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# The Security Challenges of Drug Trafficking in West Africa: Why Agenda-Setting Matters

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# PEACEBUILDING

IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA  
*African Perspectives*



Edited by  
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# The Security Challenges of Drug Trafficking in West Africa: Why Agenda-Setting Matters

*Felix Kumah-Abiwu*

## Introduction

The West African sub-region<sup>1</sup> has been the focus of global attention in recent years following the region's emergence into a major transit hub for illegal drug trafficking from Latin America to Europe.<sup>2</sup> Although the production, trafficking and use of narcotic drugs<sup>3</sup> have been one of the major global problems for several decades, the large scale trafficking of illicit drugs, especially cocaine through West Africa (WA) and the security threats to the region's stability are issues of great concern in recent times.

The 2010 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for example, has estimated that about 20-40 tons of cocaine per year with 20 tons valued at about US\$1 billion have passed through the region since the mid-2000s (surge period). This huge amount of drugs through the region by the mid-2000s was far more than the continent's combined figure of less than a ton per year in the pre-surge period.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 The sub-region consists of sixteen states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Except for Mauritania, all the rest are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
  - 2 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa: The Threat to Stability and Development" (Vienna, 2007), p.11. Retrieved on 28/12/2013, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/West%20Africa%20cocaine%20report\\_10%2012%2007.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/West%20Africa%20cocaine%20report_10%2012%2007.pdf)
  - 3 Felix Kumah-Abiwu, "The Quest for Global Narcotics Policy Change: Does the United States Matter?" *International Journal of Public Administration* 37, 1 (2014), p.53. Also see Julia Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics: Production, Consumption and Global Markets* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2006).
  - 4 UNODC. "Regional Programme for West Africa, 2010-2014: Supporting ECOWAS." (Vienna, 2010), p. vii. Retrieved from: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/FINAL\\_CONSOLIDATED\\_nov22.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/westandcentralafrica/FINAL_CONSOLIDATED_nov22.pdf)

Given the sub-region's long history of political instability, protracted conflicts, poverty and socio-economic stagnation,<sup>5</sup> it is likely that the region might plunge into long term security challenges such as terrorism, transnational organised crime, political problems and potential collapse of states. These security challenges have intensified scholarly debates in recent years on how best to address the issue. This study is also motivated by the ongoing discourse on the issues of governance and security threats in WA, but with focus on the security challenges of drug trafficking. In other words, the chapter attempts to examine how drug trafficking is shaping the security environment, what is being done (*policy actions*) and what is not being done (*policy inactions*) by countries in the region. To explore this, the chapter employs the theory of *agenda-setting* with focus on *issue definition, redefinition* and *policy entrepreneurship* in the analysis. In essence, my central argument is that agenda-setting matters in any attempt to address drug trafficking as a security challenge in WA.

Grounded on a systematic analysis of the narcotics literature, the study integrates the theory (agenda-setting) with existing works to investigate the following research questions. 1. To what extent is narcotics trafficking a huge security challenge in WA? 2. If so, what is the nature of the challenge? 3. What are the long term security implications for the region? 4. How useful is agenda-setting in providing a good understanding of strategies needed to address the issue? The chapter is structured into three main sections. The first section examines the evolution of narcotics trafficking surge in WA. The second explores the security implications of drug trafficking in the region, while the final section discusses the usefulness of agenda-setting in addressing the problem of drug trafficking and the potentially dangerous security consequences for WA. The final section also provides some policy recommendations as possible solutions to the problem.

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<sup>5</sup> UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa," p.11.

### Evolution of Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa

For more than a century, the global system has been faced with the problem of illicit drugs in terms of production, trafficking and use and WA is no exception to this problem.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the first global initiative to control narcotic drugs occurred in 1909 when the International Opium Conference was held in Shanghai, China by the United States (US), Britain and China to discuss the global flow of opium.<sup>7</sup> Subsequent conferences were held in later years, which culminated into international treaties prohibiting the production, trafficking and use of narcotic drugs such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana and other psychotropic substances except in few cases where some of these drugs were permitted for scientific and medical uses.<sup>8</sup> Like countries in WA, many other signatory countries to the global drug prohibition regime are governed by three main treaties or conventions,<sup>9</sup> which are coordinated by UNODC and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB).<sup>10</sup>

As noted, the West African sub-region continues to attract global attention following the surge in narcotics trafficking from the mid-2000s. While the emerging problem (drug trafficking) during the last few years has become the focus of some scholarly works, it must, however, be noted that the production, trafficking and use of illegal drugs are not new issues in Africa. In fact, Acheampong<sup>11</sup> argues that cannabis or marijuana, for example, has been grown in Ethiopia and other countries in southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe for centuries.

6 Kumah-Abiwu, "Global Narcotics Policy Change." Also see UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa."

7 David Bewley-Taylor, *The United States and International Drug Control, 1909-1997* (London: Biddles Ltd, 1999).

8 Felix Kumah-Abiwu, *The Dynamics of US Narcotics Policy Change: Implications for the Global Narcotics Regime* (Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012).

9 The three conventions are: *the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.*

10 Felix Kumah-Abiwu, *The Dynamics of US Narcotics Policy Change*. p.7.

11 Emmanuel Akycampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Case Study of Ghana," *African Affairs* 104, 416 (2005), p. 432.

But the widespread introduction of marijuana to WA could be traced to ex-servicemen who returned from Asia during and after World War II. By implication, the ex-servicemen could be described as the channel through which marijuana became popular in WA.

While the *popularisation argument* appears to dominate the origins debate in terms of the cultivation and use of marijuana in WA, Acheampong reminds scholars not to forget the centrality of Sierra Leone in the origins debate as well. According to Acheampong, marijuana was cultivated and used in Sierra Leone for medicinal and non-medicinal purposes for several years even before the start of the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> Sharing a similar perspective, Brown<sup>13</sup> maintains that the trade routes for licit and illicit items, including narcotic drugs have existed in the pre-independence shadow economies of WA for many decades. For Stephen Ellis, WA has been involved in the global narcotics trade for over half a century. The first recorded use of the region as a transit zone for international trafficking was in 1952, when US officials detected parcels of heroin being transported (via couriers on commercial airlines) from Beirut to New York through Kano (Nigeria) and Accra (Ghana) by a Lebanese group.<sup>14</sup>

About ten years later, Nigerian and Ghanaian drug traffickers not only started exporting what Ellis describes as large quantities of *African-grown marijuana* to Europe, but they also established a sophisticated network of local partners who provided safe storage spaces and banking facilities for the trade. By the early 1980s, West African traffickers had successfully elevated their regional trade into the global heroin and cocaine networks.<sup>15</sup> Ellis' study further reveals that about 55 percent

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12 Ibid.

