

# UNODC's Fight against Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Comparative Case Study of Ghana and Guinea-Bissau

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**Abstract:** The West African region has been identified as a major transit point for the transshipment of illicit drugs from Latin and South America into Europe. Among the countries in West Africa used mostly as a transit route into Europe is Ghana to the south and Guinea-Bissau to the North. The UNODC as the global leader in fighting the menace of illicit drug trade with field offices across the world including the West African region have succeeded in the bringing this drug menace under the control in some parts of the region such as Ghana and have failed in other parts such as Guinea-Bissau. This paper employed the Neo Elites paradigm to examine and explain why the UNODC was able to record success stories with their interventions with some governments and failed with the others in the West African region. National Elites can either promote a stable political regime or cause a disruption in the social and political systems of a country depending on whether they are consensually unified national elites or 'disunified' national elites. This study brings to bare how domestic factors were the main determinants of the successes and the failures recorded so far in the fight against drug trade.

**Keywords:** Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, UNODC, Drug Trafficking, Neo Elite theory, West Africa.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, drug trafficking as compared to other transnational organized crimes has over the years, threatened the economic, political and social development of many countries especially in Africa (USAID Programming Guide, 2013; Howell & Atta-Asamoah, 2015). The effects of this 'deadly scourge' ranges from undermining the rule of law and good governance, fostering corruption and violence, endangering economic growth, and ultimately a foremost threat to public health.

Howell and Atta-Asamoah (2015) citing Mazzitelli (2011) posits that the West African region has long been characterized with drug trafficking in illegal substances, including cocaine, cannabis, and heroin. Indeed, both local law-enforcement agencies and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have observed a steady rise in the import, export, and traffic of illicit substances, with origins as diverse as Latin America and Afghanistan. Historically, for instance, it was first thought that 'West Africa was introduced to the cultivation of cannabis and the consumption of the plant's leaves by veterans returning from military service in Asia at the end of the Second World War'. However, the historian Akyeampong has argued that the relationship has deeper roots. In Nigeria, for instance, the colonial authorities had experimented with the cultivation of the coca plant as early as 1934. There is also documented evidence of arrests for the cultivation of cannabis from the mid-1950s (Akyeampong 2005, 432). Indeed, there is extensive evidence of a flourishing trade in both heroin and cannabis at the time, with US officials noting that 'parcels of (heroin) were being conveyed by a Lebanese consortium from Beirut to New York through Kano and Accra, using corridors on commercial airlines' (Ellis, 2009, 174).

Evidence from extant literature shows the menace of drug trafficking not only in a specific country within the African continent but rather cuts across many if not all (Ellis, 2009). In Ghana, for example, drug money has supported the election of members of parliament, weakening their accountability and undermining democratic institutions. The corporate industry in Mozambique have complained of unfair competition from drug traffickers, whom it accuses of evading customs excises and container inspections. Furthermore, in Guinea-Bissau, the drug trade has promoted and aggravated political instability, resulting in the assassination of President Joao Bernardo Nino Vieira and the Chief of Defense Staff General Batista Tagame Na Wai (Ellis, 2009).

Indeed, drug trafficking represents a predominantly evil threat to development in many countries. According to a report published by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in December 2007, West Africa has notoriously become an intermediary in drug trafficking, specifically the cocaine trade between Latin America and Europe (UNODC, 2008).

Although exact figures of the volume and profits from drug trade are extremely difficult to ascertain, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2008) estimates that West African drug lords might have made between \$1.8 and \$2.8 billion in cocaine transactions in 2009 (UNODC, 2011). This is in a part of the world where the average annual gross domestic product (GDP) is \$5 billion while over 55 percent of the population in the region lives below a dollar per day (World Bank). According to Rolles et al., (2012), the high gains from drug dealings mostly cocaine and heroin, can pay for high-level corruption, sponsor armed groups, and distort legitimate markets, and the drug use that eventually comes with the trade can promote increased violence, the loss of social capital and the collapse of families and communities.

There is growing evidence of the rise in collaboration between local drug traders in West Africa and Drug cartels to turn the region into a significant transit route to Europe and North America for illicit drugs produced in South America and Asia. Because of this growing menace of drugs and organized crime around the world, international bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) were instituted.

