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WEST AFRICA'S COCAINE CORRIDOR

Building a subregional response

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APRIL 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This policy brief draws on the GI-TOC's longstanding presence in Guinea-Bissau and across the region, working with civil society to provide new data and contextualise trends related to organized-crime networks, illicit trade and state responses to them. Thank you to all stakeholders who contributed their time and insight in the research behind this brief.

NOTE

This report was corrected on 22 July 2022. The quantity of the cocaine seized by Gambian authorities in 2019 in a container imported by the Laura Food Company was included in Figure 1, and Figure 2. It was incorrect that this quantity was not known – as previously stated. Further, Banta Keita was not a resident of Dakar.

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Cover: Imagebroker/Alamy
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SUMMARY

Record-breaking cocaine seizures between 2019 and January 2021 in West Africa indicate a boom in cocaine trafficking in the region. These incidents also position Guinea-Bissau, and its neighbouring vulnerable littoral states, at the heart of the region's drug-trafficking activities.¹ The coastal countries stretching from Senegal, through Gambia and Guinea-Bissau to Guinea are once again operating as a major corridor for Latin American cocaine flowing through West Africa en route to end markets in Europe – following a lull in this route, or at least a period of diminished visibility. Cocaine production in Latin America has now reached unprecedented levels, and demand in Europe has simultaneously surged. The seizures over the last two years suggest that the volumes trafficked through West Africa exceed any in the region's history.²

Traffickers import cocaine into West Africa through multiple maritime entry points, both in the coastline stretching between Senegal and Guinea, and further south, with Cote D'Ivoire playing a prominent role since 2019.

This brief focusses on the corridor between Senegal and Guinea, and the geopolitical characteristics underpinning cocaine trafficking in this sub-region.

The structures underpinning the import, storage and onward trafficking of cocaine through this corridor are best understood as a criminal ecosystem composed of a number of closely interlinked hubs, transit points and crime zones (referred to here as the 'coastal ecosystem').³ The socio-political and infrastructure characteristics of each shape their vulnerability to exploitation by criminal networks. Mapping these illicit hubs and understanding their role in facilitating trafficking activities through the cocaine corridor enhances the understanding of the subregional cocaine economy, of the interlinkages between the various hubs and actors in the illicit market, and it informs the cross-border subregional response required to address the problem.⁴ This brief examines this coastal ecosystem, using data from recent seizures to highlight how criminal networks leverage its geopolitical characteristics in their operations.



INTRODUCTION: THE COCAINE CORRIDOR

▲ The port at Dakar is one of the key transit points in the West African drug trafficking 'coastal ecosystem'. © Georges Gobet/ AFP via Getty Images

The West African coastal ecosystem of drug trafficking began to attract attention in 2007 as significant volumes of cocaine were observed transiting the region from Latin American source countries. Domestic consumption ballooned in the region as a consequence, and drug profits compromised the integrity of rent-seeking governments and institutions in the region. From a political-economy – and societal – perspective, cocaine trafficking would prove a major destabilizer in the region and across the transport corridors of the Sahelian-Saharan countries lying along the route to market.⁵

Later, a decline in seizures from 2008 and a near drought in seizures between 2013 and 2019 were seen as evidence the region was playing a diminishing role as a trans-shipment point in global cocaine trafficking routes. Huge seizures in 2019 put paid to this theory, and point to a dramatic and seemingly sustained surge in trafficking (see Figure 2); indeed, their scale suggests that some flows had continued to transit the region during the decline years, as one-off consignments of such scale are highly unlikely. In scrutinising the structures underpinning the trafficking of cocaine through the region, this brief focusses on the coastal corridor stretching between Senegal and Guinea (referred to here as the 'coastal ecosystem').

Trafficking and instability have a recognized positive correlation in the region. The recent upsurge detected since early 2019 therefore threatens once again to send shockwaves of instability through the states of this coastal ecosystem, reaching the critically vulnerable Sahel-Sahara.⁶ A better understanding of the coastal ecosystem is urgently required to shape effective and efficient responses.

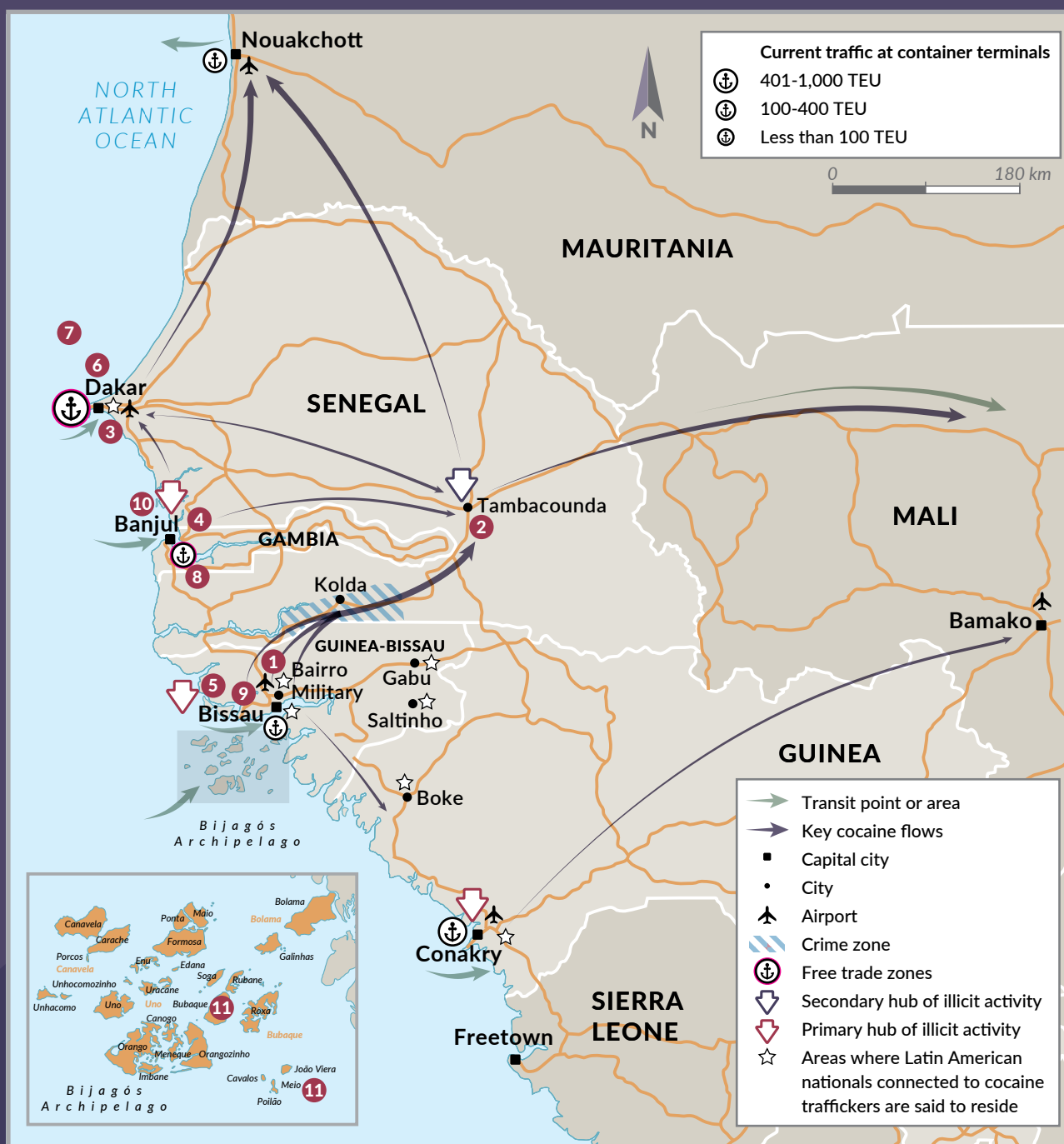
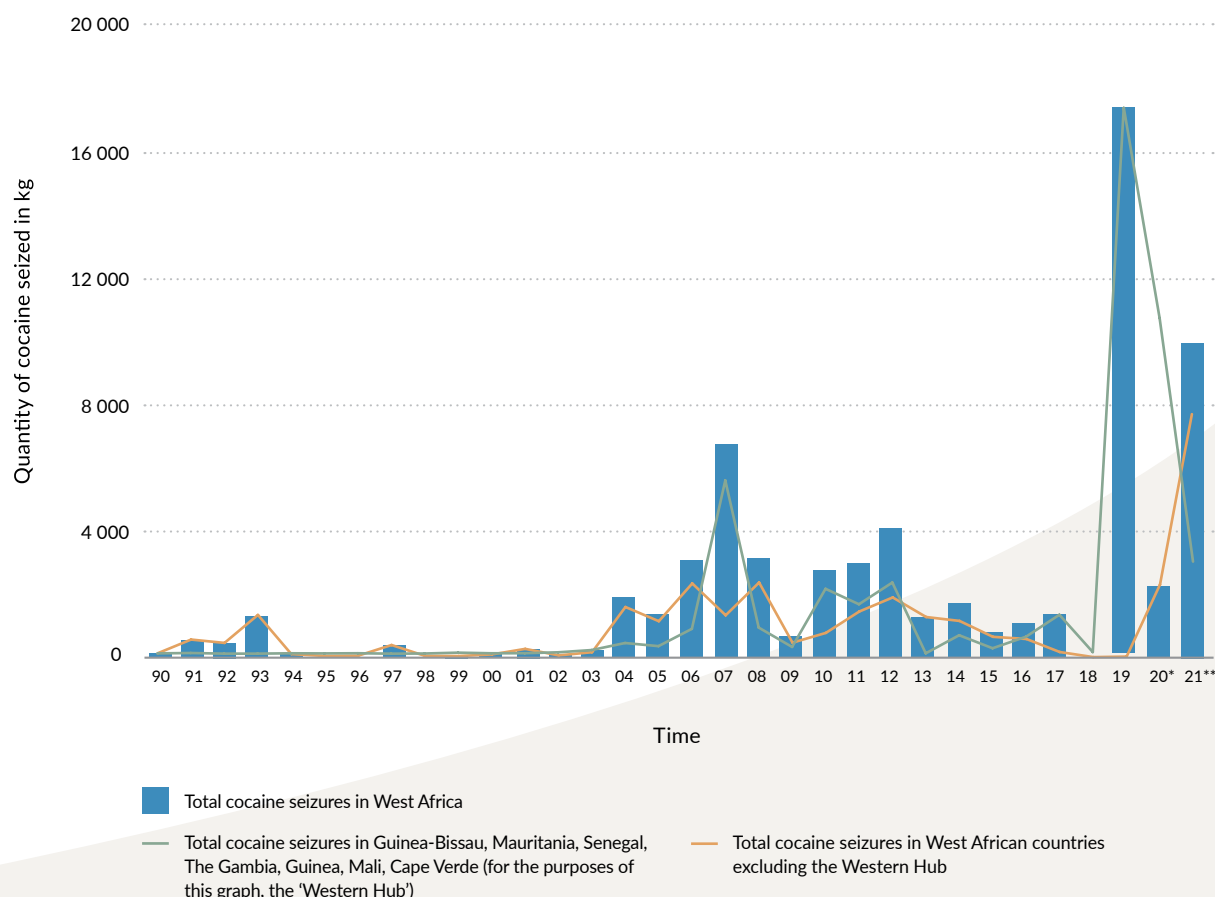


