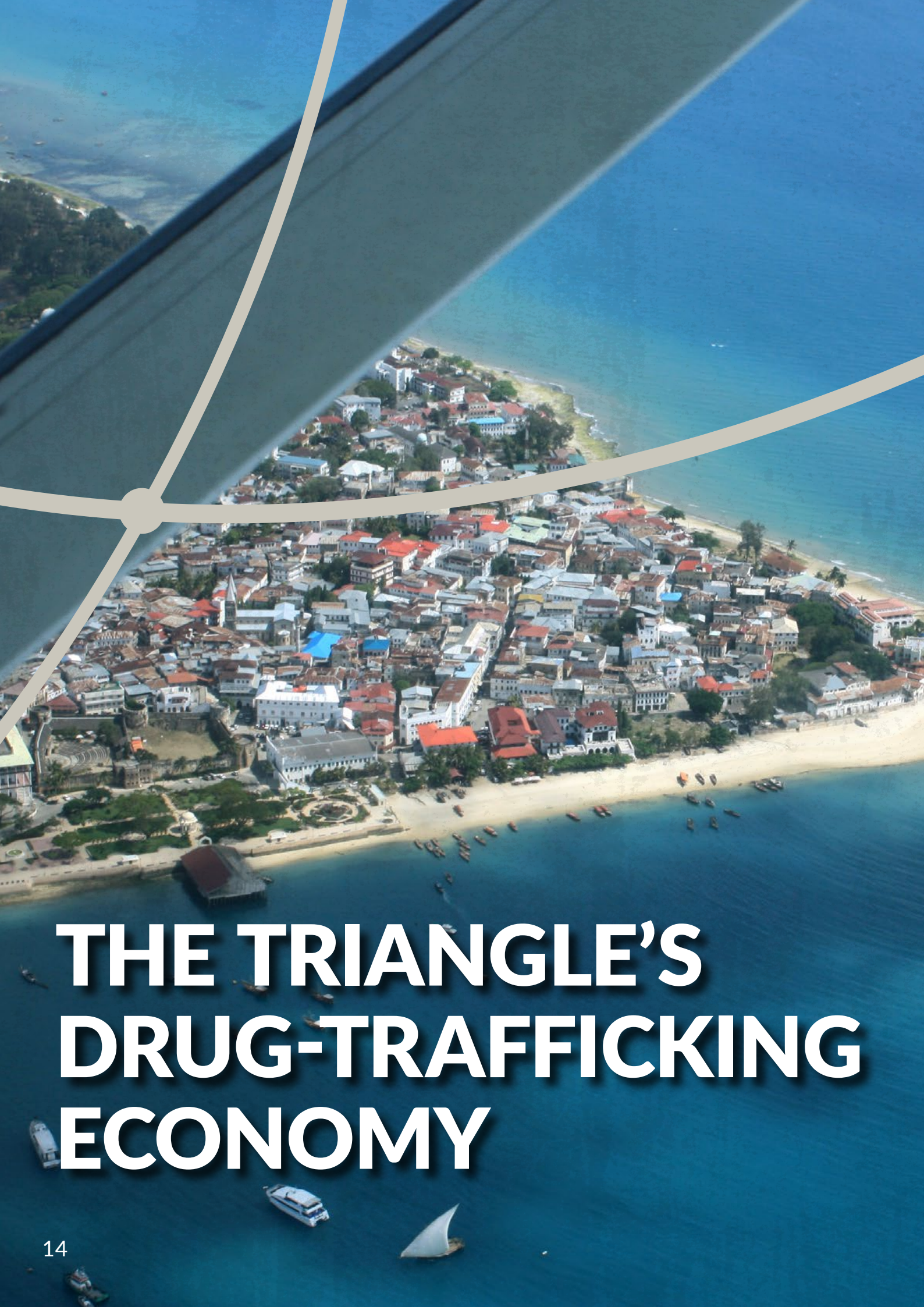


FIGURE 4 In Comoros, illicit trafficking is made up of small amounts of illegal goods being brought from its neighbours; goods moving through Comoros to other markets; and occasionally goods moving from Comoros to neighbours.

cannabinoid that has become popular among Comoran youth in recent years) coming from Mayotte and heroin coming from the Makran coast being taken back to Tanzania by the same traffickers who currently bring small amounts of drugs and other goods to Comoros on the weekly ferry from Dar es Salaam.

Our research has focused on drug trafficking and wildlife trafficking as examples of illicit economies that permeate the region under study. Changes in demand for illicit goods, law-enforcement interventions and political turmoil in one apex of the triangle provoke changes elsewhere. We also aim to contextualize wildlife products and drugs within the wider range of illegal trades that take place in this region, many of which overlap as they follow the same smuggling routes and involve the same actors.



THE TRIANGLE'S DRUG-TRAFFICKING ECONOMY



Drug trafficking, as an important illicit activity in each of the three localities within the remit of this study, best exemplifies the interconnectivity of relationships across the region. It also clearly shows their shared vulnerability to criminal exploitation.

Heroin trafficking is the most significant drug flow along the Swahili coast. For some time, the 'southern route' has seen increased heroin trafficking from Afghanistan to the coast off East and southern Africa, and then on to the main markets in Europe and North America.⁴⁶ At the same time, the local heroin market in Africa is increasing significantly – requiring increased supply.⁴⁷

The southern route initially saw heroin moving from the Makran coast of Pakistan and Iran to the coast of Kenya, then overland across Africa or by air to Europe and onwards. As Kenya increased its capacity to conduct effective law enforcement against these organized-trafficking networks, the route has shifted south. First, it moved to the coast of Tanzania and then, as mainland Tanzania increased its resilience to organized crime and its capacity to target organized traffickers, further south to northern Mozambique.⁴⁸

Our field research found that Zanzibar remains a key site for heroin trafficking. Small boats meet dhows from the Makran coast offshore and then transport heroin back to the island.⁴⁹ In northern Mozambique, heroin trafficking is well documented.⁵⁰ Our field research confirmed that it is ongoing and that new networks are emerging.⁵¹ One of these new heroin-trafficking networks operating in and off the coast of Pemba (in northern Mozambique) originated in Zanzibar and maintains strong connections with that island. The same network is also involved in human smuggling from the Horn of Africa via Zanzibar to northern Mozambique, and on to South Africa.⁵²

- ◀ Zanzibar is a long-established drug-trafficking hub in the region. Heroin and hashish arrive in small boats that collect the drugs offshore from larger seafaring dhows, or they may be concealed among containerized goods shipped to the main port. © Alastair Nelson

Other drug flows are also on the rise. Our field research discovered that cocaine is arriving directly to Pemba by sea in containers of goods from Brazil.⁵³ These drugs are then trafficked onwards to Europe and North America. We found that cocaine from Brazil is also arriving directly to Zanzibar both in containers and with drug mules.⁵⁴ These drugs supply an increasing local market, and also enter trafficking networks that move the substances to the mainland or directly to Europe using drug mules.

Comoros may increasingly play a (previously unnoticed) connecting role for some of these illicit flows. Minor amounts of heroin are moved there from Zanzibar for the small domestic market.⁵⁵ In December 2019, while field research for this report was being conducted, two drug-trafficking dhows were intercepted by Mozambican law enforcement officials off their northern coast.⁵⁶ In the weeks thereafter, it was reported that several drug-trafficking dhows moved away from the coast

and sought shelter around Comoros.⁵⁷ There was no mention of this activity during field research in Comoros, so it does not appear any cargo had been offloaded there – simply that the traffickers sought shelter. Yet it is concerning that Comoros is seen as a place of safety.