13 David E. Brown, *The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance and Human Security in West Africa* (Letort Papers/U.S Army War College Press, 2013), p.5. Retrieved on 29/12/2013, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB1151.pdf>

14 Stephen Ellis, "West Africa's International Drug Trade," *African Affairs* 108,431 (2009), pp. 172-173.

15 Ibid., p. 173.



of heroin that arrived at New York's John F. Kennedy airport between 1984 and 1989 were mostly carried by Nigerians.<sup>16</sup> A 1991 report by the Nigerian Ministry of Justice has also revealed a huge number (15,433) of Nigerians arrested for drug trafficking since 1984 in many parts of the world.<sup>17</sup> While Nigerians and Ghanaians appear to control the pre-surge phase (*before year 2000*) of the regional drug networks is certainly not to suggest a total exclusion of other West African nationals from the drug trade.

McGuire's recent work has also enriched the literature, especially on the unique characteristics of the West African drug networks as compared to other networks in the world. For McGuire, the drug networks in WA are business-focused and extensively diverse with other business activities. This strategy is contrary to other regions of the world where the so-called business tends to exclusively focus on drugs.<sup>18</sup> McGuire's observation about the West African drug networks is quite similar to Acheampong's description of the region's typical drug trafficker as one who might look like a genuine business person on the surface with multiple business outlets, but a criminal drug baron beneath.<sup>19</sup>

As the preceding discussion reveals, the West African narcotic networks in the pre-surge era were not only flexible and entrepreneurial, but these networks established a significant niche within the global narcotics trading system.<sup>20</sup> While sharing a similar view on the entrepreneurial nature of the trade, Ellis holds a rather divergent perspective on the scale of the trade (volume of trafficking).<sup>21</sup> For Ellis, drug trafficking across WA was widespread by the 1960s throughout the 1980s to attract global attention, but was unfortunately not the case. As currently known, it was

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16 Ibid., p. 180.

17 Ibid., p. 180.

18 Peter McGuire. "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa: A Governance Challenge," *The Pardee Papers* No.9. Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future (Boston University, 2010), p. 12.

19 Akyeampong, "Drug trafficking in West Africa." p.442.

20 McGuire, "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa." p.12.

21 Ellis, "West Africa's International Drug Trade." pp.172-173.

rather the sudden surge in the trans-continental trafficking through the region by the mid-2000s and the subsequent security and governance threats to the region's stability that shifted the global attention to the drug problem.

### **Explaining the Surge in Narcotics Trafficking**

The 2007 report by the UNODC<sup>22</sup> on cocaine trafficking in WA was perhaps the watershed moment that has captured global attention to the drug situation. The description of the region as "West Africa is under attack"<sup>23</sup> clearly demonstrates the seriousness of the problem. The report has, for example, revealed that large consignments (46 tons) of cocaine destined for Europe from Latin America were seized in the region since 2005.<sup>24</sup> While most coastal countries have not been excluded, Guinea-Bissau became the main hub for the landfalls of these drugs from South America for further shipment on commercial airlines in small quantities across the region to Europe.<sup>25</sup> Aside Guinea-Bissau, other large consignments of cocaine often smuggled from Colombia through Brazil and Venezuela have landed on the island of Cape Verde and the coastal countries ranging from Mauritania in the northwest to Nigeria at the far west.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Togo and Ghana have also been described as key entry points for the shipment of these drugs to European entry centres like Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup> In 2004, for example, a consignment of 588 kg of cocaine was seized at the port of Tema in Ghana and another 450kg was captured

22 UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa."

23 Ibid., p.1.

24 UNODC, "Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa," (Vienna, 2008), p.3. Retrieved on 05/01/2014, <http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Drug-Trafficking-WestAfrica-English.pdf>

25 Ibid., p.17.

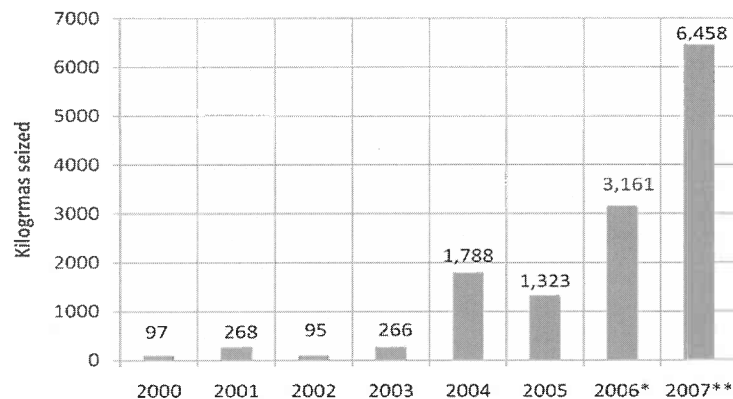
26 Liana Sun Wyler and Nicolas Cook, "Illegal Drug Trade in Africa: Trends and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service Report (2010), pp.14-15. Retrieved on 05/01/2014, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/142774.pdf>

27 Ibid.

off the coast of Togo. Similarly, a total of 1.9 tons of cocaine was seized in 2006 by Ghanaian authorities in the coastal village of Prampam. A total of 14 tons (*mixture of cocaine and cement*) was also seized at the port of Lagos, Nigeria in 2006.<sup>28</sup> The 2007 figures were not different either. For instance, a consignment of 635kg of cocaine was seized in Guinea-Bissau but the traffickers were believed to have escaped with about 2.5 tons. The Senegalese authorities were also reported to have stumbled upon 1.2 tons of cocaine in a discarded boat in 2007.<sup>29</sup>

The trend in the annual cocaine seizures, as shown in figure 2, provides a clear picture of the magnitude of the narcotics onslaught that has engulfed a region that is already faced with political, security, socio-economic and governance vulnerabilities. While this chapter focuses on the trafficking of cocaine from the Andes and its implications for the region, one cannot ignore to mention the trafficking of other narcotic drugs such as heroin from Asia to the region as well.

**Figure 2 Annual Cocaine Seizures in West Africa (2000–2007)**



**Source:** UNODC, “Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa” (Vienna, 2007), p. 8. UNODC interprets this symbol \* as preliminary data for

28 McGuire, “Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa,” pp.14-15. Also see UNODC, “Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa,” p.20.

29 Ibid., p.14.

2006 based on available data as of November 2007. And these ones \*\* as data collected between January and November 2007. Also see McGuire, "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa," p.15.