FIGURE 1 Hubs, transit points and crime zones in the coastal ecosystem, showing key cocaine seizures, 2019–2021.

This brief looks at the core characteristics of illicit hubs and ecosystems, and scrutinises the coastal coastal ecosystem. It is important, however, to recognize that changes in seizure patterns do not necessarily indicate changes in trafficking trends, and are rather often indications of the prerogatives and efficacy of law enforcement efficacy. They can nonetheless provide some insight into underlying trends. This brief draws on seizure data in the analysis, but it complements it with additional investigations conducted into networks behind the seizures, together with ongoing monitoring and data collection in the region.



* One additional 2020 seizure reported in Senegal is not included in this graph. The seizure was reported as 17 tonnes, however it has not been possible to verify this quantity, and the size of the seizure remains unconfirmed.

** Data for January to March 2021 only.

FIGURE 2 Cocaine seizures in the West African coastal ecosystem, 1990–2021.

Note: The coastal ecosystem includes Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Mali. Data from Cape Verde is included alongside these countries because, although it falls beyond the scope of analysis in this brief, it is closely interlinked and positioned off the coastal region under scrutiny.

Sources: Data collated by GI-TOC, including from UNODC Annual Reports Questionnaire and UNODC Individual Drug Seizure database (IDS); this has been supplemented with data from other UNODC sources, including regional UNODC field offices and the WENDU Report (2019), published by the UNODC in partnership with ECOWAS and the EU. Where major cocaine seizures have taken place that are not reflected in UNODC data, the dataset has been complemented by media publications and peer-reviewed papers in academic journals.



▲
A view of an island in the Bijagos Archipelago. Guinea-Bissau is a key node in West Africa's cocaine transit corridor. © Anton Ivanov/Shutterstock

AN ILLICIT COASTAL ECOSYSTEM

The coastal ecosystem, with Guinea-Bissau geographically and strategically at centre stage, displays the characteristics recognized to favour the development of hubs of illicit activity.⁷ Although the focus of this brief is the cocaine economy, the hubs, transit points and crime zones of this ecosystem are areas experiencing high levels of polycriminality.⁸

The infrastructure of mobility

Underpinning the drug-trafficking activities of this West African coastal ecosystem is a transport infrastructure that connects the region to areas of cocaine production and consumption; it also links the hubs within the ecosystem. Each of the primary hubs in the ecosystem benefits from an international airport, a seaport with a container terminal and regional road networks.⁹

Although illicit hubs can generally be rural or urban, within this coastal ecosystem each hub is a city.¹⁰ Cities often operate as key hubs for both licit and illicit business because they are situated on trade corridors, and particularly at locations where goods are trans-shipped from one mode of transport to another.

The vast proportion of global trade moves through seaports, making port cities pivotal to both international commerce *and* illicit trade. The spate of cocaine seizures in ports in the coastal ecosystem between 2019 and 2021 underscores this parallel dynamic of deviant globalization.¹¹

Capital infrastructure projects across the continent have focused on enhancing throughput at ports as a key way of driving economic development.¹² As the volumes of trade in the coastal ecosystem grows, the opportunity this provides criminal networks increases in tandem.¹³ Container traffic is particularly vulnerable to co-option by criminal networks, as the huge volumes now transiting through any given port make comprehensive screening impracticable. Port authorities in Africa and Europe have an average capacity to physically screen less than 2% of containers moving through their ports.¹⁴ The seizures made in containers are thus overwhelmingly intelligence-led. For example, in the January 2021 seizure of cocaine in a container at Banjul, Gambian authorities noted that it was only because of 'credible intelligence' that they searched the containers and found 118 bags of cocaine concealed among a cargo of industrial salt.¹⁵

However, the likelihood of illicit cargo being intercepted through intelligence is diminished as a result of corruption, which is widespread in the port authorities of the coastal ecosystem (this is explored further below).¹⁶ And posing yet a further challenge to surveillance is the fact that the ports in Banjul and Dakar are part of free trade zones, which have the regulatory effect of reducing oversight of trade and trafficking, creating surveillance gaps and facilitating money laundering.¹⁷ This combination of efficient international connectivity and poor governance makes these seaports pivotal to cocaine trafficking through the coastal ecosystem.

The increasingly well-connected international airports in the ecosystem (particularly Dakar, which has a fast-growing airport)¹⁸ also create opportunities for trafficking (albeit in smaller volumes)¹⁹ and enhance intercontinental connectivity for criminal players. The latter is particularly important to the Latin American traffickers, which are key actors in the coastal ecosystem (discussed below).

Finally, the road network is crucial to moving cocaine between hubs in the ecosystem, and beyond to end markets. Two main overland routes are used for transporting Latin American cocaine that is offloaded at entry points on the coastal ecosystem (as well as at entry points further south along the coast). The first is through Mali (passing either through the southern border with Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, or the north-west border with Mauritania), before reaching northern Niger and southern Libya on its way towards end markets. In the second, increasingly popular, route, which traces the coast, cocaine is moved from Guinea-Bissau through Senegal and on to Mauritania, from where fishing boats are used to take the commodity to Europe.



Traffic waits at the Senegal-Guinea-Bissau border. The road network is used to transport illicit goods between hubs in the ecosystem.

The road infrastructure dictates the creation of a secondary ‘spoke’ town in the ecosystem: Tambacounda, the largest city in eastern Senegal, which lies close to Gambia (see Figure 1). Tambacounda is at the crossroads for key trunk roads connecting Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Mali, and offers connections north to Mauritania. The route via Tambacounda is key to cocaine trafficking flows, as evidenced by numerous smaller seizures, including a 72-kilogram haul in April 2019.²⁰ One Senegalese customs official, who has worked extensively on this route, said that he had personally been involved in 24 seizures of cocaine on the same route in 2018, of which the largest was 6 kilograms.²¹ Seizures of hemp,²² and the prevalence of brokers in the human smuggling industry in Tambacounda point to polycriminality, with actors leveraging the opportunities presented by the city’s position at the interface between coastal and interior ecosystems.²³

The infrastructure of these hubs also offers connectivity through telecommunications. Furthermore, the cities enable criminal networks to cross the blurry divide between licit and illicit markets, laundering illicit funds through banks and legal businesses, and exploiting the services provided by lawyers and logistics companies to move commodities and manage operations. These cities offer concealment, as illicit operations can undetectably blend into legal business as drug profits are injected into the formal economy. Real estate is one of the preferred methods of laundering money, and cash from the drug trade has reportedly driven a spate of construction in Bissau and Dakar, including palatial residential homes and other buildings.²⁴

Characteristics of illicit hubs and criminal ecosystems

Although the terminology surrounding ‘illicit hubs’ is dynamic,²⁵ there is greater consensus regarding the characteristics that influence where hubs, and the interconnecting transit areas and crime zones, are created. The term ‘criminal ecosystem’ is used to refer to a tightly interwoven set of illicit hubs.

