ECOWAS and UNODC Sign Letter of Cooperation on the Fight Against Illicit Trafficking in West Africa

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) signed a letter of cooperation as confirmation of their commitment towards an effective and integrated implementation of the UNODC Regional Programme and the ECOWAS Action Plan on the Fight against Illicit Drug Trafficking, related Organized Crime, Corruption and Terrorism, as well as Drug Abuse in West Africa.

The letter of cooperation was signed by His Excellency, Marcel de Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission and Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of UNODC on behalf of the two Institutions. The cooperation between ECOWAS and UNODC will address and confront emergent threats and challenges to development, peace and stability across West Africa. These threats include transnational organized crime, illicit drug trafficking, terrorism, corruption, the laundering of criminal assets and terrorism financing, weakness in the criminal justice system, as well as HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

Parties to the cooperation recognize that if left unchecked, these constantly evolving threats will ultimately compromise social, economic and human development in the region.

In line with this development, the UNODC has developed its new Regional Programme for West Africa, while ECOWAS elaborated its Regional Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa, both covering the implementation period, 2016 – 2020.

These two strategic policy documents will mobilize joint efforts to successfully face current and future threats in West Africa. Both policy positions are aligned, and strategically complementary, and will support a framework of national, regional and inter-regional collective actions to strengthen the capacities of States in areas of governance, security and health promotion, linking national, regional and inter-regional actors.

UNODC lists achievements during the Project Steering and Coordination Committee (PSCC) Meeting of ECOWAS, EU Delegation Abuja and UNODC

The second meeting held in October 2016, of the Project Steering and Coordination Committee - a group comprising representatives from ECOWAS, the European Union and the UNODC. Mr. Pierre Lapaque, UNODC Regional Representative for West Africa and Central Africa, thanked the EU for generously funding the project, and also ECOWAS Commission for hosting part of UNODC staff in their premises. He noted that the joint partnership with ECOWAS yielded crucial Regional meetings of experts, with decision-makers of the Region drawn from Law Enforcement, Epidemiology, and Justice working closer together. This partnership paradigm would further enhance exchange of views for future collaboration. Mr. Lapaque identified and highlighted important achievements made in the substantive areas of Law Enforcement, forensics, Drug Demand Reduction and Epidemiology, to include the following:
a) Desk review of the available studies on the situation of drug abuse in ECOWAS Member States;
b) Regional Workshop on Collection and Analysis of Data on Drug Use and Estimation of Size of Drug Users among the General Population conducted in Dakar, Senegal (26-29 Sept, 2016) in which 30 focal points and epidemiologists from 16 countries participated;
c) Finalization of the grant procedure for 4 NGOs from Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mauritania and Sierra Leone.
d) Provision of technical assistance for the Annual CSO Meeting organized by ECOWAS (July 2015) and regional conference organized by the WACSI and OSIWA (January 2016) to consolidate West Africa’s position for UNGASS and support drug policy reforms in West Africa that favour drug user’s treatment rather than incarceration.
e) Conduct of up to eleven (11) law enforcement capacity assessments;
f) Completion of forensics capabilities assessment in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Niger and Nigeria.
g) Provision of manuals and reference materials to Nigeria and Gambia.

Regional Action Plan: The Mandate

Drug trafficking organisations have been using West Africa as a transit area for trafficking large amounts of illicit drugs to Europe and North America. This is owing to weaknesses in the capacity of West African states to effectively combat the movement of illicit drugs, and to fight related organised crimes both at the regional and national levels. This has given rise to related problems including corruption which undermines the economies of the West African region, the financing of terrorism with its disastrous consequences, and substance abuse, with its adverse socio-economic and health effects.

The inadequacy, unreliability and non-comparability of data on traffic and use of illicit drugs in the region further exacerbate the problem, and this is hindering the development of an effective, evidence-based response. Furthermore, Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) including national and regional networks, are often not coordinated enough, nor sufficiently supported to upscale their role as critical agents of influence in the campaign to combat the menace of trafficking in illicit drugs and related crimes, etc. The coverage, relevance, and impact of their activities are therefore not measured. Also of concern is the weak capacity of the judicial and enforcement authorities, resulting in a lack of sub-regional and regional cooperation and coordination against transnational organised crime.

Against this background, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, in recognition of the magnitude of the problem, directed the ECOWAS Commission in 2008 to take urgent action to respond to the problems of illicit drugs. In response, the “Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crimes in West Africa” and “Regional Action Plan to address the growing problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organised Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa (2008-2014)” were adopted.

