



Africa Amani Journal

ISSN 2709-2216



Vol. 9 | Africa Amani Journal ©  
Chief Editor: Dr. Michael Sitawa  
Vol. 9 Issue 2 | June 2023  
Email: [ajeditor@ipstc.org](mailto:ajeditor@ipstc.org)

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(AAJ)  
Editing Oversight: International Peace  
Support Training Centre

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## **Beyond the Border that Bothers Us: Illicit Drugs, Borderlands Insecurity and Responses in Nigeria**

### **Author:**

Olasupo Olakunle Thompson

History and International Studies Unit, Communication and General Studies

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*Illicit drug is not only a social problem but it also poses a global security threat. There is a general consensus that there is a linkage between illicit drugs and insecurity in Africa and on its borderlands. While porous borders across Africa has been identified as one of the major challenges to peace and security on the continent, other factors particularly illicit drug trade is becoming a bludgeoning and bourgeoning factor. The questions that this article sets out to answer are: What are the drivers of illicit drugs in Nigeria? What are the impacts of illicit drug on Nigeria's borderlands particularly on insecurity and what are the responses to the menace? The study finds that the growing rate of illicit drug has reached an alarming level and the drivers are: broken homes and family values, the elite, poor economy, porous borders, poor immigration laws and lapses, intergovernmental conventions, government officials including some law enforcement agencies and a transnational drug cartel or syndicate. Illicit drugs have political, economic and socio-cultural impacts on borderland security. Responses have been majorly through international, regional and sub-regional organisations, national and State governments, and community but national responses have been majorly through confrontational means by law enforcement agencies, non-state actors and community. The article argues that except for a multi-track approach to combat the menace, the belief that shoring up our porous borders alone will put an end to illicit drugs trafficking and use in the country will remain a chimera. Addressing the major drivers of illicit drugs, good governance, more political will and building institutions are some of the recommendations. The data for the study is elicited from secondary sources such as books, governmental and non-governmental desktop reports, media, documentary and video documentaries.*

**Key words:** drug abuse, Insecurity, Border, Customs, NDLEA, borderlands

## **Introduction**

Peace and security in Africa's borderlands and on the continent itself is a dream of not only Africa's past heroes and founding fathers but major stakeholders including its international partners. This underscores Africa place in global affairs. To be sure, many international and continental frameworks have been fine-tuned in this regard. The Sustainable Development Goal-16 aims to ensure a peaceful and secured world; the Africa Union agenda 2063 advocates a shared framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development for Africa to be realised in the next five decades (AUC 2015). However, this noble dream remains a wishful thought until certain things are gotten right including insecurity in Africa's borderlands.

Africa borderlands mostly lie at the geographical margins of the state are synonymous with economic, social and political marginalisation, entrenched poverty, persistent conflict, forced displacement and refugees, environmental degradation, poor health and sanitary condition, lack of adequate and potable water, lack of basic amenities, hunger, poor education, social exclusion, unaffordable clean energy, infrastructural decay, inequalities, poor life under the waters and on land, injustice and weak institutions and above all poor leadership. Thus, peace and security have been fundamentally intertwined with the good governance and the attainment of sustainable development of borderlands (AU, 2017). The borderlands of Africa play host to more than 270 million inhabitants, a combined population significantly larger than many western countries and even any single state on the African continent (UNDP, 2021a). Though this population is closely connected to circuits of regional and global trade based on cross-country clan and ethnic affiliations, they are faced with the consequences of not just being on these borderlands but also the crimes associated with borderland communities. Just like the continent itself, these borderland communities face human and national insecurities. While the causes are numerous, one major and rising factor is illicit drug with its varying shades ranging from its trade, use to its abuse. The place of borderland becomes imperative as a result of its proximity and linkage with the hinterlands. Put differently, the borderlands are reflections of the continent itself.

Since the 1980s Nigeria has served as the transit corridor for drug and illicit trafficking. Nigeria borders in the west with Benin (border length is 773 km), in the north - with Niger (1497 km), in the north-east - with Chad (87 km), in the east - with Cameroon (1690 km) (Hoffman and Melly, 2015). Thus, it is established that there is a nexus between banditry, terrorism, kidnapping and other types of violent crimes in Nigeria especially in the northern region to the use of illicit drugs. The Sustainable Development Goal 3.5 is also clear on the need to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol (UN, nd). Making a tsunaminous impact on this community and the continent as a whole, responses to illicit drug trafficking and abuse have come from concerned stakeholders.

Though many studies have focused on illicit drugs (Igbinoia, 1982; Jatau et al 2019), its impacts and linkage with insecurity and responses (Pinson, 2022; Bish et al 2022), adequate attention has not been dedicated to how illicit drugs affects the security and peace of Africa's borderlands. This article examines the linkage between illicit drugs and insecurity along Africa's borderlands as well as the present responses to the menace in Nigeria. 'Beyond the borders that bothers us' is an offshoot of Agbiboa's (2017) assessment of terrorism and Nigeria's borders. Agbiboa (2017) described Nigeria's borders as not only porous but also a nightmare for the government and the greatest challenge in the successful fight against insurgency. To adequately resolve this aim, the specific questions of the study are: What are the drivers of illicit drugs in Nigeria? What are the impacts of illicit drug on Nigeria's borderlands particularly on insecurity and what are the responses to the menace? The answers to these questions will be of immense benefit to policy makers, international donors, scholars and researchers in the field of borderlands, insecurity and transnational crimes, think-tanks, narcotic agencies among others.

The article relies on descriptive method. The method helps to describe, explain and validate the research findings. Sources for the study are elicited from documentary evidences, literature, media and verified video evidences from the internet and empirical evidences through observations. The criteria for selecting these evidences stem from its relevance to the issue of illicit drug, insecurity and borderlands. The study area covers the borders of Chad, Benin and Niger Republics.

The article is divided into six structures. These are: introduction, literature review on illicit drugs, impacts and Africa's borderlands; drivers of illicit drugs in Nigeria; impacts of illicit drugs on Nigeria's borderlands; responses to illicit drug in Nigeria and conclusion.

### **Illicit Drugs, Impact and Africa's Borderlands: A Literature Review**

There are lots of literature on the subject matters of illicit drugs, insecurity and Africa's borderland. These discourses are not only germane but also help to understand the basics of the phenomenon. Scholars have examined the history and use of illicit drug use in Africa and its borderlands. Igbinovia (1982) traces the use of marijuana in Africa to the advent of the World War I. Though some poor peasants and craftsmen use these drugs for enhancement in their daily work tasks, sexual performance among other things, certain factors are responsible for the misuse of these drugs. He noted that it is used by males and youths the most and also identified the factors responsible for its use and misuse as population movement, socio-economic or population shift and unemployment. He established a linkage between marijuana use and crimes and then observed that possession, trafficking and production of marijuana are usually met with very harsh penalties in the form of long prison sentences or fines or both has not reduced the tendencies of the use and abuses. Anyanwu (1992) traces the history of drug pushing or trafficking to the effect of the introduction of the structural adjustment programme which gave rise to increased money supply and demand pressure, accelerating inflation further. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme [UNDPC] (1995) describes illicit drug trafficking as a systemic process that involves high caliber people and that trafficking of large quantities of drugs can only be effected by groups and not individuals. It further held that drug abuse is a global menace with its social impact on family and community, health, education, crime and work and employment. The study concludes that while policy development experts do not pay attention to drug abuse as a requisite for growth and development, the impact of drug on a society's economy is monumental be downplayed.

Scholars have also taken time to examine some of the responses to illicit drug trade and use. Shaw (2015) explores the drug trafficking business in Guinea-Bissau. He affirms that it is so

sophisticated and complex that a sort of transnational cartel emerged from the country's elite including top military brass who do more than just offering protection for the illicit trade. Klantschnig (2016) discussed how the Nigeria's Drug and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in spite of its growing role in the drug war monopolised the policy decision and control of drug in Nigeria at the detriment of other enforcement agencies, customs and ministry of health. The author went on to state that the fight against narcotics have failed because apart from the fact that most states are paying lip-service to the fight, the people do not trust the government. Uzuegbu-Wilson (2019) stresses that in spite of the efforts of the drug enforcement agencies in Nigeria, the elite has not been able to replicate the gesture and most of the proceeds of the drug trade are used by the elite to circulate themselves in Nigeria's political space. Dumbili and Ebuenyi (2022) argued that the punitive measures and the concentration of law enforcement agencies in urban areas in search of illicit drugs must stop and other sustainable and inclusive ways as well as addressing the sustaining factors encouraging the drug trade and trafficking should be imbibed.