Finally, over the last four years, Comoros has seen a marked and concerning increase in the use of synthetic cannabinoids (locally known as *chimique* – which translates to ‘the chemical’), especially among youth.⁵⁸ This drug is allegedly imported from China to some of the Indian Ocean islands, including Mayotte, from where it is brought by sea to Comoros. Its use has spread rapidly to all three main islands – exemplifying the vulnerability of Comoros to illicit trafficking. There are concerns that *chimique* could be trafficked from Comoros to the East African coast by the same networks (and using the regular shipping route to Dar es Salaam) that currently bring heroin and other products to Moroni.

Zanzibar: a regional heroin hub

Zanzibar is a long-established drug-trafficking hub in the region, primarily for heroin, hashish and cocaine. Historical trade links with what is now Iran, Pakistan and India may in part be why Zanzibari traffickers were among the first people from the African continent to exploit the opportunity to traffic heroin and hashish from these areas. Most consignments are intended for onward trafficking to Europe and North America. However, there is also an active local market driven by tourism, particularly for cocaine, which is used by some wealthy Zanzibaris, but also for heroin, the use of which is increasing among the general Zanzibari population.

Heroin began appearing in Zanzibar in the mid-1980s, when it was consumed mostly by tourists, but also by wealthy Zanzibaris and other local users who had picked up the habit working elsewhere (such as in the shipping industry) and had returned to the island.⁵⁹ It was also brought by mules travelling from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.⁶⁰ Sources described how the quality of

product was high; it was nicknamed ‘brown sugar’, which suggests it was supplied directly from the source and was of high purity.⁶¹

In the late-1990s, the number of heroin users began to grow substantially. As Zanzibar opened up to international tourism, the tourist-led demand for heroin increased.⁶² Local heroin use also grew, (as did the rate of injecting drug use and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS) – both on the main island of Unguja and the second island of Pemba – as tourism opportunities spread and dealers followed. Now there are numerous established dealers who control drug sales in small patches of territory or villages across the island. They may also employ three or four street hustlers to conduct sales.⁶³

Interviewees claim that there is a well-organized system of police protection around this local drug market. According to one of the local dealers in Stonetown, this part of the city is divided into roughly 10 dealer territories.⁶⁴ Every Friday, a police officer from the local police station,



appointed to the job by a superior, travels around to collect a payment from each of the dealers. The territories are graded by size and quality, and dealers pay a pre-determined amount of either TZS 20 000 (US\$8), TZS 30 000 (US\$12) or TZS 50 000 (US\$21).⁶⁵ If a dealer is unable to pay, other dealers will contribute towards the payment. If a payment is not made, heroin will be planted on the dealer and they will be arrested and held until a payment has been received.

Within the local market, all law enforcement is directed at users, who are regularly arrested and put in cells where they detox without medical assistance.⁶⁶ Occasionally, foreigners who get involved in drug trafficking in Zanzibar without paying passage will be imprisoned, or Zanzibari businessmen who are out of favour with political protectors will be arrested or have their goods seized. In December 2019, a drug dealer died at the hands of the police. On enquiry, we discovered that he had allegedly taken drugs from a police officer to sell, but had then used the drugs himself. The beating was a lesson. It is worth noting that the police officer involved was from the mainland.⁶⁷

One small-scale trafficker we interviewed said: 'I am not afraid of the police, because when I have money I don't go to jail'.⁶⁸ This seems to be verified by the case of at least three foreign nationals who, in 2019, were caught trafficking drugs in Zanzibar without understanding how to buy protection. An Ivorian with 4 kilograms of heroin, a Brazilian with about 2 kilograms of cocaine, and a Bulgarian who bought 1–2 kilograms of heroin were arrested, convicted and sent to prison. However, in prison, they developed the connections and understanding they needed to pay their way to freedom. Within three to four months, each of them had paid and been released from prison.⁶⁹

Currently, large-scale heroin trafficking in Zanzibar is controlled by businessmen who are closely connected to politicians, or who in some cases have entered into politics themselves. Sources allege that

Stonetown, Zanzibar. According to interviewees, there is a well-organized system of police protection around the local drug market. © Alastair Nelson

If the funds are not returned in time, the friend's organs are taken out and sold on the transplant market.

three current MPs are involved in the drug trade in Zanzibar. The same sources contend that some businessmen made their money in the drug trade, and have bought legitimate businesses (e.g. in tourism, logistics and transport, manufacturing, communications, fuel supply and other sectors) to legitimize their financial status.⁷⁰ In some cases, these legitimate enterprises have grown into significant business empires.

It is a distinctive characteristic of the Zanzibari heroin market that there is a general lack of violence between major traffickers and their networks. This may hold for three key reasons. First, Zanzibar is considered to be a small place where traders and trading families have a long history of working together, or alongside each other, and resorting to violence could lead to social isolation. Second, the lack of violence helps to maintain the status quo where the police largely ignore major drug trafficking, and third, successful traffickers often branch into tourism (the most lucrative economic activity on the island) to launder their money and achieve legitimacy. Drug-related violence could threaten this industry.

There is also a phenomenon whereby entrepreneurial Zanzibaris with enough capital to travel abroad themselves become low-level traffickers (see the case study), and use heroin trade as a means of investment. Aspiring traffickers who don't have the capital for their first heroin purchase often travel to Pakistan with a friend whom they leave behind as a 'bond' until they return with payment. This is not merely a hostage situation. Before the drugs are given to the aspiring trafficker, a local doctor assesses and values the friend's organs, and drugs to this value are then supplied. If the funds are not returned in time, the friend's organs are taken out and sold on the transplant market.

Large-scale heroin trafficking to and through Zanzibar

Heroin (and hashish) arrives in Zanzibar in several ways. First, small boats are used to collect it from large seafaring dhows, which they meet offshore. These dhows travel from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan, bringing heroin from Afghanistan. They typically transport multiple shipments for delivery along the east coast of Africa.⁷¹ A recent Global Initiative (GI-TOC) survey of heroin available in local markets across Tanzania showed that the packaging used for heroin in Zanzibar is distinctly different from the packaging used elsewhere in Tanzania. This confirms that this market has its own supply and is distinct from the other local markets on the mainland.⁷²

Second, drugs may be concealed within containerized goods shipped from Pakistan and India to the main port in Zanzibar City. Large-scale traffickers may establish a general import-export business that brings multiple commodities in containers from India, allowing for heroin to be hidden in among the goods. Corrupt payments are made to allow the containers to be driven straight out of the port without inspection. The consignments are then driven into *godowns* (warehouses) belonging to the consignee. In some cases, these *godowns* have sophisticated security, including static cameras and visual surveillance.⁷³ These general importation businesses can also be used to import items duty-free to Zanzibar, and then smuggle these goods to mainland Tanzania – avoiding mainland duties and taxes.

The story of an entrepreneurial drug trafficker

As a young man, Salim* sought adventure and to make money, so in the mid-1980s he travelled overland from Zanzibar by ferry, truck, bus, foot and finally as a stowaway on a container ship, to get to Greece.⁷⁴ One of his co-travellers on the trip was Ali Khatib Haji Hassan, later nicknamed Shkuba, who gained notoriety in 2014 for his arrest and later extradition to the United States (US) as a major drug trafficker.⁷⁵ In Greece, Salim could not find work but was continually approached by local people wanting to buy drugs. So a career was born. After saving US\$3 000, he travelled to Peshawar in Pakistan and bought one kilogram of heroin from a Pakistani contact.