## **II. UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC)**

In 1997, the UNODC was established through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention to combat this menace.

UNODC is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime. It operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices. UNODC relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from Governments, for 90 per cent of its budget. UNODC is mandated to assist Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime, and terrorism. In the Millennium Declaration, Member States also resolved to intensify efforts to fight transnational crime in all its dimensions, to redouble the efforts to implement the commitment to counter the world drug problem and to take concerted action against international terrorism.

The three pillars of the UNODC work programme are:

- i. Field-based technical cooperation projects to enhance the capacity of Member States to counteract illicit drugs, crime and terrorism
- ii. Research and analytical work to increase knowledge and understanding of drugs and crime issues and expand the evidence base for policy and operational decisions
- iii. Normative work to assist States in the ratification and implementation of the relevant international treaties, the development of domestic legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism, and the provision of secretariat and substantive services to the treaty-based and governing bodies.

UNODC Regional Programme aims to prevent and combat crime, terrorism and health threats and strengthen criminal justice systems in line with international human rights standards. It is also consistent with UNODC's strategic framework for 2016-2017, the resolutions adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), which guide UNODC work at the global level. It is also consistent with the "Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation"

UNODC mandates are grounded in the:

- International Drug Control Conventions (1961, 1971 and 1988);
- United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) and the Protocols thereto;
- United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003);
- International instruments about Prevention and Suppression of International Terrorism;
- United Nations standards and norms in Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice;
- Relevant United Nations General Assembly and Security Council Resolutions, including the 2009 Political Declaration and Plan of Action and the outcome documents of the 1998 and the 2016

### III. CASE SELECTION

Ghana and Guinea-Bissau are both located in the West African region of Africa. These two countries have had their own share of involvement in the drug trafficking menace in West Africa. Extant literature shows records of drug money used to fund parliamentarians in Ghana (USAID, 2013). Ghana is a West African state that has a population of approximately 26 million. Seen as one of the most peaceful states in Africa, Ghana boasts of rich democratic governance with a stable political system and is seen as a middle-income economy according to the World Bank.

Guinea-Bissau is also a West African state with a population of approximately 1.8 million. Its territory includes parts of the African mainland as well as a group of approximately 90 islands - the Bissagos Islands -most of which are uninhabited. Guinea-Bissau is seen as one of the 10 poorest countries in the world as it is listed among the low income economies according to the World Bank. In recent years, the case of Guinea-Bissau has been on the top of the agenda in the international scene due to its extremely unstable political situation and the perceived growth in cocaine trafficking. The UNODC was one of the first agencies to draw the attention of the international community to drug trafficking in the country (UNODC). Indeed, there is growing evidence of drug trafficking which runs deep into the political and socio-economic structures of these two countries. Both countries have seen diverse interventions of the UNODC trying to combat drug trade in their countries with similar approaches yet different results were realized, as Ghana has seen successes in the drug trade been brought under control, Guinea-Bissau, on the other hand, is yet to see such success though it's a way smaller country as compared to Ghana.

It appears that most cocaine entering Africa from South America makes landfall around one of two hubs, centered on Guinea-Bissau in the north and Ghana in the south. The drugs are then trafficked between West African countries and then shipped out on commercial air flights, among other means. It is based on these that the researcher has selected these countries as case analysis.