Indeed, illicit drug trafficking and use has impacts on the society and the continent as a whole. Aning and Pokoo (2014) established a linkage between drug trafficking, violence and extremism on the continent. Aning and Pokoo argue that the financial benefits from drug trafficking contribute to the development of symbiotic and opportunistic relationships between extremists groups that threaten West Africa's fragile States. This is indeed a situation many African countries particularly Nigeria is still battling with regarding the cases of insurgents, bandits and the recent unknown gunmen. Olurishe (2019) describes drug abuse and misuse as serious challenges in the West Africa sub-region with post conflict countries bearing most of the burdens of the menace. He noted that cannabis, cocaine, other unconventional substances and prescription medicines are amongst the drugs most commonly abused in the sub-region and that social status and availability to resources appear to be important drivers of drug abuse culture. He went to state that this abuse of drugs has obvious psychosocial consequences and negative impact on academic performance was reported. Onifade (2022) agrees that drug abuse is a global problem with its attendant challenges in curbing it particularly among the youths range from personal conviction to lack of inclusive treatment programme; he reiterates the need for a

sustained and overall preventive method to address the challenges. Jatau, et al (2021) avers that drug abuse has significant impact on socio-economic state of the society particularly youths and school children.

Okumu et al (2020) noted that in spite of the initiative of the African Union on silencing the guns by 2020, it failed as a result of conceptual issues, internal and institutional issues, strategic issues, operational issues, political challenges and foreign influence. The UNDP (2021b) prioritises the importance of border communities. It highlights the six impact areas as core for the realisation of Africa's promise as natural resource governance, youth employment and empowerment, structural economic transformation, sustainable energy, climate change, and peace and security. It states that inclusive participation of African citizens in championing peace and development resonates around the support given to border community which constitutes more than 400million people and which existence is affected by the triple threat of conflict, climate and COVID-19. The Human Development Index (2022) noted the impact of insecurity on the population particularly children, the security forces and women as more than 100 million people are believed to have been displaced worldwide. It traced some of the root causes of conflict to organised crimes especially drug cartels with its attendant impact on mental health of residents. It also stresses on the need for a secured border as a result of the threats of technology, covid-19, climate change and other existential challenges to the peaceful co-existence of the world and Africa fragile states.

While Pinson (2022) argued that illicit arms fuel organised crime and armed conflict in weak states, emphasis was placed on the role of borders because illicit arms trafficking encompasses unauthorized cross-border transfers. Pinson stresses that cross-border movement of arms bear the inherent risk that diversion may likely occur somewhere along the route or after shipment reaches the final recipient. Pinson then recommends among other things the need for an effective detection of arms and ammunition trafficking incidents, seizures of arms at the time of their illicit movements, especially at border crossing before they are used to fuel armed conflicts and organised crimes. She went further to state that there was also the need for investigating and preventing networks involved in the illicit arms and ammunition trade. Similarly, Bish et al

(2022) established a linkage between illicit market, violence and instability in Nigeria. The authors also stressed the germane role that border security must play in reducing conflict and instability because the border permeates these drugs and illicit weapons. While there have been some responses by stakeholders to address this menace, much has not been achieved (Nelson, 2020; Aning and Pokoo, 2014; Shaw, 2015). These literature have given an expose of the discourse, however what is yet to be given adequate attention are the drivers of illicit drugs, its impact on borderland security and responses.

### **Drivers of illicit drugs in Nigeria**

#### *Ungoverned and Porous Borderlands*

The ungoverned and porous borders have worsened the inflow of illicit drugs into Africa's borderlands. Africa is eked as one of the worst in the world and it is home to illicit drugs such as cocaine, opium, *tramadol*, and other forms of drugs fuelling violence along borderlands and its hinterland. Inadequate security personnel and infrastructures are lacking in these borders. Nigeria's security architecture apart from suffering from inadequate personnel, indiscipline, underfunded, inadequate weapon and working tools and equipment and ethnicity among its security also have a problem of corrupt culture and lack of morale among its personnel. This has made many of them to prefer being transferred to urban centres to rural areas thereby creating these vast ungoverned spaces. Onwuzuruigbo (2021) argues that the ungoverned spaces have increased the activities of cattle rustling and banditry in the northern borderlands of Nigeria.

Porosity of the borders have also given way for the nefarious activities that take place therein. The Chief of Defence Staff, General Lucky Irabor stated that there are 137 borders in the North unprotected out of the 261 approved borders. He noted that apart from the fact the borders are unmanned, the vulnerability of the unmanned land areas in the north-east and north-west zones, particularly Borno, Yobe, Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina states – with neighbouring countries such as Niger Republic and Chad among others have made it easy to be a major access route to criminality and violent crimes. For instance, the National Security Adviser, Major General Babagana Monguno at a workshop in 2021 stated that:

*Africa's porous borders remain a major source of concern as this has aided smuggling of prohibited items and irregular migration as well as other transnational organized crimes. Nigeria is bordered to the North by Niger, to the East by Chad and Cameroon, to the South by the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean, and to the West by Benin (Monguno, 2021).*

The activities at these porous borders have resulted in the inflow of contrabands, small arms and light weapon, illicit drugs and other triggers of bloody clashes in the mainland and borderlands. Drugs have to a large extent fueled several insecurity across the country and in the borderland of Nigeria and other Africa states. Worryingly, the gaffers who should be at the helms of Nigeria's border security have consistently come out to say they do not know how many ungoverned spaces are in Nigeria and that the porous situation cannot be salvaged.

#### *Broken homes and family values*

Most of the consumers of illicit drugs are those who are from broken homes and inadvertently lost family and African values and moors. These consumers have had history of either staying with none or one of their parents. Some also stay with guardians who cannot take care of them. In recent times, the displacement around the borderland as a result of conflicts have driven many consumers into the streets or with friends who are themselves drug abusers. With peer pressure, these consumers have taken solace in the intake of illicit drugs. Some parents are also consumers and they have significant influence on their children who make up the youths. Jazuli et al (2021) from an empirical studies in Indonesia established that though broken homes does not significantly contribute to drug abuse, it had some effects but they also found that having a disharmonious family has a 6.179 times greater risk of being a drug abuser than people/adolescents who have a harmonious family

#### *Transnational Cartels, The elite and Corruption*

Trafficking of drugs is usually not done by an individual. Most of the illicit drugs trafficking are done by constellation of transnational cartels and the elite. Any wonder then that the UNDCP (1995) posits that "individuals acting alone do not usually move significant quantities of drugs; hence the focus on control of supply is normally on organized groups or



cartels.” In cases where powerful politicians and elite are also users of these illicit drugs, then it becomes very hard if not futile to make laws to curb it.

In Nigeria, attempt to unravel these cartels by the media and law enforcement agencies have not been easy as some of these investigators have paid with their lives. A case in point is the late Dele Giwa, a renowned editor who was at the verge of unraveling a criminal drug cartel during the military regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime traced the supply of methamphetamine, locally known as ‘Mpuru Mmiri’, to South Africa since 2019 (Adepegba, 2022). The Nigeria’s senate president, Dr Ahmad Lawan noted that drug barons were behind the lingering insecurity in the country through provision of funds for insurgent groups such as Boko Haram, bandits and kidnappers with which they use the money to procure arms and ammunition. He further stated that the proceeds of illicit drug trade is used to fund terrorism and one would wonder how these groups usually get rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and sophisticated arms (Aborisade, 2021).