According to the UNODC, a consignment of about 2.4 tons of heroin was seized from West Africans, especially Nigerians on commercial flights with links to Asia since 2000.<sup>30</sup>

Another dimension of the drug debate deals with the question of why the West African sub-region became attractive as a new target for the global drug traffickers. Few explanations might help better understand the change. For clarity purposes, I re-categorised these explanations into externally-driven and internally-driven factors. As most scholars share, the global shift in the cocaine market from North America to Europe since the mid-1980s could be one of the key externally-driven factors responsible for the change. As it is well known, the cocaine market in the US has been one of the largest, but the demand and availability of cocaine have debatably been on the decline in the US for the past few years.<sup>31</sup> What then explains the decline in the US? The literature underscores two major reasons for the changing trends. First, the aggressive crackdown (*law enforcement*) by US authorities on the trafficking of cocaine and other hard drugs like heroin from the Andes. Second, the enormous assistance (monetary and logistics) that the US government has provided and continues to provide countries such as Colombia<sup>32</sup> for the destruction of coca farms and trafficking networks. The interdiction of drugs through effective border patrols by governments in the Western Hemisphere is another factor to the decline.<sup>33</sup>

30 UNODC, "Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa," p.4.

31 UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa," p.17.

32 Colombia produces about 54 percent of refined cocaine for the world market with Bolivia and Peru supplying the rest (Brown, "The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance," p.15).

33 UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa," p.17

As the regular trafficking routes to the US drug market continues to be disrupted, the search for new consumption markets and transit routes became the obvious choice for the drug cartels.<sup>34</sup> Two important outcomes could be noticeable from the global shift in the cocaine market. First, Europe became the new consumption market for the drug. For instance, the use of cocaine among the adult population in Britain was reported to have increased more than four-fold, from about 0.6 percent in 1996 to 2.6 percent in 2007.<sup>35</sup> A similar increase in cocaine use was reported in Italy, Spain and France.<sup>36</sup> Second, the West African sub-region emerged as the new trafficking route to the European drug consumption market.<sup>37</sup> For some analysts, the sub-region was chosen because of its so-called periphery status in the global drug trade. While the periphery argument might be convincing to some extent, a rather more rigid interpretation of that assumption could be misleading from a broader perspective. This is because of Ellis' argument, as earlier noted, about the global outreach and sophistication of the West African drug trade.

For the internally-driven factors, other scholars also share the view that WA has for a long time been characterised by existing conditions which created the right atmosphere for the successful trafficking of drugs. In other words, the internally-driven factors of the region have provided the necessary incentives or fertile grounds for the drug trade to flourish. Although the literature is endowed with various descriptions of the existing conditions (internally-driven factors), Aning and Pokoo's recent work has provided a good overview of these conditions.

According to them, the West African sub-region presents an ideal choice as a transit hub for drug traffickers because:

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34 Ibid., p.17.

35 Ibid

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

Its geography makes detection difficult and facilitates transit; the region boasts well-established networks of West African smugglers and crime syndicates; and a vulnerable political environment creates opportunities for operation. In some countries, civil wars, insurgency operations, and coups have led to diminishing human capital, social infrastructure and productive national development assets. They have also generated instability, with an increase in the number of armed groups operating in the region and an increase in flows of small arms and light weapons (SALW).<sup>38</sup>

An interpretation of the quotation underscores the intertwined of geography (*poorly protected borders*), socio-economic (*stagnation*) and political (*ineffective institutions of state/corruption*) factors that are responsible for the drug trade in the region. Clearly, the sub-region is not only faced with the complexities of external and internal forces shaping drug trafficking, but the security challenges to regional stability cannot in anyway be ignored.

### **The Security Challenges of Drug Trafficking in West Africa**

Although the 2013 report of the UNODC<sup>39</sup> shows some decline in the flow of cocaine to 18 tons from the peak of about 47 tons in 2007, many observers of the region, including the author of this chapter, share the view that the security challenges facing the region from drug trafficking have not been diminished. Generally, the security implications of the drug trade has been the focus of recent debates, as earlier noted, but it is equally essential not to forget the existence of other serious threats aside drug trafficking to the region.

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38 Kwesi Aning and John Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to National and Regional Security in West Africa," West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD), Background Paper No. 1 (Accra, 2013), p.3. Retrieved on 05/01/2014, [http://works.bepress.com/kwesi\\_aning/2](http://works.bepress.com/kwesi_aning/2) Also see UNODC, "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa," and McGuire, "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa."

39 UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment," (Vienna, 2013). Retrieved on 06/01/2014, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West\\_Africa\\_TOCTA\\_2013\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf)

In fact, Addo has observed that the region is facing many threats from criminal activities such as terrorism, armed robbery, money laundering, human trafficking and the trafficking of light weapons.<sup>40</sup> On the trafficking of light weapons, Alan Bryden and his colleagues,<sup>41</sup> for example, argue that the trafficking of these weapons could be explained by the region's difficulty in transitioning from the old order (authoritarian regimes) to the new (democratic systems) after the Cold War ended.

Considering the complex interactions and the multi-dimensionality of these threats, it is very likely that either of these threats could negatively affect the region's relative peace and stability in many different ways. By and large, one cannot underestimate the potency of these other security threats, but I argue, as other scholars might share, that the security threat from the ongoing drug trafficking is more likely to negatively shape the region with destructive outcomes than earlier thought. My assumption is based on the increasing sophistication of the drug networks, especially their growing links to regional criminal insurgents and terrorist groups.

With the current pattern of these threats, outcomes such as security breakdown of fragile governments and the rule of law through corrupt practices cannot be ruled out in the region. In fact, the 2007 report of the UNODC indicates that drug flows through WA are not only creating the incentives for high levels of corruption of law enforcement officials and political elites, but some of these officials have been reported to be directly involved in the drug trade.<sup>42</sup> The potential impacts of these occurrences in undermining governance and the rule of law are serious matters that can no longer be taken for granted. Few of these cases are

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40 Prosper Addo, "Cross-Border Criminal Activities in West Africa: Options for Effective Responses." Kofi Annan International Peace Keeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) Paper No.12, May 2006, p.3.

41 Alan Bryden, Boubacar N'Diaye and Funmi Olonisakin (eds), "Challenges of Security Sector Governance in West Africa," Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF, 2008).

42 UNODC. "Cocaine Trafficking in West Africa." p.29.

worth mentioning here. In Guinea Bissau, for example, it is common, as the UNODC suggests, to hear frequent allegations of high ranking public officials in government and the military involved in drug trafficking.<sup>43</sup>

Other countries in the region are not excluded from the political corruption associated with the drug trade. In 2010, Mauritania convicted high-ranking police officials on charges relating to cocaine trafficking, while the Gambian President dismissed senior security officials who were alleged to have been involved in drug trafficking. The officials involved in the Gambian case in 2010 were the national police chief and deputy, navy chief, the deputy army chief and other top officials of the National Drug Enforcement Agency.<sup>44</sup> A similar case occurred in Mali in 2010 when a police commissioner was convicted in connection with a proposed plan to construct an airstrip in the Sahel desert for future landings of “cocaine planes” from the Andes.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the Sierra Leonean Minister of Transportation was forced to resign in 2008 following his implication in cocaine trafficking syndicates.<sup>46</sup>

Aside the wide-ranging negative consequences of the trade on the region’s rule of law and democratic governance, the emerging trend of narco-terrorism is perhaps one of the potentially dangerous security threats currently facing the region’s stability.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the growing links between drug traffickers and terrorist groups have not only attracted attention to the issue, but observers of the region are seriously concern about the long term security and governance implications of the new trend. As the literature has clearly established,

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43 Ibid.