The 2008 Action Plan was reviewed, validated and transformed into the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan, 2016 - 2020. The European Union (EU) on the 22nd December 2013 signed a EUR 16,470,000 Financing Agreement with the ECOWAS Commission as support for the implementation of the project, titled: Support to ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on illicit drug trafficking, related organized crime and drug abuse in West Africa. The project which is being implemented jointly by the ECOWAS Commission and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), aims to achieve four results: 1. Improved ECOWAS Drug Unit advocacy, monitoring and coordination capacity; 2. Harmonised information on drug abuse epidemiology and data collection; 3. Good practices on drug prevention and treatment are identified and disseminated; and 4. Improved law enforcement to effectively combat transnational organised crime related to drugs and improved sub-regional, regional and international cooperation.

One of the outcomes of this project is that the ECOWAS Drug Unit (EDU) is now strengthened for effective drug control and prevention of substance use disorders. It now has the requisite technical staff in place, to work with member states, NGOs, CBOs and CSOs in the region. In addition, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and other resource persons are on hand to help provide valuable technical advice.

It is therefore essential that Member States in the region and Mauritania put together programmes that will take advantage of the available expertise in the region toward improved drug control and prevention in West Africa. Finally, I envisage that the ECOWAS Drug News (this Newsletter), and the ECOWAS Drug Unit Web Portal will serve to disseminate information on good practices on drug and crime policies, project progress, drug control and prevention activities that are being undertaken, both at the regional and national levels. In this regard, I urge all ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania to consider and adopt this Newsletter and the ECOWAS Drug News (this Newsletter) and this newsletter.
Experts from ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania, and Representatives from UNODC & INTERPOL Validate and Recommend Adoption of 2016-2020 ECOWAS Drug Action Plan

The ECOWAS Experts Meeting effectively utilised the instruments of experts’ presentations, analyses, projections, and group discussions to analyze and proffer solutions to illicit drug trafficking, organized crime, drug abuse, and cross-border terror. Concrete observations and resolutions were reached, which are to be communicated to relevant agencies and institutions of member countries and Mauritania, for implementation, to help curtail and halt the spread of illicit trafficking of drugs and related organized crime within the region.

There were exhaustive discussions over several items on the meeting agenda; including the detailed review of the five thematic areas of the Regional Action Plan, namely political commitment and allocation of adequate resources, effective law enforcement and national/regional cooperation, appropriate, adequate and efficient legal and policy framework, drug demand reduction, and suitable systems of relevant, valid and reliable data of drug supply and demand. The Regional Action Plan also integrates new priorities such as – ensuring the availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes, and preventing their diversions; incorporates cross-cutting issues such as drugs and human rights, youth, women, children and communities.

Experts at the meeting noted the imperative for systemic capacities to coalesce and consolidate collaborative efforts so as to eradicate the menace of illicit drug trafficking, related organized crime, and drug abuse. Experts were clearly of the view “that corruption undermines all efforts to address illicit drug trafficking and all forms of related organized crimes”, and that it was thus important “to strengthen capacities to tackle and control corruption and its associated dimensions, as an integral part of the fight against all forms of trafficking and organized crimes”.

The experts further stipulated that “the prospects for synergizing the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan, and the fight against corruption within the ECOWAS region and Mauritania should be made to thrive on active collaboration between drug commissions and anti-graft agencies of member nations and Mauritania, for prompt response and more effective results.

Chairman of the meeting Mr. Gwee K. Porkpah thanked the experts for their diligent review, validation and recommendation for adoption, of the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan (2016-2020); which facilitated its adoption by Ministers of Justice and Interior/Internal Affairs of ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania. The Chairman called on the experts to also work towards achieving the desired goal of maintaining security for the region; and impressed on them to mobilize support for leaderships in their individual countries to increase their commitment to address illicit drug trafficking, organised crime and drug abuse across the region.

ECOWAS Articulates Effective Regional Action Plan

ECOWAS Drug Unit Strengthened to Improve Advocacy, Monitoring and Coordination of Drug Control in West Africa

The Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, has articulated and developed an Action Plan to combat and reverse the trend of illicit drugs trafficking, drug abuse, and organized crimes within the region. This is consistent with aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 which is the roadmap to transformational and inclusive development on the continent, and the ECOWAS Community Strategic Framework (2016-2020).

The ECOWAS Regional Action Plan is also in line with the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control (2013-2017) as well as the UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa (2016-2020).

In developing the new ECOWAS Drug Action Plan, several partners, notably, UNODC experts contributed in diverse ways. Organisations, partners and stakeholders were also engaged throughout the consultations widely held; including ECOWAS Member States; ECOWAS Drug Unit in-house collaborators (Directorates of Legal Affairs and Political Affairs and Regional Peace and Security); Technical partners, namely, AU, INTERPOL, and the European Union (EU). Regional Civil Society Organizations also provided input to the Action Plan following a workshop held in Abuja, Nigeria.

