

Trends in Illicit Drug Trafficking in Nigeria: Highlighting the Imperative of Raising the Red Flag

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ABSTRACT

Drug trafficking has assumed a frightening dimension and poses a serious threat to human and national security. One of the major challenge facing Nigeria as a country is the problem of illicit drug trafficking and consumption. Hard drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, ephedrine, and psychotropic substances, though mostly produced outside the country are on high demand and abused by people of different class, religious and cultural background. In drug trafficking, some fundamental forces romance each other in ensuring the success or otherwise of this organised criminal activity. These include the routes, mode of concealment, the medium of transportation and deception technique. Others include drug barons, merchants, traffickers, agents, distributors, couriers, and peddlers. The joint and shared efforts of members of these syndicates determine the fate of the illicit drug commerce. Available records of arrest with the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) indicate that there has been an exponential and steady increase in the number of persons arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. From four hundred and sixty-four (464) drug traffickers arrested in 1990, the statistics stood at eight thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six (8,826) arrest in 2014. The statistics further revealed that between 2000 and 2014, a total number of eighty-six thousand, three hundred and fourteen (86,314) persons were arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. In light of the above, this paper examined the trends in illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria, highlighting the need to raise the red flag. The paper recommends that strong laws, good governance, and political will are fundamental in checking the problem of illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria. In addition, Nigeria Law Enforcement Agency should focus on adequate intelligence gathering that will aid them in designing efficient ways of achieving a drug-free society.

Keywords: *Trends, Illicit Drug, Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin Trade, Red flag.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global community is seriously being threatened by the increasing problem associated with illicit drug trafficking. According to [USAID \(2013\)](#) illicit drug trade, like any other type of transnational organized crime, portends danger to political and socio-economic development, fosters corruption, and violence, undermine rule of law and good governance, and poses serious health challenge. Drug barons in their lucrative drug business engage different means in moving their consignment. Air, ships, animals, catapults, sandbag bridges, tunnels, and human beings (mules) are some of the most patronized means used by drug traffickers to move their treacherous wares around the world. These drugs, despite not being cheap, are in high demand universally hence the constant supply by the unscrupulous businessmen who trafficked them ([Ellis, 2009](#); [UNODC, 2010](#); [Maqbool, 2014](#)). Drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, amphetamine, ephedrine, and psychotropic substances are commonly patronized drugs in Nigeria, these drugs enter the country and are distributed to Nigerians of different socio-economic, religious and cultural background. Drugs such as cocaine and heroin are not produced in Nigeria, however, the drugs are in high demand, and the quantity in circulation is heartbreaking. Nigeria is known as a transit nation due to its strategic geographical location and unpoliced land borders ([Dambazau, 2007](#)). This makes it possible and easy for the conveyance of illicit drugs from source countries to consuming nations. Thus, Nigeria provides the missing link between producing countries of these drugs and the consuming nations of the world ([Dambazau, 2007](#); [Adeniyi, 2016](#)).

Contemporary Nigeria society is in a serious dilemma and in a pathetic situation, this is because narcotic drugs such as cocaine, crack, heroin, morphine, and other related illicit drugs hitherto traded in secret places are now readily available and can easily be bought on the streets of Nigeria ([Adeniyi, 2016](#)). This development is disturbing and has been described as a dangerous trend in the illicit drug trade in Nigeria. The increase in the cultivation of cannabis across Nigeria has compounded the country's drug problem ([Adeniyi, 2016](#)). Hitherto, Cannabis cultivation was prevalent in southern and middle belt areas of Nigeria, but over the years, large sizes of cannabis farmlands had been discovered in states like Katsina, Kebbi and Adamawa States ([NDLEA, 2010](#)). The trend in local supplies of cannabis from the traditional high-risk areas of Ondo, Edo, Osun, Oyo, Delta, and Ogun states have now changed to supplies from various parts of the country thereby increasing consumption and export rates ([NDLEA, 2010](#)). Cannabis no doubt is the most trafficked illicit drug; it is cultivated in different parts of the country. The cultivation of cannabis across various parts of the country has compounded the nation's drug problem.