### IV. WEST AFRICAN REGION AND DRUG TRAFFICKING

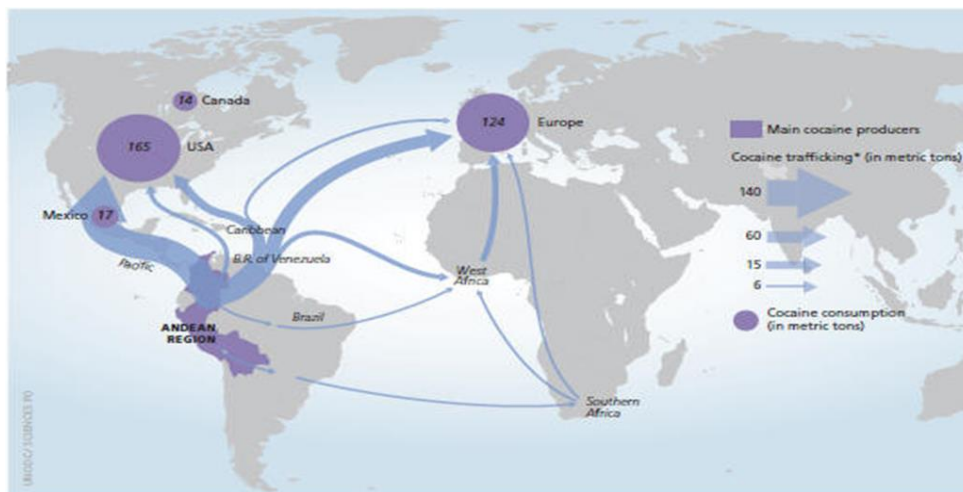
Howell and Atta-Asamoah (2014) argues that the exponential rise in the trade in illegal substances funnelled through West Africa has also been attributed to a number of key relationships that developed between Nigerian and Ghanaian nationals, and Latin American suppliers (Ellis 2009, 175–176). The distribution networks discussed above were initiated by Nigerian nationals, who began transporting small quantities of cocaine from Latin America to Nigeria, which were then forwarded to the EU. From East Pakistan and Afghan, heroin was sent to Nigeria, again in small quantities, before being shipped to the USA. As these networks became established, larger quantities of the drugs were entrusted to the West African distributors. As shall be explored below, the development of these routes heralded the creation of specific systems, operational mandates, and smuggling techniques by West African distributors that not only allowed them to gain their suppliers' trust but also established the procedures with which law-enforcement agencies could either be avoided or co-opted.

As a result, West Africa began to serve as a key international transit point – both the EU and the USA could be directly reached from Nigeria using container ships or commercial airlines while at the same time, Nigerian officials were found to be notoriously lax, if not outright corrupt (UNODC 2008a, 7–9). As Ellis has noted, 'in the general atmosphere of corruption and manipulation that characterised General Babangida's years as the president of Nigeria, from 1985 to 1993, the nation's role in the global narcotics trade grew' (Ellis 2009, 180). These trade networks soon expanded and diversified.

In 1983, for instance, it was reported that both ships and planes from Nigeria frequently carried heroin, cocaine, cannabis, and amphetamines (UNODC 2008a, 7–9).

The region’s role in the transnational trade in illegal substances has continued to grow, strengthened by favourable foreign exchange rates, continued maladministration, and increasing income disparities (themselves becoming ever more glaring with the region’s adoption of consumption- orientated capitalist economic systems).

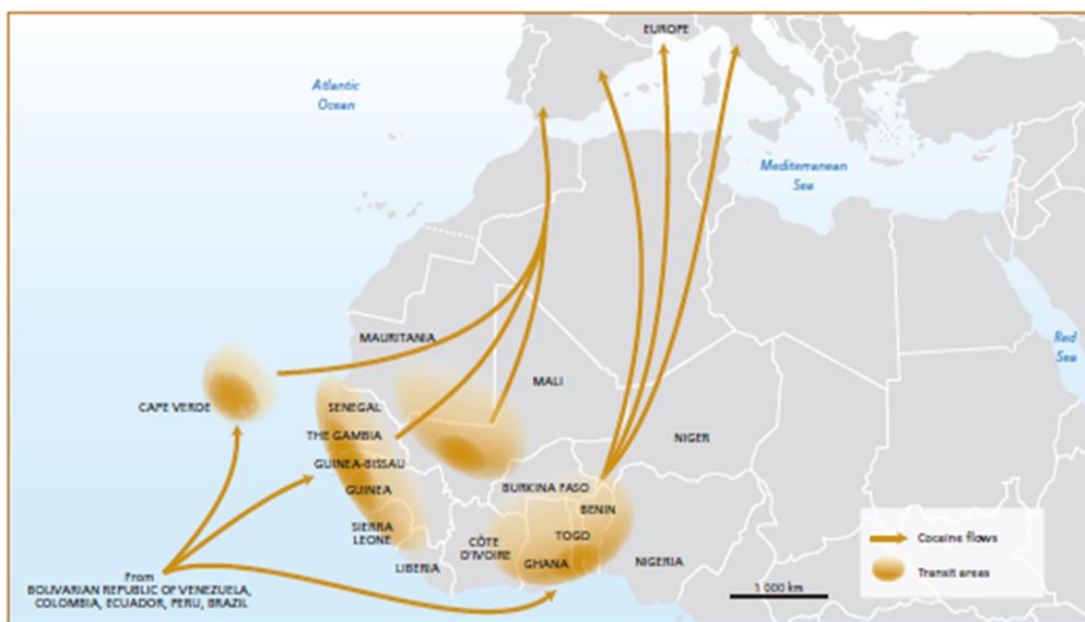
Indeed, driven by the demand and value of illegal drugs – especially cocaine and heroin – the West African region has become an important node in the transnational trade in illegal drugs. Moreover, with their large and entrenched diaspora, West African nationals have been able to create highly effective but loosely based outposts in many of the world’s major cities, thus creating networks of kin that ensure effective cooperation (Akyeampong, 2005, 429–447).