The Commission’s Consultative engagements with key partners, namely the G7+ nations, Colombia, Portugal, Spain, the EU Commission, Europol, INTERPOL, MAOC (N), UNODC and UNOWA...
The Action Plan is the major boost to stem the tide, and check the depletion and sapping of human resource occasioned by crimes and illicit drug-based activities within the region, and ECOWAS intends to achieve this by policy resolve, structural, and institutional collaborations.

In the opening address at the meeting, Commissioner, Social Affairs and Gender, Dr. Fatimata Dia-Sow expressed satisfaction with the representation from the Member States and Mauritania. The Commissioner outlined efforts the Commission and Member States had made towards implementation of the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan, since its adoption by the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in 2008. The Commissioner then drew attention to some of the impediments that had threatened implementation of the plan, which included inadequate technical and financial resources.

The Commissioner however assured the experts that the ECOWAS Drug Unit had since been strengthened following the recruitment of technical staff, made possible through a grant from the European Union (EU) to the ECOWAS Commission under the 10th European Union Development Fund (EDF). The UNODC Project Implementation Support Team is also domiciled at the ECOWAS Commission with support provided by the EU, and these entities will jointly play a key role in the implementation of the Regional Action Plan.

Technical Sessions Showcase Collective, Strategic Action Against Drugs and Crime

It is also worthwhile that they discussed in comprehensive terms the ECOWAS anti-terrorism response, and the emphasis was not only on democracy and good governance as being basic to a successful anti-terrorism campaign, but also the sharing of intelligence and cross-border, inter-agency collaboration (between the Police, Customs, and Immigration).

Presentations were also made on the indicative budget and the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism (MEM) of the Action Plan. It was noted that, as part of funding for the Action Plan, the European Union, under the 10th EDF had provided EUR 16,470,000 to support some of the activities of the action Plan. The MEM, which is a vital and integral part of the Action Plan, establishes the overall framework for the continued monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of progress in implementing the different components of the Action Plan.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism is to allow Member States and the ECOWAS Commission to receive assessments on the degree of implementation of the Action Plan in its five thematic areas.

The INTERPOL presentation demonstrated a clear example of how intelligence sharing was critical in a particular joint police operation – ADWENPA. Operation ADWENPA was conducted across the land borders of Elboe/Noe; Affao/Kwadjoviakope; Seme/Krake, and the three international airports in Accra, Abidjan and Lagos. It was envisaged that this kind of joint operations will forster expected synergy among law enforcement operations in the sub-region. Participants at the meeting surmised
The Ministerial Meeting on the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crimes and Drug Abuse in West Africa, 2016 - 2020 stressed the imperative for all parties, stakeholders and supporting agencies to collaborate and pursue this robust agenda that will see to effective policy implementation. Participants noted that the opportunity to match words with action is further emboldened by a number of factors, chief of which include: 1) ECOWAS has strengthened its technical capacity; 2) the availability of funding from the European Union, and 3) the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan 2016-2020, which Plan represents the cardinal position and policy of the ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania, as far as drug control is concerned.

His Excellency, Marcel A. De Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission apody noted that the ECOWAS Sahel Strategy would be vital in support of especially, the implementation of post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and reconciliation initiatives in selected Member States faced with these challenges.

For West Africa, drug use prevention, treatment and rehabilitation are the most cost-effective means of reducing drug-related crimes. As a part of this regional commitment, the UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa and ECOWAS Drug Action Plan 2016-2020 was formally launched at 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on 19th September, 2016 at the UN Headquarters, New York. As a first step, the launch has given global visibility to the West Africa related crimes. As a part of this regional commitment, the rehabilitation are the most cost-effective means of reducing drug-

that “embarking on joint capacity building programs at the ECOWAS Centre of Excellence, particularly on corruption and proceeds from drug trafficking will be of immense benefit to enhancing peace, security and stability in the region”.

Notably, other related thematic issues arising from role of the (Nigerian) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Training Academy will also be of great value in this quest.

It was equally noted that steadfastness on the part of governments of member countries and Islamic Republic of Mauritania via the dutiful offsetting of their commitments, would be a denominator of the mileage to be covered; and these indicators would come up for evaluation at the next meeting.

ECOWAS and Mauritania Adopt Common Policy Position UNODC Endorses Action Plan

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Most critically, delegates to the Ministerial meeting took note of, and recognized, that there are disparities in the level of development of Member States in the region. Well-endowed Member States therefore pledged to cooperate to assist the weaker States, in pursuit of the common goal to eradicate illicit drug trafficking, drug related crime and drug abuse within ECOWAS Member-States and Mauritania.