Available records of arrest with the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency ([NDLEA, 2014](#)) indicate that there has been an exponential and steady increase in the number of persons arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. From four hundred and sixty-four (464) drug traffickers arrest in 1990 to eight thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six (8,826) arrest in 2014. The statistics further revealed that between 2000 and 2014, a total number of eighty-six thousand, three hundred and fourteen (86,314) persons were arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. Data further revealed that the youths between ages 16 to 40 years constitute the high-risk group for drug trafficking in the country and the desire to make quick money, peer group influence, and ignorance have been identified as the major predisposing factors to drug trafficking. Studies ([Lafiaji, 2002](#); [Fobur, 2009](#); [Ukwayi et al., 2012](#); [USAID, 2013](#); [Felix and Ukwayi, 2014](#); [Adeniyi, 2016](#); [Okpa and Ekong, 2017](#); [Okpa and Ukwayi, 2017](#); [Ukwayi and Okpa, 2017](#); [Ukwayi and Okpa, 2018](#)) have shown that drug trafficking portends great danger to the survival of human race. However, some fundamental forces romance each other in ensuring the success or otherwise of this organised criminal activity. These include routes, methods of concealment, modes of transportation and deception technique. Others include drug barons, merchants, traffickers, agents, distributors, couriers, and peddlers.

The joint and shared efforts of members of the syndicates determine the fate of the illicit drug commerce. This paper examined the trends in illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1. Strain Theory

The paper adopted [Robert \(1968\)](#). Merton argued that the failure of individuals to meet up the cultural goals of the society compels them into criminal behaviour in order to realise their goals. The desire of any society is to see her citizens excel, but not all citizens have access to equal socio-economic prospect to meet societal demand. This disagreement creates a strong sense of strain on citizens. This is responsible for all manner of deviant and criminal behaviour such as drug trafficking among citizens. Merton developed five methods of reacting to the ends-means dilemma among citizens. They are conformity, innovation, ritualists, retreatists, and rebellion. The desire to get to the top is the dream of a significant number of Nigerians, especially the youths. However, the means of achieving this dream is not evenly distributed and accessed by all Nigerians. The manner of resource distribution in Nigeria handicaps some people to the advantage of others. The frustrated poor members of the Nigeria society are subjected to pressure on how to achieve their dreams and life aspirations. Consequently, breeding disapproval and strain on them to engage in drug trafficking, in other to check the strain. Critics argued that social strain theory has simply over simple social structures, values and the relationship between individuals and social values. By this mindset, the assumption is that the conditions that create criminality are “fixable” and as such, crime can be tinkered and manipulated by appropriate social engineering.

2.2. Trends in Illicit Drug Trafficking in Nigeria

Drug trafficking is an outlawed trade, where drugs under legal prohibition are made available for general consumption. It takes series of processes such as production, cultivation, manufacture, procurement, storage, importation, exportation, transportation, distribution, offering for sale, dealing in, peddling in and sale of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control ([NDLEA, 2010](#); [Adeniyi, 2011](#)). The illicit drug trade is an organized transnational criminal activity, which cut across different countries of the world. Why few of the nations are source countries, others like Nigeria are transit and consumption countries. According to [Dambazau \(2007\)](#) illicit drug trade started in Nigeria after the Second World War when Nigerian soldiers who fought in the war in India and Burma (now Myanmar) brought the seeds of cannabis into Nigeria. Initially, they planted the seeds for personal use and due to the favourable climatic conditions and fertile soil they continued to plant it for commercial purpose ([Adeniyi, 1993](#)). Since then, the country had been witnessing increasing the use and sale of cannabis. The attendant problems associated with the use and abuse of cannabis made the government put in place several legislations to contain its spread. The drug problem assumed a different dimension in the early 1980s as a result of the influx of narcotic drugs into Nigeria. Drugs such as cocaine, heroin, Amphetamine, ephedrine and psychotropic substances entered the drug scene in the country. Unpatriotic Nigerians whose business is trafficking in illicit drugs brought these drugs into the country. Though Nigeria is not a producer of cocaine and heroin, these drugs are now available in the country. The country then assumed the status of a transit nation due to her strategic geographical location and expansive porous land borders. This makes it possible and easy for the conveyance of illicit drugs from source countries to consuming nations. Thus, Nigeria provides the missing link between producing countries of these drugs and the consuming nations of the world. Available records from NDLEA, revealed that cocaine is brought in from Latin American countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil and Caribbean, while Heroin and synthetic psychotropic substances are brought in from Asia, particularly India,

Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Laos. Cannabis is the most widely patronized illicit drug produced in Nigeria and it is cultivated illegally in different parts of the country.