Source: UNODC, 2008 report

Fig.1: Main Global Cocaine Flow, 2008

The report suggests that cocaine is not a drug that is produced in Africa but Africa is serving as a channel for transporting the product. Much of the production is done in South America but some of the products are transported through Africa, West Africa and South Africa. These products are then transported to their final destinations, usually Europe.



Source: UNODC report 2013

Fig.2: Cocaine from West Africa to Europe

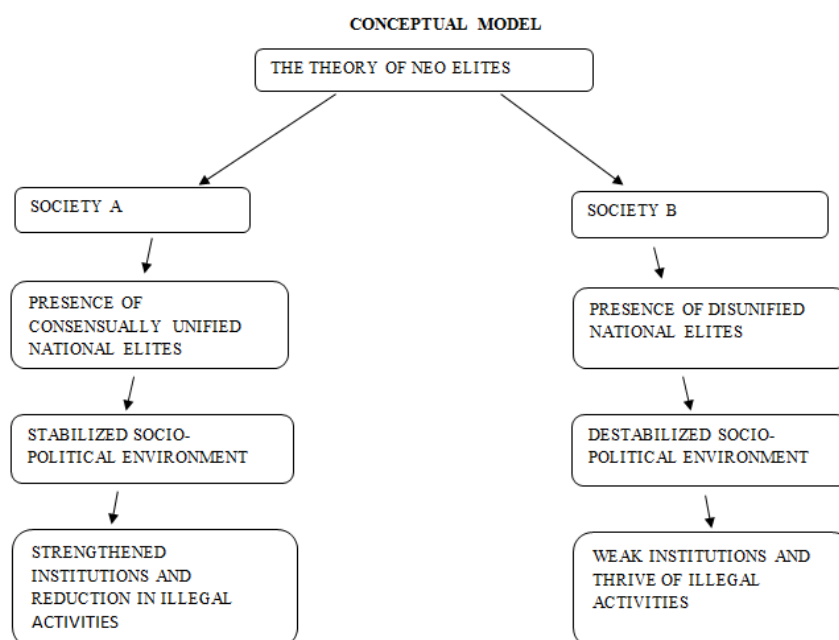
This report further indicates the destination of cocaine from Africa, West Africa to be precise. From the diagram, it can be seen that the region around Guinea Bissau is a major transit area for the cocaine business. This is indicated by the depth of the colour. Ghana can also be described per the report as a major transit area. Cocaine from these two areas are further sent to Europe, its final destination.

