

DRUG TRAFFICKING: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE OFFENSIVE ACTION PROGRAMME OF THE NATIONAL DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

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Abstract

Despite every effort to put drug trafficking under control in Nigeria, it appears to continue unabated. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)'s Offensive Action Programme in curbing drug-related activities across Nigeria. It examines key performance indicators, including the number of arrests, drug seizures, prosecutions, and the dismantling of drug syndicates, between 2021 and 2023. This is done using secondary data sources and methods, and the analysis of official records. E.M. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which describes how an idea gradually gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) within a particular social system, was adopted as the study's framework. The findings highlight challenges in Nigeria's anti-drug trafficking initiative, including legal loopholes, corruption, and inadequate funding, and the study recommends enhanced inter-agency collaboration, strengthened legislation, and increased intelligence investment.

Keywords: Drugs, Drug trafficking, Offensive Action, NDLEA, Nigeria

Introduction

Drug trafficking is not new to Nigeria. Some decades ago, Rotimi (1998) had reported that it was increasingly rare for Nigerian publications to go a day without reporting on juvenile drug misuse, arrests of drug dealers, legal actions against them, and occasionally their imprisonment. Ugwukwu et al (2012), in confirmation of this position, reveal that during the years between the late 1970s and the early 1980s, drug trafficking was only local and primarily on Indian hemp, which is the only illicit substance produced in Nigeria. Maintaining that international drug trafficking was introduced in the 1980s, Asare and Obot (2013) also confirm that cocaine and heroin were introduced in Nigeria for the first time in the 1980s.

The foregoing confirms that Nigeria got listed in the league of international drug trafficking nations because of the drug-related activities of some of its citizens who have been in the illicit business for close to five decades now. According to the UNODC World Drug Report (2021), Nigeria has a drug use prevalence rate of 14.4%, which is significantly higher than the global average of 5.5%. The main agency responsible for the prevention and control of drug use and trafficking in Nigeria is the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). In January 2021, the Agency launched the “*Offensive Action Programme*”, which was geared towards a nonstop, intensified push to reduce drug use.

However, what is worrisome is not only that drug trafficking is on the increase in Nigeria but the socioeconomic implications of the increase in drug trafficking and the concomitant rise in drug abuse, dependency and addiction. Ediomu-Ubong and Richard (2018) posit that, as the most populous country in Africa and as a transit country for the passage of drugs to Western countries, Nigeria's position is strategic. This provided the needed impetus for trafficking to persist despite a long history of harsh drug control measures.

Several countries have developed local measures, including international collaborations, to tame the tide of drug trafficking. From the inception of her citizens' involvement in international drug trafficking, Nigeria boasts of very punitive laws against both drug use and drug trafficking, some of which have been endorsed by external bodies such as the US DEA (Ediomu-Ubong & Richard, 2018). In the 1980s, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Buhari and Idiagbon's military administration issued Decree 20, which made drug possession and trafficking deadly offences. Three Nigerian men were publicly executed by a military firing squad in 1985 after it was determined that they had illegally possessed heroin and cocaine. The military trial found 26-year-old former Nigeria Airways employee Bartholomew Azubike Owoh, 30-year-old spare parts trader Lawal Akanni Ojuolape, and 29-year-old sailor Bernard Ogedengbe guilty of capital punishment. Obafemi (1985). The execution of these young Nigerians greatly infuriated the public. As a result, the Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) (Amendment) Decree of 1986 overturned the Decree and replaced it with a life sentence.

Subsequently, Decree No. 48 of 29th December 1989 was promulgated, which birthed the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). Since the inception of the NDLEA, the agency has been churning out programmes and developing tactical measures to ensure the ugly trend of drug use and trafficking is brought under control. One of the agency's latest efforts is the launch of the Offensive Action programme, which aims to sustain increased efforts to reduce drug use. This motivated NDLEA agents to conduct 24-hour, seamless, coordinated, and goal-oriented operations, such as locating and capturing drug traffickers, halting the transportation of illegal narcotics, and swiftly prosecuting criminals. (NDLEA, 2021)

The paper aims to assess the NDLEA's Action Programme to ascertain its successes and failures three years after its launch. This is done using secondary data collection methods and the analysis of official records. The paper's position argument has implications for arresting the incidence of drug trafficking to its barest minimum.

