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## West Africa and the Drug Menace: Finding a Solution Based on Grant's 6 point Hypotheses

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### **Abstract:**

*The narcotic trade poses a very high danger to all countries. This illegal activity brings in its trail several problems to both the producing country and the countries in which the drugs are finally consumed. Equally worrying are the impacts that the trade is having in countries and regions that serve as the transit points before they reach their final destinations. For several geographic and socio-political reasons, West Africa has now become a major transit route for drug cartels. Despite the net negative impact that their activities are having on countries in the region, crafting a lasting solution to end it has not been easily forthcoming. Most of the strategies being pursued have not achieved much success. Using Grant's hypotheses, the aim of this paper is to present a solution that deals with the core structural causes underpinning the problem.*

**Key words:** Drug trade, West Africa, Solution

### **1. Introduction**

West Africa, with its serene and long unprotected stretch of coast line is now gaining notoriety for the receipt of narcotic drugs shipped from South America and destined for Europe and parts of North America. Grant (Grant, 2007) argues that, in the case of West Africa, the political vacuum created by the end of the cold war in the 1990s facilitated series of political and economic problems in the region. Some of the political problems included competition among armed factions, which gradually metamorphosed into internal State instability, fragility and paved the way for the drug trade to thrive in the region. Proceeds from the trade and other criminal activities became the main source of funding for the numerous splinter 'rebel' groups scattered across the region. Other writers on the subject like Ellis (Ellis, 2009) have shown that Lebanese smugglers, using their numerous trading interests across the region as a cover, were using West Africa as a transit point to transport heroin to the USA as early as 1952. Later in the sixties and seventies, other West African nationals started exporting African-grown marijuana to Europe on a relatively large scale. However, with an increase in the demand of cocaine in North America, this trend changed and the collaboration between traders from Latin America and West Africa took roots (Ellis, 2009). Such West African nationals became the facilitators on the African continent and saw to the smooth trans-shipment of the drugs to their final destinations.

### **2. West Africa as a Narcotic Route of Choice**

According to the United Nations report on drugs (UNODC, 2010), North America is the largest regional cocaine market, with close to 40% of the global cocaine-using population. The region in 2008 required a total of 196 metric tons of pure cocaine to satisfy the net demand for that region alone. The net demand for the drug in Europe is also very high. Demand in countries such as Italy, Spain, Germany and Great Britain as well as some of the relatively smaller European countries are increasing (UNODC, 2010). Available statistics show that in that same year, an estimated 124 metric tons of cocaine were consumed in Europe in 2008 alone (UNODC, 2010). A greater percentage of this tonnage got to Europe through West Africa.

Various scholars have given several reasons for the preference of West Africa as the transit point for narcotic drugs into North America and Europe. But, in my view, as a West African, the most elucidating and comprehensive causal argument is presented by Grant's hypotheses, which has sadly not received enough attention nor guided policy choice in the fight against the drug menace in West Africa (Grant 2007). Grant postulates that the increase in the incidence of the menace in West Africa could be attributed to six main pull factors:

Firstly, he attributed it to the weakened States and the diminishing central authority in most countries in West Africa. Issues like ineffective governance, decline in central authority, corrupt individuals and State structures that are no longer able to provide very

basic public goods like security and stability for the populace could be placed in this category (Grant, 2007). Secondly, he demonstrated that socio-economic challenges brought about by protracted conflicts in the sub-region serve as pull factors for the drug trafficking business. The civil war in Sierra Leone, for example, lasted for about ten years and saw the collapse of all the structures of state (Rudner, 2007). With the supply of guns and support from other countries like Libya and Burkina Faso, several atrocities were visited on the citizens by the rebel groups, who pillaged all that they came across. The citizens were left with nothing after the end of the war in 2002, and the country currently relies on donor support and the relatively very small tax receipts that come to the central government from the few corporate concerns and the people they employ. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise that took place in the country after the war involved 72,500 ex-combatants (Rudner, 2007). As highlighted by Grant (2007) and other scholars, majority of these people are unemployed, making them very vulnerable to the activities of drug cartels operating in West Africa. Liberia, a country sharing borders with Sierra Leone, with a very long coastline facing the Atlantic ocean, also went through a protracted period of civil conflict as a result of issues bordering on a gamut of inter related problems cutting across ethnicity, economics, land ownership and coup d'états. The country also had its share of destruction from the activities of West African war lords and their marauding criminal rebel groups. The civil war in that country also left in its trail thousands of unemployed youth, who could be easily exploited by criminal elements involved in the drug trade.

The third set of factors that Grant outlines are purely economic and closely related to the net impact that is realized during conflicts. Here, the issue of economic instability and the diminished opportunity brought about by economic stagnation as a result of mismanagement and corruption serve as pull factors for drug cartels, who find it easier to conscript in such environments. This is simply so because partaking in the drug business is seen by the citizenry, especially the teeming unemployed youth, as a legitimate means of survival. The fourth and fifth factors are closely related and involve the mass flow of migrants across the region because of economic reasons or as a result of natural disasters. Usually, criminal elements take advantage of the unhindered ease in movement of such mass populations to transport drugs across the region. The sixth issue has to do with challenges associated with cross-border Corporation. The inability of designated institutions in the various countries to effectively liaise and share information also serve as a pull factor for the incidence of the drug trade in the region (Grant, 2007).