Although a large number of geopolitical and socio-economic characteristics have been identified to be favourable to the development of hubs, the most critical fall into the following four categories.²⁶

1. Underpinning the connectivity integral to these nodes connecting global illicit flows is the infrastructure of mobility, namely roads, seaports and airports. This infrastructure connects the local to the regional space, and beyond it to the international, connecting criminal networks to international supply chains and marketplaces, and facilitating connections between groups.
2. An informal economy is crucial to the development of illicit hubs, while intersections with formal financial systems are desirable. Overwhelmingly cash-based, the informal economy facilitates the laundering of the proceeds from the illicit economy. Where an informal economy exists alongside licit business, it can provide an entry point for black money to be injected into the formal financial system.²⁷
3. Hubs commonly develop in or near spaces of contested sovereignty, which creates opportunities for informal regulatory frameworks

and criminal governance. This includes border areas, geopolitically liminal spaces typically characterized by lower levels of state control.²⁸ In addition to patchy governance, borderlands also offer practical advantages for criminal networks. This is particularly the case when those borders are porous. At the same time as lowering barriers for criminal actors, border porosity creates jurisdictional challenges in pursuing criminality and hampers law enforcement.²⁹ Corruption (which falls into the fourth category below) exacerbates these criminal advantages and legal challenges. Corruption facilitates irregular cross-border movement of people and commodities, and often stymies cross-border law enforcement cooperation.³⁰

4. Hubs typically emerge in areas where the rule of law is weak, but not entirely absent.³¹ Corruption, which greases the wheels of the illicit economy, flourishes in areas of weak governance, facilitating protection economies.³² However, as detailed in point 1 above, criminal networks need reliable infrastructure to operate. In the case of highly unstable or failed states, infrastructure is compromised, threatening operations. For example, in the context of the drugs trade, the potential loss of a consignment to bandits or armed groups – types of groups commonly found in failed states – presents an unacceptable risk to profits.

Strategic redundancies and diversified trafficking routes

The spate of seizures since 2019 in the region points to numerous entry points and routes being used in cocaine trafficking operations. This is likely in part to be the case because a range of actors coordinate the imports, but it also points to networks adopting different import routes.

This ability to switch between interlinked hubs (also a characteristic of the coastal ecosystem in the mid-2000s), builds in redundancies to the cocaine supply chain, enabling traffickers to adapt to socio-political or law enforcement developments.³³

Two incidents in the ecosystem's history highlight how trafficking networks have leveraged these redundancies to adapt first to a socio-political change (more specifically shifts in protection structures), and, secondly, to law enforcement pressure. They also partly explain why Guinea-Bissau is not used more exclusively as an entry point, despite the favourable conditions afforded by its chronically weak institutions.

Firstly, in 2007, the Bissau-Guinean military are reported to have started stealing drugs from the Latin American cartels. The latter were able to quickly shift operations into

neighbouring states, moving their base, and indeed their numerous cars, from Bissau to Conakry.³⁴ This incident, and the propensity to theft among the military it reveals, also illustrates a further driver for avoiding over-reliance on Guinea-Bissau, which would risk granting the military, now having proved themselves to be unreliable partners, significant control of the trade. Notably, since then, the military's tactics remain unchanged: between late 2020 and January 2021, the military is reported to have stolen part of a cocaine consignment from a new Bissau-Guinean operator, which they had already been paid to protect.³⁵

Secondly, the surge in cocaine flowing through Guinea in 2013 points to further displacement from Guinea-Bissau in the wake of the US DEA's 2013 sting operation, which spooked operators.³⁶

These diversified dynamics should be perceived as part of a concerted strategy to diminish law enforcement success, and are a function of the inherent tensions in the relationships between criminal actors and protection structures. Networks will switch routes when tensions escalate and their trade is threatened.

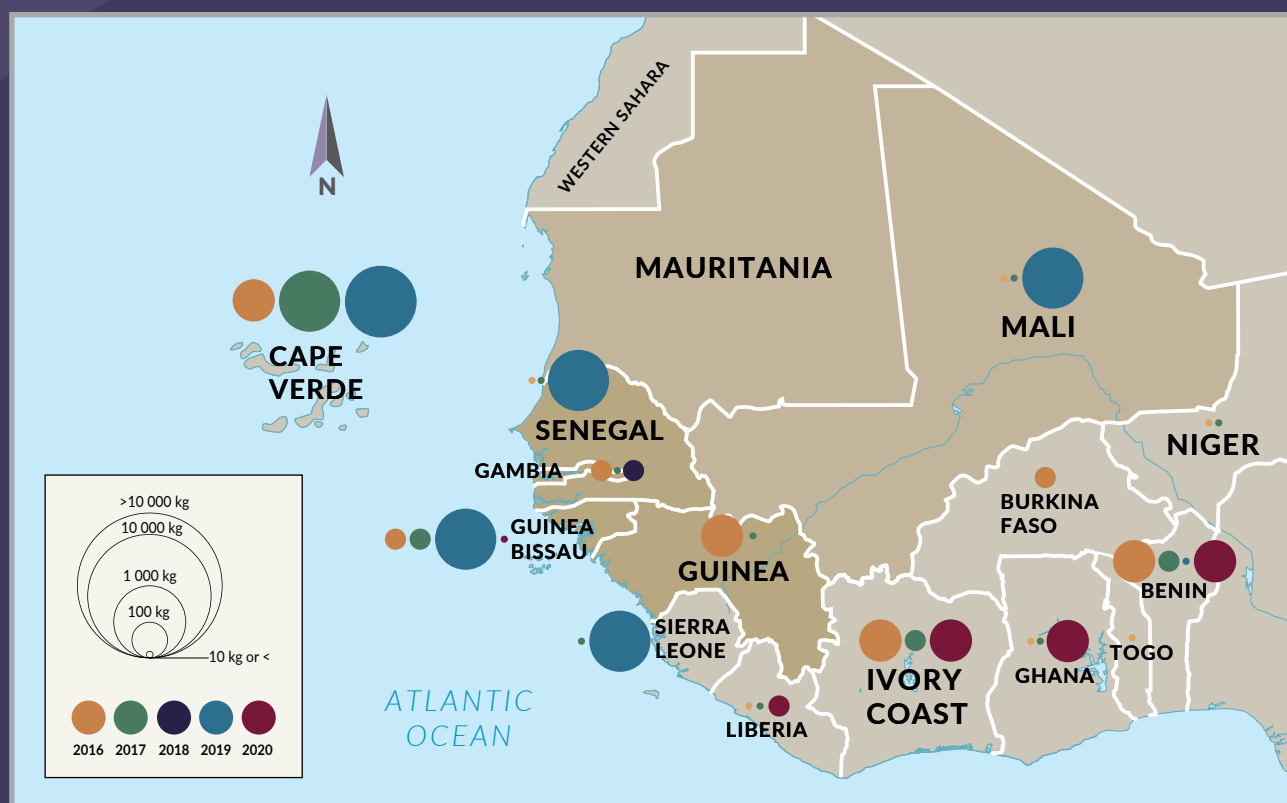


FIGURE 3 Cocaine seizures in West Africa, 2016–2020.

Borderlands and contested space

The coastal ecosystem contains a dense convergence of borderlands. Freedom of cross-border movement in the region permitted to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) citizens has had the side effect of benefiting criminal actors too, while the challenges this presents to law enforcement and legal pursuit remain.³⁷ Criminal actors take easy advantage of the permissive regional border regulations – to relocate when the risk of being interdicted threatens in one hub, and to readily transport cocaine between hubs and to end markets.³⁸

The contested governance of the Casamance region, lying between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, brings into sharp focus the key role of borderlands in this ecosystem. Bisected by the main trafficking route from Guinea-Bissau to Tambacounda, the region is a convenient buffer zone between the cocaine entry point, storage and 'safe haven' functions of Guinea-Bissau and the other hubs in the coastal ecosystem (particularly Mali).³⁹ The March 2019 seizure of 789 kilograms of cocaine in Guinea-Bissau was made near Safim, a town 15 kilometres from Bissau. Safim lies on the road leading north to the border with Senegal; this consignment was most likely headed for Mali, and then onwards to Mauritania.⁴⁰ The route to Mali would most likely have been the main road through the Casamance region to Tambacounda.⁴¹

The people of the Casamance region, of a different ethnicity from the majority of Senegalese, have long felt marginalized within Senegal.⁴² This has spurred a separatist movement, and the region has been in a state of low-level insurgency since the mid-1980s. An uneasy truce was broken in January 2021 when fighting between Senegalese forces and Casamance rebels flared up once again.⁴³

In the absence of proper state oversight of the region, Casamance has become notorious for the unrestricted movement of not only cocaine, but a range of other illicit commodities, including arms, illegal timber and other drugs. It is also a source region for migrants heading to Libya and Europe, and for migrants in transit from neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Gambia.⁴⁴

Finally, the maritime borders of the coastal hubs are crucial in their role as entry points for cocaine, not only as a result of poor port governance, as discussed above, but also as a result of the topography, with an array of informal entry points peppering the region's coastline. Guinea-Bissau's Bijagos Archipelago provided a naturally concealed landing point for cocaine that was seized in March and September 2019.⁴⁵

Governance and rule of law

The countries in the coastal ecosystem cluster towards the bottom of the Fragile States Index 2020. However, none falls within the two most fragile categories (failed states and rampant insecurity).⁴⁶ This degree of country fragility is an environment that is optimum for illicit governance structures: these are institutionally weak states but retain sufficient stability to facilitate successful business operations.⁴⁷

Governance and illicit markets co-exist in an uneasy balance: weak governance allows criminal markets to develop, which, in turn, generates instability. However, excessive instability makes the hub less attractive to illicit operators, driving displacement elsewhere.⁴⁸ Antonio Mazzitelli, head of the UNODC programmes in West Africa, argues that by 2008 cocaine trafficking had driven too much instability in the coastal states, leading to the virtual disappearance of seizures in West Africa.⁴⁹ While this conclusion is hard to evidence, data from the Fragile States Index between 2006 and 2020 does point to an overall increase in instability between 2008 and around 2017, after which each of the ecosystem countries started becoming more stable – tallying with the 2019 resurgence in seizures. (The data does not however track a clear decrease in fragility between 2008 and 2020).