44 UNODC. “Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa: A Threat Assessment” (Vienna, 2013), p.9-10. Retrieved on 19/01/2014, [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West\\_Africa\\_TOCTA\\_2013\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/West_Africa_TOCTA_2013_EN.pdf)

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Brown, “The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance in West Africa.” Also see Kwesi Aning, “Understanding the Intersection of Drugs, Politics and Crime in West Africa: An Interpretive Analysis,” Global Consortium on Security Transformation (GCST), Policy Brief Series No 6, 2010. Also see UNODC and Wyler and Cook, “Illegal Drug Trade in Africa.”



international drug traffickers with links to terrorist groups are well-organized, profitable and capable of influencing public officials through their corrupt practices. These drug traffickers are also noted to have a reputation of undermining national security through aggressive acts of violence against state security agencies and innocent individuals. Colombia and Mexico are good cases in point.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of West Africa, the literature is quite clear about the emerging links between drug traffickers and terrorist/extremist groups, particularly in the Sahel region. It is believed that terrorist groups who are also affiliated with the drug trade like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have their strong presence in WA. Two FARC members involved in trafficking of cocaine were, for example, arrested in Guinea Bissau in 2007. A similar arrest involving other FARC operatives was made in Liberia in 2010.<sup>49</sup>

As Ellis has rightly observed, "Guinea-Bissau is not the only country in West Africa where Venezuelan and Colombian traffickers, including even FARC operatives, have taken up residence... Similar reports come from Accra, Conakry, Monrovia, and other capital cities."<sup>50</sup> Brown's recent study also reveals the involvement of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in drug trafficking for the purpose of financing their terrorist activities.

For instance, three self-described affiliates of Al Qaeda were extradited by Ghanaian authorities to the US in 2009 to face narco-terrorism charges.<sup>51</sup> In fact, a recent report by the US Senate also confirms the growing links between drug traffickers and terrorist groups in the region. According to the report, two Colombians in Algeria, including an alleged member of FARC and three individuals affiliated with AQIM

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48 McGuire, "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa," p.10.

49 Brown, "The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance in West Africa," p.21

50 Ellis, "West Africa's International Drug Trade," p. 192.

51 Brown, "The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance in West Africa," pp.22-24. Also see Wylter and Cook, "Illegal Drug Trade in Africa," p.6.

were arrested in March 2013 by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on charges related to cocaine trafficking.<sup>52</sup>

Besides AQIM and FARC terrorist groups, Hezbollah (*Lebanese-based terrorist group*) is also believed to have some ties to the drug trafficking networks, especially through the collaboration with some members of the Lebanese diaspora community in WA.<sup>53</sup> Although Boko Haram (*Nigerian-based terrorist group*) has not yet been specifically linked to any trafficking network, their future involvement could not be ruled out. Despite the difficulties often associated with studies involving trans-border criminal groups, especially when it comes to getting access to classified sources (*security-related documents*) on terrorist activities, the cases mentioned above have clearly shown the growing link between drug traffickers and terrorist groups in the region.

The foregoing discussion on the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA has generally been informed by two main points. First, the chapter has provided a contextual background regarding the nature and trends of the security challenges. Second, the chapter has also explored the new dimension of the security challenge, especially the growing link between drug trafficking and terrorism. With respect to the first and second research questions set for this study, the discussion has shown that the extent of the security challenge of drug trafficking is not only huge, but the nature of the challenge, especially the link to terrorist groups is potentially precarious for the region. The 2012 invasion of northern Mali by AQIM<sup>54</sup> is a compelling case of the potential security breakdown other countries might face if the issue is not properly addressed. Indeed, the potential security breakdown in the region provides an answer to my third research question regarding the long

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52 US Senate Report, "Eight Steps to Counter the Drug Trade in West Africa," Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control (One Hundred and Thirteenth Congress-First Session), December, 2013, p.3.

53 Brown, "The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance in West Africa," pp.22-24.

54 Brown, "The Challenge of Drug Trafficking to Democratic Governance in West Africa."

term security implications of the drug trade. My next task is to explore the final research question of whether agenda-setting is useful to finding solutions to the problem. Before examining the final research question, it is essential to recognise some of the existing national policy options and regional initiatives in place.

For several decades, governments in WA have somehow responded to the drug issue by the passage of narcotic laws and the establishment of national agencies to implement the laws.<sup>55</sup> Regionally-focused policy initiatives were also formulated to address the issue. For example, countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Gambia have some of these drug laws dating back to the 1930s, with most of the laws targeting the production and use of marijuana and more recently cocaine.<sup>56</sup> On the agencies, Ghana has the Narcotics Control Board (NACOB) while Nigeria has the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).

Other countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia have similar narcotics agencies<sup>57</sup> with most of the agencies often supported by UN partners<sup>58</sup> (UNODC/UNOWA)<sup>59</sup> and other industrialised countries. The establishment of the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative (WACSI) by the US government to help fight transnational organised crime, such as narcotics trafficking is one good example.

Other regionally-based (ECOWAS) initiatives to address the problem include: Resolution on the Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse (ECOWAS 1997), Decision on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing Drug Control Activities (ECOWAS 1998) and Decision on establishing the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in WA (ECOWAS 1999).<sup>60</sup>

55 Aning and Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to West Africa," pp.9-10.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa," p.7.

59 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime/United Nations Office for West Africa.

60 Aning and Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to West Africa," p.10.

Similar other political declarations include: The Bamako Declaration, Abuja Declaration, West African Coastal Initiative (WACI) and The Dakar Initiative.<sup>61</sup>

These initiatives and political declarations appear laudable, but the political will to effectively implement them is what might be lacking in the region. Perhaps, the extent of the problem has not been fully understood for it to receive the needed high level attention it deserves, especially on the security challenges. I therefore argue that agenda-setting should be a good starting place to finding solutions to the issue. In other words, the issue must be properly re-defined or reframed with high attention status on the agenda (*national, regional, continental and global*). Simply put! The theoretical construct of agenda-setting with focus on *issue definition, re-definition and policy entrepreneurship* should matter in our attempt to understand the strategies needed to address the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA.