A striking feature in the trend of drug trafficking in Nigeria is that these narcotic drugs such as cocaine, crack, heroin, morphine and other similar drugs are now readily available and can easily be bought on the streets of Nigeria. Drug merchants who operate in syndicates bring these drugs into the country. These syndicates have been categorized into four specific specialties in Nigeria as the procurement syndicates based in source countries; courier syndicates involving low ranking human carriers of various nationalities; overseas distribution syndicates which handle the sales at the final destination where they are consumed and local merchandising syndicates, which specialize in bringing in drugs from source countries and sell to other local syndicates that ferry those drugs abroad (NDLEA, 2008). The illegal cultivation of Cannabis in different parts of Nigeria has really compounded the country's drug problem. Hitherto, Cannabis cultivation was prevalent in southern and middle belt areas of Nigeria, but over years large sizes of cannabis farmlands had been discovered in states like Katsina, Kebbi and Adamawa States. The trend in local supplies of cannabis from the traditional high-risk areas of Ondo, Edo, Osun, Oyo, Delta and Ogun states have now changed to supplies from various parts of the country thereby increasing consumption and export rates (NDLEA, 2010).

An aspect of drug trafficking trend in Nigeria is the use of courier services to convey drugs to different parts of the world. Drug merchants because of their belief that courier service is a relatively secure method of transporting their consignment repeatedly adopt this medium of distribution in the illegal trade. However, the use of courier company to convey drug often constitutes the misuse of the companies services because the management might not be aware but individual employees might be involved. The most commonly smuggled drugs through courier services according to NDLEA (2010) include heroin, cocaine, cannabis, MDMA (commonly known as ecstasy) lysergic acid diethylamide and amphetamines. Drug Trafficking Organisations (DTOs) often prefer the use of courier services to smuggle illicit drugs because the drugs can easily be concealed in parcels even in small quantities with relatively low operational cost and without the drug being accompanied. Besides, it is possible to send many consignments of drugs from one location to several destinations. Another dimension in the trend of drug trafficking in Nigeria is the use of neighbouring countries to smuggle drugs and goods into Nigeria. It is quite revealing that this is easily made possible because of the porous land borders and the fact that Nigeria's neighbouring countries have not been very stringent in their searches of containers before they are cleared and released to consignees. Drug trafficking organisations (DTOs) based in Nigeria usually exploit the situation by consigning their containers through these neighbouring countries from where they are moved across the border into Nigeria. In most cases, individual human mules are recruited to convey them in small quantities to consuming countries (NDLEA, 2010).

A worrisome trend in drug trafficking is the constant device of means of beating security checks and avoid detection by drug traffickers. This account for why drug merchants and their cohorts always change their preferred sources of drug supplies and destination. They always do this in order to avoid direct flight to countries of the destination so as to prevent the detection of the drugs and evade arrest. The discovery of clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of methamphetamines in the country has added a new flip to the trend of illicit drug enterprise in Nigeria. This, however, is a sad and ugly development as Nigeria is now one of the countries in the world where methamphetamines are produced through clandestine laboratories. The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) has reported that eleven clandestine methamphetamine laboratories have been discovered and dismantled in the country. These laboratories were discovered in both Lagos and Anambra states. The discovery of these clandestine drug manufacturing laboratories has also increased the trafficking of methamphetamines through courier houses, seas ports, airports and land border posts.

Hitherto Nigeria was earlier classified as a “transit” hub in the global drug scene, however, the country is gradually achieving the status of not only a “consuming nation” but a “producing nation”. This is due to illegal cultivation of Cannabis and a recent discovery of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in Nigeria. This is an unfortunate development and a disturbing phenomenon. The trend in the illicit drug trade is assuming an alarming proportion in Nigeria. Records of arrest from NDLEA indicate that there has been a steady increase in the number of persons arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. In 1990, when the agency started operation, four hundred and sixty-four (464) drug traffickers were apprehended, while in the year 2014, 8,826 persons were arrested for trafficking in illicit drugs. Between the year 2000 and 2014, a total number of eighty-six thousand, three hundred and fourteen (86,314) persons were arrested for drug trafficking-related offences. Data further revealed that the youths between ages 16 to 40 years constitute the high-risk group for drug trafficking in the country and the desire to make quick money, peer group influence, and ignorance have been identified as the major predisposing factors to drug trafficking. Finally, Nigeria no doubt is having serious drug problem and cannabis is identified as the most trafficked illicit drug, which is illegally cultivated in different parts of the country. The increasing discovery of clandestine laboratories for the manufacture of methamphetamine has also compounded the nation’s drug problem.

2.3. Overview of Routinely Trafficked Illicit Drugs in Nigeria

Nigeria has played a role in the global trade in both licit and illicit psychoactive substances for centuries. However, [Dambazau \(2007\)](#) has identified the following types of illicit drugs as being commonly trafficked by Nigerians. They include Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) and psychotropic substances.