Acting as his own mule he travelled back to Zanzibar, where he sold half of the kilogram locally to tourists and rich Zanzibaris – leaving money for his family. He travelled back to Greece and sold the second half on the streets, where his return was higher. This allowed him to buy more heroin wholesale in Greece, and he stayed there for a year making money as a local drug dealer. Then he returned to Zanzibar.

In the mid-2000s, Salim had saved enough capital to enter the market again. This time he travelled to Brazil on the guidance of a friend whom he had met in Athens. He spent a month in São Paulo, getting to know the market and working out how to travel back to Greece. In Brazil, he bought 900 grams of white cocaine from a secure production facility in the forest, one day's drive from São Paulo. Then he travelled to Greece, once again acting as his own mule. He spent four months in Athens, during which time one of his old heroin contacts helped him find a buyer. He sold the cocaine for US\$30 000. He travelled back to Zanzibar with the money in his shoes.

Salim says his trafficking career never took off because of a lack of capital to make the initial purchases. He did go on to be a renowned drug 'packer' – a skill he first learned in Athens and then did part-time in Zanzibar for some of the major traffickers who use mules to transport drugs to the mainland and other countries. He is skilled at concealing drugs in Zanzibari crafts, rucksacks, shoulder bags, suitcases, shoes and other items of clothing, nappies and baby clothes.

** Not his real name.*

The union government appoints senior customs officers from the mainland to the port and airport, rotating them every two years. However, key local officials in the port maintain continuity. They allegedly also facilitate the corrupt payments required to maintain and protect the systems which allow for the goods of key traders to be released without inspection.⁷⁶

Some heroin shipments are also brought by mules travelling from Pakistan and India by air. Some of these mules are coordinated by the major traffickers, and others are individual traffickers who have raised the capital to travel, purchase and bring back drugs themselves (see the case study).⁷⁷

Securing supply lines of heroin naturally relies on traffickers establishing strong links to supply networks in India and Pakistan. To facilitate payments, some traffickers reportedly buy gold that is smuggled to Zanzibar from mainland Tanzania, then travel to Dubai with this gold (and sometimes with cash), sell the gold and keep the funds in Dubai bank accounts.

Large-scale traffickers also take steps to boost their local legitimacy. This includes supporting politicians, or entering politics directly, to legitimize their status and 'buy' protection through social capital. Others may reportedly buy or support a local soccer team as a mechanism to engender popularity and support (note the point made earlier in this report regarding the hesitancy of the police to conduct major investigations and provoke disturbance), as well as to meet and recruit young people who can be used as mules.

Connections between Zanzibar's heroin and cocaine markets

Heroin and cocaine trafficking in Zanzibar overlap significantly. Key cocaine traffickers identified to us are all involved in heroin trafficking as well, and many of the characteristics of the people involved and how they work are similar – as are their importing and exporting techniques.

Cocaine arrives in Zanzibar by the last two methods described above for heroin, i.e. in containers of goods (shipped from Brazil) and by mules who travel by aeroplane. According to one source, container shipments of Vespas coming from Brazil have included cocaine concealed in their tyres and fuel tanks.

Cocaine has been trafficked through Zanzibar since at least the mid-2000s.⁷⁸ At this time, there were already Zanzibari people in Brazil to support mules who travelled over from Zanzibar to bring back cocaine. Some of these facilitators then set themselves up as 'consultants' – providing advice and support to Zanzibari traffickers who were new to cocaine trafficking, and who needed help buying cocaine and choosing a route and means to move it to the interim destination, or to the final market.

Zanzibar as a transit point

While some heroin, hashish and cocaine remain in Zanzibar to serve the local market, most of these drugs are moved further. Significant quantities are smuggled

Wall paintings in a Zanzibari methadone clinic raise awareness of health dangers associated with drug use. Although Zanzibar is primarily a transit point for drugs, there is also a local market.

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Macomia, Cabo Delgado. Heroin destined for northern Mozambique's local markets is typically transported in trucks carrying goods to shops. © Emidio Josine/AFP via Getty Images

by small boats to Bagamoyo, just north of Dar es Salaam, where the supply is consolidated and then moved on.⁷⁹

Some heroin moves directly to Dar es Salaam, often couriered by people travelling on the ferry. This includes young children and young women with babies, as they are seldom searched.⁸⁰ From Dar es Salaam, quantities of heroin and hashish are packaged and distributed across local markets in Tanzania, northern Mozambique and the Comoros islands.

Heroin destined for northern Mozambique's local markets is typically transported in trucks carrying goods to shops across Cabo Delgado. These trucks depart from the Temeke-Sudani area in southern Dar es Salaam, travelling via the Negomano border crossing.⁸¹ Heroin is packaged on advance order, hidden in sugar and biscuits.⁸²

The route to Comoros uses a similar method via the weekly ferry that travels from Dar es Salaam to Moroni.⁸³ Shops order various items via a shipping

agent, and when prior orders for heroin and hashish are made, these consignments are packaged inside the goods. In some instances, a few kilograms have been hidden inside mattresses.⁸⁴

An unknown, but apparently significant, quantity of heroin and cocaine is moved internationally by drug mules. This route will, of course, be impacted by the travel restrictions and a reduction in commercial flying resulting from the spread of COVID-19.

The mules are often young women, sometimes with babies, who might be recruited believing that they will be travelling internationally for a work opportunity.⁸⁵ There are reports that some journeys to well-screened airports may have as many as 10 mules on a flight, so if a few get stopped the rest will get through as the airport's holding facilities for drug mules will be full.⁸⁶ The mules carry drugs to Europe and Asia, typically on airlines that travel via the United Arab Emirates. They also sometimes travel to South Africa, and onwards to the US or Europe.

Growing flows and new networks in northern Mozambique

On 16 December 2019, footage of a burning dhow and its captured crew brought alive the reality of the heroin-trafficking route from the Makran coast to northern Mozambique.⁸⁷ The dhow had been rigged such that in the event of attempted interdiction, it would spill fuel over the 1.5 tons of heroin it was carrying which could then be ignited. Three of the Iranian crew of 15 died, while the remaining 12 were rescued and arrested.⁸⁸

Ten days later, Mozambique announced a second seizure, this time successfully seizing the dhow and arresting the 12 Pakistani crew with what was initially reported as 434 kilograms of heroin.⁸⁹ Local sources say the seizure was in fact 300 kilograms of methamphetamines and around 150 kilograms of heroin, destined for Australia and Europe.⁹⁰ This spate of offshore seizures, as well as recent arrests of drug mules travelling from Mozambique,⁹¹ suggests that international counter-narcotics agencies are focusing on Mozambique's role in the drug-trafficking route to key markets in the US and Europe, and that they are supporting its national law-enforcement authorities to act.