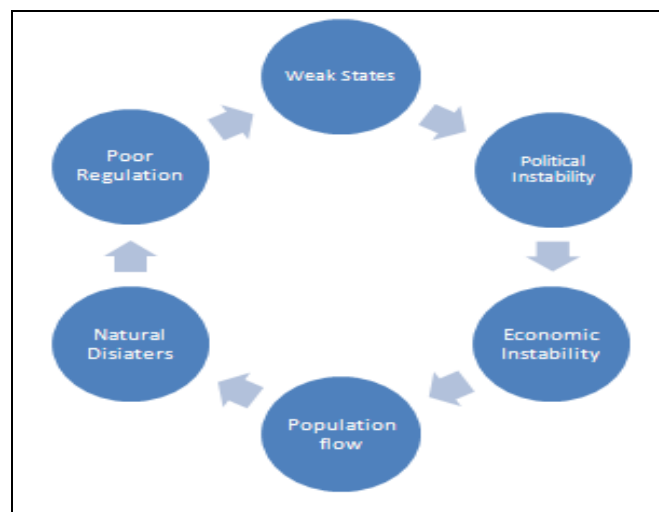


Figure 1: Grant's pull factors

### 3. Impact of the Trade

Just like any organized criminal activity, the drug trade in West Africa has the potential of destroying whole countries and institutions. The political unrests in a country like Guinea-Bissau, which is highly attributable to the turf consolidating activities of drug cartels shows how dangerous the trade can affect the very sovereignty of States. Studies have shown that there is a very strong relationship between political instability and organized criminal activity involving drugs (UNODC, 2010). Corroborating Grant's position, Thoumi has also shown that an activity such as the illegal drug trade thrives very well within weak States where laws are generally weak and hardly enforced (Thoumi, 2007). Because of the huge profits that drug traffickers make from their trade, they easily invest in other businesses in various sectors of the economy, usually, as a cover-up. With very low profit making motives, they price their goods and services in such a way that they dislodge other legitimate businesses operating in those sectors of the economy, leading to the systematic closedown of the industries that cannot face such artificially induced competition posed by the cartel-owned businesses. This trend ends up dislodging the economies of transit countries (UNODC 2010: 231), leaving in their trail a lot of unemployed people. Drug trafficking cartels also infiltrate formal state institutions through corruption, and further weaken the capacity of the state to stop their activities. With the huge profits that they make, cartels are able to fund the activities of whole political parties and individuals seeking political office. The trade supports the activities of related criminal elements like money launderers, rebel groups and terrorist affiliated groupings (UNODC). Heba Saleh (2008) has established a possible link between drug cartels in South America and terrorist groups operating in North Africa.

Over time, transit countries in West Africa have become consuming points and a significant percentage of the drugs destined for Europe and North America end up being consumed in such countries. A study by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNSRD), conducted back in 1994 did indicate that, the consumption of illicit drugs obtained through this process was not only having serious physical, social and economic consequences for the individual consumers in such countries, but also imposed enormous costs on the society as a whole (UNRISD,1994). Generally, drug consumption has direct and indirect costs; the direct costs include increased state expenditure on police, courts, military, treatment programmes and welfare payments, as well as net government expenditure on security measures that will be aimed at tackling the problem (UNRISD, 1994). As highlighted earlier, the indirect economic costs include the displacement of legal industries, decreased State control over the economy, and serious fiscal problems due to the 'inflation inducing' nature of the 'fake' cartel business activities. Studies have also shown that there is a very strong causal correlation between drug usage, increase in violent crime rate and the transmission of diseases such as HIV/AIDS among the youth in transit countries (UNODC, 2010).

#### 4. Conclusion

Although several strategies have been advanced to help address the problem of the drug trade in West Africa, they mostly address what could be labeled as the 'symptoms' and are better fit to serve only as palliatives for the very short term. Aning, for example, makes a recommendation that is mainly based on "deepening the knowledge and raising awareness of the drug trade; and increasing inter-regional corporation and collaboration" (Aning, 2013). Although some of the practical steps that he outlines touches on very few of the main structural issues underpinning the problem, in totality, it fails to comprehensively address the germane issues relating to the pull factors, which, in my view, are at the core of the problem. A well crafted approach based on Grant's pull factors will easily help address the problem both in the short and long term. Practically, such an approach should be as follows: Conscious efforts should be made to strengthen the capacity of the state through the strengthening of its institutions of governance. For example, entry into institutions like the police, customs, immigration, the military and other related state agencies should be based on merit and not on political affiliation, ethnicity and patronage. Those employed into such institutions should be made to undergo periodic training to ensure that they are up to date with the contemporary usage of state of the art equipments and how they can be used to better facilitate the work they do.

The alignments of state institutions should also be well planned to ensure that duplication of functions are avoided. Policy guidelines directing the operations and relationships between these institutions should also be very clear without ambiguity to ensure that they function to deliver their mandated outputs efficiently. Governments in the sub-region should also critically address the issue of corruption by instituting stringent and punitive measures that can be enforced when they are violated. In that same light, the terms and conditions of employment of persons working in the public sector should be equitable enough to reduce the temptation and attractiveness of bribes and general corrupt practices.

Prudent economic development strategies that invest in the youth and focuses more on value addition to agriculture products should be pursued. This approach has the potential of creating mass employment and will reduce the incidence of poverty and its associated mass economic migrations that is plaguing the region and facilitating interest in the drug trade. With the involvement of religious bodies, NGOs and the school system, States should intensify public education on the negative effects of the drug trade and highlight its impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of its citizens and the country as whole. Finally, criminal codes and prosecuting procedures involving drug related offences should be rationalized to ensure that persons found engaging in any form of narcotic related business could be easily arraigned before a court of competent jurisdiction for prosecution without difficulty.

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