(i) Cannabis

Cannabis is the most widely patronized and trafficked illicit drug in Nigeria. The drug is produced from the plant Cannabis Sativa and is known and referred to as “Wee-wee”, in eastern Nigeria. “Weed”, “Grass”, “Kaya”, “Stone”, “Pot”, “Ganja”, “Morocco” are some of the designation cannabis is referred to in Nigerian drug market. The drug is quite affordable and readily available because the drug is cultivated and produced locally. Apart from being consumed locally, cannabis is exported and consumed in Europe and North America. The most significant drug problem facing Nigeria is the cultivation, production, consumption, and exportation of cannabis ([Lafiaji, 2004](#)). This crop is grown largely in the southern and middle belt areas on agricultural farms sometimes spanning up to twenty (20) hectares ([Lafiaji, 2004](#)). Nowadays, Cannabis is widely cultivated illegally in the South West and South-South regions of Nigeria. In 2013, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) discovered and destroyed 847.46 hectares of Cannabis plantations nationwide while in 2014, 4,529.15 hectares of Cannabis plantation was discovered and destroyed through its Operation Weed Eaters. The quantity of Cannabis Sativa destroyed on the farmlands amounted to 53,719,342.32 kilograms ([NDLEA, 2014](#)). Similarly, the agency seized a total of 205,373 kilograms of Cannabis in the year 2013: while in the year 2014, 158,852. 2 kilograms of cannabis were seized from drug traffickers. The implication of this widespread illegal cultivation of cannabis is that arable farmlands that are supposed to be used for cultivation of food and cash crops are now being used for the cultivation of cannabis sativa. This will therefore, threaten food security and reduce food production and supply with attendant food scarcity as well as looming famine. Given the large quantities of cannabis seizures and destruction every year, it is crystal clear that this drug is the most widely produced, trafficked and consumed illicit drug in Nigeria.

(ii) Cocaine

Cocaine popularly known as “Charlie” in some parts of Nigeria is a potent and powerful stimulant derived from the Coca plant. The drug is a crystalline powder, with a bitter taste and white in colour. Cocaine can be sniffed, smoked, or administered through intravenous injections. In the Nigeria drug market, it is given different local names such as coco, oja, smoke, cocktail, blow, chunk and so on (Dambazau, 2007). Cocaine is imported into Nigeria from South American countries like Columbia, Peru, Bolivia Venezuela, the Guynanas, Brazil and trafficked via West Africa to Europe. This drug is smuggled by commercial flights or shipped into the country. This is attested to by the haul in illicit drug seizures witnessed by our country in recent times at one of the seaports in Lagos. This is what is often referred to as “cocaine warehousing” in West Africa. Apart from Cocaine, another derivative which is also powerful is called Crack. It is refined from Cocaine hydrochloride, dried and broken into tiny pieces called “Crack” because of the cracking sound it makes when being smoked. It is also called “rock”. Nigeria drug traffickers trade in both Cocaine and Crack and significant arrests and seizures have been made in this regard. The NDLEA reported that in 2014 the Cocaine seizures made amounted to 226.041 kilograms, while in 2013, Cocaine seizures made weighed 290.2 kilograms. This indicates that the drug problem is much on the ground in Nigeria.

(iii) Heroin

Heroin is a narcotic drug, derived from Opium poppy plant known “*Paper Soniferium*”. The Opiates are Morphine, Heroin, Codeine, Papaver Moscapaine, and thebaine. Heroin is a crystalline powder and could be white, grey, brown, or black in colour depending on the degree of its purity. It exists in tablets, capsule, or liquid and can be consumed orally, sniffed, smoked, or injected. In Nigeria, this drug is given names such as “H”, “Horse”, “White stuff”, “Smack”, “Gbana”, “Joy”, “powder”, and so on (NDLEA, 2008). Drug baron makes fortunes by trafficking on this drug, which is not produced in Nigeria. Heroin is the source from Golden Crescent countries of South East Asia of India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Golden triangle nations of South West Asia of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. This drug is highly sought after and patronized by Nigeria drug addicts. According to NDLEA, in 2013 the agency made Heroin seizures of 24.53 kilograms, while in 2014, it made seizures of 56.449 kilograms of Heroin (NDLEA, 2014). This is an indication that Heroin is one of the most illicit drugs trafficked by Nigerian drug merchants. According to the United State Department, Nigerian trafficking organisations are involved in smuggling heroin from Afghanistan and Pakistan to several parts of the United States, including Ohio and New York area.

(iv) Amphetamine-Type Stimulants

Amphetamine-type stimulants are a group of substances comprised of synthetic stimulant including amphetamine, methamphetamine, methcathinone, and ecstasy-group substances (e.g., MDMA and its analogues). ATS is transported mainly from Nigeria to several countries in West Africa with traffickers using the land route due to the free movement policy of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) rather than air route for transporting ATS within the region. Nigerian groups are also reportedly trafficking amphetamine overland in Benin (UNODC, 2012).