## V. NEO ELITE PARADIGM AND THE COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS

Political instability, social and political crises amongst others have been identified as factors that facilitate the occurrence of social and economic problems. The Elitist ideology emerged as a familiar and noticeably defined part of western political ideology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels were noted as the leading contributors of the elite theory. The Elite theory was developed to bridge the gap in political sociology by establishing a relationship between elite transformation and political stability. These writers criticized classical democratic thinkers and the likes of Aristotle and Karl Marx. They insisted that it is impossible to have the majority to rule. Again, they argued that society is divided into two parts, we have those who rule and the ones who are ruled; and those who rule usually constitute only a very small section of the society. They criticized Aristotle's classifications, which separated political systems into three categories. These are 'rule by one, rule by a few, and rule by the many', and said this isn't the truth either, because no man is able of rule by himself, and the many, also, lack the capability to rule but it is the few, under any political system, who exercise effective government. The Elitist theory is clear in its simple argument that a minority, rather than the majority, controls the affairs. The entire populace of a country, the ordinary man, is unproductive. Even in societies where elections are conducted and with other democratic machineries, it is suggested that the ruling elite governs in ways that are basically independent of control by a popular masses.

A "New Elite paradigm," emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s. It drew highlights on the important effects of divisions that may come up within the elite of any society. Its principal arguments, as noted by John Higley and Michael Burton (1989), was that: "A disunified national elite, which happens to be the most common type, yields a series of unstable regimes that fluctuate between authoritarian and democratic practices over varying intervals. On the hand, a consensually unified national elite, which historically is seen to be rare, tends to produce a much stable regime that may evolve into model democracies such as Britain, or the United States, if the economic conditions and other sectors permit." According to Field and Higley (1980), disunified elites happens to show in the past of most of the currently stable, western countries. Disunity, they opined, is the "normal" or usual case of elite structure. Followers of disunified national elites see power as personalized and reliant on direct regulation of organized powerful forces. They extremely distrust each other, they see coups d'état and other irregular annexation of government authority as possible happenings, and various parties among them often try such seizures. They are unable to rely on each other for teamwork and tolerance, the factions involved of the disunified regularly organize sections of non-elites for either defensive and offensive charges against other elite sections. This usually results in regular mass protests, strikes, unrests, and uprisings, which the military and police might or might not overpower. Elite disunity most often than not has produced a high level of societal conflicts. Field and Higley (1980) again explained consensually unified elites as those that are noted by a prevalent elite unanimity on the rubrics of the political game and by the form of political space and controlled partisanship described by Lijphart, Di Palma and the Purcells. According to Higley and Moore (1981:584), they added the presence of an all-encompassing system of formal and informal communication, friendship and power wielding among top placed individuals in all major elite groups to the concept of such elites. According to Burton (1984) consensually unified elites have been made up in three ways: through a thoughtful and voluntary settlement between previously fighting elite groups, as it occurred between 1688 and 1689 in England, 1809 in Sweden, in about 1933 in Mexico, and in Venezuela and Columbia during the late 1950s; secondly, through the unifying practice of working with a not fully free representative political system and then fighting for full independence, as in the cases America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland and thirdly through the creation of a fundamentally transitional, imperfectly unified elite form and its steady conversion into a consensually unified one where economic and other conditions allow, as in Norwegian and Danish cases during the 1930s (Field and Higley, 1978). Once it is fashioned, the consensually unified elite system happens to be self-perpetuating. Nations who happen to have such elite structures have remarkably showed great records of stable government and displayed low levels of communal protest. National elites according to Burton and Higley, 1987b) refers to persons who have the capacity to foment political trouble if they so desire to without any meaningful repression. National elites could, therefore, be seen as people who wield a lot of political power by virtue of their positions within organizations and social movements. These people have what it takes to influence the political atmosphere as and when they desire. Elitists, therefore, are individuals who are key figures within