### **Theoretical Construct of Agenda-Setting**

For most scholars, theories are not only essential in explaining a given phenomena, but they help to minimise the complexities often associated with any phenomena being studied.<sup>62</sup> The theoretical concept of agenda-setting is no exception! Agenda-setting is one of the well-established theoretical traditions in media and political/policy studies with similar ideas and interpretations of the concept. My application of the theory in this study is however grounded on the political science literature and tradition. In fact, political science research on agenda setting, as Peter Mortensen has observed, focuses on how and why agendas shift over time and why agenda-setting matters in policy outcomes.<sup>63</sup> These

61 Etannibi Elemika (ed). "The Impact of Organised Crime on Governance in West Africa. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, (Abuja, 2013), p. 8. Retrieved on 19/01/2014, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/nigeria/10199.pdf>

62 Michael Mintrom and Sandra Vergari, "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs, and Policy Change," *Policy Studies Journal* 24, 3 (1996). Also see Kumah-Abiwu, *The Dynamics of US Narcotics Policy Change*.

63 Peter B. Mortensen, "Political Attention and Public Policy: A Study of How Agenda Setting Matters," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33, 4 (2010).

questions are equally relevant and useful to the narcotics policy agenda in WA. What then is agenda-setting?

McLendon defines agenda-setting as the process by which an issue or a problem moves from a relative obscurity to become a priority issue as a result of serious and sustained attention normally given to the issue by political actors.<sup>64</sup> On Studlar's part, agenda-setting is the process where issues are seriously considered toward the achievement of a policy goal.<sup>65</sup> The theory is composed of conceptual tenets such as issue definition, redefinition, venue shifting and policy entrepreneurship among others.<sup>66</sup> While recognising the centrality of these tenets in explaining policy outcomes, the application of all the conceptual elements is beyond the scope of this work. In essence, agenda-setting is applied in this study with focus on issue definition, re-definition and policy entrepreneurship.

### **Issue Definition/Re-Definition and Policy Entrepreneurship**

According to Rochefort and Cobb, issue (*problem*) definition is what political leaders choose to identify as public issues and how these leaders and the public think and talk about the issues.<sup>67</sup> For Baumgartner and Jones, issue definition is the purposeful process by which political leaders accomplish certain goals and objectives.<sup>68</sup> Advancing similar ideas on the concept but from a slightly different perspective, Janet Weiss underscores what issue definition is not. For Weiss, the definition or redefinition of an issue is not just a label, facts or perceptions, but ideas that attempt to address the causes and consequences of a

64 Michael K. McLendon, "Setting the Government Agenda for State Decentralization of Higher Education," *The Journal of Higher Education* 74, 5(2003), p.482.

65 Donley Studlar, *Tobacco Control: A Comparative Politics in the United States and Canada* (New York: Broadview Press, 2002), p 65. Also see David Dery, "Agenda Setting and Problem Definition," *Policy Studies* 21, 1 (2000).

66 Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

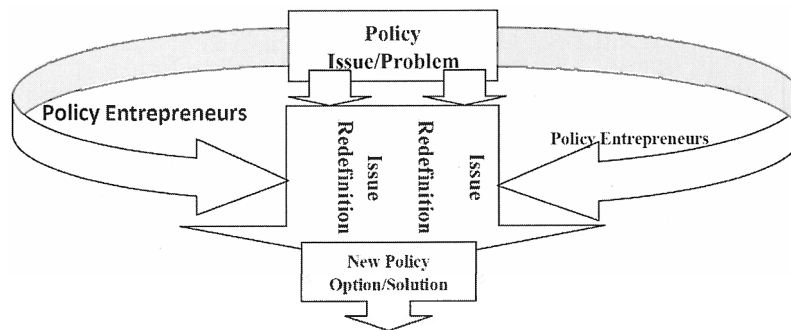
67 David Rochefort and Roger Cobb "Problem Definition: An Emerging Perspective" in David Rochefort and Roger Cobb (ed), *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda*. (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

68 Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, p.23.

problem.<sup>69</sup> In other words, Weiss' assumption considers the ability to properly redefine an issue as one of the crucial steps to finding solutions to policy problems.

Aside the conceptual tenets of issue definition and re-definition, policy entrepreneurship constitutes another core element of agenda-setting theory. John Kingdon, who is perhaps the leading policy theorist on policy entrepreneurship, describes policy entrepreneurs as policy agents who look for windows of opportunity to push their pet projects (*policy issues of interest*) onto a national agenda for policy action.<sup>70</sup> Studlar sees policy entrepreneurs as advocates who take advantage of circumstances to define or redefine issues and push them onto a public or government agenda<sup>71</sup> as shown in figure 3.

**Figure 3 Agenda-Setting Model**



**Source:** Author's own design with ideas from John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, (1984) and Donley Studlar, *Tobacco Control in the United States and Canada*, (2002).

The idea of an entrepreneur might be traditionally associated with the field of business, but policy theorists argue that the same principles of a

69 Janet Weiss, "The Powers of Problem Definition: The Case of Government Paperwork," *Policy Sciences* 22, 2 (1989).

70 John Kingdon *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1984). Also see Michael Mintrom and Phillipa Norman, "Policy Entrepreneurship and Policy Change," *Policy Studies Journal* 37, 4 (2009).

71 Studlar, *Tobacco Control in the United States and Canada*, p.180.

business entrepreneur apply to policy studies as well. In fact, Mintrom and Vergari,<sup>72</sup> contend that policy entrepreneurs undertake actions that shape the policy environment just as business entrepreneurs do for the market place. Like business entrepreneurs, policy entrepreneurs invest their time, resources, reputation and money to promote specific policy outcomes. A careful analysis of the various conceptual interpretations suggests that policy entrepreneurs' primary goal is to shape policy outcomes and to a large extent, advocate solutions to policy problems. It is also evident that the individual appears to occupy the centre in the scholarly discussion on policy entrepreneurship, but Crow's recent study suggests that groups also have the ability to act as policy entrepreneurs (*unified entity*) because of their size, resources and influence in shaping policy outcomes.<sup>73</sup>

After carefully setting the tone in terms of the historical background to the study (drug trafficking in WA) as well as the theoretical foundation, the question of interest that emerges is: And so what for West Africa? In other words, what are the policy options or best practices that can address the drug issue? Apparently, the attempt to address the empirical question regarding the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA is grounded on my primary argument that agenda-setting matters.

### **Policy Options/Recommendations: Why Agenda-Setting Matters**

As revealed in the preceding discussion, issue definition, as many policy scholars argue, is one of the most significant first steps in addressing a given policy problem. Two reasons might help explain this significance. First, an issue that is well-defined in most cases attains high agenda status with attractive attention to it. Second, once an issue gets high on a given agenda (*national, regional, continental or global*) with the corresponding high attention, it is more likely that the issue will attract

72 Mintrom and Vergari, "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs and Policy Change," p.422.

73 Deserai Anderson Crow, "Policy Entrepreneurs, Issue Experts and Water Rights Policy Change in Colorado," *Review of Policy Research* 27, 3 (2010), p.301. Also see Dery, "Agenda Setting and Problem Definition."

the attention of key political actors and other members of the society such as political groups (governing/non-governing), civil society groups and members of the attentive public to seriously think and talk about the issue for possible solution.<sup>74</sup> As earlier noted, drug trafficking from the Andes through WA to Europe has become one of the serious security issues facing the region within the past few years.