Seaworthy dhows transport heroin from the Makran coast of Iran and Pakistan to sites in northern Mozambique as far south as Angoche. As in the Zanzibari market, shipments of heroin are often made up of various consignments, which are transported to shore by small boats that meet the dhows offshore at designated points. The consignments are then broken up. An increasing amount goes to local African markets,⁹² but most ends up being transported onwards to the US and European markets. Current understanding is that northern Mozambique is becoming more important in this route as law-enforcement capacity and action in Kenya and mainland Tanzania improve.⁹³

While northern Mozambique may currently be seeing a new spike in heroin shipments, its role in international drug flows is well established. Researchers have recorded that since at least the early 2000s, heroin and possibly cocaine from Brazil have been making their way to Mozambican ports in containers of goods, imported

Heroin dhow burning off the Cabo Delgado coast, December 2019.

Still taken from video circulated on social media shortly after the dhow was captured





by wealthy business people and traders who have strong connections to FRELIMO and local power brokers.⁹⁴

In Maputo, local businessman Mohamed Bashir Suleman (known as MBS), who was named as a 'drug kingpin' by the US administration in 2010, was alleged to have held sway over Maputo port at the time.⁹⁵ MBS has also enjoyed close political connections to the last three presidents of Mozambique and others in the ruling party.⁹⁶ Suleman denied the drugs allegations and has never been charged in Mozambique. Detailed investigations carried out by researchers in 2018 claimed that members of the Rassul and Moti families (who are alleged to fall under the MBS-linked cartel)⁹⁷ are leading players in this market in Nacala Port. Our own investigation has identified that there are long-standing traders who are involved in the import business and fulfil a similar role in Pemba.⁹⁸ It should be noted that none of these persons have ever faced charges in respect of narcotics trafficking.

Our investigation revealed that the entry of heroin and cocaine through Pemba port is seemingly still linked to one specific trader, who owns numerous businesses that rely on imported goods and allegedly maintain the corrupt networks needed to ensure that their containers are not properly searched, sources claim.⁹⁹ These sources also described the further movement of the narcotics, detailing how the drugs are moved out of the port by specific customs officers and then taken directly to a company warehouse.¹⁰⁰ Some of it then goes by road to Nampula and likely on to South Africa for further transport, another proportion apparently exits via the airport with drugs mules,¹⁰¹ and some is sold locally. Local distribution is done using trusted motorbike taxis.¹⁰²

Our fieldwork confirmed that both heroin and cocaine are still arriving in Pemba port hidden among goods in containers. There has reportedly been an increase in containerized goods arriving directly from Brazil since a trade agreement was signed

The port at Pemba is a key hub for heroin and cocaine, which arrive hidden among containerized goods.

© Field researcher #1

between Mozambique and Brazil in 2015, which has led to an increase in cocaine trafficking to Pemba. Good-quality cocaine is now available locally on the street in Pemba.¹⁰³

However, drug trafficking in northern Mozambique is going through major changes. New trafficking networks have emerged, likely in response to improved law-enforcement capacity further north on the East African coast, shifting a larger volume of trafficking further south. This tallies with previous research carried out in 2017–2018, which linked improved access to communications networks such as WhatsApp to an increase in drug-trafficking networks.¹⁰⁴

Our fieldwork also found evidence of other networks now engaged in the drug trade along the coast, using small boats to transport heroin and other substances from the dhows. Each network has become able to ensure its protection through corrupt links to lower-level officials, which differs from earlier networks that relied on higher-level corrupt links to ensure top-down control. Some of these newer networks are described below.

First is the so-called 'Galby group', a network that was led by Tanveer Ahmed (alias Galby), a Pakistani national reputedly of Seychellois origin. Ahmed was arrested with three others (a Kenyan national and two Tanzanian nationals) in Pemba in October 2018 with 34 kilograms of cocaine, around 2 kilograms of hashish and 10 passports.¹⁰⁵ Ahmed was finally extradited to the US in January 2020, where he is facing charges of drug trafficking. The Kenyan national and one Tanzanian national have been released, and as far as we could ascertain, have had the charges against them dropped. To the best of our understanding, the second Tanzanian national is apparently still in prison in Nampula. Interestingly, the Galby group is known for trafficking cocaine, heroin and hashish, all of which comes ashore in small boats from the dhows met offshore. It remains

New trafficking networks have emerged, likely in response to improved law-enforcement capacity further north.

unclear, as yet, how the cocaine is reaching the dhows. One working hypothesis is that it is being transported from Zanzibar.

A second newer player is the 'Zanzibar network'. A known trafficker who is involved in numerous illicit trades in Zanzibar, including heroin, ivory, human smuggling and gold from South Sudan, has also established a base of operations in Pemba. One of his trusted agents is based in Mozambique, where he is overseeing the construction of four houses on a compound near the new university. This compound is used to store goods (described as heroin and previously also ivory) and people who arrive in Pemba, before they are moved on to South Africa.¹⁰⁶

There has also been an increase in local heroin availability across northern Mozambique. This signals a growing local market, which seems to be associated with the influx of labour surrounding local resource finds. The large population of artisanal miners in Montepuez is one of the main markets for low-grade heroin in northern Mozambique. Heroin arriving here is controlled by Tanzanian trafficking networks. Once it arrives it is sold from one of two known shops (both are food takeaway businesses outside town) only to known dealers, who then sell it on to the miners. The dealers are mostly from Nigeria and other West African countries.¹⁰⁷

We conducted a heroin pricing survey in Montepuez and Pemba in January 2020, and found that three grades of heroin were available (prices given are for Montepuez):

1. Low-grade street quality, similar to what is available across Tanzania,¹⁰⁸ for MZN 200 per bag (US\$3),
2. Medium quality for MZN 500 per bag (US\$7.50), and
3. High quality in a larger size, for MZN 2 000 per bag (US\$30).

The low-grade heroin had the same packaging as heroin found on the local market in Tanzania, which tallies with the import route via the land border with Tanzania described above. The high-quality heroin was packaged quite differently and local sources said that it comes from Pemba.

Comoros: a crossroads for multiple drug flows

The remote geographic location of Comoros means that it does not currently play a major role in the transcontinental drug trade. Rather, the islands sit at a crossroads for what are currently minor drug routes flowing into and through the archipelago from multiple directions. There is a small local market for several drug types. The consumer base for synthetic cannabinoids, in particular, is growing rapidly and will likely have a major negative health impact in Comoros. However, weak governance and their distant location make the island nation vulnerable to exploitation by drug traffickers, and Comoros may be considered as a site of future risk.

There are three main drug markets in Comoros:

1. Cannabis and hashish, which are used recreationally by many people across the islands,
2. Heroin and cocaine, which are mostly used by wealthier people, so mostly restricted to Moroni, the Comoran capital but with minor consumption in other major centres, and
3. Synthetic cannabinoid (*chimique*), which first arrived via Anjouan in the east, but has now spread across all three main islands and is mostly used by young people.

The entrance and customs office at Mutsamudu, the main deep-water port in Comoros. © Alastair Nelson





The central mosque in Moroni, the capital of Comoros and the city with the country's largest local drug market.