The hub states share, to differing degrees, governance characteristics repeatedly identified to be favourable to the emergence of illicit hubs – namely, concentrated power, resources in very few hands, no oversight and no separate functioning judiciary.⁵⁰ In these hubs, the role of the politico-military elite, offering protection in exchange for rents, stretches back to the roots of the regional cocaine bulk transit trade in the early 2000s.⁵¹

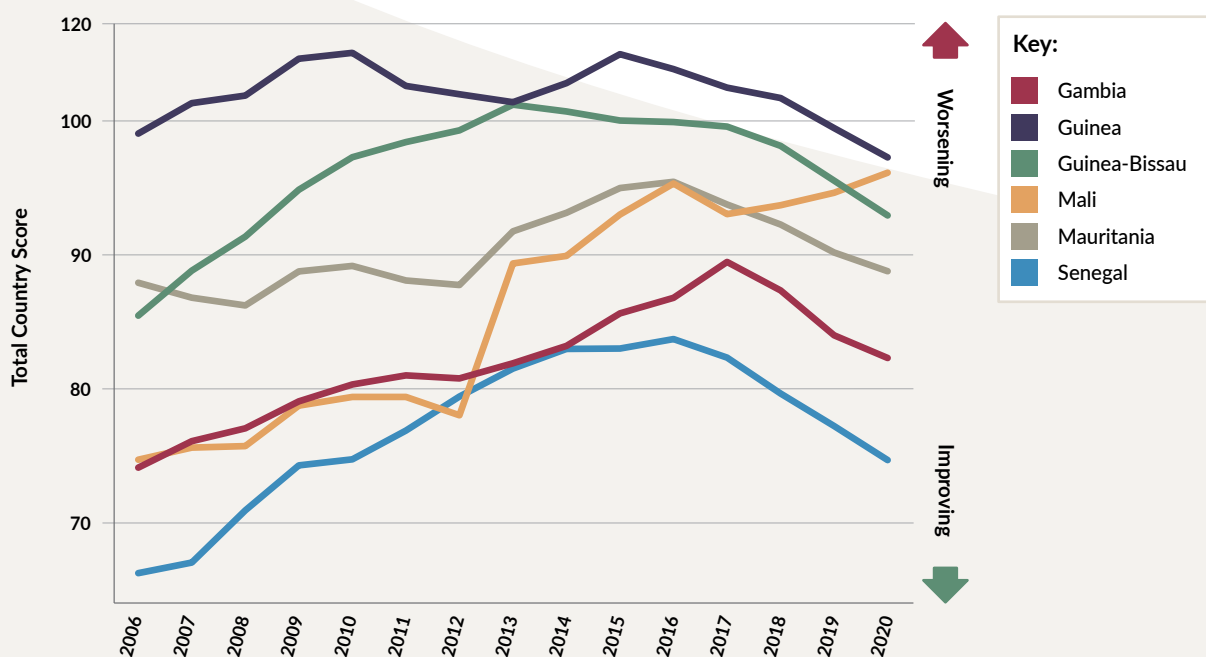


FIGURE 4 Instability trends in the countries of the coastal ecosystem, 2006–2020.

Source: Fragile States Index 2020

These protection structures have demonstrated remarkable resilience, despite regime change, political upheaval and a number of military coups.⁵² Many key players in the protection structures of the hubs in the coastal ecosystem have either remained in power through much of this period,⁵³ or are cyclically reshuffled, becoming invisible for periods of time before returning to the spotlight. In an example of the latter, the February 2020 seizure of power by President Embaló in Guinea-Bissau appears to have once again emboldened a number of prominent military figures who had retreated into the background of Bissau politics, and who have previously been closely associated with the drugs trade, including individuals on international sanctions lists.⁵⁴

While elite protection structures are highly localized, shaped by the geographic influence of key players in each state, they have also been closely interlinked. For example, political connections between President Vieira of Guinea-Bissau and Guinea's President Conté during the emergence of the regional cocaine economy were critical in the development of the localized cocaine trade, with significant levels of cross-border movement of traffickers between the two Guineas.⁵⁵

The role of certain criminal entrepreneurs in engendering protection across a number of different hubs underscores this connectivity. For example, several sources indicate that Braima Seidi Bá – a politically connected businessman and Bissauan

cocaine trafficker – connected the Latin American cocaine traffickers and Conté, pointing to cross-border links in hub protection structures (the role of Seidi Bá is explored further below).⁵⁶

The state institutions of each hub in the coastal ecosystem offer a degree of protection to the cocaine trade. Guinea-Bissau, whose institutions are chronically weak and have long depended on rents from the cocaine trade, appears to operate as a safe haven – both for stock (cocaine is stored in the country before being shipped on in smaller amounts)⁵⁷ and for criminal actors who are seemingly able to evade detention in the country following a seizure. Most recently, Banta Keita, believed to be a key figure behind the January 2021 three-tonne seizure in Banjul, is reported by some commentators to have fled to Guinea-Bissau, although others indicate Senegal, and Keita's exact whereabouts remain unknown.⁵⁸

Such high-level protection arrangements are clearly essential to the functioning of the coastal ecosystem's drug economy. Meanwhile, petty corruption, including among border staff, customs authorities and the police, also plays a role in the illicit hubs and transit points. The two are linked: the low salaries paid to law enforcement and customs officials increase their vulnerability to bribery; they are also a result of resourcing shortfalls – shortfalls that are in part due to the policies of the elite, who divert resources through patronage networks and limit spending on public services.⁵⁹

Dakar Airport. The connectivity provided by international airports in the region is important to Latin American traffickers. © Seyllou/AFP via Getty Images





▲ Cocaine is destroyed by the authorities in Bissau, September 2019.

PLAYERS IN THE COASTAL ECOSYSTEM

Spaces operate as illicit hubs if their favourable characteristics can be exploited by criminal actors. Two sets of players have since the mid-2000s taken advantage of the conditions presented by the hubs of the coastal ecosystem: the Latin American traffickers, who connect cocaine production points to these transit points, and the regional criminal entrepreneurs who control much of the trade, and operate as intermediaries between the Latin Americans and local protection structures. The third point in the triangle of key players behind the cocaine economy of the coastal ecosystem is the politico-military elite, who provide protection for the other two groups, ensuring the trade is not disrupted.

The two large 2019 seizures in Guinea-Bissau – 789 kilograms in March and over 1 800 kilograms in September (the latter being the largest in the country's history) – provide insight into how these key players operate between hubs in the ecosystem.⁶⁰ They also underscore the ongoing importance of one criminal entrepreneur: Braima Seidi Bá, one of the country's most long-standing cocaine traffickers. Seidi Bá rose to prominence in the mid-2000s as the military's grip on the trade fragmented,⁶¹ and returned centre stage in 2019. Believed to be behind the March 2019 operation, Bá was convicted by Bissauan courts of coordinating the operation leading to the September 2019 seizure.⁶² The regional links highlighted in the wake of the March 2019 seizure are shown in Figure 5.⁶³

Additional arrests (and further investigations) following the two seizures revealed networks of individuals spanning four hubs in the coastal ecosystem (Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Guinea), a set of actors in Niger, who appear to have been linked to regional protection structures, and a group of Latin American traffickers.⁶⁴

All of these groups move readily between hubs in the coastal ecosystem. For example, the Latin American traffickers linked to the March 2019 consignment had a presence in both Dakar and Bissau at the time, in line with the practices of Latin American traffickers since they first came to prominence in West Africa in the early 2000s.⁶⁵ (In the wake of the March seizure, the Latin American traffickers in Dakar, and two of the four in Bissau, quickly fled).⁶⁶ Similarly, several Colombians who are regularly in Bissau are known to move between there and Conakry.

Evidencing the close ties between Latin American players and regional criminal entrepreneurs, a number of Colombians in Bissau are known to be closely connected to Seidi Bá.⁶⁷ One Colombian – John Freddy Valenta Duque – was convicted in connection with the August 2019 import coordinated by Seidi Bá and his fellow ringleader, Ricardo Monje (a dual Colombian and Mexican national).⁶⁸

While Duque is currently serving his sentence in Bissau, Monje and Seidi Bá remain free.