The illicit drug business is a complex, abrasive and very secretive kind of business that entails some forms of networks and ritual. Formation, successes and sustenance involve a good number of collaborations, alliances and compromises. This can only be achieved by the elite. The elite are a provided group in a society who use their clout and network to macadamize the starting up and running of the illegal business. In some climes, these groups form the political echelon of the society. Cases of these elite groups attaining as high as head of states have been established in South America and Europe. In Nigeria, these elite have their sponsors and members even in the presidency. A case in point was the alleged involvement of some high caliber cabals during the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida. Seizures in 2013 in several West African countries reveal that trafficking network involves a range of actors including businessmen, politicians, members of the security forces and the judiciary, clergymen, traditional leaders and youth (Aning and Amedzrator, 2013). Shaw and Gomes (2020) established how Guinea-Bissau has not just become a transit route to cocaine especially during the COVID-19 pandemic but also how the proceeds from the trade has become addictive for the political elite and military brass. In Nigeria, some personnel of the drug enforcement agency have fallen

victims to the activities of these cartel. The NDLEA chairman, Buba Marwa has noted that some of its officials have been kidnapped or killed by these powerful cartel and elite. In one of its raid in Lagos Island, five of the personnel lost their lives (Okere and Ogundepo, 2022).

Sustaining the success of the cartel and the elite is the menace of corruption. Corrupt practices of customs and immigration officers who compromise their positions have also made the explicit trafficking of illegal drugs into the borderlands and hinterland successful. For example, Professor Onyeiwu while sharing his experience along the borderland between Ghana and Nigeria stated that when the public bus he was travelling in was caught by the Nigeria customs with smuggled products, rather than detain it, they asked the driver to settle his way. Also, Communities around Nigeria and the Niger republic border in Jigawa State accused some personnel of the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) and other security agencies of engaging in heinous activities (Muhammad, 2022).

#### *Poor economy, Poverty and Unemployment*

The oil doom and decapacitation of the nation's economy by the forces of neo-colonialism and neo-liberal and multi-national banks have impoverished the Nigerian State and drove most of its population into organised crimes such as internet fraud, counterfeiting and illicit drug trade in the 1980s. The acceptance of the Structural Adjustment Programme did not only impoverish the State but also began the eroding of values and norms among its population. Dwellers along the borderland are most hit by these changes because of their peculiarities thereby pushing them into illegal activities to sustain themselves and their families. In several countries in Africa, political instabilities have led to diminishing human and capital and social infrastructure and productive national development thereby plunging the state into poverty. This in turn reinforces the illicit drug trade and abuse among the population. Nagelhoutab et al (2017) established that drug use increases in times of recession as a result of the conditions that many find themselves thereby causing psychological distress. In Nigeria, the endemic poverty of 133 million poor people has further driven most of those at the borderlands into smuggling business, oil theft, drugs trafficking and other criminal activities.

#### *Ineffective laws, Ethnic Proclivities and Inadequate Technology*

Immigration and Customs laws in border communities of third world countries are always ineffective to fight against illegal activities. Ineffective laws also include poor regulations to curb the activities of pharmaceutical companies and marketers who import some of these drug products in order to make huge profits at the detriment of the citizenry. Klantschnig et al (2020) argued that though the West African sub-region has become a route for the trade and use of tramadol but state policies in checkmating its abuse has created a blurry line between its legality and medical need. Klantschnig & Dele-Adedeji (2021) for instance established how opioid (Tramadol) is officially despised and yet so widely used and traded in Lagos Nigeria. This also extend to the customs and borders as many of those in West Africa and the continent are even more precarious based on their propensity to act as the transit and destination of most illegal activities in Africa's sub-region. The Commander of Narcotics, NDLEA, Shehu Dankolo blamed the rising cases of drug abuse on failed laws in Nigeria (Nzor, 2022).

The mismanagement or inability to control the Economic Community of West Africa State protocol on free movement among member states is also a driver of illicit drug trade. The Protocol stipulates among other things the right of community citizens to enter, reside and establish economic activities in the territory of member states and outlined a three phased approach to achieve the "complete freedom of movement" envisaged by the treaty. This protocol which came in to effect in 1979 in spite its goodwill has not been well managed by member states. Thus, the benefits of the protocol have not been maximized. It was also reported that the four supplementary protocols adopted between 1985 and 1990 committed member states, among other things, to:

*provide valid travel document to their citizens, grant Community citizens the right of residence for the purpose of seeking and carrying out income-earning employment, ensure appropriate treatment for persons being expelled, not to expel Community citizens en masse, limit the grounds for individual expulsion to reasons of national security, public order or morality, public health or non-fulfilment of an essential condition of residence (Opanike and Aduloju, 2015)*

Apart from the poor custom laws; ethnic affinities and religion have played major roles in reproducing crimes along these borderlands. In Nigeria border community, the allowance of

some Arab speaking or Fulfude speaking herders into the country have further allowed the illegal trade to flourish. Often times; these illegal drugs are saddled on the backs of these beasts of burdens or inside motor bikes and vehicles. There are allegations that ethnic affinities have allowed the activities go on unchallenged. There is a viral video recently in Nigeria where a custom officer angrily spoke against his superior officers and tore his uniform because of the compromise in illegal border trade along Cameroun, Chad and Niger borders. He confessed how he arrested so many smugglers at Malabo checkpoint on Bele Road, Adamawa state but he got a call from a senior officials of the NCS who asked him to release the suspects ([Ogbuokiri, 2022](#)). The Custom Officer was not only relieved off duty but also arrested, detained and tagged mentally derailed. There are growing rumours and concerns that he may even be dismissed. This shows the extent that the so called elite and government officials could go in the racketeering.

Lack or ineffective deployment of technology is also a huge problem. While Nigeria government has allocated a lot of monies for the purchase of high-technology for its border controls either in land or at the ports, these monies have been embezzled or misappropriated.

#### *Poor Policies and Lack of Political Will*

The policies of the government on borders, customs and immigration has not only been poor but most times ineffective to deal with the array of challenges affecting illicit drug trafficking, use and abuse in Nigeria as a whole and along border communities in particular. There seems to be cherry-picked policies that favour certain areas at the detriment of the other ethnic group in Nigeria. In fact, the dual custom and immigration policy between the north and southern borders are pointer to the failures to stop these activities of transnational organised criminal gangs. For example, while many of the porous borders are domiciled in the north, most of the security personnel are deployed to the south. While the Nigerian Government closed its land borders with neighbouring Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger in august 2019, it excluded Ghana from the border ban. This gesture was criticized by many analysts for not only being selective but also compromising ([Vanguard, 2019](#)).

While people were allowed to pass through, the movement of goods was blocked. The reason for the policy was to stem the smuggling of goods, particularly rice. Yet the phenomenon

did not stop, but it also increased the poverty level in the Nigeria and increased the smuggling as the smugglers devised other means. There were allegations that some borders in the north were still left opened and operational. One will then wonder if such policy was purported for the south alone. It was no surprise when government stated that in spite of the border closure, it gave freedom to certain individuals to continue to import and export the borders. Of importance is that of these three individuals (Dangote, BUA and an unnamed gas company), two were certainly from the north and the identity of the third remains unknown (Olatunji, 2020). In all it shows that the government over the years has lacked the political will to control the border.

### *Media, Pop-Culture and Beliefs of Border Community Dwellers*

The media has not given adequate reportage to border activities. The new media and even the academia have all not done enough to unveil the activities of the border community. Perhaps, this is because this people occupy the dregs of the society. Most of the songs and popular celebrities also glorify the use of illicit drugs and crimes.

Also, one of the drivers of the illicit drug trade, use and abuse along border community is the dwellers in the border community. This is because while the government sees trade and activities of traffickers around borderlands as illegal, the indigenous community along borderland sees it as a way of life. The then Public Relations Officer of Nigeria Customs, Joseph Attah noted that the challenges they face from illegal smuggling are non-cooperative attitude of some border dwellers; willingness of some Nigerians to help the smugglers mob Customs operative; and use of motorcycles and animals to smuggle through difficult terrains, among others (Salau, 2018). He went on to state that “suppression of smuggling remains the most challenging aspect of Customs functions as different people see anti-smuggling operations differently, he said the Customs has device more technical means of tackling the menace.” Other drivers are change in status, tourists, inadequate personnel, lack of training, poor interagency collaborations, celebrity lifestyles, greed among others.