social organizations that have the tendency or ability to influence the social and political discourse as well as atmosphere (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). According to Higley, Burton and Field (1990), countries may experience the same phenomenon such as independence post World War II but have different national elites who determine the state of that country as exemplified by countries such as India and Pakistan as well as Ghana, Nigeria and Botswana. The elitist paradigm or perspective according to Burton (1984) is largely underdeveloped or not concentrated on because of the possibility of it offering a counter-argument to the Marxist approach that has come dominate in modern socio-political discourse. Notwithstanding the various forms of unified elites proposed by Field and Higley, Cammack (1990) drew a sharp distinction between a “disunified” national elite and “consensually” unified national elite. According to Cammack, a disunified national elite describes a political condition where there is shift between democratic governance as well as authoritarian rule. This form of elite rule creates a high degree of instability in states where they are practiced. This is largely as a result of disagreements and lack of unity among the elites or those who are the helm of affairs of the state. Communication among disunified national elites can conveniently be described as sporadic and limited (Cammack, 1990) in the sense that members do not share the same ideologies and beliefs with regards to political conduct. A consensually unified national elite, on the other hand, creates a stable political atmosphere that is so much characteristic of democratic societies. This stability stems from the agreement between the elites of that society on how the country should and must be governed. This unity and agreement among the elites reduces the tension and anger that often characterizes societies plagued with discord of any form among elites who feel they are all qualified to determine the form of government to be adopted in administering the affairs of the state. The consensus that is developed between these elites reduces the partisan strain that could characterize elite groups (Cammack, 1990). The New (neo) Elite framework is relevant in this study considering the fact that while a consensually unified elite would result in a stable democracy, a disunified elite would result in an unstable political environment. Some countries within Latin America, Asia and Africa were characterized by a disunified elite structure, which are usually responsible for a breakdown in the democratic structures of these countries. While a unified elite would stabilize a particular political dispensation, empowering the followers is important in making it a democratic dispensation (Case, 1996). The two broad categories of socio-political environment would determine the extent to which illicit drug trade would flourish or not in Ghana and Guinea-Bissau. A stable political environment would mean the state institutions in charge of ensuring the smooth administration of the state would be in tandem with one another to ensure that any of such illegal activities are not carried out. On the other hand, when there is political instability, which is often created by some of the elite and influential people in society, illicit drug trade would be enhanced. This is because, in the midst of the chaos, there would be disintegration among the state machinery resulting in an improper coordination of activities between the various state agencies. In addition, most of the elites have ties with these drug lords and those engaged in this act of illicit drug activities to the extent that a disruption in the social and political structures would enhance their powers through finances made from illicit drug flows.



**Fig 3: Influence of the Theory of Neo Elites in Ghana and Guinea-Bissau**

The figure above shows that there is presence of disunified elites in Society B as there is the presence of consensually unified elites in Society A. National elites as has already been identified have the tendency to either cause stability or instability in a country. They cause stability when they are consensually unified (as is the case of society A) but when they are disunified, they are likely to cause instability (as is the case of Society B). For the purpose of this discussion, Ghana will represent Society A whereas Guinea-Bissau will represent Society B. As noted earlier, the society that has the presence of unified national elites demonstrates stable socio-political environment, which leads to the strengthened institutions and stable political system. Ghana in this discussion perfectly fits into Society A, where there is the presence of consensually unified national elites who irrespective of their political affiliations or interests, put their differences behind them and work together for the betterment of the country. Ghana enjoys one of the most stable socio-political environments with strong institutions and state machinery within the region of West of Africa. Issues with political unrests, demonstrations, strikes, among other communal protest are very minimal if not totally absent in Ghana. As a result, illegal and criminal activities find it difficult to thrive in the country since these unified elites always seek immediate solutions to curb rising issues that threatens the peace and stability of the country. A classic example was in the year 2012 when the then opposition leader, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo who felt cheated in the presidential elections, took the issue to the court and after the supreme court ruled in favour of John Dramani Mahama the then sitting president, he (Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo) decided to concede defeat for the sake of the peace and stability Ghana enjoys. The elites in Ghana over the years have tried as much as possible to put their interests aside when it came to matters that affects national unity and this has been demonstrated in the fight against drug trade in the country. In 2005, one of Ghana's parliamentarian; Eric Amoateng was arrested for having in his possession heroin believed to be six million dollars in value. Also in 2016, a British fugitive by name David McDermott, who is believed to be linked to a drugs group, was arrested in Ghana. He had established himself in the country for years and was married to the stepdaughter of Mr. Henry Kofi Wampah, former governor of Bank of Ghana. Such arrests of highly connected and political figures in connection with the illegal drug trade is as a result of the support of UNODC and the cooperation of the consensually unified national elites in Ghana to wipe out the bad nuts and ensure the continuity of the stability the nation enjoys. Ghana is gradually seeing a reduction in this drug menace.