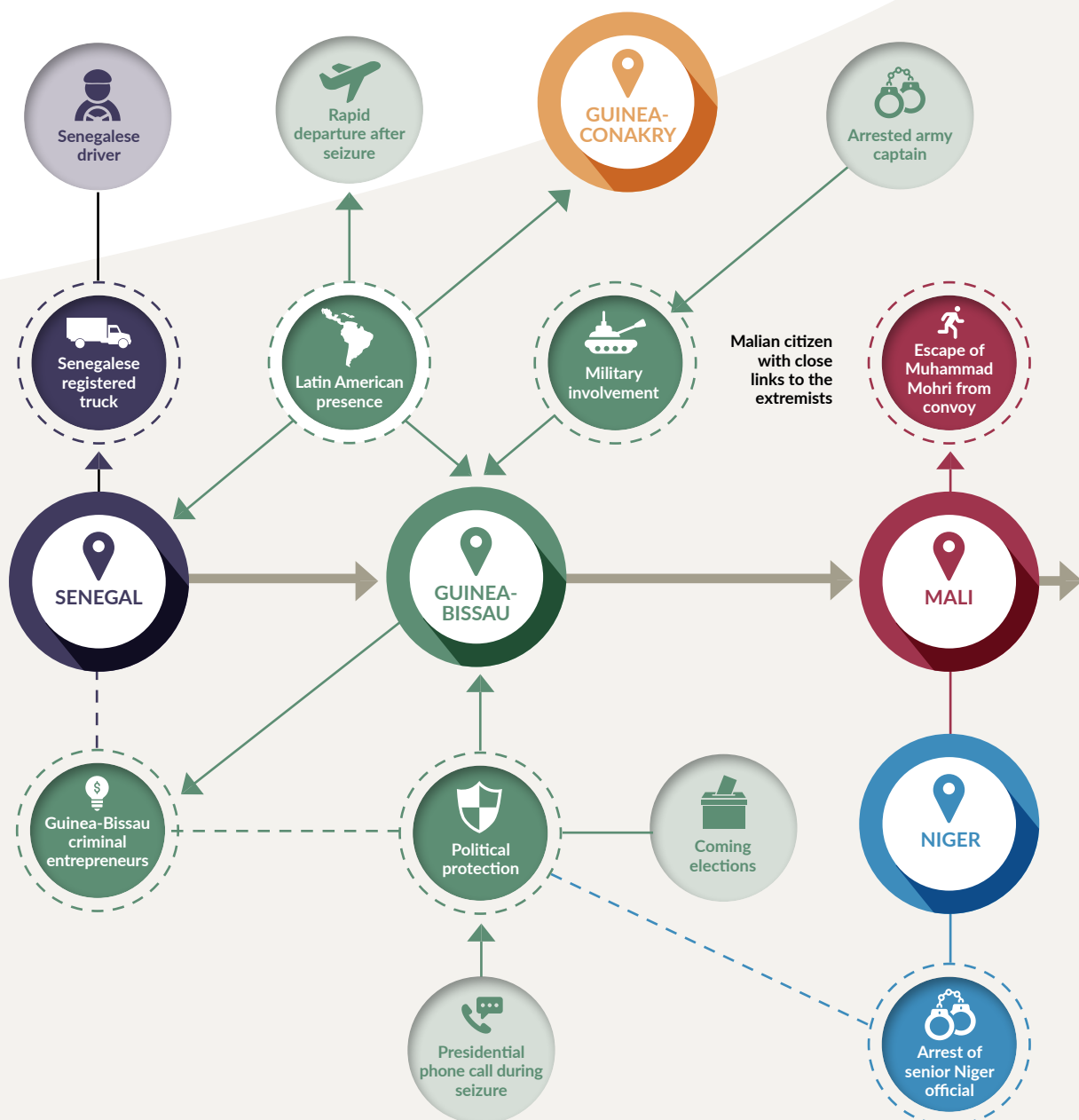


FIGURE 5 Cross-country connections in the March 2019 Guinea-Bissau cocaine seizure.



▲ Guinea-Bissau has been singled out as a prime example of how the transit drug economy undermines regional stability.

REGIONAL INITIATIVES

The upsurge in cocaine trafficked through West Africa in the early 2000s went largely ignored by international and (at least officially) regional players until 2007.⁶⁹ At this point, concerns about the impact of the illicit trafficking of cocaine on governance in the region triggered a number of responses, including a high-level political commitment and a regional action plan by states to respond to the challenge in 2008, called the Praia Declaration.⁷⁰

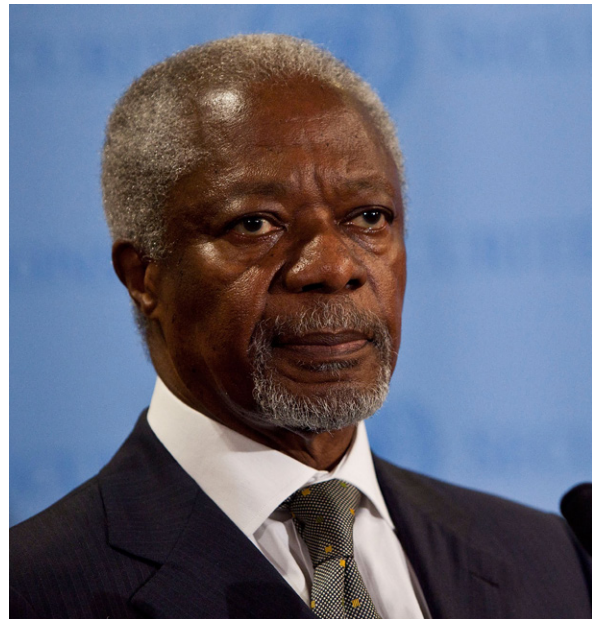
Later, in 2013 the West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) was established, convened by the influential Kofi Annan.⁷¹ The WACD's flagship report, which drew from a number of regional consultations, emphasized the regional impacts of the cocaine trade, and underscored the relationship between trafficking and erosion of governance, instability and conflict, as well as domestic consumption. The WACD report, titled 'Not just in Transit', singled out Guinea-Bissau, repeatedly citing the country as a prime example of how trafficking would undermine democratic processes in the region.⁷²

Although the WACD continued to be active in catalyzing regional and international discussion and focus on drugs trafficking in West Africa, the Praia Declaration and other efforts targeted at the political level largely went without follow-up.⁷³ Despite this, ECOWAS has remained involved and active in monitoring the political stability of Guinea-Bissau and in taking remedial action, including through statements and the application of sanctions, during periods where warning signs of instability are present. However, the stance of ECOWAS towards Embaló's acquisition of the presidency in 2020 marred its otherwise strong record in the country.⁷⁴

From an operational perspective, a number of regional initiatives in West Africa have sought to strengthen the fight against transnational organized crime and promote regional cooperation and intelligence sharing. Prominent programmes include the West African Coast initiative, launched in 2009 to enhance law enforcement and criminal justice capacity; a series of EU-funded projects to enhance maritime security across the Gulf of Guinea, which includes a focus on strengthening port capacities against illicit trafficking; and AIRCOP, a linked UNODC programme whose objective is to build the interdiction capacity of agencies at selected international airports along the cocaine route in Latin America, the Caribbean and West Africa.⁷⁵

Although a number of these projects have yielded impressive results, they have been hamstrung by patchy political will in the region. Furthermore, the programming focus has often been on West Africa as a whole, rather than on specific routes, or the ecosystems this paper has analyzed, arguably weakening their impact.⁷⁶

A subregional approach, which is more closely tied to the characteristics of specific corridors or ecosystems, may be positioned to yield better results. The July 2019 entry into a memorandum of understanding to strengthen law enforcement cooperation in relation to drug trafficking and related organized crime by law enforcement bodies in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal is a promising step towards enhancing subregional coordination.⁷⁷



Kofi Annan convened the West Africa Commission on Drugs, which underscored the relationship between drug trafficking and instability. © Andrew Burton/Getty Images



▲ A subregional approach is needed to formulate a programming response to the illicit economies of the West African coastal ecosystem. Here, ECOWAS mediator, Goodluck Jonathan, and President Embaló attend the swearing in of Mali's transition president.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A SUBREGIONAL RESPONSE

Record-breaking global cocaine production is supercharging international trafficking routes as countries of production push to move ever greater volumes towards consumption markets. In this macro-environment, understanding West Africa's cocaine economy as a criminal ecosystem, composed of a number of closely interlinked hubs, borderlands and connecting zones, emphasizes the importance of a subregional approach in formulating an appropriate policy and operational programming response. In particular –

1. Programming and implementation work responding to the upsurge in cocaine trafficking should be subregional in focus, and in some cases concentrate activities in single states, while operating in tandem with complementary initiatives across the region. Broad regional programming is often insufficiently tailored to the specific needs of each country or ecosystem, which can dilute its impact.
2. Reinforced high-level regional commitment to respond (or at the very least, to be seen to respond) to drug trafficking is required. This should be spearheaded by regional bodies, including ECOWAS and the African Union, who should revive the Praia Declaration on drug trafficking and political interference, and promote regional information sharing, joint action and the appropriate use of international instruments to sanction involvement in drugs trafficking.