© Alastair Nelson

Most of the heroin, cocaine and hashish in Comoros come via Zanzibar. Our sources connected to the drug trade in Zanzibar explained how some of these substances are acquired by secondary networks, which package small amounts to be taken to Comoros. Most of the drugs are then smuggled on the weekly ferry from Dar es Salaam, either concealed in bags or items of clothing, or sometimes – for slightly larger volumes of a few kilograms – hidden inside mattresses.¹⁰⁹

Heroin and hashish also arrive in Comoros via sailors who work on commercial vessels. Although the main deep-water port in Comoros is in Mutsamudu on the island of Anjouan, sailors drop most of their drugs at Moroni, which has a much smaller and shallower port. 'Agents' buy small quantities of drugs directly from the sailors – either meeting the ship in the port or, when they are moored offshore, travelling to the ships by small boats, usually with outboard engines (known in Comoros as *kwassa-kwassa*).¹¹⁰

As the national capital and home to the country's only international airport, Moroni hosts most of the economic activity in Comoros and is the site of the largest local market for most drugs.¹¹¹ Heroin, cocaine and hashish are mostly sold from a particular neighbourhood known colloquially as 'Majaju', which means 'full

of trash'. There is a small group of heroin users who rely on this area for their drug supply, and weekends see an increase in recreational use among the city's elite.¹¹²

Most cannabis (known locally as *bhang*) arrives in Comoros from Madagascar and Tanzania. From Madagascar, it is mostly brought over on small boats from the north-east. From Tanzania, cannabis mostly arrives in containers, often mixed in with foodstuff (e.g. in rice sacks). Some hashish arrives this way too.¹¹³ Cannabis is widely used by the local population of Comoros, with a small tube of cannabis reportedly selling for just over one dollar.¹¹⁴

Chimique is a synthetic cannabinoid that has arrived in Comoros from Mayotte. The drug reportedly originates from factories in China and can be bought on the internet. Synthetic cannabinoids are human-made, mind-altering chemicals designed to bind to the same receptors in the brain as THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), the active substance in cannabis. These chemicals bear no relationship to cannabis and their effects can be unpredictable. *Chimique* is reported to have arrived in Mayotte in 2012 to 2013, when it first appeared among teenagers and young adults.¹¹⁵ Its spread across the Comoros islands has been seen mainly in the same age group.

Chimique was first noticed in Comoros on the island of Anjouan in 2017 to 2018, arriving with passengers on the ferry from Mayotte.¹¹⁶ It spread quickly across Anjouan among teenagers and young adults, impacting negatively on classroom performance,¹¹⁷ leading to a major increase in local theft (bananas on the island increased in price as young people began to steal and sell them for *chimique* money); and also leading to associated domestic and social problems.¹¹⁸

Island life in Comoros means that people are closely connected, so local theft within communities strains social bonds. *Chimique* has now spread across all the Comoros islands. The drug reached Moroni in 2019, where it has been spreading among the same age cohort and is already having a negative impact on school productivity and family life.¹¹⁹

Even though numerous small groups are involved in the Comoros drug trade, there is little or no violence between them.¹²⁰ This is surprising as the groups involved come from quite different places, and many are not from Comoros originally. Drugs from mainland Africa are mostly brought by Tanzanian networks, with some involvement of other East Africans (such as Kenyans and Ugandans), while drugs from Mayotte are mostly brought by Comoran networks. The lack of violence may be a result of each Comoros island having a relatively small population. Everyone knows everyone, even foreigners who are based in Comoros, and the social pressure of this close-knit community reduces violence.

These strong social networks are, however, also known to hamper police operations to counter the sale and trafficking of drugs. When operations are planned, information is typically leaked in advance. Often only drugs are recovered, but no arrests made.¹²¹

When arrests are made, these are often newcomers from the mainland who have arrived to try to find space in the market to sell drugs themselves.¹²²



- ▲ *Chimique* – seized in 2019 by Anjouan customs in a raid on a known supply network extending from Mayotte to Mutsamudu.
© Harifa Abodo Nourdine

- ▶ Sealed evidence, *chimique*, seized in Anjouan.
© Alastair Nelson





WILDLIFE AND TIMBER TRAFFICKING IN THE TRIANGLE



Trafficking of wildlife, timber and other environmental products is a major economy along the Swahili coast. This is due to the wealth of natural resources both within the ‘triangle of vulnerability’, which forms the focus of this study, and in neighbouring locales – such as the unparalleled biodiversity of Madagascar.

Similar to what we see in drug-trafficking flows, the wildlife markets of Zanzibar, Comoros and northern Mozambique are inter-dependent. Criminal networks exploit discrepancies in legislation between different jurisdictions, as our fieldwork has found to be the case in Zanzibar in recent years. Likewise, pressure from law enforcement in one locale can lead to criminal networks being displaced elsewhere in the region. In this case, we have seen how ivory-trafficking networks operating between Zanzibar and Mozambique have proven to be adaptable. These networks were able to shift their operations out of the reach of Tanzanian law enforcement to operate with impunity in Mozambique for a number of years.

However, unlike drug flows (for which there is a level of domestic demand), the primary demand for wildlife products from this region is an external one, from China and Asia. As more evidence emerges about the role that wildlife trade may have played in the spread of the coronavirus to humans, and in particular that pangolins may have been a vector for the virus, China and Vietnam have imposed (at least temporarily) new restrictions on the trade in live animals. While emerging reports from West Africa have suggested that the demand for pangolins has declined significantly since the outbreak of the pandemic,¹²³ the longer-term implications for wildlife trade remain to be seen.

Zanzibar: a legislative loophole

Historically, Zanzibar was the principal centre for the ivory trade, which first started here in the 16th century. The trade reached a peak in the late 19th and early 20th century, when an estimated 75% of the entire world’s supply of ivory was shipped from the island.¹²⁴ Estimates of the volume of trade at this time range from

◀ Niassa National Reserve elephant memorial, Mariri Concession. Until recently, northern Mozambique was one of the epicentres of elephant poaching. © Alastair Nelson

8 000–30 000 tusks shipped per annum.¹²⁵ In 1970, the Tanzanian government declared that all ivory trade henceforth fell under state control, which immediately resulted in a black market underpinned by corruption.¹²⁶

In the modern day, Zanzibar has been a hub not only for ivory trafficking but also for other wildlife products and timber, including shark fins,¹²⁷ reptiles,¹²⁸ sea cucumbers,¹²⁹ and rosewood from Madagascar.¹³⁰

A fundamental challenge to stopping the trade of wildlife products through Zanzibar is a discrepancy in legislative and institutional arrangements between the island and the mainland. Mainland Tanzania treats wildlife crime as a serious crime under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, with serious sanctions and penalties, and resources given to investigating and prosecuting these crimes. However, wildlife protection, fisheries and other natural-resources management are non-union matters and mainland legislation does not apply. The relevant legislation in Zanzibar does not recognize the same seriousness of crime, and thus does not provide for the same sanctions and penalties.

Further, and very significantly, until April 2019 the relevant legislation in Zanzibar only applied to native species. Thus, the majority of species listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), including elephant, rhino and their products, were excluded. This made Zanzibar a very attractive hub for wildlife traffickers.