### **Illicit drug and its Impact on Nigeria’s Borderland Security**

Illicit drugs have found its transit and destinations through Africa's borderlands to the hinterland. Cannabis is the most widely used of the illicit drugs with about 209 million users globally. This is followed by opioids (61 million), amphetamines (34 million), cocaine (21 million) and ecstasy (20 million) (UNODC, 2022). The UNODC (2022) states that the annual use of the substance was higher in Africa in 2020 than the global average estimated at 6.5 per cent of the population aged 15–64. It also reported that West and Central Africa had the highest prevalence of use in the region at 9.7 per cent. These drugs have explicit impacts on Nigeria's borderland from political, socio-cultural to economic. These impacts all form both the national or physical security and human security matrix.

**a. Socio-cultural**

*Family and Community Disintegration*

The family is the smallest unit of the society. It is also the first place of socialization. It has a huge role in child and societal development because it is the first place where children learn what is right and what is bad. The family is experiencing existential crises in recent times. In other words, Family is the smallest unit of socialization through which the child learns about morals, belief, rules, social norms and values system of a society. Illicit drug abuse can find its way in the family setting thereby destroying the bond in this revered institution. Hoffman and Goldfrank (1990: 467) averred that “Substance abuse and addiction have grave consequences on our existing social systems, effecting crime rates, hospitalizations, child abuse, and child neglect, and are rapidly consuming limited public funds.”

Studies have shown a relationship between substance abuse and disintegration of family and societal values (Christensen, 1983; Lander et al, 2013; Meghan, 2018). Recent records show that there is an increasing rate of divorces. For example, between January and February 2020, a total of 4, 000 divorce applications were reportedly filed before various courts in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and that in the same year, Kano State registered over one million divorcees (Editorial, III). Indeed, many cases could not have been reported officially. Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Sadiya Umar Farouq,

decried the adverse effect of social ills such as drug abuse on the well being of families. She went on further to state that drug abuse is one of the causes of family and social disintegration (Obi, 2022). According to the National survey on Drug Use released by the European Union, not less than 14.3 million Nigerians between ages 15-64 have used drug outside of medical need. The survey revealed that one in eight persons in Nigeria have suffered consequences of another person's drug use (UNODC, 2022).

### *Health challenges and Mortality*

Illicit drug in all shades such as trafficking, trade, use and abuse have direct and indirect impact on the health and wellbeing of the dwellers of the community around the borderland. This manifests itself in prevention and treatment cost, hospital costs or medical costs, disease burden as well as mental health and depression. Commonly abused drugs include cannabis, cocaine, *methamphetamine* (crystal meth), heroin, diazepam, codeine, cough syrup and *tramadol* (Jatau, et al 2021). As Agwogie 2022 puts it:

*As a country, Nigeria is about 3% of the world's population, but account for 6% of the world population of cannabis users and 14% of the world's population who misuses pharmaceutical opioids making Nigeria one of the countries in the world with the highest number of people who misuse tramadol and cough syrups containing codeine or dextromethorphan (2022:3).*

The side effect of the addiction of these drugs is also gory. For example, studies have shown that crystal meth causes the following Increased physical activity, increased high blood pressure, high body temperature, dilated pupils, heavy sweating, paranoia, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, fleeting euphoria, unpredictable behaviour, tremors, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, dry mouth, anxiety, depression, fatigue and exhibition of violent behaviours, seizures, respiratory or airway abnormalities, persistently elevated heart rate etc. (Brandt, 2022).

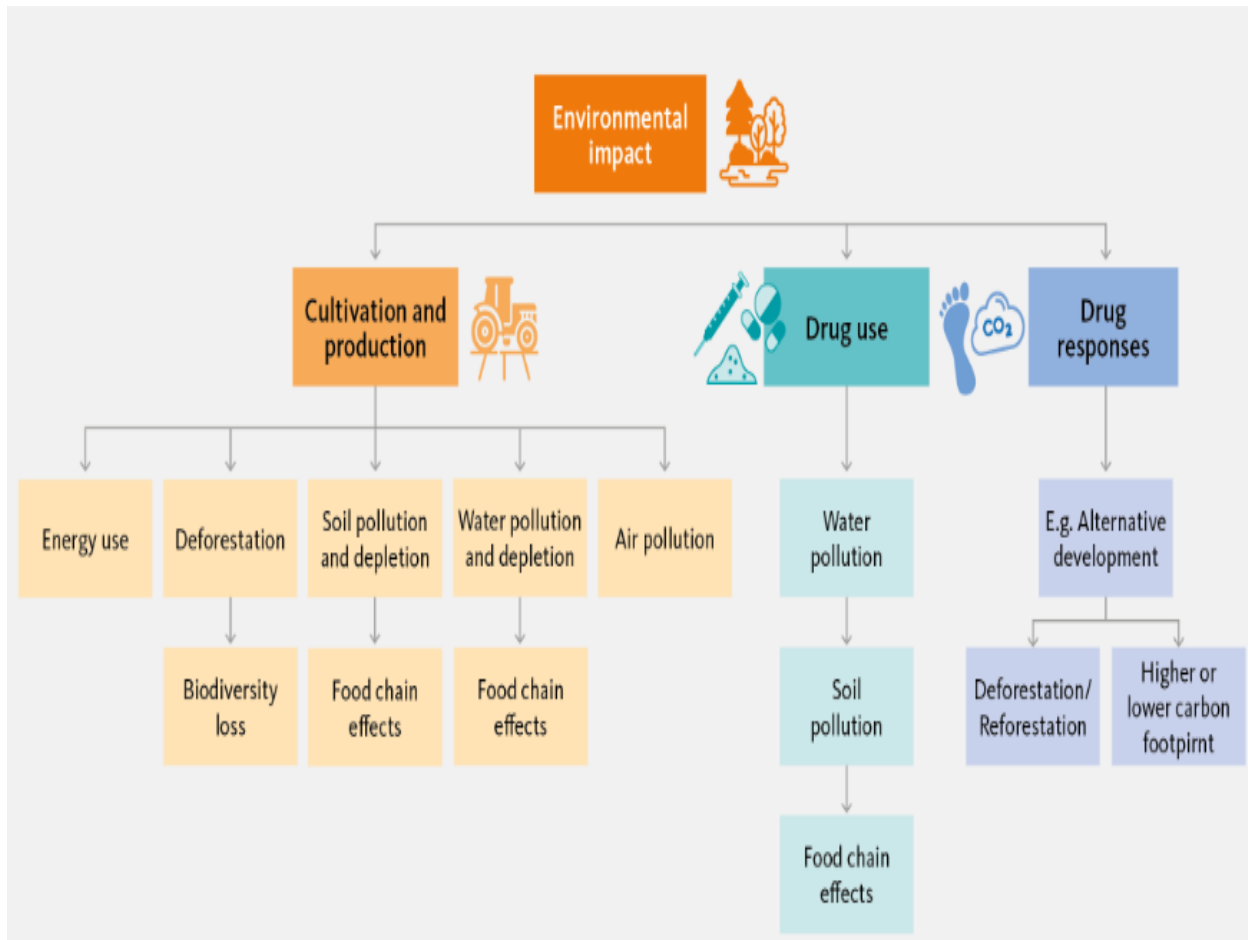
The use and abuse of these illicit drugs have had adverse effect on the users and the community in many ways. First, there has been an established relationship between maternal mortality, infant mortality, and birth weight and drug abuse. In other words, women who take

either alcohol or abuse or misuse drugs in pregnancies or after birth are likely to either lose the baby or lose their lives (WHO, 2014; Stone, 2015).

Secondly, some of those who are addicted involve in all forms of shady deals to get money to take these drugs. Some of the most infamous type of crime is kidnapping for ransom. The users also have to put up with the cost of sustaining the use. For instance, *Médecins Sans Frontières* [MSF] (2015) noted that there were only two medical doctors in the whole of Borno North.

Thirdly, when the drugs begin to take its effect, access to healthcare which is really unavailable or almost non-existent in border communities is crowded. This is because apart from the lapses in the country's healthcare system, many of the border communities lack access roads and adequate healthcare practitioners. Apart from the strains it has on users, access to health care is also affected by the users. The increase in the number of these affected by drug intake also affects the unequal health facilities available in the country. Nigeria has only 24, 000 actively licensed physicians giving a doctor-patient ratio of approximately 1:10,000 as against the needed 363, 000 to attend to the over 200 million population (Adebowale-Tambe, 2022). Nigeria has only 250 trained psychiatrists for its more than 200 million populations according to the Association of Psychiatrists in Nigeria (APN) which is a 1:800,000.