3. Enhanced monitoring and surveillance of dynamics across the illicit hubs in the coastal ecosystem, together with their regional connections, is needed to understand the unprecedented volumes of cocaine being trafficked through it, and to build an evidence base for fast and effective responses. Drug trafficking markets in West Africa remain poorly understood, hampering appreciation of their scale and impact. Efforts should include data-collection on domestic use, which is rising, according to anecdotal evidence, but still remains poorly understood in quantitative terms. While in the short term the urgent need for greater analysis should be met by both regional and international bodies, in the long-term the capacity of regional bodies and states to collect data and monitor national illicit markets requires strengthening.
4. Information sharing and cooperation between key regional law enforcement units across the hubs in the coastal ecosystem should be reinforced, in line with the goals of the memorandum of understanding entered into between three states in July 2019. The Judicial Police in Guinea-Bissau are well positioned to spearhead such regional collaboration. The country's Transnational Crime Unit should also be empowered to play a more central role.
5. Operational support to improve border control in the coastal ecosystem should focus on the key transport nodes, and particularly on the seaports, which are pivotal to the ecosystem. In particular, support should focus on mitigating the risk of trafficking by freight containers, including by bolstering operations of SEACOP, and through expansion of the UNODC Container Control Programme, currently operational in Dakar, across the vulnerable ports in the coastal ecosystem.
6. International partners, including the UN system, can and should play a role by encouraging regional commitment by governments as part of the response package. This should include supporting high-profile prosecutions, engaging with and providing support for high-level policymakers participating in the destruction of drugs, and building integrity and anti-corruption efforts into all programmes and initiatives, as a prerequisite to funding.

NOTES

- 1 More cocaine was seized in the first three months of 2019 in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde alone than in the entire African continent between 2013 and 2016.
- 2 Since 2012, levels of cocaine production have been rising sharply. UNODC estimates indicate that 2017 was a record production year, with 1 976 tonnes manufactured – a rise of 25% on the previous year. This was due in major part to an increase in coca production in key producer countries, notably Colombia, where the area of coca cultivation (which tripled in size between 2013 and 2016) had risen to an estimated 171 000 hectares by 2017.
- 3 Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Cape Verde is also a trans-shipment point. The island falls beyond the scope of the area covered in this brief, but interconnections merit further scrutiny.
- 4 Worldwide, illicit hubs form an interconnected web, and tracking them enables a mapping of the illicit economy, tracing the geography of 'deviant globalization'. See the 150 'black spots' identified in research conducted by Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, which include Guinea-Bissau, and two areas of particular relevance to the coastal ecosystem examined here: the tri-border areas of Algeria–Mali–Niger, and Sierra Leone–Liberia–Guinea; see Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. The term 'deviant globalisation' – referring to 'the unpleasant underside of transnational integration' – was coined by Nils Gilman in Deviant globalisation, Wired, 5 May 2018, <https://www.wired.com/2010/05/deviant-globalization/>.
- 5 Competition for control over the lucrative market was a key driver of Guinea-Bissau's repeated cycles of violence and political upheaval, while the collapse of the Malian state in 2011 highlighted the scale of trans-Saharan drug trafficking flows and the extent to which they were contributing to instability. Ongoing instability in the Sahel, and even more so in Libya, which remains mired in conflict, has contributed to the partial displacement of trafficking routes towards the coast, with Mauritania increasingly operating as a significant exit point. Although a range of drugs are trafficked in both directions across the Sahara, including hashish and prescription drugs, such as Tramadol, cocaine is by far the most profitable, and consequently the most intricately tied to the stability of the region.
- 6 The relationship between trafficking of illicit commodities and fragility is well established. Trafficking activities contribute to, and entrench, fragility and instability in the region in myriad ways, but which can broadly be categorized as follows: providing a source of financing and weapons for criminals and rebel groups; rewarding and promoting skills related to violence; shifting the incentives of policymakers and military leaders; causing conflicts between competing groups; leading to alternative governance systems. See Côme Dechery and Laura Ralston, Trafficking and fragility in West Africa, Fragility, Conflict, and Violence Group, World Bank, 2015, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/22475>.
- 7 Hubs typically perform one or more of three functions: production, transit or distribution. The hubs of the ecosystem operate primarily as 'transit hubs', in line with the ecosystem's geography, situated between cocaine-producing areas in Latin America, and consumption markets in Europe and the US. See Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 8 Countries in the region play a significant role in a range of other markets, including human smuggling, timber smuggling and illicit logging. See Rosewood smuggling in The Gambia: Shipping firm halts timber exports, BBC 8 July 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53325743>. Polycriminality was found to be a key characteristic of major illicit hubs: most 'blackspots' identified by Brown and Hermann operated in a number of markets, Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 9 Research by Brown and Hermann finds a relatively even spread across rural and urban spaces; see Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 10 Put another way, each of the hubs in the coastal ecosystem is an 'intermodal transshipment point' (i.e. where transshipment occurs between different modes of transport). See A. Changmin Jiang et al, Transport networks and impacts on transport nodes, US National Library of Medicine, 2018.

- 11 Seizures have also been made in ports further south on the West African coast, although the largest seizures are concentrated in the countries of the coastal ecosystem, together with Cape Verde, Sierra Leone and Cote-D'Ivoire. See: Breaking news: Cocaine valued at over 4.5 billion dalasis seized at port as massive manhunt rolled out for Fajara man, The Fatu Network, 8 January 2021, <https://fatunetwork.net/breaking-news-cocaine-valued-at-over-4-5-billion-dalasis-seized-at-port-as-massive-manhunt-rolled-out-for-fajara-man/>; Benjamin Roger, Dakar cocaine seizure shows West African ports are easy transit hubs, The Africa Report, 17 October 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/18839/dakar-cocaine-seizure-shows-west-african-ports-are-easy-transit-hubs/>; Dakar Port: 4 kilograms of cocaine seized, three suspects arrested (Douanes Senegalaises, 17 September 2019), <https://www.douanes.sn/en/node/1393>; Benin: 557kg of cocaine leaving for the port of Antwerp seized at the Port of Cotonou Cochimaou S. Hounbadji, *Bénin: 557 Kg de Cocaine En Partance Pour Le Port d'Anvers Saisi Au Port de Cotonou*, Bénin WEB TV, 2 October 2020, <https://beninwebtv.com/2020/10/benin-557-kg-de-cocaine-en-partance-pour-le-port-danvers-saisi-au-port-de-cotonou/>.
- 12 D. Danelo, Constructing crime: Risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities in Africa's infrastructure, ENACT, 2019.
- 13 Authorities in Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau have all announced plans to increase throughput. See <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/1-1-billion-investment-in-new-senegal-port-and-terminal-by-dp-world>; Gambia Ports Authority, Annual report 2017 to 2019, https://www.gambiaports.gm/storage/files/1/Annual_Reports/annual_report_gpa_2019.pdf. However, currently expansion plans in Guinea-Bissau are stalled, while throughput in many ports declined during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 14 D. Danelo, Constructing crime: Risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities in Africa's infrastructure, ENACT, 2019.
- 15 Drug Law Enforcement Agency, the Gambia, Ministry of Interior, Information note on the seizure of 2ton, 952kg, 850g of cocaine, 8 January 2021. The port of Banjul, a secondary regional hub aiming to serve as a 'gateway to the ECOWAS region', has experienced on average 7% growth in annual throughput since 2008 (reaching total throughput of 2.5 million metric tonnes by 2018, some 75% of which was container traffic). Throughput experienced a particular spike (16%) between 2016 and 2017, when regime change in the country was perceived to bring greater operating stability, https://commons.wmu.se/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2153&context=all_dissertations. The African Development Bank termed Banjul a 'gateway to ECOWAS' in https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/AfDB_-_Gambia_-_Transport_sector_diagnostic_study.pdf.
- 16 Bissau's port, lying at the closest point between Africa and Latin America, is rendered wide open to criminal networks due to the combination of scant screening capacity and widespread corruption.
- 17 OECD/EUIPO, Trade in counterfeit goods and free trade zones: Evidence from recent trends, illicit trade, OECD Publishing, Paris/EUIPO, 2018.
- 18 Africa's top ten fastest growing airports revealed, Routes online, 6 November 2019, <https://www.routesonline.com/news/29/breaking-news/287373/africas-top-ten-fastest-growing-airports-revealed/>.
- 19 The ongoing use of air trafficking routes is corroborated by seizure data. For example, between 2011 and 2020, there have been periodic seizures of cocaine in Guinea-Bissau airport on routes linking Latin America, Bissau and Europe. The volumes are of course far smaller than those seized on maritime vessels.
- 20 See <https://www.douanes.sn/en/node/1341>.
- 21 Interview, Dakar, June 2019.
- 22 Douanes Senegalaises, Fight against international drug trafficking: Another big catch of hemp in Tambacounda, 12 November 2020, <http://www.douanes.sn/en/node/1647>.
- 23 Research Programme Consortium, Migrant smuggling in the Casamance area of Senegal, August 2019, <http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org/files/file.php?name=moop-smuggling-senegal-online.pdf&site=354>.
- 24 Interviews, local and foreign officials, Bissau, July 2019.
- 25 See, for example, 'Geopolitical black holes', in Moisés Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy*, New York: Anchor Books, 2005; 'hubs of illicit marketplace', Patrick Radden Keefe, 'The geography of badness: Mapping the hubs of the illicit global economy', in Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, National Defense University Press, 2013; David M. Crane. Dark corners: The West African joint criminal enterprise, *International Studies Review*, 10, 2008, 387–391; and Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 26 These categories draw on the literature of illicit geography, including Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, National Defense University Press, 2013 and Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 27 Cities built along trading corridors, and which constitute the centres of global finance and trade, often offer these first two characteristics.
- 28 In Brown and Hermann's mapping of global illicit hubs, 80% of those identified lie within borderlands. See Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 29 While a hub is situated on land, the liminal space of border areas also applies to sea borders. The boundaries of a country's territorial waters are often poorly mapped out, and international waters usually offer safe havens from interdiction in part due to the dizzying complexity of jurisdiction. See Ian Urbina, *The Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier*, Vintage, 2019.
- 30 Border areas also favourable for smuggling economies that take advantage of taxation differences and other cross-border differences.