Literature Review

Global Overview of Drug Trafficking

For decades, numerous national and international publications have described the patterns of drug trafficking around the world. More recent reports have identified Europe as a "hotspot" for the bulk of the world's most popular drugs' consumption (Dolliver, 2015). In 2019, according to the UNODC's annual report on drug trafficking and use, 271 million people (or 5.5% of the world's population) between the ages of 15 and 64 used drugs in the preceding year. Heroin, cocaine, cannabis (including synthetic cannabinoids), and various amphetamines are the narcotics that are most frequently trafficked. (Council of Europe, 2005). Since cannabis is currently grown in practically every nation in the world, cannabis production is still quite common worldwide (UNODC, 2014). These variables, coupled with

the broad appeal and widespread demand for cannabis products, are driving trafficking trends. Cocaine and heroin are two of the world's most valuable drugs and originate from two distinct source regions (UNODC, 2010). In the United States, the most often trafficked illegal substance, marijuana, is increasingly used by adults of all ages, both sexes, and even pregnant women (SAMHSA, 2023).

Dolliver (2015) contends that different drug trafficking patterns can be found within Europe itself, particularly in the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. These countries not only have sizable markets for illicit goods and services but also serve as entry points for well-established trafficking routes into Western Europe from the Middle East and Asia.

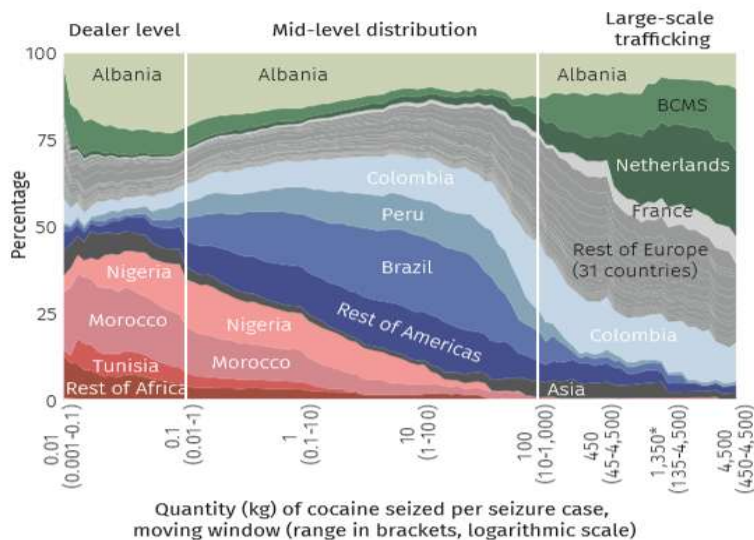
The Role of Nigeria in Global Drug Trafficking Patterns

In an attempt to chronicle the history of drug trafficking in Nigeria, Ugwukwu et al (2012:126) had posited that:

“...international drug trafficking in Nigeria was an aftermath of the United States’ hard stance on drug use and trafficking and an offshoot of the efforts of international drug barons and producer nations to search for alternative routes of transporting their drugs to the consumer nations”.

Nigeria was discovered during the search for this alternative trade route in the 1980s and has since then played an active role in the global drug trafficking patterns. Nigerian traffickers and, to some extent, Nigerian territory appear to have a major influence on the consolidation of drugs entering the West African coast and their distribution to other countries, both inside and outside the subregion. Nigerian traffickers often collaborate with their counterparts in other countries.

