

The GLOCEPS

Commentary Today

Transnational Organised Crimes Pillar

Strengthening law enforcement against expanding global cocaine markets in East Africa

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Photo Credit: The Star

According to the 2023 Global Report on Cocaine by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the international supply of cocaine is currently at a record high. This follows a 35% rise in coca bush cultivation in South America (the world's largest cocaine producer) between 2021 to 2022. The uptake in harvest and consequent production has equally coincided with amplified trafficking activities by international criminal networks. A growing shift away from US markets to European markets for narcotics has made nationals of East and Southern African states vulnerable to exploitation as couriers. In light of this, the Eastern and Southern Africa Commission on Drugs (ESACD) was launched in January 2023 to raise awareness and engage with policymakers to find new approaches to address weak national and regional responses including corruption and poor institutional capacity. Within the same year in Kenya, UNODC through the Global Maritime Programme trained 20 officers from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) and the Kenya Coast Guard Service (KCGS) on the execution of counter-drug trafficking operations at sea. This initiative sought to enhance East Africa's maritime law enforcement cooperation

and active operational coordination. Despite such commendable initiatives, East African states specifically Kenya and Tanzania remain significant targets for narcotic trafficking syndicates. This is primarily due to their proximity to the Indian Ocean and law enforcement vulnerabilities tied to weak border governance, corruption, lax maritime enforcement, and resource limitations, which remain high-priority areas in need of urgent intervention.

Foremost, inadequate capacity within East African regional governments to collectively generate accurate data on illicit drug markets has led to over-reliance on potentially inaccurate assessments. This has affected effective regional formulation and review of policies, resulting in loopholes that have allowed traffickers to evade arrest and prosecution. Following such shortcomings, efforts have been put in place to address the menace. For instance, on November 8, 2022, the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) hosted the 30th Meeting of Heads of National



Photo Credit: UNODC



Drug Law Enforcement Agencies in Africa (HONLEA-Africa) aimed at increasing cooperation initiatives to counter drug trafficking threats. Additionally, the International Criminal Police Organization, (INTERPOL) through Project ENACT (an initiative with a time frame between 2017-2025 seeking to enhance human security by providing expert policy advice and capacity building in Africa) continues to enhance criminal analysis efforts in East Africa to tackle transnational crimes including drug trafficking.

Such regional initiatives, however, mainly focus on the 'train and equip' model that is often short-term, thus, providing grounds for continuous activities by drug trafficking syndicates. International police seizure data indicate that most of the cocaine available in European drug markets is smuggled to Europe by sea from South America, primarily in maritime container shipments entering major container ports such as Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Valencia. As such, national governments in collaboration with international partners should embark on long-term transformation of their naval capacities, ensuring effectiveness and efficiency. Multi-national maritime partnerships through participation in security initiatives such as the Combined Maritime Force (CMF) would greatly aid in addressing the compounding risks posed by international drug trafficking groups.

Furthermore, resource constraints due to inadequate funding, undermine law enforcement capabilities leading to a low rate of prosecution and conviction. Available resources such as patrol boats and telecommunications monitoring devices often cannot meet the high demand for



Photo Credit: International Naval Cooperation

policing activities, such as border patrols and surveillance, and intelligence gathering. Owing to insufficient funding, the purchase and maintenance of such necessary policing equipment and technology to combat drug trafficking are restricted. Moreover, there is often a lack of adequate training for law enforcement officers involved in drug trafficking investigations stemming from limited resources. Officers may not have the necessary knowledge and skills to identify drug trafficking routes or conduct effective surveillance. This can lead to incompetencies in drug trafficking cases, leading to loss of valuable resources and opportunities to prevent drug trafficking activities.

The consequences of resource scarcity on the policing of drug trafficking in East Africa are severe. It leads to increased drug trafficking activities, which have social, economic, and security consequences, such as increased crime rates, decreased productivity, and decreased quality of life.

In conclusion, the emergent security risks in East Africa posed by expanding global cocaine markets require urgent and sustainable interventions. Such mitigation measures should entail; enhanced regional and international cooperation, and increased resource mobilization for improved maritime enforcement. In addition, tackling corruption among East Africa's law enforcement officers and enhancing their capacity to deal with the issue is crucial. Governments in the region and relevant bodies such as the ESACD and the HONLEA-Africa need to prioritize drug control and invest in prevention programs that promote effective policing initiatives.

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