Methamphetamine is relatively new in Nigeria. But it is the most powerful, addictive and dangerous. It is three times as potent as cocaine. That is why those who are addicted to it are always hyperactive and restless. The drug, which is referred to as poor man cocaine is white in colour, odourless, and bitter substance that can easily dissolve in water or alcohol. It can be taken orally, by smoking, snorting, or injection. In the drug market, the drug is popularly known as “Meth” or “Paya”. This drug has the capacity of enhancing sexual performance and medical

property as a pain killer. Common destinations for methamphetamine trafficking out of Nigeria are Japan, Malaysia, Thailand, and China. Egypt, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Qatar have been used as transits countries for drugs to be smuggled to Japan. Methamphetamine is largely trafficked by air to destinations in other regions. In terms of street value, meth is cheaper to buy than cocaine or heroin. Drug barons invest more resources on it because of the high-profit margin. Perhaps this explains why it is relatively easily available. Methamphetamine is now produced in clandestine laboratories in Nigeria. The first discovery was in Lagos in 2011 and up till date, eleven clandestine methamphetamine laboratories were discovered and dismantled in Lagos and Anambra States. In the course of the operation, criminal networks from Latin America such as Bolivia and Colombia were found to be actively involved in this illicit enterprise. Methamphetamine production is being carried out in Nigeria with the use of its primary precursor, ephedrine and other chemicals. In 2013, a total of 340.8 kilograms of methamphetamine were seized by NDLEA, while in 2015, methamphetamines seizures stood at 410.82 kilograms (NDLEA, 2015).

(v) Skonk And Combine

Skonk and Combine are two substances commonly procured, stored, peddled, and sold in different parts of Nigeria. Skonk is modified Cannabis, which is a hallucinogen, depressant, and illegal drug. It is more costly and sweeter. It has no Cannabis smell and cannot be easily perceived or detected. This drug is usually procured from Ghana. The combine is a local name used to describe a mixture of psychoactive substances, which have a stimulating effect. This substance is common in some parts of Nigeria. The combination of psychoactive substances has different appellations as:

- SAMSUNG – which is a mixture of Cannabis and ogogoro, local gin distilled from raffia palm
- SIEMEN- a mixture of Cannabis and Heroin
- NOKIA- a mixture of Cannabis and Cocaine
- SAGEM- a mixture of Cannabis, Cocaine, and Heroin (Adeniyi, 2011)

Table-1. Drug Interdiction and arrests scorecard from 2000-2014.

Year	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin	Others	Total	Male	Female	Total
2000	272,260.02	53.42	56.6	234.28	272,604.32	2,253	132	2,385
2001	317,950.20	195.82	46.63	308.84	318,501.49	2,693	136	2,829
2002	506,846.09	35.35	55.62	791	507,728.06	2,549	108	2,657
2003	535,593.75	134.74	87.58	937.41	536,753.48	2,316	174	2,490
2004	68,310.07	124.47	90.94	233.83	68,759.31	3,382	318	3,700
2005	125,989	395.91	70.42	88.72	126,543.65	3,181	292	3,473
2006	192,368.30	14,435.88	33.09	515.57	207,352.84	5,883	440	6,323
2007	210,262.90	393.678	120.638	699.735	211,476.00	5,891	477	6,368
2008	335,535.34	365.4904	11.6054	530.4033	336,442.84	7,584	315	7,899
2009	114,700.71	392.05	104.71	712.77	115,910.24	6,700	342	7,042
2010	174,661.59	706.433	202.08	2,550.622	178,120.73	6,296	492	6,788
2011	191,847.91	410.81	39.752	2,985.447	195,283.9	8,072	567	8,639
2012	228,794.13	131.89	211.03	4,562.585	233,699.64	7,510	542	8,052
2013	205,373	290.2	24.53	134,280.38	33968.11	8,324	519	8,843
2014	53878,194.52	226.041	56.449	7,562.49	53,886,039.5	8,332	494	8,826
Total	57,368,687.53	18,292.1824	1,211.6744	156,994.0823	57,229,174.11	80,966	5,348	86,314

Sources: NDLEA 2010 Annual Report. NDLEA (2014).

Table 1 shows the drug interdiction and arrests scorecard from 2000-2014. The table shows that a total of 57,368,687.53 of cannabis, 18,292.1824 of cocaine, 1,211.6744 of heroin and 156,994.0823 other illicit drugs was seized between 2000-2014. The table also revealed that a total of 86,314 suspects were arrested between 2000-2014.