Guinea-Bissau, on the other hand, is a perfect example of Society B where there is a high presence of disunified national elites who put their interest above national unity and growth. These kind of elites distrusts each other and thrive on competitions sometimes wield support from non-elites to defend themselves or offend the other factions. Guinea-Bissau has one of the unstable socio-political environments in a West Africa with very weak institutions and corrupt state machinery. Political unrests coupled with demonstrations, strikes amidst the assassination of top government officials and people of high repute in society is the order of the day as a result of the struggle of power and recognition among these disunified national elites. As a result of this situation in Guinea-Bissau, illegal and criminal activities are on the high as most of these disunified elites are responsible to for illegal and criminal activities that flourishes in their society. As such, the activities of UNODC in the fight against this drug trafficking menace has become difficult if not ineffective to deal with the situation in Guinea-Bissau as most of the people responsible to help in the fight are actually the brains behind the flourishing nature of the trade in the country. Guinea-Bissau has since been declared a narco-state by the United Nations and the United States of America as the situation grows from bad to worse.

In a statement before the Security Council on 19 April 2012, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Guinea-Bissau, Mamadú Saliu Djaló Pires, directly blamed the recent coup on the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, Lieutenant General Antonio Indjai. He said the reason for the coup was to allow Indjai to "undermine the ongoing process of reform and assure his continuing collaboration with organized crime and drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau." (UN Security Council, 2012).

He recounted the incident in which Indjai rose to his present position; On 1 April 2010, Lieutenant General Antonio Indjai invaded the premises of the United Nations in Bissau to "liberate" Rear Admiral Bubo Na Tchuto. He subsequently kidnapped the Army Chief of Staff, General Jose Zamora Induta, and imprisoned Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Júnior for several hours, in order to put pressure on the Government and President Bacai Sanhá to appoint him and Bubo Na Tchuto chiefs of staff of the army and navy, respectively. They were confirmed in office through coercion and threats to the country's civil authorities, the Prime Minister and President of the Republic (UN Security Council, 2012). He went on to describe a country where drug suspects were released by the military, where drug flights land on public roads with the protection of the army, and where soldiers beat and humiliate the police publicly.

This 'Neo Elites Paradigm' perfectly explains why the UNODC's strides to fight drug trafficking in the West African region, has seen significant progress in Ghana and minimized the drug situation in the country but has failed to record such impact in the Guinea-Bissau drug situation. This is generally as a result of the presence of consensually unified national elites in Ghana and disunified national elites in Guinea-Bissau.

## VI. CONCLUSION

West Africa's positioning and weather conditions made it easier, convenient and safer for the transport and storage of the drugs as the weather is quite similar to that of South America. Also, employment of stringent measures by countries that hitherto served as transit points for drug transport from Latin and South America such as Spain enhanced its security checks thereby frustrating the activities of those engaged in the trafficking of drugs. Africa presented itself a safer option. This is due to some factors existent on the continent such as political instability and lack of political commitment to fight drug trade, poverty, weakened state institutions, and lack of law enforcement on drug trade. The greed and selfishness of some national elites further explains the different results observed between countries in the fight against drug trade with the support of the UNODC. National elites can either promote a stable political regime or cause a disruption of the political and social system, which ultimately benefits them since they are more likely to enjoy free and easy movement of drugs across their borders.

With Ghana making positive strides in its fight against illicit drug trade because of the commitment of its national elites, Guinea-Bissau is still plagued with continuous drug-related issues mainly because the political actors have not shown any commitment to fighting the menace.

The factors that resulted in the differences observed between Ghana and Guinea-Bissau are mainly internal which suggests that domestic factors are important determinants of the success of any intervention program and cannot be ignored.

In the efforts at tackling the drug menace, political leaders should strengthen their security and border systems, ensure a stable political atmosphere coupled with political will and commitment to ending the menace, reduction in poverty and also ensuring that laws on illicit drug trade are enforced to later in partnership with the UNODC as well as other international bodies. It is only when African governments take proactive measures would they be able to end the illicit drug activities on the continent and to a large aid in solving the global drug problem.

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