- 31 Several studies have found a relationship between weakness in the rule of law and the prevalence of organized crime within a state's borders; see E. Buscaglia and Jan Van Dijk, Controlling organized crime and corruption in the public sector, *Journal on Crime and Society*, 3, 1 & 2 (2003), 3–34; Jan Van Dijk. *World of Crime: Breaking the Silence on Problems of Crime, Justice, and Development Across the World*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008; H.E. Sung, State failure, economic failure, and predatory organized crime: A comparative analysis, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 41, 1 (2004), 111–129.
- 32 Some protection economies evolve into 'criminalised states' focused on facilitating and predating illicit economies, rather than providing public state services.
- 33 Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
- 34 Interview, senior law-enforcement official, Bissau, July 2019. Lansana Gberie, Crime, violence and politics: Drug trafficking and counternarcotics policy in Mali and Guinea, Brookings Institution, Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Latin America Initiative, 2016, p. 10.
- 35 Interviews with low-level street dealers in Guinea-Bissau, December 2020–January 2021.
- 36 David Lewis, Surge in cocaine trade undermines Conde's bid to revive Guinea, 41 January 2014, Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/guinea-drugs-idUKL5N0KX2F720140131>.
- 37 Globalization, it has been noted, thwarts capability of controlling goods crossing borders.
- 38 For example, regulations on the Guinea-Bissau side of the border are rudimentary, with a local businessman reporting very high levels of corruption in engagements with officials. Seizures are repeatedly made at the border between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal. These are the results of larger consignments of drugs in Guinea-Bissau being broken up and transferred in smaller-sized units to Mali, reflecting Guinea-Bissau's role as a storage hub. Interviews, foreign and local law-enforcement, Bissau, July 2019.
- 39 The Casamance region has long been an area of contested sovereignty, including clashes between the former colonial powers of France and Portugal. The drugs, which had been transported by sea were packed into the false bottom of a refrigeration truck used to transport fish. Interviews, local and foreign law enforcement officials, Dakar and Bissau, June and July 2019.
- 40 Interview, senior Senegalese law enforcement official, Dakar, June 2019.
- 41 Other options would entail driving into or through Gambia, or south to Guinea. The onward trafficking route from Tambacounda and to Mali passes through the borderlands across the country's northern border with Mauritania, and currently operates as a key trafficking corridor.
- 42 Ethnic heterogeneity is another characteristic of black spots highlighted in Stuart Brown and Margaret Hermann, *Transnational Crime and Black Spots, Rethinking Sovereignty and the Global Economy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. The roots of Guinea-Bissau's drug trade can be traced back to the 1998 Bissau war, and particularly to the trafficking of arms to separatist fighters in the Casamance region. Guinea-Bissau's political elite at the time, starved of resources as economic liberalization favoured privatization, used arms trafficking to acquire resources to fund political mobilization and patronage networks (as they would later use drugs trafficking). When this was made public, ensuing dismissals triggered the civil war.
- 43 In February 2021, a group of Casamance rebels threatened to enter Guinea-Bissau if Senegalese troops used Guinean territory as a base from which to launch attacks in the region.
- 44 Research Programme Consortium, Migrant smuggling in the Casamance area of Senegal, August 2019, <http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org/files/file.php?name=moop-smuggling-senegal-online.pdf&site=354>.
- 45 It is key to bear in mind that the borders of territorial waters are extremely contested, and international waters an area of overlapping jurisdictions. Illicit actors transiting these maritime borderlands and 'no-man's lands' exploit these legal characteristics, with the effect that illicit markets flourish in the high seas. See Ian Urbina, *Outlaw Ocean: Crime and Survival in the Last Untamed Frontier*, Vintage, 2019.
- 46 The Fragile States Index includes 11 categories, moving from most stable (very sustainable) to the least stable (very high alert). Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Mali are all deemed 'alert' countries (the third most fragile category); Gambia and Mauritania are at 'high warning' (fourth most fragile); Senegal, the strongest of the grouping ranks 'elevated warning', (fifth most fragile).
- 47 Further pointing to widespread corrupt practices, all states, with the exception of Senegal, fall into the lower half of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with most clustered in the bottom quarter. Note that the list comprises 180 countries. The countries in the ecosystem rank as follows: Guinea: 130; Guinea-Bissau: 168; Gambia: 96; Senegal: 66; Mauritania: 137; Mali: 130. See Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/index/nzl#>.
- 48 As has been tracked with the displacement of routes from the Sahel-Sahara towards the coast by the collapse of the Malian state and ongoing instability across the region, particularly in Libya.
- 49 Patrick Radden Keefe 'The geography of badness: Mapping the hubs of the illicit global economy', in Michael Miklaucic and Jacqueline Brewer (eds), *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, National Defense University Press, 2013.
- 50 Quote drawn from the description of post-Soviet Ukraine's emergence as a black market hub by former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jonathan Winer: 'There's concentrated power, resources in very few hands, no oversight, no separate functioning judiciary, a huge porous border, huge inherited military facilities, lots of airstrips, a bunch of old planes.' Jonathan M. Winer and Phil Williams, Russian crime and corruption in an era of globalization: Implications for the United States, in *Russia's Uncertain Economic Future*, John E. Hardt (ed.), Washington, DC: M.E. Sharpe, 2003, 97–124.

- 51 Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: the evolution of an elite protection network, 2015, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Shaw-drug_trafficking_in_guineabissau_19982014_the_evolution_of_an_elite_protection_network.pdf; for the drivers of Insecurity in Mauritania, see Anouar Boukhars, April 2012, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/mauritania_insecurity.pdf. A leaked cable from US Ambassador to Mauritania, Mark Boulware, to the African Union, ECOWAS and a number of governments on 11 June 2009 states: 'The considerable macroeconomic impact of the trafficking makes it impossible to believe that political and government leaders in Mauritania are not involved in the problem.' See https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09NOUAKCHOTT386_a.html.
- 52 For example, in Mali, which has suffered extensive state collapse and political upheaval, there has been a significant degree of elite recycling, with players shuffled between posts but remaining broadly consistent. See Peter Tinti, Drug trafficking in northern Mali: a tenuous criminal equilibrium, 17 September 2020, ENACT, <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2020-09-17-mali-drugs-research-paper.pdf>.
- 53 A number of key figures in the current political and security establishment of Gambia under Adama Barrow have not changed since former president Jammeh's administration, whose government was widely reported to derive profits from drug trafficking. In the wake of the January 2021 seizure in Banjul, the Gambian press, perceiving the response by Barrow's government to be 'muted', attributed this perceived lack of action to high-level government complicity, due to the 'known' involvement of key figures in the current government in the drug trafficking trade. This could support a theory of Gambia as a country falling into the categorization of 'stable' elite protection for the drugs trafficking market over time. In 2017 Jammeh was included on the US sanctions list for human rights abuses and corruption: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0243>. During Jammeh's regime, the state was broadly focused on predation of resources, reportedly including the flourishing drugs trade, rather than provision of public services. Close affiliates of Jammeh, including Muhammed Bazzi, have been accused by the US treasury of links to drug trafficking. Jammeh's involvement has also been reported in the local press, quoting the former Deputy Director of the Gambian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (see <https://www.infosplusgabon.com/a-la-une/9271-former-gambian-leader-was-involved-in-illegal-drug-trade/>.) Further, Bissau Guinean navy commander, Bubo Na Tchuto (who was arrested by the US in a sting operation and served four years in prison for drug trafficking charges) is reported to have been close to Jammeh, and fled to Gambia in 2008, spending a year in hiding. See *Atlanticactu, Gambie: Saisie de 3 tonnes de cocaïne, un enquêteur de la DLEAG écarté pour avoir interpellé un proche d'un chef d'état*, 13 January 2021, <https://atlanticactu.com/gambie-saisie-de-3-tonnes-de-cocaine-un-enqueteur-de-la-dleag-ecarte-pour-avoir-interpelle-un-proche-dun-chef-detat/>; Gibril Saine, Where is outrage from the Gambia gov't on the 4 billion Dalasi cocaine seizure?, The Fatu Network, 12 January 2021, <https://fatunetwork.net/where-is-outrage-from-the-gambia-govt-on-the-4-billion-dalasi-cocaine-seizure/>. Regional diplomats concur that levels of criminality in the country are higher than ever. Interview with diplomat, Bissau, January 2021.
- 54 In particular Antonio Indjai. See Mark Shaw and A. Gomes, Breaking the vicious cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau, May 2020, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Guinea-Bissau_Policy-Brief_Final2.pdf.
- 55 Cocaine trafficking increased further under Alpha Condé's government, which came to power in 2010. Although much remains unknown regarding the role of Guinea in the regional cocaine trade, it is clear that the protection structures reached the top of the country's political establishment. For example, the eldest son of Conté, Guinea's president between 1984 and 2008, was widely known to be at the centre of a drug-trafficking network. Ousmane Conté confessed to this on state television, in one of a number of televised trials presided over by Dadis Camara, leader of the military coup that ousted the president. Shortly after, Ousmane Conté was included on the US sanctions list. See Stephen Ellis, West Africa's international drug trade, *African Affairs*, 108, 431, 2009, 171–196; West Africa's 'cocaine coast', *Strategic Comments*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, 17, 5, 2011, 1–3; US Department of the Treasury, 1 June 2010, <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/recent-actions/20100601>.
- 56 This was confirmed in interviews. See Mark Shaw, Drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, 1998–2014: The evolution of an elite protection network, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 3, 2015, 347.
- 57 Seizures are repeatedly made at the border between Guinea-Bissau and Senegal – the results of larger consignments of drugs in Guinea-Bissau being broken up and transferred in smaller quantities to Mali, reflecting Guinea-Bissau's role as a storage hub. Interviews, foreign and local law-enforcement, Bissau, July 2019.
- 58 Drug Law Enforcement Agency, the Gambia, Ministry of Interior, Information note on the seizure of 2ton, 952kg, 850g of cocaine, 8 January 2021; Ditadura do Consenso, *Cocaína-3 Toneladas Apreendidas Na Gâmbia*, 18 January 2021, <http://ditaduraeconsenso.blogspot.com/2021/01/cocaina-3-toneladas-apreendidas-na.html>; *Atlanticactu, Gambie: Saisie de 3 tonnes de cocaïne, un enquêteur de la DLEAG écarté pour avoir interpellé un proche d'un chef d'état*, 13 January 2021, <https://atlanticactu.com/gambie-saisie-de-3-tonnes-de-cocaine-un-enqueteur-de-la-dleag-ecarte-pour-avoir-interpelle-un-proche-dun-chef-detat/>. Telephone interview with source in Guinea-Bissau, 20 January 2021. This is one of a number of examples; an additional illustration of Guinea-Bissau's role as a 'safe haven' is that one of the three Senegalese men identified by local police to be behind the import of 4 kg of cocaine seized in Dakar fled to Guinea-Bissau to avoid arrest. United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, 24 December 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S_2020_1293_E.pdf. Benjamin Roger, Dakar cocaine seizure shows West African ports are easy transit hubs, The Africa Report, 17 October 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/18839/dakar-cocaine-seizure-shows-west-african-ports-are-easy-transit-hubs/>.