While some degree of attention (national, regional, continental and global) has been given to the issue of drug trafficking in WA, especially on the growing nature of the trafficking, I contend that the security aspect of the issue (drug trafficking) has not received much attention it actually deserves. In short, the security challenge of drug trafficking in WA is facing what I will describe as serious attention and definition deficits. In fact, my assumption about the deficits is not to diminish some of the existing efforts by West African governments to address the problem. For example, it is well known that governments in the region through ECOWAS have policy initiatives,<sup>75</sup> as previously noted, with supports from key actors like the African Union and other UN agencies.

Whereas these efforts are commendable, two crucial questions of interest might be useful to ask here. First, has the issue (*security challenge of drug trafficking*) been given the needed institutional and/or systemic<sup>76</sup> attention it deserves? Second, to what extent has the issue been properly defined as a high security threat to the region? In fact, a systematic observation of the region through the literature will reveal the deficits of attention (institutional and systemic) to the drug issue. In essence, my underlying assumption regarding the issue is twofold. First, I argue that the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA have not received the urgent attention it deserves. Second, the issue (security challenges

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74 Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*.

75 Aning and Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to West Africa." p.10.

76 Systemic (public) agenda-setting involves the general public with the media in most cases leading the discussion. Institutional (governmental) agenda involves agencies of the main branches of government (Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*).



of drug trafficking) has not been properly defined by governments in the region to reflect the potentially dangerous threat from the growing link between drug trafficking and terrorism in recent years.

As expected, some critics of my assumptions might argue that the issue has been gaining some attention in terms of policy initiatives by governments and other international partners in recent years. Of course, I do share this line of thinking or argument to some extent, especially with regards to regional initiatives such as the *Bamako Declaration*, *Abuja Declaration*, *WACI* and the *Dakar Initiative*) and other efforts by the AU and UN partners currently in place.<sup>77</sup> Although these efforts are acknowledged, it is also noticeable that these initiatives have largely been driven from regional perspective, which to some extent might be desirable options, but in practice less effective in implementation because of the seemingly weak political commitment from national governments who are not doing enough to create high public attention to the issue. I am arguing, or better put, proposing the need for a strong national commitment (*micro-level*) and attention to the issue in each country before the regional level (*macro-level*). This is where countries that play leading roles in the region on political and policy issues become extremely important for other countries to emulate.

As widely known, Ghana and Nigeria appear to be the leading regional actors on many issue areas (e.g., security and governance), especially within the framework of ECOWAS for many decades. Thus, Ghana and Nigeria could be described as policy leaders and not laggards in the sub-region. Consequently, if the needed attention to the issue is not strong in countries like Ghana and Nigeria or the issue properly defined in those two countries, it is plausible that other countries might not be motivated in drawing policy lessons from the two leading countries. The obvious question of interest is: How can a regional group like ECOWAS be very effective in dealing with the security challenges

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<sup>77</sup> Etannibi Elemika (ed), "The Impact of Organised Crime on Governance in West Africa." Also see Aning and Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to West Africa,"

of drug trafficking if serious political commitment and high attention to the issue by governments, especially the leading regional players (Ghana and Nigeria) appear to be lacking in enormous proportion?

Indeed, the answer (s) to the above question is not only difficult and complex, but I am of the view that Rochefort and Cobb's conceptual ideas on issue redefinition might help provide some good framework as a starting point. As Rochefort and Cobb have reminded us, an issue tends to get high agenda status if it is properly defined and/or redefined and sustained on the agenda through engaged public debate for policy actions. On the contrary, an issue with low agenda status is likely to become dormant on the agenda with the consequences of less attention and policy inactions on the issue.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, Ghana's case might provide some support to the argument. As the theory suggests, key actors in government, especially the executive branch, in this case presidents, prime ministers and head of states play pivotal roles in setting national agendas and defining key national issues of interest. Similarly, actions or inactions of the executive branch of government, like other institutions of state, can help or hurt key policy problems in attaining high agenda status. The constitutionally mandated State of the Nation address that Ghanaian sitting presidents deliver annually to the Ghanaian Parliament constitute a good indicator in determining the direction of government policy priorities to pressing national and regional issues of concern.

Like previous State of the Nation addresses, especially those delivered from the mid-2000s and onward, the 2013 address by President John Mahama,<sup>79</sup> for example, has underscored Ghana's willingness to help tackle the drug trafficking issue in the country as well as the sub-region. Despite the fact that the 2013 address, like previous addresses, has drawn

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78 Rochefort and Cobb (ed). "Problem Definition: An Emerging Perspective."

79 The 2013 State of the Nation Address, *Opportunities for All*, Delivered by H.E. John Mahama, President of Ghana to the 6<sup>th</sup> Parliament of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic (Accra: February 21, 2013), p.20.

some levels of attention to the issue, a critical review of the address reveals that the issue was rather discussed from a broader perspective and not specifically defined from a national security standpoint for urgent policy action. Likewise, the 2014 address reiterated the so-called priority to the drug issue by the government, but the address failed to highlight the potential threat to the stability of the sub-region due to the growing link between drug trafficking and terrorist activities.<sup>80</sup> In essence, both addresses, like previous ones, have accorded some levels of presidential attention to the issue, but when it comes to the potentially dangerous security threats of the issue, it is clear that the issue was not properly defined from high national security standpoint, let alone given the high attention it deserves.

As the case in Ghana, as it appears to be in other countries in the sub-region, Nigeria has also reiterated its willingness to find solutions to the drug issue, but the question of whether the issue has been properly defined as a potentially serious security threat to the region is yet to be seen. For instance, President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria addressed the First African Legislative Summit in Abuja in 2013 and also underscored the vulnerability of African countries to drug trafficking, but the address failed to give high attention to the drug issue as one of the serious security threats to the continent, especially on the link between drug trafficking and terrorism.<sup>81</sup>

The inability of the Nigerian President to redefine the drug issue as a potentially dangerous security threat was disappointing on two levels. First, as earlier noted, Nigeria, although debatable, is an important leader and player on the continent hence its ability to influence policy directions. Second, the audience (*African Parliamentarians*) could be

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80 The 2014 State of the Nation Address, Delivered by H.E. John Mahama, President of Ghana to the Parliament of Ghana (Accra: February 26, 2014), p.21.

81 Address by President Goodluck Jonathan, GCFR at the First African Legislative Summit (Abuja-Nigeria, November, 2013). Retrieved on 20/01/2014, <http://thewillnigeria.com/news/president-goodluck-jonathans-address-at-the-first-african-legislatve-summit-abuja/>

described as a perfect window of opportunity for the Nigerian President to put more emphasis on the issue by redefining it on the continental agenda for active and engaged discussion.