Revised CITES regulations to align Zanzibar's legislation with the mainland were drafted in 2018, signed on 27 March 2019 and published on 12 April 2019.¹³¹ This gives CITES-listed, non-native species the same protections under Zanzibari law as native species. However, differences still exist in recognition of the seriousness of the wildlife and timber crime. Institutionally, Zanzibar also lacks the capacity to implement the levels of enforcement to combat wildlife crime being seen in mainland Tanzania.¹³²

Shifting epicentres of ivory trade along the Swahili coast

Zanzibar maintained its role as a major centre for the illegal ivory trade until approximately 2016. The trade had become associated with Chinese syndicates who had initially set up base in Tanzania for other business, e.g. the Shuidong syndicate who were established sea cucumber traders in Zanzibar before diversifying into ivory. In 2016, they claimed that they had been smuggling ivory from Tanzania to China for more than 20 years and that Shuidong was the destination for 80% of all poached ivory illegally trafficked to China from Africa.¹³³ Law-enforcement pressure on the illegal ivory trade from the mainland forced the Shuidong syndicate to relocate their wildlife-trade operations to Pemba in northern Mozambique in 2016, and then to Nigeria in 2017–2018. Ultimately though, the syndicate has been largely disrupted by Chinese law-enforcement activity during 2018–19.¹³⁴

Similar to the Shuidong case above, our research found that a major Zanzibari ivory trafficker also moved his base of operations to Pemba, northern Mozambique, in about 2016. He is still linked to human smuggling and possibly gold smuggling in Zanzibar, but



From 2008 to 2018, Niassa National Reserve in Mozambique lost at least 72% of its elephant population to poaching.
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is no longer involved in the illegal wildlife trade. We attribute this to a general decline in ivory trafficking from East Africa as a result of concerted international law-enforcement operations targeting known trafficking networks, and to a spate of successful law-enforcement action in northern Mozambique that specifically targeted ivory traffickers.¹³⁵

Overall, our research did not detect any current ivory trade in Zanzibar. This is not because of increased risk to traders, but rather because it has become almost impossible to obtain ivory from the mainland – the perceived threat of moving ivory appears to be too high right now. This stems from a campaign by Tanzanian wildlife authorities, who are saturating the mainland with low-level informers in order to try and detect 50–75% of ivory being brought to local market.¹³⁶ This is in recognition of their inability to target some of the key high-level traffickers who enjoy political support, and thus they've aimed to starve the local market at a lower level.

Until recently, northern Mozambique was one of the epicentres of elephant poaching, illegal wildlife trade and illegal logging on the continent. In the 10 years from 2008 to 2018, Niassa National Reserve lost at least 72% of its 2008–2009 elephant population of 13 000–15 000 animals to poaching.¹³⁷ The ivory store in Lichinga, the capital of Niassa province, was raided in 2016 and 867 pieces of ivory weighing just over a ton were stolen, some turning up in seizures in Maputo and Cambodia the following year.¹³⁸ Investigations were also showing ongoing illegal export of restricted hardwood species from Pemba, facilitated by patronage and corruption.¹³⁹ By 2016, the ports of Pemba and Nacala had become the main exit ports on the East coast of Africa for ivory being shipped to Asia.¹⁴⁰

This was the result of the erosion of rule of law and the spread of corruption across northern Mozambique. The historical vulnerabilities described above formed the foundation for these developments, namely a weak state; political and economic



capture of trade and access to resources by wealthy or politically connected individuals – especially during the war and post-war years; a history of drug trafficking with key state support; and underlying inequity, insecure land rights, and distrust of authorities.

The movement of large quantities of ivory, which is fairly cumbersome to transport and hard to hide, into southern Tanzania from 2009–2014 and then to Pemba after 2014 will have significantly contributed to this spread of corruption across all tiers of government. For example, notorious Tanzanian Chupi Mateso, who appears to have operated in Mozambique with impunity for at least four years,¹⁴¹ had allegedly established numerous corrupt networks at district and provincial government level within the provinces of both Niassa and Cabo Delgado. According to one of our sources, he allegedly made numerous monthly payments to protect his business.¹⁴² The effect of this corruption was so pervasive that it took three years of investigation, by individuals who had separated themselves from their local units, to finally arrest him in July 2017. According to a well-placed government source, a decision was taken at the highest level of national law enforcement on the day of Mateso's arrest to charge him only with immigration offences and then deport him to Tanzania, where a conviction on ivory-trafficking charges was more likely.¹⁴³

Our fieldwork did not detect large-scale ivory trafficking through Pemba, which indicates that this picture has shifted again. This is reputedly due to a perception of a major focus on ivory trafficking by elements of Mozambican law enforcement that are incorruptible. This perception is largely based on Mateso's arrest and extradition, and follow-on arrests of lower-level traffickers in the months after his arrest.¹⁴⁴ We found that previously known small-scale traffickers are still holding small stockpiles of ivory in the field around Niassa Reserve, but are not yet prepared to sell them.¹⁴⁵ However, during the later part of our fieldwork in January 2020 there were unconfirmed reports that ivory from northern Mozambique was being touted for sale in neighbouring countries.¹⁴⁶

A diverse market for other wildlife products

Our research also investigated whether wildlife and timber products in general were being trafficked through the region, in addition to ivory. Again, legislative discrepancies between Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania are a salient factor.

In 2016, Tanzania suspended all trade in live animals for three years, which was extended indefinitely in 2019 pending revision of the law.¹⁴⁷ However, wildlife legislation and associated regulations and decrees are non-union matters, and thus this decree does not extend to Zanzibar. Zanzibar has explicitly chosen not to follow suit as they are looking to develop a local captive wildlife tourism industry, which will require the import (and sometimes export) of live animals.¹⁴⁸

In the 10 years (2006–2015) prior to this ban, Tanzania had exported 86 113 live animals to Asia, the most common species of which were leopard tortoises (20 089 exported).¹⁴⁹ The government of Tanzania estimated that it lost US\$10 million in revenues in the first two years of the ban, and the private traders estimated that they were losing tens of millions of dollars per annum.¹⁵⁰ The financial losses from the ban provide a strong incentive for the private traders to find ways to export live animals through Zanzibar.

The stage is set for private-sector traders to establish captive breeding facilities on Zanzibar and to start exporting live animals. There is limited CITES management capacity in Zanzibar. Coupled with a lack of capacity to monitor these centres, and an overall lack of capacity to tackle the illegal wildlife trade, this raises the risk of unscrupulous traders laundering wild-caught animals from the mainland through these facilities in Zanzibar. It also makes it easier for endangered species from other countries in the region (e.g. Madagascan tortoises) to be trafficked via Zanzibar under the guise of local species.

While we did not find any evidence of a major trade in the standard high-value wildlife and timber products (i.e. ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales, rosewood and local hardwoods), this is not to say that small volumes or irregular shipments of these products are not transiting Zanzibar. Further, we did not investigate deeply the trade in marine species, e.g. shark fins, seahorses or the branchial filaments from Mobulid rays. Thus, while we found no evidence of trafficking in these products, this does not mean that it does not exist – especially from remote sites around the island.

However, we did find evidence of trafficking of endangered species of tortoises from Madagascar (both ploughshare and radiated tortoises), as well as leopard tortoises from the mainland, due to the inconsistencies in the implementation of CITES regulations between Zanzibar and the mainland.

In August/September 2017, 16 critically endangered ploughshare tortoises were transferred by the government to a privately-owned wildlife petting centre on Zanzibar – Cheetah Rock. It is estimated that only about 440 to 770 of these

Tanzania suspended all trade in live animals, but the decree did not extend to Zanzibar.



Endangered species of tortoises from Madagascar (such as these ploughshare and radiated tortoises, seized in Malaysia) are trafficked via Zanzibar.

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tortoises remain in the wild. They were apparently seized from the illegal wildlife trade at Zanzibar airport and transferred to Cheetah Rock for safekeeping.

Thirteen of the 16 animals have markings on them, indicating that they had been released back into the wild from a captive-breeding programme in Madagascar. They are now on display to tourists, who visit Cheetah Rock for an entrance fee of US\$160 per person to interact with the animals kept there.