**Figure 1: The Three Routes of Drug Environmental Impact**

Source: UNODC (2022)

The environments where drugs are processed and manufactured are also not left out of the targets of pollution and hazards. The discovery of *methamphetamine* laboratories across Nigeria particularly in south-east, south-south and Lagos State raises points to the extent of this menace. The disposal of the illicit drugs or its inappropriate disposal into the environment in sewage, on land, may find its way into underground water and thereby affect plants, human and animal including aquatic organisms. Thus, these animals and humans may be chronically exposed to very low doses of these drugs and the chemicals used in their illicit manufacturing which may not only cause the death of these animals and humans but also cause food insecurity

and scarcity. The destruction of the aquatic and vegetation may also affect the ozone layer and contribute to the challenge of climate change and food insecurity. In many borderland communities in Nigeria, farmers now jettison food and cash crops for substance growing thereby contributing to food insecurity.

### *Gender Violence*

The impact of illicit drug drugs particularly use and abuse has led to an increase in gender violence particularly domestic and spousal violence. The use of steroids has also led to many cases of rape and physical abuse of spouses. It has been revealed that when criminals such as cultists, bandits and terrorists take these illicit drugs, they are sexually aroused and this leads to the urge to rape their victims and sometimes the need for them to go and kidnap women and girls in the towns in order to pleasure themselves. In 2021, about 10 women were violently raped in their camps after they were kidnapped from a community in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State (*National Daily*, 2021). In 2022, a victim who narrated her ordeal in the hands of the bandits stated that:

*They made sure all the women abducted were raped. So, we all watched as they raped every one of us in our presence. They were two men, each of them had their way with me twice. They had told us before we left the village that they came for the wives. They didn't demand ransom; the abduction was only for sexual gratification (Abdullahi, 2022).*

There is no doubt that rape and domestic violence or spousal abuse also has unintended effect on not only the victims but also family and friends. Thus, it can be established that there is a linkage between drug abuse, rape, mental health and productivity. The use of drugs was particularly high during the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown and the impact was unprecedented. Thompson and Awange (forthcoming) established that while women were the most abused during the lockdown period in Nigeria, men were not also left out though in lower number.

### *Endangered Youth and Productivity*

Most of the users and victims of these illicit drugs are the youth population. The projection is that illicit drug users are likely to increase by 40 percent by the year 2030. The youth population has overtly been referred to as the future and leaders of tomorrow. The NDLEA found that 40 percent of youths aged between 18 and 35 were deeply involved in drug abuse. Few youths arrested with some of these illicit drugs have argued that it makes them do work easily, however, available evidence show the opposite as it has a long term effect on not just the muscles but also on their thinking and reasoning faculty thereby affecting productivity. The productive base of the borderland community has also suffered from the abuse of drugs since the youth are supposed to be the engine of growth and development of these marginalized communities. It also affects school leaving age and out-of-school children. There has been significant relationship between drug abuse and school abandonment or drop out.

#### *Violent Crimes, Terrorism and Banditry*

There has been a linkage between illicit drugs and all shades of violent crimes including terrorism across the globe and around Africa's borderlands. Igbinovia (1982) argues that illicit drug abuse and use is criminogenic and violence-inducing in African states. Other scholars have shared similar perspective on the linkage between illicit drug and violent crimes (Bishi et al 2022, Pinson, 2022). For example, Piazza (2011) finds that illicit drug production and opiate and cocaine wholesale prices are significant positive predictors of transnational and domestic terrorist attacks. A UNODC Report (nd) notes that in 2004 about 400 tons of cocaine was exported from one Latin American country with an estimated value of \$US2billion and that by 2006, the total potential value of Afghanistan's opium harvest accruing to farmers, laboratory owners and Afghan traffickers reached about \$US3.1billion. Aside from Afghanistan, the cases of drug trafficking has exacerbated the domestic terrorism in most Latin American countries especially between around the borderlands of the Gulf of Mexico and the United States. While this has not transcended into terrorism, the proceeds have sometimes been sent abroad to finance terrorism in vulnerable countries and emerging democracies. Nigeria has also recorded such

cases. For example, the government of the United Arab Emirate arrested and prosecuted some Nigerians financing terrorism in Nigeria (Oyeleke, 2021).

These terrorists aside using the proceeds of drugs to purchase small and light weapons also use these drugs to stimulate their activities. For example, the Chairman of the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, Buba Marwa revealed that kidnappers and armed bandits request for drugs as ransom. He furthered:

*Unfortunately, drug use does not show in the face, so you won't know if your next-door neighbour is using drugs. We now have an increase in criminal acts starting with kidnapping, insurgency, and banditry. Now it has upgraded to rape and assassinations. Behind it all is drug use. Criminals all use drugs, even kidnappers now ask for ransom in drugs and until we get to the root of the problem, these criminals will continue to flourish (Nwosu, 2021).*

This level of hypnotic drug use leads to manslaughter, burglary, rape, communal violence, amongst other ones. To further buttress this point, it was reported that bandits terrorizing some communities in the Munya local government area of Niger State demanded for packs of cigarettes and rolls of marijuana as ransom from residents to secure the release of their kidnapped relations in late 2021. This shows that the bandits and terrorists are now accustomed to taking the substances and since they could not get it in their hide-outs, kidnapping to get such commodity is likely to continue along the borderlands. The Director, Media and Advocacy, Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Mr Femi Babafemi narrated how psychotropic drugs were discovered in the camps of the Boko Haram during a clearance operation by the Nigerian Armed Forces. He further observed that most of the insurgents and bandits terrorizing hinterland and borderlands of Nigeria particularly the North-West and Boko Haram/ Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) terrorists operating in the North-East after being arrested confessed to regular use of drugs and a few were captured with drugs including pharmaceutical opioids and that these bandits and insurgents usually showed some forms of withdrawal symptoms after spending some days in custody of law enforcement agents (Mbele, 2021). This in turn leads to the displacements of victims and creation of refugee crises which are already manifesting in the country and borderlands in particular. The West Africa

Commission on Drug (2014) agrees that the sub-regional insecurity, state fragility and violent extremism are fueled by drug trafficking and corruption. Thus, the activities of these criminals affect the overall peace and security of the borderlands and the continent and global community as well.

**b. Political**

Drug abuse has a tendency of thwarting democracies and destabilizing the political space. Most people who use drugs may feel agitated and decide to wage a so called just war against the state thereby causing political instability. In Nigeria where youth make up the highest demographics of voters; no doubt that their activities could make or mar Africa's largest democracies. In terms of demographic distribution of the 2023 general elections and voter registration, the National Commissioner at Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) in charge of Information and Voter Education Committee, Mr. Festus Okoye stated that 7.2 million new voters or 76.5% are young people between 18-34 years while there is a slightly higher number of female (4.8 million or 50.82%) than male (4.6 million or 49.18%) and that the youth ,make 48 million out of the entire 93.5 million eligible voters (Vanguard, 2023). There have been instances of youths under the influence of drug destroying campaign boards and vehicles in some States in Nigeria.

Drug cartel through their activities could also destroy governance and democracy. They could do this by influencing corrupt public officials at all levels of law enforcement and government. This can in turn lead to unbridled chaos and protests and even coups which may destabilise the democratic space. This played out in the 1980s in Nigeria where it was alleged that a coup that brought in General Babangida was as a result of an investigation into the drug business of some cabals by the Muhammadu Buhari regime. Maja-Pearce (1988) in a newspaper report wrote:

*According to rumour (I say rumour, since no-one has been charged there has yet to be a denial) Dele Giwa had been told by one Gloria Okon, whom he had visited in London, that the wife of a certain person at the highest level was implicated in the escalating cocaine trade. No names need be mentioned, but every Nigerian journalist — every Nigerian — knows perfectly well who is being referred to.*

Leaders or politicians under the influence of drugs may also make policies and decisions that are anti-people and tend to support the continued trend in the trade. It was on this basis that many professional agencies, religious leaders and even the NDLEA called for compulsory drug test for the next crop of politicians in the country (Adewale, 2017; Ayitogo, 2022a).