Distribution of foreign nationals arrested in Europe in connection with individual cocaine seizures, by nationality, according to size of seizure, 2018-2020



Source: UNODC, Global Report on Cocaine 2023

Figure 1: The figure shows that Nigerian nationals are consistently represented across all seizure sizes, including dealer-level and mid-level distribution of cocaine consignments, more than all the other African Countries, indicating involvement beyond opportunistic or low-level trafficking roles.

The History/Evolution of Drug Legislation in Nigeria

Available literature indicates that in Nigeria, attempts to regulate the manufacture, sale, and use of harmful drugs have existed since the colonial era. The goal of the Opium Control Treaty of 1912 was to establish control measures throughout all regions under British colonial administration. Consequently, Nigeria passed the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance in 1935 in an effort to regulate the manufacturing and use of hazardous drugs. Thus, at independence, Nigeria inherited the psychoactive substance control system from the British colonial government. The country has implemented some of the strictest legislation ever to combat drug usage and trafficking (Obot, 2004).

The 1966 Indian Hemp (Cannabis) Decree prescribed the death sentence or twenty-one years in prison for growing cannabis, ten years in prison for trafficking in cannabis, and ten years in prison for possessing or consuming cannabis. These provisions were amended by the Indian Hemp Act of 1975. The Act decreased the penalty for cannabis smoking to six months and/or a fine, and it eliminated the death penalty provision.

In 1984, things changed again. While The Indian Hemp (Amendment) Decree stipulated some other stiffer penalties for drug-related offences, the Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) Decree of 1984 prescribed death penalty by firing squad for dealing in, purchasing, selling, exposing, offering for sale, or persuading any individual to purchase, sell, smoke, or inhale the drug known as cocaine or any similar drug (Federal Military Government, 1984; in Obot 2004). Enacted in July 1984, the decree took effect retroactively, beginning on 31 December 1983 (the day the new government took power). The decree's terms resulted in the conviction and firing squad execution of three young men who had been detained for cocaine and heroin trafficking, following its enactment. The death penalty was again repealed and replaced with life imprisonment by the Special Tribunal (Miscellaneous Offences) (Amendment) Decree of 1986. Subsequently, the NDLEA Decree was enacted.

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and Drug Trafficking Prevention and Control

Globally, drug trafficking is a major problem, posing serious dangers to public health, national security, and economic stability. The main organisation in charge of fighting drug-related crimes in Nigeria is the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). In order to address Nigeria's expanding drug problem, NDLEA was established in 1989 by Decree No. 48, commonly known as the NDLEA Act (Adelekan, 2019). Through law enforcement, intelligence gathering, and public awareness campaigns, the agency is responsible for ending the production, trafficking, and abuse of illegal substances (Otu, 2021). This organisation's activities include breaking up drug networks, seizing illicit substances, and apprehending drug traffickers.

One of the main methods used by the NDLEA is interdiction. This tactic involves monitoring and stopping illegal drug shipments at Nigeria's seaports, airports, and borders (Okoli & Orinya, 2020). The agency collaborates with foreign organizations such as the US Drug

Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to enhance its operational capacity (Eze & Adebayo, 2022). Relationships of this kind facilitate intelligence sharing and cooperative activities, both of which are intended to undermine international drug operations.

Nevertheless, the NDLEA faces challenges in effectively carrying out its mandate. One of the biggest issues is the agency's limited funding, which makes it difficult to hire enough personnel and purchase state-of-the-art monitoring technology (Oluwafemi, 2021). According to Ajayi (2020), corruption in law enforcement organisations, particularly the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), is another barrier to effective drug control. According to Ogundipe (2023), some officials are complicit in a conspiracy with drug traffickers, undermining efforts to prevent drug usage. The fact that Nigeria's borders are so porous, which facilitates the smuggling of illegal narcotics throughout the nation, is another significant barrier. Nigeria is still a major transit hub for heroin and cocaine headed for North America and Europe, according to a 2021 study from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Once again, the prevalence of drug use, particularly among youth, makes combating drug trafficking much more challenging (Akinyemi & Owoaje, 2019).