While the government of Madagascar would like the tortoises to be returned, the Zanzibar government is concerned that they may not be safe in the wild in Madagascar, and will allow them to be kept at Cheetah Rock for the time being.¹⁵¹

In 2018, 200 leopard tortoises were seized at Zanzibar airport. The tortoises were believed to have been collected on the mainland and brought to Zanzibar for export following the 2016 suspension of trade in live animals from the mainland. In 2019, 400 critically endangered radiated tortoises were seized at Zanzibar airport. They are being kept at a secure location in Zanzibar. The Zanzibari authorities have not decided whether these should be returned to Madagascar or not. As with the ploughshare tortoises, they are concerned that if the animals are returned, they may be stolen again.¹⁵²

In northern Mozambique, while ivory trafficking has declined under focused law-enforcement pressure, trade in other wildlife products continues. Our local sources



reported that lion teeth and claws are being trafficked through Pemba and that pangolins are available for sale – both live and scales, if ordered.¹⁵³ There is also evidence that people previously involved in trafficking both timber and ivory are now focused on other lucrative forms of wildlife trade. For example, a dubious contract has been granting sole rights for sea cucumber and crab exploitation in the Quirimbas National Park to a company owned by a Chinese individual who was allegedly previously implicated in illegal timber trafficking.¹⁵⁴

Pangolin for sale from a village in Niassa National Reserve. © SERNIC

The illegal wildlife trade in Comoros mainly focuses on endemic tortoises from Madagascar, mostly radiated tortoises.¹⁵⁵ This is an ancient trade, first recorded from the eighth or ninth century when tortoises from Madagascar were first brought to Comoros as a supply of meat.¹⁵⁶ More recently, Comoros has become one of the exit points for valuable Madagascan tortoises – shipped by boat from Madagascar to then exit by plane towards demand countries in Asia.¹⁵⁷ One of the largest single seizures of 1 014 radiated tortoises was made at the airport in Comoros in 2014,¹⁵⁸ while more recently, in 2018, 222 radiated tortoises were seized in Comoros and shortly thereafter returned to Madagascar.¹⁵⁹ Again in December 2018, a large consignment of radiated tortoises was seized in Comoros after likely arriving by boat from Madagascar.¹⁶⁰

Comoros is one of the countries (along with Reunion and Mayotte) mentioned by illicit rosewood traders from Madagascar where smaller ports can be used to transfer rosewood to other vessels, and then disguise its origin.¹⁶¹

A red motorcycle is parked on a cracked concrete surface in a narrow alleyway. The motorcycle is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing left. It has a red body with black accents and a black seat. The background features a weathered wall with peeling white paint and a red door. The door has some graffiti on it, including the number '219'. A concrete step leads up to the door. On the left, a yellow wall and a blue metal railing are visible. The ground is uneven and littered with some trash. The overall scene suggests a gritty, urban environment.

CRIMINAL MARKETS BEYOND DRUGS AND WILDLIFE



The drug and wildlife markets of the Swahili coast do not operate in a vacuum. As described above, the unique political economies of the three sites under study predispose them towards criminal exploitation and trafficking. Drugs and wildlife are therefore just two prominent examples of a broader spectrum of illicit trade in the region. Criminal networks across many markets exploit legislative and tax differences between jurisdictions, serve illicit demand for particular goods, and facilitate trans-regional smuggling routes across the Swahili coast.

In northern Mozambique, illicit trafficking was previously centralized around a few key commodities (e.g. heroin, timber and ivory), controlled by economically powerful traders with high-level support from the local political elite. There is evidence now that there are multiple networks and multiple markets, with a diversification of products being trafficked in each market. This expansion has driven growth in the low-level corruption needed to support these networks.

Our research found that local law-enforcement officials are aware of the expansion and diversification of illicit trafficking, but feel powerless to combat it. This includes law-enforcement officials who have previously played important roles in complex investigations. These individuals see themselves as watching from the sidelines as rule of law breaks down, which is also fuelling a sense of loss of government control in the area. This builds on an impression that central and provincial government has neglected northern Mozambique. Social services (infrastructure, education and health services) are perceived to be poor, and economic opportunities for youth are considered to be non-existent. Local economic opportunity is viewed as being captured by the elite, or by foreigners who are allowed access to the resources under corrupt systems.

Overall, the result is that people are aligning themselves along ethnic or religious lines, which provide some form of structure or protection against a system that is failing them. During our research in and around Pemba, numerous interviewees described ethnic and religious tensions within the city itself. Our sources linked these tensions

- ◀ A backstreet in Mutsamudu, where young people come to use *chimique*. Over the last four years, Comoros has seen a marked and concerning increase in the use of this synthetic cannabinoid. © Alastair Nelson

Discrepancies in tax regimes also shape smuggling routes between Comoros and Mayotte.

to the extremist violence in the area, as people who feel excluded for ethnic or religious reasons find common cause with the insurgent group. This affiliation is associated with the need for a new order that could address the pervasive corruption. It also links to a sentiment that government does not have the best interests of local people at heart, but rather protects the corrupt status quo.

Zanzibar is situated as a key point for the smuggling of many kinds of goods. Firstly, Zanzibar port is a free port, where no import duties or taxes are levied. This creates an opportunity for goods to be imported into Zanzibar and then smuggled to Dar es Salaam (Tanzania's economic centre and the closest port to Zanzibar) duty-free. Mainland Tanzanian companies are reported to set up branches in Zanzibar to import goods, which they then transfer to the mainland.¹⁶² Multiple sources reported that general import companies in Zanzibar offer small businesses and individuals the opportunity to put goods in containers, which they can then collect from Zanzibar. Sugar and rice, in particular, are alleged to be smuggled via Zanzibar into Tanzania in large quantities, undermining tax-revenue generation.¹⁶³

Zanzibar has historically been known as 'the spice island'. To this day, cloves remain its biggest export crop, and are bought by a state company for a fixed fee which is far below the price that can be earned on the free market in Kenya. Zanzibar was once the world's largest producer of cloves and had a near-monopoly on the trade. Clove production has nearly halved since independence in 1964, with tourism now the dominant economic activity on the islands. At independence, the Zanzibar State Trading Corporation was formed to buy all cloves from the farmers at a fixed price and to sell them on the open market. So important was this trade to the government that it imposed a mandatory death sentence in an effort to stop trafficking.¹⁶⁴ Clove smuggling continues to this day, with smugglers

buying cloves directly from the farmers for a higher price than the state company will pay, transporting them to Mombasa by boat and selling them on the open market.¹⁶⁵

Discrepancies in tax regimes and a demand for certain goods also shape smuggling routes between Comoros and Mayotte. The European Union (EU) border around Mayotte presents an opportunity for smuggling (from Comoros to Mayotte) goods that are banned, restricted or heavily taxed in the EU. A cigarette factory has been established on Anjouan, the Comoran island closest to Mayotte. Now cigarettes are also found, along with migrants, on the *kwassa-kwassa* making the dangerous voyage to Mayotte.¹⁶⁶ (It is not known if the cigarette manufacturer is in any way complicit in the illicit trade of its brand, or whether it bears knowledge of the smuggling activity.)