**c. Economic**

The economic cost of illicit drug abuse along border communities vary from its waste of financial resources, reduction of labour force and turnover to absenteeism from legitimate workplaces. Most times, proceeds of illicit drugs are sufficient enough to invest and empower thousands of vulnerable population such as women, aged and physically challenged who live in border communities. With more than 20 million drug users in Nigeria who are both within the mainland and Africa borderlands, one can vehemently state that there would have been sufficient developmental and welfare programmes if these monies are channeled into such ventures.

Workplace productivity can also suffer when employees are abusing drugs. Employees under the influence may make costly errors, not show up for work (which may require the business to hire a temporary substitute), or incur health care costs that could affect the company's insurance and tax plan. While the economic cost of drug abuse in the United States was estimated at US\$193 billion in 2007 (ONDCP, 2007), there is no available statistics for Nigeria. The money allocated to the fight against illicit drug can also be used to develop other areas along Africa borderlands.

The labour force also suffers in the sense that addicts become less productive to the society and eventually lose their jobs and livelihood. Though most of the communities in Nigeria's borderland tend to farming, fishing and agricultural activities generally, the effect of illicit drug use affects productivity and societal development. It was estimated that there were 4.6 million non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids, of whom 3 million were men in Nigeria in 2017. Of the non-medical users of pharmaceutical opioids, most had used tramadol and, to a lesser extent, codeine, or morphine, in the past year, representing 4.7 per cent of the adult population aged 15-64 (UNODC, 2022). The Commander of Narcotics, National Drug Law

Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), Shehu Dankolo revealed that 40 per cent of Nigerian youths between 18 and 35 years were deeply involved in the abuse of drugs (Nzor, 2022). Many of the youths have also adopted illicit drugs as a source of livelihood due to lack of employment opportunities or underemployment and since drug economies can overshadow legal livelihoods because of its lucrativeness. Addicts sell their property and even engage in all shades of illegalities to get access to any of these drugs. In a country where kidnapping thrives, many of these addicts even kidnap their bosses in order to use the ransom to purchase illicit drugs.

### **Responses to Illicit Drugs and Borderland Insecurity in Nigeria**

#### *International*

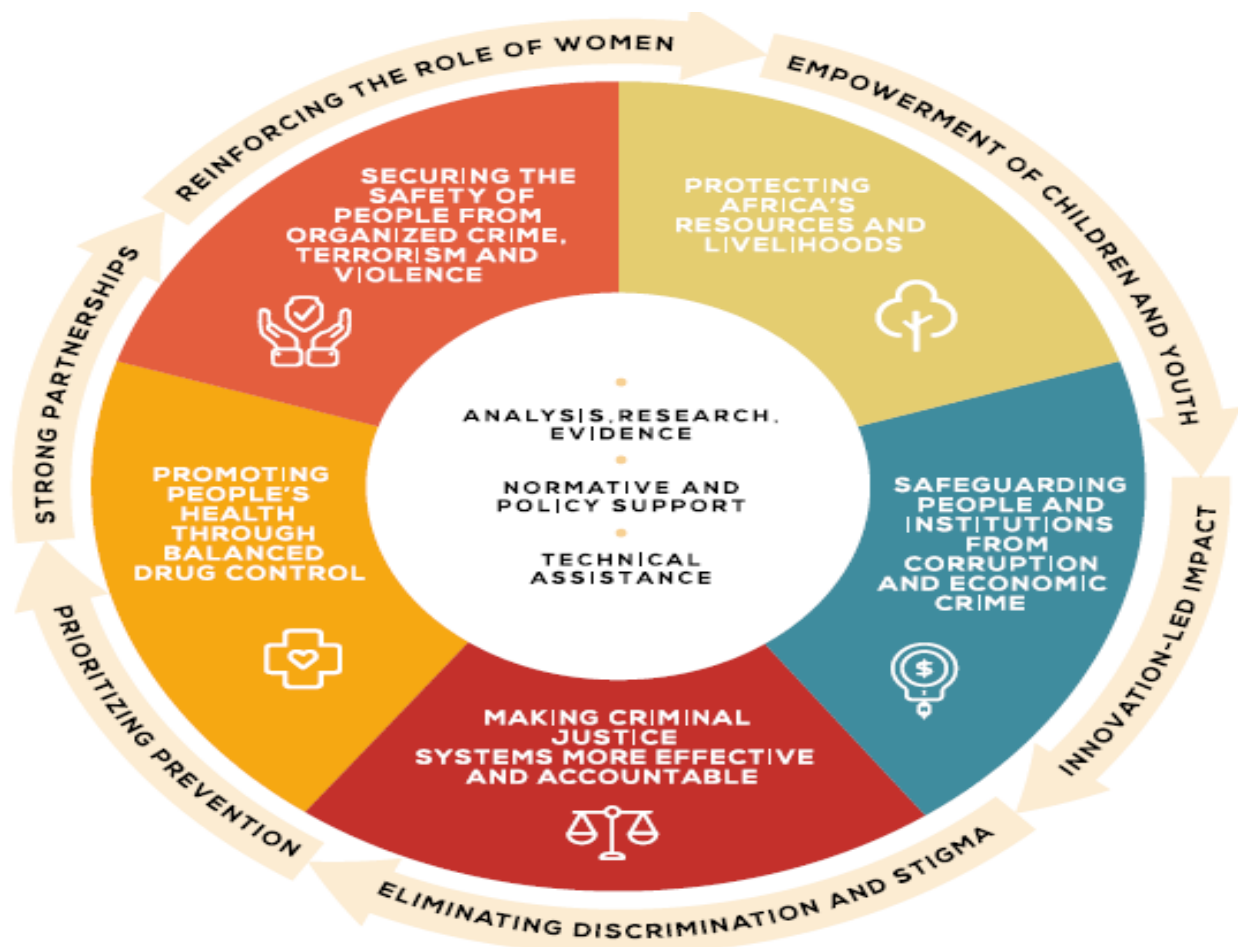
The international community has made several efforts in dealing with illicit drug trade and borderland insecurity. This is because of the linkage between drugs and peace and security. The United Nations, through the United Nations Office of Drug Committee (UNODC) has spearheaded this responses through laws, policy frameworks and programmes including financial aid to assist countries particularly those around border areas. The UNODC has led the war against transnational drugs, narcotics and all forms of corruption that could affect peace and security. This has also been followed from efforts from the United States US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other international partners such as the European Union. For example, the UNODC has intervened in Nigeria's drug and narcotic challenges since the 1980s through the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 2014, the European Union in collaboration with the UNODC committed more than EUR34 million for a duration of 53-month (January 2013-May 2017) in the fight against drug abuse in Nigeria (<https://www.unodc.org/nigeria/en/drug-prevention.html>). In fact, the UNODC have consistently collaborated with the Nigerian government on its anti-drug and narcotic drugs polices. These collaborations range from providing assistance in terms of training, human capacity development to technical aid.

In more recent times, the UNODC has embarked on a more ambitious and practical plan anchored in its belief in the limitless promise that Africa holds for its people, and the conviction

that UNODC can contribute to realizing this potential. The Vision also embodies the UNODC unwavering commitment to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the African Union's Agenda 2063, and in doing so bringing true change to the everyday lives of Africa's people, now and in the future. This is reinforced by the new UNODC corporate strategy 2021-2025, which will ensure efficient, impact-oriented delivery across our mandate areas around the globe (UNODC, 2020).