- 59 Where policymakers or the political elite can access 'unearned' sources of revenue, such as rents from illicit drugs, they become less reliant on taxation and economic growth as their principal source of income. In turn, this drives greater reliance on rent-seeking activities, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that diminishes accountability. This cycle leads to the creation of patronage networks, as rents are distributed to a small group of supporters. OECD, *International drivers of corruption: a tool for analysis*, 2012, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/accountable-effective-institutions/49263997.pdf>.
- 60 Alberto Dabo, Guinea-Bissau police say 1.8 tonnes of cocaine seized in biggest ever haul, Reuters, 3 September 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bissau-drugs/guinea-bissau-police-say-18-tonnes-of-cocaine-seized-in-biggest-ever-haul-idUSKCN1VO1VU>; the seizure is rumoured to be fraction of a larger 13 000 kg shipment destined for Europe. interviews with journalists in Bissau, September 2019.
- 61 At this time, Seidi Bá is also reported to have opened up a new channel in Guinea-Bissau which avoided the elite, relying instead on low-level military figures. Interview, individual with close connections to the traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 62 Interview, individual close to trafficking networks in Guinea-Bissau, Bissau, July 2019. See República da Guiné-Bissau, Tribunal Regional de Cacheu, *Acórdão No. 13/2020*.
- 63 The timing of the seizure, just before parliamentary elections in Guinea-Bissau, is widely perceived to suggest that Bissau-Guinean players connected to this consignment needed the money for electoral campaigning. A call made by the Office of the President to the Judicial Police leading the investigation (nominally because ballot boxes were allegedly on the truck and the president was 'concerned' that there may have been some attempt to subvert the electoral process), also raised suspicion of high-level political protection.
- 64 Most prominent among those arrested in the March 2019 seizure was Sidi Ahmed Mohamed, a Nigerien from Tchintabaraden (halfway between Agadez and Anderamboukane, on the Malian border), which was once a key point on the trans-Saharan cocaine route. Sidi Ahmed Mohamed is a member of the cabinet of Ousseini Tinni, the President of the National Assembly of Niger. Notably, the truck used to transport the cocaine was registered in Senegal. The convictions following the September seizure track a similar regional span: seven Bissau-Guineans (four of whom were part of the Seidi Bá family), four Colombians and a Malian. For more detail on the September seizure, see *The Seidi Bá cocaine trial: A smokescreen for impunity?*, January 2021, GI-TOC Civil Society Observatory of Guinea-Bissau.
- 65 The operations of a key Latin American trafficker known as Rafael (full name Rafael Antonio Garavito-Garcia), who played a significant role in the emerging Guinea-Bissau trafficking economy around 2002, typifies the regional approach taken by the Latin American networks. Rafael, while active in Guinea-Bissau, also had interests along the entire West African coast. He stayed for a period in Bissau, but also in Dakar and Conakry. This built a strong regional foundation for future expansion across the region. Information on Rafael's operations in part drawn from quotes from a transcript from a recording by the prosecutor during the questioning of the DEA confidential source Ricardo Jardinero, Case 1:12-cr-00839-JSR Document 79 Filed 04/24/15, p. 58. Significantly, Rafael also spent time in Lagos, Nigeria, and developed good links with Nigerian criminal networks, which spanned the coast and had connections to Europe. Interview, individual with close links to traffickers, Bissau, July 2019.
- 66 Interview, senior Senegalese law-enforcement official, Dakar, June 2019. Interview, individual close to trafficking networks in Guinea-Bissau, July 2019. Similarly, while the route taken by Rafael Monje, the Latin American ringleader of the September 2019 consignment, remains unclear, it is likely he leveraged the ecosystem's international airports to return to Latin America, where he is believed to remain.
- 67 The most prominent of these is Carlos Rojos Ramon. John Freddy Valenta Duque and Herbert Garcia Perez are also often present, moving between Bissau and Conakry. Interview, individual close to trafficking networks in Guinea-Bissau, Bissau, July 2019.
- 68 See República da Guiné-Bissau, Tribunal Regional de Cacheu, *Acórdão No. 13/2020*.
- 69 Felix Kumah-Abiwu, *Changing trends in West Africa's drug policy terrain: A theoretical perspective*, *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 57, 1, 2019, 52.
- 70 Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crimes in West Africa, Praia, December 2008, <https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/ecowaspoliticaldeclaration.html>. The declaration was signed by the then president Vieira for Guinea-Bissau.
- 71 Kofi Annan Foundation, Statement by Kofi Annan at launch of WACD, 31 January 2013, <https://www.kofiannanfoundation.org/news-releases/kofi-annan-launches-west-africa-commission-on-drugs/>.
- 72 West African Commission on Drugs (WACD), *Not just in transit: Drugs, the state and society in West Africa*, Geneva, 2014.
- 73 The WACD has implemented a series of drug demand-reduction trainings across the region, spearheaded efforts to create a model law for West Africa around drug policy, and continued to engage in dialogue with regional leaders.
- 74 Frequently, the issue of elite complicity in illicit flows is noted as a predicate factor in the continuing cycles of political instability, including in the most recent efforts by former president José Mário Vaz to try to consolidate power in the run-up to the November 2019 election. Alberto Dabo, Guinea-Bissau newly appointed PM resigns under pressure from ECOWAS, Reuters, 8 November 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bissau-politics/guinea-bissau-newly-appointed-pm-resigns-under-pressure-from-ecowas-idUSKBN1XI2F0>.

75 The West African Coast Initiative (WACI), was launched in 2009 as a joint programme with a comprehensive set of activities targeting capacity building at both national and subregional levels, in the areas of law enforcement, and strengthening of criminal justice institutions. It was mainstreamed with the security sector reform whereby the internal security forces were being transformed from a force to a service by way of community policing. WACI comprises a three-tier steering and coordination mechanism, including a High-level Policy Committee, a project operational committee and a country-specific steering and coordination body, namely the Transnational Crime Unit (TCU). The TCU in Guinea-Bissau was created in 2010 as a referential element to this regional initiative, and it is intended to act as the primary point of contact in the country for transnational organized crime, as well as the primary liaison point to the TCUs across the region. In 2014, the EU endorsed an EU Strategy for the Gulf of Guinea, with ECOWAS, EECAS and the Gulf of Guinea

Commission. This included projects to build a regional information-sharing network, the launch of the Critical Maritime Routes Monitoring, Support and Evaluation Mechanism (CRIMSON), a regional port security project and SEACOP, a seaport cooperation project to strengthen port capacities against maritime illicit trafficking. All of these initiatives, while either not including or not yet active in Guinea-Bissau, contribute overall to enhancing the country's maritime security.

76 This is in line with monitoring and evaluation assessments conducted regarding a range of projects targeting drug trafficking across Africa that have found that, although monitoring and analysis need to be conducted regionally, a more 'zoomed in' focus is required in operational programming.

77 More specifically, the MOU is entered into between the Judicial Police in Guinea-Bissau, the Drug Law Enforcement Agency in Gambia, and Senegal's Office Central de Répression du Trafic Illicite des Stupéfiants.



GLOBAL INITIATIVE

AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with 500 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

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