Stolen goods, such as vehicles, also make their way from France to Mayotte and then on to Comoros.¹⁶⁷ At a more local level, expensive smartphones are stolen in Mayotte and brought back to Comoros for a quick sale. New models of Samsung phones, for instance, can be bought in Domoni, on the east coast of Anjouan, for €50.¹⁶⁸

The illicit economies of this region are constantly evolving. The Ministry of Environment in Zanzibar, for example, is becoming concerned about the illicit trafficking of waste to Zanzibar. The ministry has noticed an increase in what is described as second-hand goods being imported to the island and then dumped, such as old tyres and worn-out vehicles. On the formal policy front, they also recently declined a licence for a planned plant that would produce electricity by burning waste. The plan included importing 200 000 tonnes of waste per year from the EU. They also recently declined a licence for another investor who wanted to establish an incinerator and a plastic recycling plant to separate and either burn or recycle imported plastic waste from the US.¹⁶⁹ The Ministry of Environment feels that they do not have the capacity to adequately monitor these threats and to prevent the surreptitious illegal importation of waste products.¹⁷⁰



Human smuggling: transit routes to South Africa and Mayotte

The Swahili coast lies on a human-smuggling route for migrants moving from the Horn of Africa to South Africa. People moving from Ethiopia and Somalia travel to Mombasa, then Shimoni on the border of Kenya and Tanzania, from where they are moved to Pemba Island, Tanzania. From Pemba they move to the main island in Zanzibar. Here they are put up for a while, and in many cases the migrants receive new papers at this point, which allow them to travel more easily, or even to fly directly to South Africa if they can afford it.¹⁷¹ Those who continue overland have two route options, either by bus from Tanzania to Zambia, or down the coast to northern Mozambique. On the coastal route, dhows from Kilwa in Tanzania move migrants to Mocímboa da Praia in Mozambique, from where they take buses south. These same dhows have also been used to transport other illicit products, including ivory and heroin.¹⁷²

The Zanzibar network (described earlier as one of the drug-trafficking groups working on northern Mozambique's coast) is also known to facilitate human smuggling, with a base in both Zanzibar and Pemba. They facilitate landings in Mocímboa da Praia and on the beaches near Pemba, typically on full-moon nights.

'Mayotte is Comoran, and will forever remain so.' There are significant social, economic and political differences between the Union of the Comoros and Mayotte, and these play out in patterns of illicit trafficking.

© Alastair Nelson

The human-smuggling route to Mayotte is still used by people who want to find work there – and in the hope of finding a way to Europe.


Mayotte is also a major destination for irregular migrants. France considers Mayotte to be French territory, and thus it is part of the EU. People from Comoros and further afield, including Madagascar, Rwanda, the DRC and the Republic of Congo were illegally entering Mayotte to make their way to France as refugees. However, since 2014, France has enacted a series of laws that have changed the status of migrants arriving in Mayotte, giving them fewer protections and no rights to French residency. Comorans now wanting to get to Europe take the Libyan route, and there are agents in Sudan and Libya who deal specifically with Comoran migrants.¹⁷³

However, the human-smuggling route to Mayotte is still used by people who want to find work there – and in the hope of finding a way to Europe. The *préfet* of Mayotte, supported by a study done in 2018,¹⁷⁴ estimates that up to half of Mayotte's current population of 270 000 may be foreigners. In the first seven months of 2019, some 15 000 people were deported – the overwhelming majority of them Comorans. However, many of these people turn around and head straight back to Mayotte, often arriving back within a week of having been deported.¹⁷⁵ People from Madagascar also arrive in Comoros by boat to make their way to Mayotte.¹⁷⁶

Tellingly though, there are reports of double the number of deaths on the small boats that cross between Anjouan and Mayotte (on the final leg of this human smuggling trip), versus deaths on the same boats when they cross similar straits between islands in Comoros.¹⁷⁷ A 2012 report by the French senate put the death toll of people crossing from Anjouan to Mayotte between 1995 and 2012, at between 7 000 and 10 000.¹⁷⁸ However, more recently Comoran officials have said that the true figure could be as high as 50 000.¹⁷⁹



AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE



Each of the apexes of the triangle of vulnerability is already facing some kind of political turbulence, violence or a decline in the rule of law. Future political turbulence and economic shocks will continue to affect (and be affected by) criminal networks. At the time of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic is sweeping the world and lockdown restrictions are being put in place across southern and East Africa. The effects of the pandemic will be difficult to predict, including the implications for organized crime. While some forms of trafficking may be curtailed by restrictions on travel, criminal groups may reposition themselves to take advantage of the confusion caused by the pandemic and bolster their local legitimacy – particularly where local governance is weak or considered illegitimate.

In Cabo Delgado, the immediate major challenge is from the ASWJ violent extremist insurgency, which is undermining local governance and rule of law by clearly standing up to the authority of the national defence and security forces. At the same time, there seems to be an increase and diversification of drug trafficking. Government appears to be trying to respond to this, as evidenced by arrests and seizures of heroin boats in December 2019. However, reports of links between ASWJ and drug traffickers are a major cause of concern. The extremist group seems to be taking advantage of the coronavirus crisis to launch major attacks and strengthen their position in Cabo Delgado by projecting a sense of power, invincibility and territorial control, and by distributing food to local people following their attacks. This will help them to bring in new recruits, while securing and holding territory will enable them to access finance and logistics. If reports of their links to the drug-trafficking networks that use the northern Cabo Delgado coast are true, these recent attacks may well be an attempt to secure a strategic location to strengthen this role and allow revenue generation.

- ◀ **Understanding the current vulnerabilities that link Zanzibar, Comoros and northern Mozambique may form a basis for anticipating the future patterns of trafficking in this region.** © Alastair Nelson

The Mozambican government seems powerless to address this threat right now. Not only is it overwhelmed by trying to contain the coronavirus and deal with the outbreak of violence in the centre of the country in the wake of RENAMO break-aways, but the government is also facing a crisis of leadership. Military leaders are seen as being compromised by involvement in corrupt activities, and rank-and-file FDS members are not keen to engage the militants.

Zanzibar has long held a key role in smuggling economies in the region. It remains a vulnerable location, particularly as the disputed elections left the island without a governing coalition. Powerful economic players are taking advantage of this, cementing the illicit economies and turning themselves into licit economic players – in some cases even taking on political positions.

In Comoros, the government is trying to establish control, but service delivery is weak and a bloated civil service means that it is unable to pay salaries across the whole country all year round and needs to rotate support. It is difficult to police all landing sites, and Comoros remains vulnerable to becoming an important drug-trafficking hub for moving multiple products to illicit markets in the region.

Our research on drug-trafficking markets, wildlife crime and other forms of smuggling, shows that Zanzibar, Comoros and northern Mozambique are linked by trafficking routes and criminal networks that operate across borders. The historical factors that gave rise to their modern political economies make these societies vulnerable to corruption and exploitation by criminal groups.

Going forward, the COVID-19 pandemic casts an uncertain future, and may exacerbate the problems of this already-volatile region. The pandemic will shape global economies and reshape the role of governments in enforcing social-distancing restrictions, often through the use of police and security forces to ensure compliance. Vulnerabilities to corruption, illicit trafficking, and state abuse may become fault lines that widen under the stress placed on states and societies. Understanding and monitoring the current vulnerabilities between Zanzibar, Comoros and northern Mozambique may, therefore, form a basis for anticipating the future patterns of trafficking in this region.

Criminal groups may reposition themselves to take advantage of the confusion caused by the pandemic and bolster their local legitimacy.

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This material has been funded by UK Aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.