**Figure 2: Overview of UNODC Strategic Vision for Africa**



Source: UNODC (2021: 5)

The area regarding drug control involves improved data collection and analysis, strengthened responses to drug trafficking, improved responses to drug use and related HIV prevention, treatment and care, better access to medical use of controlled medicines containing



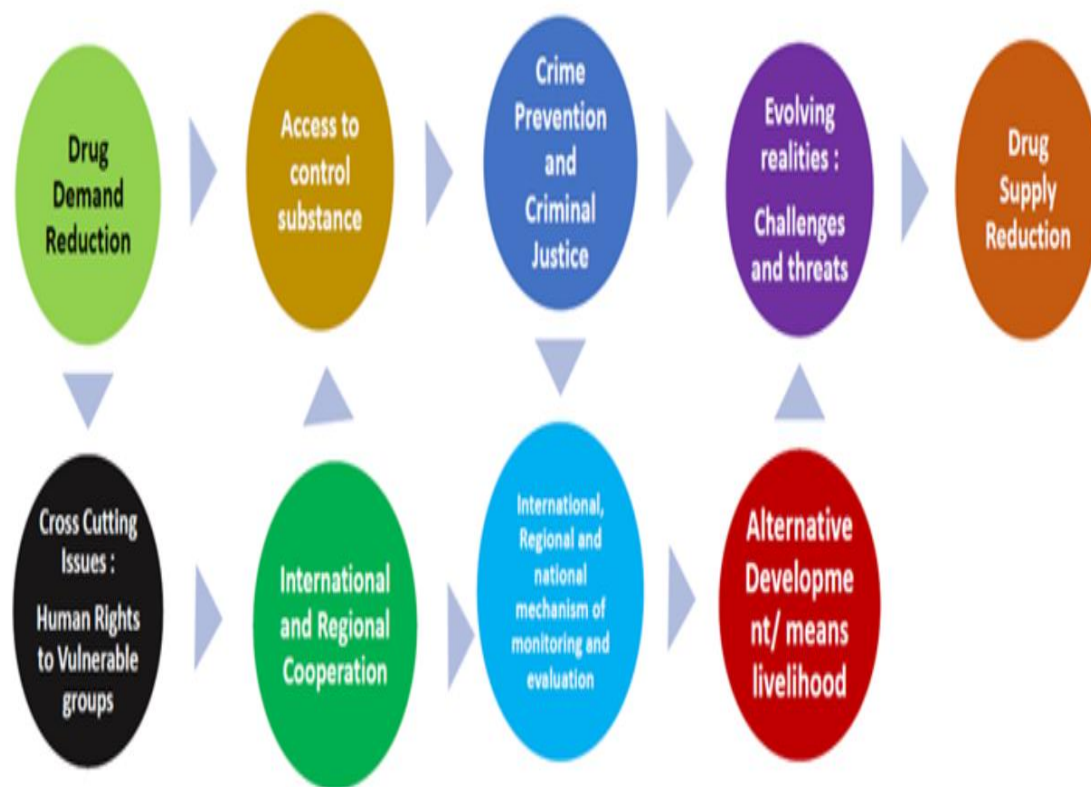
narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and finally give more protecting from falsified medical products (UNODC, 2021). On drug control, it also involves assisting Member States to enhance cross-border, regional and international cooperation contributing to more secure borders, ports, airports and maritime areas. By this, it contributes to peace and security on the continent. Be that as it may, the UNODC is not unmindful of the challenges in achieving these desired goals and vision for the continent. To be sure, some of the identified challenges it identified are Africa's population (1.3billion), climate change, poor healthcare limited for a bit above 400 million Africans, endemic poverty among its population which foresee about 2/3 of world's poorest people living in fragile situations by 2030, corruption which has denied Africans more than \$50 billion per year in public and private money and the global pandemic (UNODC, 2021:6. There is no doubt that these assessment of its weaknesses can help the UNODC achieve its vision but with just two years to the expiration of its strategy (2021-2025), it appears as if a lot is needed to be done as many African states are still battling with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and global oil glut.

### *Regional Response*

At the regional levels, the African Union has over the years championed the fight against illicit drugs and its effect on peace and security on the continent. Some notable interventions were the African Union Continental Minimum Quality Standards for Drug Treatment (2012); the Common African Position on Controlled Substances and Access to Pain Management Medication (2012). The African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017) adopted in January 2013 encourages AU member states to ensure that policies reflect the importance of human rights and public health in drug control (AU nd). Between 2014 and 2016, the AU initiated the Addis Ababa Declaration (2014) which stresses the need to scale up balanced and integrated responses towards drug control in Africa and the Common African Position for UNGASS (2016) as well as the Decisions & Declarations of Sessions of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Health, Population. In 2017, the African Union Commission (AUC) also demonstrated its firm commitment to transform the nature of border governance by establishing the African Union Border Programme (AUBP). The AUBP

developed and galvanised support from the AU Member States on a multitude of normative guidelines and instructive documents including the AU Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (Niamey Convention) (AU, 2017). Anchored on the principle of subsidiarity, the Strategy emphasised the role of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Member States, constituting the building blocks of the AU. In this regard, the Strategy has taken into account the major international and continental initiatives and blueprint documents of peace and security and development such as Agenda 2063, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and African Governance Architecture (AGA), the Common African Positions related to Migration, the Humanitarian System, and the Sustainable Development Goals (AU, 2017). In 2019, it launched the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control (2019-2023) (AU, 2019). This appears to be comprehensive as a result of the key areas of implementation.

**Figure 3: The Nine Key Areas of AU Plan of Action on DC&CP, 2019-2023**



Source: Basutu, (2020).

It appears the dialogue to end drug abuse is unending. In May 2022, the African Union launched the Global Dialogue on Drug Demand Reduction in order to explore and interrogate thoughts on how Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean can find mutual working opportunities that benefit our people both today and in the future. This was anchored on the Agenda 2063. The Director of Social Development, Culture and Sports of the African Union Commission (AUC), Mrs Cisse Mariama Mohamed stated that, “together we can identify gaps and opportunities and come up with actionable recommendations in developing and implementing sustainable drug demand reduction initiatives. We are committed to sustaining the dialogue. You can count on the African Union” (AU, 2022).

However, due to limited reporting by member states, assessing the level of political and operational engagement in implementing AU policy in the area of illicit drug trade and borderland security remains difficult. Additionally, a lack of synergy among the member states as well as poor planning and lack of political will have made a mess of most of these regional interventions. More so, the Union has not been able to evaluate the effectiveness of previous policies before inaugurating new ones and it has been established that the problems are not making new ones but building institutions to implement these policies. Moreover, the AU has not taken into consideration the capacity and weaknesses of the member states in implementing these novel policy. For example, the Union has not been able to deal with leaders involved or culpable in some of these atrocities.

#### *Sub-Regional Response*

At the sub-regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), South Africa Development Commission among others, though emphasis will be on the ECOWAS. ECOWAS had championed several strategies in the context of its commitment to international norms and standards regarding narcotics control. Resolution relating to Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse in West Africa (ECOWAS 1997); Recommendation C/98 on the establishment of a Regional Fund for Financing of Drug Control Activities in West Africa; 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 West Africa (ECOWAS 1999).

In the 21st century, it has embarked on other ambitious policy to curb the menace of illicit drugs and insecurity in Africa's borderlands. The ECOWAS initially put in place, adopted and endorsed its Political Declaration and Regional Action Plan on drugs for 2008- 2011 which was then extended until 2015. Prior to the ministerial meeting, experts on the subject matter – as well as stakeholders from member states, the African Union (AU), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), INTERPOL and the European Union (EU) – deliberated on strategies to address the drug problem in West Africa, and to agree a new Regional Action Plan for 2016-2021. It also includes a commitment to review and collate drug policies across the region.

In addition, ECOWAS set up the West African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (WENDU) for the collection and collation of epidemiological data at the regional and national levels in July 2017 (ECOWAS, 2017). The Network is present in all 15 ECOWAS member states, and includes a focus on drug treatment demand indicators and aggregate data on drug supply to inform policies. There has been constant revision on the initial framework. For example, it launched the Regional Report of statistics and trends on illicit drug supply and use in September 2021 (ECOWAS, 2021). However, lack of a harmonized sub-regional policy hindered by different language, currency, and economy as well as political instability and eroding democracies among others have not allowed these noble policy to succeed.

### *National Response*

So far there has been no national framework for fighting illicit drug in Nigeria particularly in the borderlands. Nigerian state has made significant efforts in combating illicit drug and disrupting illicit flows over the years particularly since the 1980s. Nigeria has both unilaterally and in collaboration with other countries and international agencies spearheaded a range of measures against transnational crime. The country's responses to organized crime including illicit drugs in the borderland and in the country as a whole encompass legislation, policy, enforcement and military operations (Bish et al 2022). In May 2015, the then president,

Goodluck Jonathan endorsed the National Drug Control Master Plan (NDCMP) 2015- 2019. The policy and strategy provided provide a roadmap on drug control for all ministries, departments and agencies in Nigeria and help to strike a balance between drug supply suppression and drug demand reduction actions. To facilitate implementation of the Plan, the project worked with member agencies and ministries of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Drug Control to develop a costed operational plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework for the master plan (UNODC, 2015). This worked simultaneously with the drug agency---The Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA).