There have been conflicting opinions regarding the National Drug Law Enforcement Act's (NDLEA) ability to stop drug trafficking. According to some scholars, the agency has made significant strides, especially in recent years, as evidenced by the rise in drug seizures and the apprehension of prominent traffickers (Bello, 2023). As an illustration of the agency's expanded enforcement strategies, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) stated in 2022 that it had confiscated almost 3,000 metric tonnes of drugs, setting a record (NDLEA, 2022).

However, it has been argued that despite an increase in arrests and seizures, the drug trade as a whole is still strong because of structural socioeconomic problems, including unemployment and poverty (Chukwu, 2020). To address the underlying causes of drug trafficking, experts contend that a more comprehensive strategy that includes socioeconomic development projects and rehabilitation programs is required (Ibrahim, 2021).

Therefore, it can be said that the NDLEA is essential to the prevention and management of drug trafficking in Nigeria. Even while it has been successful in terms of enforcement and interdiction, challenges, including scarce resources, corruption, and porous borders, restrict its efficacy. To achieve its objective of enhancing its impact, the agency must strengthen its operational capabilities, promote integrity among its staff, and implement a comprehensive strategy that includes socio-economic initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The study examines the adoption and implementation of the NDLEA's Offensive Action Programme using E.M. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory as a framework. The theory explains how new ideas or practices spread over time within a social system through communication channels. It focuses on five elements: innovation, communication channels, social system, time, and adopter categories.

Within this paradigm, the Offensive Action Programme is regarded as a state-of-the-art, intelligence-driven approach to drug enforcement. Its effectiveness depends on effective communication, acceptance, and implementation by NDLEA staff, lawmakers, communities, and other stakeholders. Effective media communication and grassroots engagement are

essential for promoting understanding and acceptance, even though community opinions significantly influence cooperation or resistance. Perceived advantages, implementation simplicity, resource accessibility, institutional integrity, and public confidence all influence adoption rates. Obstacles like resource scarcity, corruption, or human rights issues may slow adoption. Over time, the program's dissemination can be increased by highlighting its relative advantages and conformity with current policies.

All things considered, the DOI theory provides a useful framework for assessing the program's adoption process, stakeholder dynamics, and implementation difficulties. To improve the effectiveness of enforcement and reduce drug-related crime in Nigeria, it is important to emphasize clear communication, public involvement, and strategic alignment.

Methodology

Given that a review design could provide thorough insight into successes, gaps, challenges, and trends without primary data collection, the study design chosen is the systematic/narrative literature review, which aims to examine, summarise, and critically evaluate existing research, reports, policy documents, and media sources on NDLEA's performance in combating drug trafficking in Nigeria. The data came from news reports, government reports, international organisations, academic journals, and the media.

The criteria utilised to include resources were peer-reviewed journals, government reports, reliable media sources, studies and reports addressing NDLEA's operational activities, interventions, difficulties, or impact, and sources published between 2010 and 2025 (to reflect recent trends and performance). Reports that were out of date or redundant, sources that lacked institutional backing or credible authorship, and publications that were irrelevant (such as drug research unrelated to Nigeria) were removed.

A systematic search using databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and institutional repositories was employed for data Collection. Data analysis involved thematic and content analyses (Identifying recurring themes such as seizure statistics and enforcement strategies, comparing trends over time, and quantifying key aspects (e.g., number of operations, drug seizures, arrests, convictions) reported across NDLEA Annual Reports and secondary literature).