The meeting, tagged “Ministerial Meeting on the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crimes and Drug Abuse in West Africa” was attended by Ministers or their representatives from Burkina Faso, Côte D’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo – all Member States of ECOWAS – and Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Hon. Abubakar Malami SAN underscored the essence of the Action Plan, particularly as it represented a regional collective resolve, which itself, was a response to the directive of ECOWAS Heads of States and Governments to the Commission, to build upon the successes of the earlier [2008-2014 ECOWAS Drug Action] plan.

Nigeria’s Hon. Minister of Justice pointed out that it was the pursuit of synergy that galvanized ECOWAS Member States to seek a common position in terms of drug control policies. He noted the uncomfortable fact that “the world is currently divided in terms of drug control policies.” The Minister therefore urged for the unanimous adoption of the new Regional Action Plan (2016-2020); which in his words, “represents the position of ECOWAS Member States which is to ‘punish illicit drug trafficking but at the same time offer treatment and rehabilitation to people with substance use disorders.’”

Key Note Speaker, H.E. Marcel A. De Souza, President of the ECOWAS Commission, represented by the Vice President – H.E. Edward Sing hatey, appreciated member states, for the achievements recorded in implementing important parts of the 2008-2014 Action Plan. The President applauded efforts being made by members to align domestic legislation on corruption and money laundering with international legal standards, and particularly those who have initiated actions to raise awareness on drug use disorders particularly among vulnerable groups. He rallied for the adoption of intelligence-based actions to identify and act upon illicit drug trafficking, money-laundering and other organized criminal activities, including improving border security.

The President emphasized that despite these achievements, illicit drug use continues to claim the lives of the productive segment of our citizens, especially the youths; and called for deliberate enlightenment campaigns aimed towards vulnerable members of the society, especially the youth, who are targeted the most by traffickers of illicit drugs.

Whilst laying the schedule for the joint launch of the UNODC Regional Programme for West Africa and the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan, the President called on Ministers to re-double their...
Participation of Islamic Republic of Mauritania, geographically located in West Africa, at the “Ministerial Meeting on the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa” was a clear demonstration that the fight against drugs was intra and trans-regional.

Mauritanian Minister Maitre Brahim Daddah remarked that the problem of illicit drugs was global. He therefore solicited for a broad spectrum of stakeholder cooperation and shared experiences, in order to combat this destructive phenomenon. Maitre Brahim Daddah highlighted efforts being made by his country to include the setting up of the National Commission to address illicit drug trafficking and the use of psychotropic substances. He acknowledged the contribution and collaboration of UNODC, INTERPOL, and the West African Network of Central Authorities and Prosecutors (WACAP), against organised crime. Maitre Brahim Daddah also assured that his country will continue to share their experiences with ECOWAS Member States. He therefore advocated for enhanced communication, to foster trade and trans-regional cooperation.

He noted that the Plan was comprehensive enough, in the sense that it took into account the gravity and sophisticated dimensions which drug trafficking had assumed in the region wherein he noted “the discovery of Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) super laboratory in Nigeria, similar to those used by Mexican cartels”, which is credible evidence that this highly lucrative trafficking is spreading in Nigeria and other countries in the region.

The final push for the adoption of the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan came shortly after the Chairman of the Experts Meeting, Mr. Gwee K. Porkpah presented the report to the Ministers of ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania. The Honorable Ministers commended the experts for the quality of work done in reviewing and validating the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan. They equally congratulated the ECOWAS Commission, the experts and partners for their combined efforts towards the development of the Plan. Whereupon, the Honorable Ministers unanimously adopted the 2016-2020 ECOWAS Drug Action Plan.

Following the example of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, members endorsed the recommendation to in future, invite countries like Libya and Algeria which share common, vast borders with some West African countries to the north, to participate in ECOWAS meetings. Members agreed that this would facilitate further collaboration and cooperation from a Pan-African point of view.

In response, ECOWAS Vice President, Mr. Edward Singhatey, observed that Mauritania’s participation would add value to regional cooperation. The Vice President reminded Ministers that the fight against illicit drugs required a concerted effort, as no country could win the fight on its own.

News From Member States, Donors and Partners

Nigeria

National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Strengthens Capacity - 15,000 personnel to be recruited in 2017

The Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency, NDLEA, is poised to recruit 10,000 personnel in 2017, following the approval it received from His Excellency, Muhammadu Buhari GCFR, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to this effect. Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Hon. Abubakar Malami SAN disclosed this while addressing Ministers and other representatives of Governments, at the Ministers Meeting on the ECOWAS Drug Action Plan to Address Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crimes and Drug Abuse in West Africa.”

Nigeria’s Attorney General and Minister of Justice announced that the approval came on the heels of recorded achievements of the Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency with respect to combating trafficking of illicit drugs and the prevention of substance use disorder within Nigeria’s borders. The Minister noted that this development was an indication of Nigeria’s readiness and commitment to provide the required human and material resources, in line with the regional objective of the new Action Plan on illicit drugs.