Again, one is mindful of the fact that the two cases from Ghana and Nigeria are limited to make generalisation for the region, but my choice of the two countries is significant because of their leading roles on many issue areas in the sub-region. In fact, the dilemma of the West African leadership story, which is debatable by the way, is the fact that if Ghana and Nigeria (key sub-regional leaders) cannot demonstrate the strong leadership in redefining the issue from a high security standpoint with the needed attention and subsequent policy solutions (national and regional), who else might take that leadership role in the sub-region?

As clearly argued, drug trafficking has been recognised as a problem with some level of attention in WA, but it is also evident from the discussion that the nature and implications of the problem are changing very fast with new dimensions to the issue. The drug trafficking problem, as this chapter argues, should no longer be viewed as ordinary policy or social problem like any other problem confronting the region. As argued by few other scholars, it is clear that the security and governance implications of narcotics trafficking in the region are becoming very dangerous with potentially undesirable security outcomes for the region.<sup>82</sup>

With the new security threats from drug traffickers and terrorist organisations, it is apparent that the old definition of the issue as a common problem must be re-considered. New dimension of existing issues create the opportunity for old issues to be redefined to reflect the changing trends and reality of the emerging problem.<sup>83</sup> The drug issue is certainly not different and this explains why I am making the case for agenda-setting to be part of the broader drug trafficking debate.

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82 McGuire, "Narcotics Trafficking in West Africa." Also see Aning and Pokoo, "Drug Trafficking and Threats to West Africa."

83 Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Also see Studlar, *Tobacco Control in the United States and Canada*.

Fundamentally, the drug issue must be redefined to reflect the security fragility currently facing the region.

So where should the region start from? Perhaps, Janet Weiss' thesis on the dynamics of attention shifts might offer some support to my argument and a good starting place. Drawing on Anthony Downs' concept on issue attention cycle, Weiss reminds policy experts to look for opportunities for the redefinition of existing and non-workable policy issues into new ones with renewed purpose and direction for solution.<sup>84</sup> In the case of WA, the old issue is the existing drug trafficking problem, which has largely been defined as a common social problem for several decades.

This chapter is, however, advocating for a redefinition of the issue from a high security standpoint and not anymore from just a social problem. In this case, I suggest the need for the recognition by governments across the region that the drug trafficking issue with links to terrorist and extremist groups has become a potentially dangerous security threat to the collective stability of the region. Policy makers in governments and civil society groups must make every effort to intentionally redefine the drug issue to reflect the seriousness of the emerging security problem. Again, the recent crisis (political and security) in Guinea-Bissau and Mali are two examples for our regional leaders.

Aside issue redefinition, this chapter is also making the case for agenda-setting with focus on policy entrepreneurs for two main reasons. First, to enable policy entrepreneurs sustain the issue on the agenda (*national, regional, continental and global*). Second, to enable policy entrepreneurs find creative solutions to the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA. As earlier discussed, policy entrepreneurs invest their ideas, time and resources to promote policy outcomes. Roberts and King share a similar idea, but they have described the concept as *public entrepreneurs*. For them, public entrepreneurs are advocates coming from "outside the formal positions of government...who help

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84 Weiss, "The Powers of Problem Definition," p. 110. Also see Anthony Downs, "Up and Down with Ecology: The Issue-Attention Cycle," *The Public Interest* 3 (1972).

to introduce, translate, and help implement new ideas into public practice.”<sup>85</sup> I share Roberts and King’s assumption on how public entrepreneurs employ their innovative ideas in redefining problems, building alliances and setting policy agendas.

Theoretically, the idea of policy entrepreneurship is a compelling one in terms of how entrepreneurs shape policy outcomes, but the question of how the conceptual idea can be translated into a practical policy is the challenge, especially in developing regions like WA. Although useful, the concept of policy entrepreneurship has not been sufficiently explored as one of the policy options in the scholarly literature let alone among policy practitioners in dealing with policy issues until recently when Kofi Annan emerged on the scene as a “policy entrepreneur” to help the issue attain high global attention.

Drawing on the lessons from the Global Commission on Drug Policy of which the former Secretary General of the UN is a member, Kofi Annan and his Foundation established the West Africa Commission on Drugs (WACD) in January, 2013.<sup>86</sup> The Commission has eleven regional members drawn from the security and law enforcement, civil society, the health sector, judiciary and the political world. The Commission, which is chaired by former President Olusegun Obasango of Nigeria, has the goal of examining “ways and means to enhance the political priority accorded to drug trafficking and its impact on West Africa...It will undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the drug trafficking problem and its ramifications, including governance and public health.”<sup>87</sup>

Kofi Annan’s strong voice in drawing global attention to the West African drug problem as well as the determined efforts by members of

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85 Nancy Roberts and Paula King, “Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 1, 2 (1991), pp.147-148.

86 Kofi Annan Foundation. Retrieved on 22/01/2014, <http://kofiannanfoundation.org/our-work/west-africa-commission-drugs>

87 *Ibid.*,p.1.

the Commission in exploring collaborative ways to finding solutions to the issue, appear to fit the conceptual idea of policy entrepreneurs. As discussed, policy entrepreneurs are in most cases interested in investing their time, resources and reputation in shaping policy outcomes.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, one can describe the roles of Kofi Annan and the eleven members of the Commission as group policy entrepreneurs who are committed to bringing high attention status to the drug issue as well as helping find solutions to the problem. Similarly, the activities of Kofi Annan and members of the Commission are consistent with Crow's ideas of how a group or groups can act as policy entrepreneurs in shaping policy outcomes.<sup>89</sup>

Another usefulness of agenda-setting worth considering is the policy entrepreneurs' ability to develop strong networks and alliances for policy change. As Roberts and King have argued, policy entrepreneurs are effective in shaping policy outcomes with not only their ideas, but the strategy of building networks and alliances of other like-minded advocates of the issue.<sup>90</sup> Applying this theoretical concept to the role of the WACD (policy entrepreneurs), it is again apparent that the Commission is well-positioned to sustain the issue on the agenda (sub-regional, continental and global) for some time to come. With a sustained attention to the issue, it is more likely for concrete policy solutions to emerge.

While the Commission's role in shaping policy outcomes on the drug issue looks promising, it must also be noted that their success would largely depend on how effective they can build strong networks and alliances of like-minded advocates of the issue (*security challenges of drug trafficking*) in government, non-governmental agencies, civil society groups and members of the attentive public across the region. I therefore recommend, based on the theory that the Commission

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88 Mintrom and Vergari, "Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs and Policy Change."

89 Crow, "Policy Entrepreneurs, Issue Experts and Water Rights Policy Change."

90 Roberts and King, "Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function."

should try and build strong partnerships and alliances on the drug issue throughout the region.