The NDLEA was formed by Decree No. 48 of 29th December 1989 to specifically combat narcotics in the country. This was in response to the rising trend in the demand for and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances which adversely affected the international image of Nigerians and Nigeria in the 1980s. The agency is in charge of drug policy and control in Nigeria and it is also mandated to curtail illicit production, importation, exportation, sale and trafficking of psychoactive substances (NDLEA, nd). The agency has 14 directorates, 14 zonal commands, 111 state area commands and 10 Special (airports & seaports) commands. Its commands are situated in all the nation's airports, seaports, border posts and strategic locations on the road networks in the country.

Though there are specific laws on crimes in the country, the country has also specifically laid down laws on narcotics. The NDLEA Act Section 11 (c) stipulates a life imprisonment for a person who engages in the selling and buying or makes an offer for sale or deals with any cocaine heroin, LSD or any other drugs of similar nature. Section 11 (d) of the Act punishes mere possession of a drug, using a drug by inhaling, smoking or injecting, by imprisonment for not less than 15years but not more than 25 years (<https://nigeria.tradeportal.org/media/NDLEA%20Act.pdf>). However, the Chairman/ Chief Executive Officer of the NDLEA, Brig. Gen. Mohamed Buba Marwa (Retd) seek for the removal of the clause that allows for the option of fine for drug offenders as way to strengthen the deterrence effect of court prosecution and conviction (NDLEA, 2021). He also called on more collaboration with both regional and sub-regional organisations. At the 30th Conference of

Heads of Drug Law Enforcement Agencies Africa (HONLEA) in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2022, he notes:

*The global drug problem has placed higher demands on countries to work round the clock to achieve this goal and consolidate the achievements recorded. It is on the above premise that my delegation is proposing strengthened collaboration at both regional and sub-regional levels. This noble objective could be realized with the creation of an informal network of HONLEA contact persons to complement and enhance real time exchange of intelligence or operational information. It will also enhance more robust activities all year round. At the sub-regional level, countries should endeavour to establish sub-regional group like HONLEA for strengthened collaboration under the auspices of the regional economic communities (NDLEA, 2022a).*

To show that the agency has set an example on the continent, Nigeria was elected to host the next conference of Heads of Drug Law Enforcement Agencies Africa, HONLEA in 2023. It also appears as if the agency has achieved some successes. In his remarks, Mr Marwa stated that:

*The starting point is the harnessing of all the stakeholders by the national drug focal agency. Through this national coordination and collaborative effort, Nigeria has steadily made significant efforts in tackling drug challenges and has between January 2021 and August 2022, recorded unprecedented arrests, in the region of 21,302 suspected drug traffickers, including 28 drug barons. In the area of prosecution, the agency has secured 3,111 convictions, and seized 5.4 million kilograms of illicit substances. On Drug Demand Reduction, the Agency within the same period had brief interventions, counselling/rehabilitation for over 12,326 drug users (NDLEA, 2022a).*

However, the agency has also deplored violent and militant means in carrying out its tasks. Apart from barging into people's privacy; extrajudicial killings in the name of arrests have raised questions and demeaned the few successes recorded (Ezeobi, 2022). More so, some of the personnel have also been fingered in shady deals. A case in point is the ongoing case of some NDLEA official working in cahoots with a former police chief, Abba Kyari who is alleged to be a member of an international drug cartel (Aytogo, 2022b). The case is still before the court but Mr Kyari apart from the allegations of being involved in a drug cartel was also identified in the case of a global internet fraudster (Ramon Abass AKA Hushpuppy) by the United State of America (Busari and Princewill, 2021).

While Mr Kyari may be a scape-goat or unlucky, there is no doubt that there are other ones who have not been caught among the law enforcement agencies and even border security in our airports and ports as most of the illegal drug interceptions are made inside the country and very few at the point of entry. One will then wonder if there are no personnel or intelligence to track these drugs before its entry into the country. It is on that basis that the communities and private individuals have also joined in the response to the illicit drug trafficking war.

#### *State and Community*

Some of the states with international borders have made laws or implemented awareness programmes on the illicit drug abuse. Some of their wives have also entered into collaborations with the NDLEA in order to stem the tide of the menace. For example, in 2018, Northern Governors' Wives Forum (NGWF) stressed the need for collaboration by stakeholders to tackle increasing cases of drug abuse by youth in the country. Hadiza Abubakar, the Chairperson of the forum and wife of Bauchi State Governor made the call at the forum's quarterly meeting in Sokoto in May 2018. In 2021, the Gombe State Government under Governor Inuwa Yahaya and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) resolved to support each other in the fight against illicit drugs in the state (Aytogo, 2021). Its counterpart in Adamawa also passed a bill against drug abuse which also stresses the need for all categories of persons in the state to undergo compulsory drug test for applicants for appointment, employment and schools admission in the state. Nevertheless, these have not succeeded in curbing the menace as the basics have not been tackled. To be sure, the borders still remain porous and there have been no concreted efforts at examining the drivers of drug abuse including endemic poverty, religious extremism, increasing out-of-school children or rather put succinctly, there have been no political will by the governors and their wives who usually inaugurate pet projects for the aesthetics and corrupt tendencies and not altruistic reasons.

State based security operatives have also taken the fight by the horn. Suspects have been arrested and paraded by the State created Ebubeagu Security outfit, in Ebonyi State. Many communities have taken the fight to the drug traffickers and users by naming and shaming and even publicly beating and stripping them. This method seems to be prevalent among the south-

east area of Nigeria. There have been viral videos of youths and even children being stripped naked and publicly flogged by community vigilante or youths (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLGh0HvYwII>). Some of the traffickers have also been banished from the community. However, just like the inhuman way used by the NDLEA, many have condemned this approach of abuses and lack of dignity of the human persons. .

## **Conclusion**

The revealed that illicit drug is a social and global menace. While many studies have emphasised on the porosity of Africa and Nigeria's borderlands as the major factor affecting the peace and security in the area, this article argues that it goes beyond the borders. Other factors identified for the continued trend in the problems include poverty, elite, corruption, inadequate personnel, unemployment, lack of technology, lack of political will among others. The illicit drug market (trafficking, use and abuse) also have negative impacts, politically, socially and economically on border security. While there have been international, regional and sub-regional frameworks as well as national and community responses to tackle the menace, the cases have continued to increase daily. The national and community response approach have majorly been through violent means which has violated the rights of many citizenry and at times led to extrajudicial killing in the name of making arrests.

The article argues that except for a multi-track approach to combat the menace, the belief that shoring up our porous borders alone will put an end to illicit drugs trafficking in the country will remain a chimera. Addressing the major drivers of illicit drugs, good governance, more political will and building institutions are some of the recommendations. The government must also invest in human capital development by providing job opportunities and enabling environment for businesses to thrive, provide affordable and quality healthcare and above all invest in the youth because they are the major users of these illicit drugs and perpetrators of violent crimes. In the short term, technology and sufficient personnel should be deployed to the borderlands. All the unmanned borders should be manned and the dwellers around the border communities should be re-oriented and provided with sustainable jobs with a conducive



environment for businesses to thrive. In the long term, a harmonized framework should be designed by the international framework to curb the menace of illicit drugs on the continent especially borderlands as the failure to do this will affect the peace and security of these states and may pave way for state fragility. Moreover, there is the need for proper evaluation of past national and international policies on drugs in order to understand the areas where interventions is most needed.

### **BIO**

**Olasupo Thompson** teaches in the History and International Studies Unit, Communication and General Studies Department, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria. He has a PhD in Social history, MA History & Strategic Studies and MSc in Comparative Politics. His areas of expertise are social history, comparative politics, security and vulnerable studies. His works have appeared in both national and international journals such as African Insight and Indian Quarterly. He is a fellow of the International Labour Organization on Child Labour Studies. He is currently undertaking a sponsored project by the IFRA on the observations of the Nigerian 2023 general elections.

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