(vi) Psychotropic Substances

These are substances naturally or synthetic that are capable of producing stimulation or depression on the Central Nervous System and are placed under international Control. Such substances are covered by the convention on psychotropic substances, 1971. These substances such as tramadol and cough syrup containing codeine are controlled drugs and cannot be sold without a prescription. In most cases, arrest and seizures made by NDLEA are from chemists and Patient and Proprietary Medicine Dealers. These people are not permitted by law to sell or store these psychotropic substances but because of the financial gain, they venture into this drug trade. Large quantities of these drugs have been seized by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) nationwide. In 2013, NDLEA reported seizures of 133,920 kilograms of psychotropic substances, while in 2014, 7,407.44 kilograms of psychotropic substances were seized by the Agency (NDLEA, 2014).

2.4. Drug Trafficking: Entry and Exit Routes

The most crucial factor put into consideration by drug barons in the movement of their consignment is the entry and exit route. This is fundamental because the successful movement of these illicit drugs from the production point to consuming nations is dependent on the route applied. The drug merchants know this and will map out plans on the best routes to pass their drugs in order to avoid detection by drug law enforcement agencies. Nigerian drug traffickers usually travel to South America to procure Cocaine. They start their journey from Nigeria to South Africa and connect Brazil where they enter South American countries of Columbia, Peru, and Bolivia to purchase Cocaine (Adeniyi, 2016). According to Dambazau (1995) Cocaine originates from Latin America, especially from Columbia, Peru, Venezuela, Equador and Bolivia with transshipment points at Panama, Honduras, Costa Rica, El-Salvador and Nicaragua while the final destination is the United States and Canada. The Mexico route is noted for trafficking Cocaine from Columbia and Cannabis Sativa (Marijuana) to United State. The dominant organised crime syndicates on this route are the Cali, and Medellin Cartels and Gulf Cartels based in Columbia and Mexico respectively. The North Africa route is famous for peddling Heroin from turkey and cocaine from Columbia through Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia to Europe. Similarly, the West Africa route originates Cocaine and Heroin from Latin America, South East, and West Asia. On this route, Nigeria and Ghana are main transit countries for onward movement to the United States and Europe. According to Dambazau (2007) the Afro square, a platform under which the African drug barons and traffickers operate, control the trade on this route. The South African route becomes prominent after the end of the apartheid regime in that country. A lot of contraband goods, Heroin, Cocaine, and Cannabis now flood the country with the advent of a democratic government. Sadly enough is the allegation that the South African connection is being spearheaded by Nigerians. It is estimated that Nigerians control 90 percent of the South African narcotics market and more importantly they have made the country a key transshipment point for drugs bound for Europe and the United States (Fobur, 2009). Heroin, which is another drug trafficked by Nigerian drug traffickers, is peddled and smuggled through different routes before getting to its final destination. Lafiaji (2004) identified the following as the main transit routes of Heroin in Africa.

- Lagos – Addis-Ababa – New Delhi (Return)
- Lagos – Addis-Ababa – Karachi (Return)
- Lagos – Addis-Ababa – Curacao-Karachi (Return)
- Lagos – Amsterdam – New Delhi (Return)
- Lagos – Johannesburg – New Delhi (Return)
- Lagos – Kenya – Karachi (Return)
- Amsterdam – Croatia – Nigeria (Return)

- Croatia – Amsterdam – Abidjan – Nigeria.

Heroin is essentially procured by Nigerian drug merchants from South East Asian countries of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan as well as South West Asia countries of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. The drugs are later taken to consuming nations of the United States and Western Europe nations. In Nigeria, Lagos is known and regarded as the best connecting flights to most countries in the world. This partly explains why Nigerian drug traffickers prefer the Lagos route. Different types of drugs such as Heroin, Cocaine, Cannabis, Methamphetamines and so on have been seized along this route. In a nutshell, there is no doubt that illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances involves a complex network of routes and transit points worldwide.