More importantly, policy entrepreneurs can be effective in redefining existing issues from new perspectives.<sup>91</sup> Again, we find evidence of this assumption with WACD's goal of redefining the drug issue from three main perspectives. First, WACD has set the goal of redefining the issue (drug trafficking) with high attention on its impacts on governance. Second, the Commission has also set the goal of redefining the issue by drawing attention to the security consequences for the region. Finally, the Commission has also set the goal of redefining the issue by drawing attention to the public health approach to narcotics control (*prevention and treatment of drug addicts*). With the global quest for drug policy shift towards a more public health approach to narcotics control,<sup>92</sup> coupled with the rising addiction to narcotics use in the region, it is not surprising that the Commission (WACD) has the public health option of drug control as one of its core objectives. Clearly, Kofi Annan and the Commission's goals on the security implications of drug trafficking in WA validate the concept of policy entrepreneurship.

Although the focus of this chapter has been on the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA, it is important to also highlight other similar drug related-concerns across the region. One of the issues of concern is the increasing rate of local drug production and use in recent years. Besides the large scale cultivation of marijuana, a recent report by the UNODC<sup>93</sup> indicates a sturdy rise in methamphetamine labs across the region. For example, two methamphetamine producing labs were discovered in Nigeria in 2011 and 2012. It is also estimated that about 3000 methamphetamine couriers travelled from countries like Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal and Nigeria to Japan, Malaysia and Thailand in 2010 alone with about US\$360 million generated from

91 Crow, "Policy Entrepreneurs, Issue Experts and Water Rights Policy Change."

92 Kumah-Abiwu, "Global Narcotics Policy Change."

93 UNODC, "Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa," p.4.



the trade.<sup>94</sup> In addition to cannabis, the region is witnessing an increasing use of cocaine due to the trafficking network from the Andes.<sup>95</sup>

As clearly advanced, agenda-setting matters and quite important to the broader drug debate, but frankly agenda-setting cannot exclusively offer a complete explanation on how to effectively deal with the issue. Scholars have offered some long-term policy recommendations that must be noted as well. A long term policy option that has generally been endorsed is the need to strengthen state capacities, especially weak states in the region. According to Rice and Patrick, weak states are countries that lack the ability to effectively perform the core functions of statehood such as the capacity to establish and maintain stable systems (socio-economic, political and security) as well as to effectively control their territories.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, the sub-region is not devoid of weak states. Countries such as Mali, Guinea and Guinea Bissau and those emerging from violent internal conflicts like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire are few examples.<sup>97</sup>

It is necessary that political leaders with support from the international community take the lead in developing long-term policy goals in strengthening the capacity of weak states through democratic consolidation and collaborative governance in the region.<sup>98</sup> As Rice and Patrick have argued, weak states can easily become incubators and breeding grounds for transnational security threats if strategic policies are not taken to avert the situation. The cases from Latin America as well as the recent Malian case provide some good lessons for the region.

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94 Ibid., p.4.

95 UNODC, *World Drug Report 2013*. United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.13.XI. 6 (Vienna, 2013), p. 10.

96 Susan Rice and Patrick Stewart, *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World: Global Economy and Development*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2008).

97 Etannibi Elemika (ed), "The Impact of Organised Crime on Governance in West Africa."

98 Felix Kumah-Abiwu, "Post-Cold War Democratization in Africa: The Paradox of Elections and Democratic Consolidation." Also see James Agbodzakey, "Collaborative Governance of HIV Health Services Planning Councils in Broward and Palm Beach Counties of South Florida." *Public Organization Review* 12.2 (2012).  
*West Africa Review* 19 (2011).

Experts on the region also share the common view for long-term policies such as security sector reforms, poverty reduction and socio-economic development as lasting measures that can fight the corrupt practices often associated with drug trafficking. Of particular interest is the growing infiltration of drug money into the very fabric of the society, which has been accompanied by massive corrupt practices among public officials such as security personnel, politicians and ordinary West Africans.<sup>99</sup> In terms of short and medium policy options, I will recommend the following to be considered.

1. Redefinition of the drug issue by governments in the region as well as by ECOWAS.
2. Strong leadership (*political will*) from Ghana and Nigeria in redefining the issue as a potentially dangerous security threat to regional stability. Ghana and Nigeria must also coordinate/lead in the implementation of the ECOWAS initiatives.
3. Establishment of independent/robust narcotics policy research centres in each country to help formulate and advise national governments on narcotics policy issues.
4. Capacity building initiatives for law enforcement agencies/acquisition of reconnaissance aircrafts/drones (national/regional) for effective monitoring of coastlines and entry ports.
5. Intentional public awareness programmes to expose drug-related corrupt practices.
6. Emphasis on shared collaboration with the international community.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the security challenges of illicit drug trafficking through West Africa in recent years. Grounded on a systematic analysis of the existing literature, the chapter has integrated the theory

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<sup>99</sup> Etannibi Elemika (ed), "The Impact of Organised Crime on Governance in West Africa."

of agenda-setting with emphasis on issue definition, redefinition and policy entrepreneurship to examine the central question of whether agenda-setting matters in the attempt to understand policy strategies and solutions needed to address the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA. Undoubtedly, the West African sub-region is faced with growing security threats from drug trafficking, especially traffickers who are becoming linked with terrorist organisations. Given the region's history of political instability, armed conflicts and socio-economic stagnation, it is incumbent on governments, scholars, policy experts as well as ordinary West Africans to engage in serious discussions regarding the issue.

The central argument that has been extensively discussed with examples is the fact that agenda-setting as a theoretical construct matters in addressing the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA. The chapter has persuasively demonstrated that the issue (*security challenges of drug trafficking*) must be properly redefined as a potentially dangerous security threat to the region and be sustained with high attention on the agenda (*national, regional, continental and global*) through the efforts of policy entrepreneurs. Policy entrepreneurs, such as Kofi Annan and other emerging advocates like Kwesi Aning among others are encouraging news for the region. Like former President Kwame Nkrumah and other nationalist leaders who were full of vision to liberate Africa from colonialism, West Africa and the continent also need visionary leaders like Nkrumah<sup>100</sup> to recognise the impending danger that drug trafficking poses to the long term stability and peace of West Africa and the rest of Africa.

In conclusion, agenda-setting matters, as clearly advanced in the chapter, but the author is not suggesting that agenda-setting is the panacea to the security challenges of drug trafficking in WA. As noted, agenda-setting

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100 Felix Kumah-Abiwu and James Ochwa-Echel, "Rethinking the Ideas of Pan-Africanism and African Unity: A Theoretical Perspective of Kwame Nkrumah's Leadership Traits and Decision Making," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, 6 (2013).

is indeed useful and does matter, but the theory is applied within the broader context of existing policy initiatives and future policy options in finding lasting solutions to the security challenges of drug trafficking in the West African sub-region.