The Offensive Action Programme of the NDLEA

Offensive Action is a nonstop, ramped-up drug-supply reduction campaign. Launched on 18th January 2021, it galvanised NDLEA operatives to work round the clock in seamless, coordinated, goal-oriented actions, including tracking and arresting drug traffickers, interdicting illicit substance shipments, and fast-tracking the prosecution of offenders. To kick-start the campaign, the Chairman/CEO of the NDLEA, Gen. Mohamed Buba Marwa (Retd), OFR, convened a meeting with all NDLEA commanders of the 36 states, FCT and special commands at the agency's headquarters in Abuja and emphasised that all commanders must be committed to eliminating illicit drugs from Nigerian communities by aggressively confronting drug traffickers. He announced that offensive action will be the Agency's guiding philosophy, necessitating constant and unwavering enforcement against drug-related crimes. Given the close relationship between drug misuse and crimes like terrorism, kidnapping, insurgency, cultism, rape, and political violence, he claims that the success of this strategy is closely related to Nigeria's socioeconomic stability. He also cautioned that drug offenders'

resistance would not be accepted and that the new approach represented a clear departure from earlier methods (NDLEA Today, 2021).

As a result, the Offensive Action Programme was established as a calculated move to step up the battle against drug usage and trafficking. It specifically seeks to disrupt narcotics networks, boost intelligence collection, and increase the agency's operational effectiveness.

The Gains, Prospects and Challenges of the Offensive Action Programme

1. Gains of the Offensive Action Programme

Since its implementation, the Offensive Action Programme has produced numerous favourable outcomes. One of the most significant benefits is the dramatic rise in the number of drug seizures and arrests. Thousands of drug traffickers, including high-profile persons involved in transnational drug syndicates, were detained by the NDLEA in 2022 (NDLEA, 2022). According to Adelekan (2023), the increased enforcement has caused some drug networks to be broken, which has resulted in a reduction in the flow of illegal narcotics into and within Nigeria.

The seizures, arrests, and convictions notwithstanding, the drug traffickers have become more daring, despite every effort to check abuse, increase surveillance, and harsh punitive measures, because the huge financial benefits remain a major motivating factor for smugglers who continue to adopt deceptive means to ferry their goods. For instance, smugglers hide drugs inside heads of fish, footwear, baby foods, vegetables, imported machines and automobiles, aside from the traditional injection of cocaine (Anthony, 2022). In all, however, the implementation of the Offensive Action Programme has continued to give insights into the modus operandi of the drug barons. Some of these Modes of Concealment are shown below:



Fig 2: Methamphetamine hidden inside custard containers (NDLEA Report, 2022:76)



Figure 3: Cannabis and Ecstasy Tablets hidden inside tubers of yams (NDLEA Report, 2022:76)



Figure 4: Parcels of cocaine hidden in tomato sauce tins (NDLEA Report, 2022:75)

The programme's emphasis on intelligence-led operations is another significant accomplishment. To boost intelligence sharing and cooperative operations, the NDLEA has strengthened its cooperation with domestic and foreign partners, including the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (Eze & Adebayo, 2023). As a result, drug manufacturing centres throughout the nation have been identified, and drug lords have been tracked and apprehended more effectively (Ogundipe, 2023).

The program has also contributed to increasing public sensitisation and awareness of the dangers of drug abuse. NDLEA has intensified its anti-drug initiatives, concentrating on communities, schools, and media outlets, to educate Nigerians about the harmful consequences of drug use and trafficking (Ajayi, 2022). These programs have been linked to a decrease in the incidence of drug abuse among youth in some regions (Akinyemi & Owoaje, 2022).

2. Prospects of the Offensive Action Programme

With more efficient use of technology, the Offensive Action Programme has the potential to improve drug control in Nigeria greatly. The NDLEA will be able to employ state-of-the-art technical tools to improve drug detection, monitoring, and investigative procedures with sustained government assistance and increased cooperation with international organisations.

Implementing advanced surveillance techniques and forensic technologies will be crucial to improving the agency's capacity to combat illegal drug trafficking (Okoli & Orinya, 2023).

One of the most promising applications of this technology integration is the use of big data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) in narcotics law enforcement. AI-driven systems can help analyse large datasets, identify trafficking patterns, predict potential hot spots, and optimise law enforcement operations. Additionally, by integrating data from multiple sources, including financial transactions, communication networks, and social media platforms, big data analytics can enhance real-time monitoring and the tracing of drug syndicates. Studies show that the NDLEA can implement preventive measures before unlawful operations escalate by using predictive modelling and artificial intelligence to proactively identify trafficking routes and emerging drug trends (Okoli & Orinya, 2023).