2.5. Drug Concealment Strategies

Another important factor in illicit drug enterprise is the modus operandi of concealment. In order to beat security checks, drug traffickers devise various ways and methods of concealing their goods. Reports from NDLEA reveals that some of the ways drug traffickers conceal drugs are by using roasted chicken slices, cans juice, kola nut cases, and dry fish. Other means of concealment are engraved timbers, wevon, and sealed up cylinders. Drug traffickers also conceal drugs in pampers, photo-albums, corpse and coffins, shoes-holes, designer's buttons, false bottom suitcases, fridge compressors, motor spare parts as well as the television set. Tubers of yams, loaves of bread, tins of tomatoes and margarine, toothpaste tubes, and cooking stoves are among the recognized means of concealing illicit drugs. Aside from all these, drug couriers, have been found to conceal drugs in their stomach through ingestion, swallowing, private part like the anus, which is common among female traffickers; inside stew or food, brazier, lining of clothes, belts and handbags, but their most preferred method of concealment is by ingestion. Large quantities of illicit drugs are been shipped into Nigeria through containers. These drugs are concealed in moulding machines, floor tiles, white cement, and bails of cloth. Available information from NDLEA also shows that illicit drugs are concealed in stethoscopes, sewing thread, ceramic flasks, and make-up packs/kits. Other means of concealing drugs include Laptops, jewellery, artifacts, coolers, and balloons. Another trick now in vogue is the destruction of claim tags on drug-label luggage in order to make identification of owner difficult upon arrival. Such luggage is left unclaimed for a while, after which arrangement is made using airport contacts or accomplices to claim the luggage at a later date. Drug barons are not relentless in their tricks and they keep on initiating new modes of concealment as those being used are detected by law enforcement agencies.



Plate-1. Cocaine coated with roasted chicken.

Source: NDLEA (2014).

Palate 1 shows illicit drugs concealed in a roasted chicken.



Plate-2. Hard drugs in the artifact.

Source: NDLEA (2014).

Palate 2 shows hard drugs concealed in artifacts.

2.6. Transportation of Illicit Drugs

The medium of transporting illicit drugs to retailers and final consumers is also critical in illicit drug enterprise and directly connected to the route. Drug barons in moving their consignment, patronize the three major means of transportation namely, land, air, and water. However, the air space enjoys the highest patronage by drug barons in moving drugs to European countries. The increasing number of drug traffickers arrested in these airports as reported by mass media support this submission. Air transport is preferred above another medium of transportation in the movement of illicit drugs because it is considered the fastest means of transportation among the three means of transportation in the world. Within a few hours, drugs are delivered at the intended destination. NDLEA data analyses reveal that 80 percent of cocaine and heroin traffickers arrested between 1999 and 2010 travelled by air (NDLEA, 2010). The most frequently used Airline by drug barons are Ethiopian Airline, Etihad Airways, South African Airways, Qatar, and Turkish Airlines. Others include Arik, Air France, Kenya Airways, Roya Air Maroc, Alitalia, Rwanda Air, Egypt Air and so on. Ethiopian Airlines was the most frequently patronised flight by couriers, followed by Emirate and Etihad Airlines respectively (NDLEA, 2014). Notwithstanding, as a result of tight and tougher security measures at the entry and exit points of most countries of the world; due to the menace of drug trafficking, a combination of all means of transportation can be involved but this will depend on the nature of the route. It is argued that the network of transportation is never fixed or continuous, but highly flexible and it is always backed by contingency plans involving alternative routes and modes of movement (Dauglas, 1991). The preference of Lagos airport by drug barons is because it is Nigeria's prime airport. It also has the greatest number of international flights with connecting flights to so many other airports in the world where couriers could dispose of their drugs. Drug traffickers also utilize the land and sea in the distribution and supply chain of their products. Illicit drugs are regularly intercepted on land, and in Nigeria borders by officials of NDLEA and other sister security agencies. The most seized drug is Cannabis, which usually transported by land in tankers, trailers, heavy-duty trucks, delivery vans, bullion vans, and company vehicles. Cannabis and Methamphetamines being cultivated illegally and manufactured illegally in clandestine laboratories respectively have been seized on the road while being conveyed from farmlands and production centres to the intended destination. Illicit drugs are easily trafficked

in and out of the country unnoticed because of the vastness and the porous nature of Nigeria borders. Nevertheless, security agencies have made remarkable interception, arrest, and seizures in some entry and exit points where there is a tight security network.

The waterways are also another medium of transportation used by drug traffickers in the movement of their consignment in and out of Nigeria. There are many cases of drugs worth several billions of Dollars smuggled into Nigeria through Tincan port and Apapa Warf. It is on NDLEA records that in 1994, Heroin that weighed 48.3 kilograms was smuggled into Nigeria from Thailand by foreign ships but was detected at Apapa seaport. In 2001, another consignment of Cocaine weighing 60 kilograms was smuggled into Nigeria and intercepted by NDLEA at the Tincan Island Port, Lagos. In 2011, NDLEA made two interceptions of cocaine that weighed 165 kilograms and 110 kilograms at Tincan Island Port, Lagos concealed in floor tiles carefully packed (NDLEA, 2011). Similarly, in 2012, the NDLEA reported that she discovered and intercepted 113.49 kilograms of Heroin also at Tincan Island Port (TCIP), Lagos, concealed in moulding machines (NDLEA, 2012). Recently, 576 kilograms of Ephedrine and Methamphetamines concealed inside foodstuff in the container were detected and intercepted by NDLEA at Apapa Warf. The consignments were to be exported to South Africa (NDLEA, 2012). All these large quantities of drugs seized at the nation's seaport show the desperation of some unscrupulous Nigerians to get rich quick. It should be noted that as a result of the bulky nature of Cannabis, land and sea transportation have always been preferred by traffickers. There are instances of detection and interception of cannabis at the Mfum border in Cross River state with Cameroon border at Ekok and also at the Seme and Idiroko borders with Benin Republic and in several other entry and exit points in Nigeria. In 2014, 6.3 kilograms of pure cocaine was discovered and intercepted at Calabar Jetty by NDLEA, Cross River State Command (NDLEA, 2015).

2.7. The imperative of Raising the Red Flag

Drug trafficking is registering new alarming trends in Nigeria with disturbing and subverting effects on public health, good governance, economic growth, and security. The increase in the illicit drug trade has led to the creation of local markets for the consumption of illicit drugs such as Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Amphetamines, Methamphetamines, and other mind-altering psychotropic substances. The abuse of these drugs has resulted to damaging health problems, broken homes, domestic violence, low productivity, loss of a job, road traffic accidents and delinquent acts like stealing, pilfering, truancy, assault, and rape. The fallout effect of drug trafficking which is the availability of psychoactive substances has also invariably led to drug abuse and other associated crimes such as armed robbery, burglary, arson, assassination, kidnapping, militancy, terrorism, insurgency, and political thuggery. All these create an unsafe environment, which constitutes a great threat to the peace, safety, stability, and security of society. Drug trafficking has created a bad image for the country as innocent Nigerians travelling abroad for genuine purposes have been subjected to humiliating, embarrassing and dehumanising searches at major international airports under the assumption that every Nigerian is presumed to be drug baron or trafficker. Drug trafficking has led to the arrest, prosecution, conviction, and execution of Nigerians in foreign countries over drug-related offences. Also worrisome is a situation where persons arrested, persecuted and convicted for drug-related offenses, after serving jail terms or while on bail often return to illicit drug commerce.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Illicit drug trafficking is a serious social problem that has assumed an alarming and dangerous dimension, with severe implications on socio-economic development. The trend in illicit drug trafficking has evolved and expanded from cannabis, cocaine and heroin trade to amphetamine-type stimulants. Nigeria is particularly susceptible to the

influence of transnational criminal organizations because of widespread corruption, poverty, illiteracy, greed, laziness, and desire to get rich quick. Other factors include; unpoliced border, strategic geographic location, and mismanagement of both human and material resources, lack of political will, ineffective law enforcement agencies, and inadequate financial aid to security agencies. In light of the above submission, it is pertinent to put forward the following recommendations:

- (i) Attitudinal change among Nigerians should be encouraged. The perception of Nigerians towards material wealth and the get-rich-quick syndrome, at all cost, should be discouraged. There should be a shift in focus and emphasis from acquiring material wealth at all cost, to moral rebirth, ethics, and social re-orientation. Nigerian should refrain and desist from glorifying ill-gotten wealth and affluence. Any wealth or riches, which the source is unknown should not be celebrated, this will help instill the values of hard work, honesty, and dignity of labour among Nigerians. A better and more honourable way of earning a living should be revealed to Nigerian youths through teachings and empowerment programmes.
- (ii) The government should provide cannabis farmers with high yielding seedlings for food and cash crops such as maize, yam, cassava, plantain cocoa, groundnut, cotton and so on in order to discourage illegal cannabis cultivation and boost food supply and food security.
- (iii) Constant and aggressive enlightenment programmes on the ills of drug trafficking should be encouraged. Ignorance is one of the factors that promote illicit drug trade in Nigeria. The government needs to initiate and implement public enlightenment programmes to sensitize the general populace on the inherent dangers of drug trafficking and abuse. Such programmes should provide information on the consequences of trafficking in illicit substances. This will give members of the public opportunities to have informed opinions about the drug scourge and desist from this criminal enterprise.
- (iv) National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should be strengthened through sufficient funding. The agency should be well funded and equipped to meet the challenges of the modern drug crisis and enhance the performance of the agency.
- (v) A stiffer penalty in line with the penalties for various drug offences stipulated in the NDLEA Act should be meted out to convicted drug traffickers. Giving the option of ridiculous fines or light sentences will not serve any deterrence purpose.

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