Artificial intelligence-driven surveillance methods, such as automatic license plate readers and facial recognition systems, have the potential to enhance checkpoint monitoring and border security significantly. These developments can reduce human error and increase the accuracy of drug detection efforts. In forensic investigations, advanced analytical techniques such as machine-learning-based drug profiling can be very helpful in determining the source of confiscated drugs. This can offer crucial information on trafficking networks and supply chains. Incorporating these technological advancements will boost operational effectiveness and deter criminal groups from exploiting traditional flaws in Nigeria's drug enforcement framework (Okoli & Orinya, 2023).

Additionally, more rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for drug offenders might be made available. According to experts, implementing a more rehabilitative strategy may help reduce drug-related offences in the long run (Ibrahim, 2023). This is true even though enforcement is currently the primary focus. Increasing the number of rehabilitation facilities and offering vocational training to individuals who have undergone rehabilitation can help lower the recidivism rate among former drug users and traffickers (Chukwu, 2023).

Legislative changes that seek to strengthen anti-drug laws and ensure that offenders face tougher penalties can also enhance the Offensive Action Programme's effectiveness. The NDLEA's operations should be strengthened, and drug-related offences should be discouraged through improved legislative frameworks and judicial efficiency (Bello, 2023). Another crucial element for the program's long-term sustainability is ongoing collaboration with international organisations that can provide both technical and financial support.

All things considered, the Offensive Action Programme's prospects for drug control in Nigeria seem promising, mainly due to its potential to incorporate new technologies. Adopting artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and advanced forensic techniques can help the NDLEA detect, prevent, and stop drug-related crimes. If international cooperation and governmental support are maintained, these technologies will be vital tools in Nigeria's ongoing battle against illegal drug trafficking (UNODC, 2023).

3. Challenges of the Offensive Action Programme

Despite its achievements, the Offensive Action Program has numerous challenges that keep it from realising its full potential. Insufficient funding is a major challenge. Oluwafemi (2022) claims that the NDLEA's inability to purchase new equipment, provide staff training, and maintain efficient operations is caused by a lack of funding. Insufficient funding may seriously impair the organisation's capacity to continue high-impact operations.

Another significant obstacle is the corruption in law enforcement. The efficacy of anti-drug policies is allegedly hampered by certain authorities' unscrupulous actions, such as helping drug traffickers in return for bribes (Ajayi, 2022). Improved incentives for law enforcement officers, more transparent accountability mechanisms, and stricter internal monitoring systems are all essential elements in the battle against corruption.

The complexity of Nigeria's porous borders, which facilitates the smuggling of illegal narcotics, is another significant challenge the country must overcome (Ogundipe, 2023). Due to insufficient border control measures and a lack of skilled personnel, it is challenging to prevent the entry of drugs from neighbouring nations. Improving border security through enhanced monitoring, technological developments, and international cooperation is a critical step towards mitigating the effects of this challenge.

Furthermore, drug abuse and trafficking sectors are still fueled by socioeconomic factors like unemployment and poverty. Due to a lack of viable economic opportunities, many people, especially young people, resort to drug-related activities as a means of livelihood (Ibrahim, 2023). To address these fundamental problems, comprehensive policies that promote employment, education, and social welfare must be implemented.

Based on this, it is reasonable to conclude that the NDLEA's Offensive Action Programme has made significant strides in Nigeria's battle against drug trafficking and misuse. The program's success in seriously damaging illegal drug trafficking networks has been attributed to greater enforcement, increased intelligence sharing, and public awareness campaigns. Unfortunately, its ideal performance is hindered by several challenges, including, but not limited to, financing constraints, corruption, porous borders, and socio-economic issues. Increased government investment, legal reforms, improved border control, and holistic approaches that address the underlying causes of drug-related crimes are all necessary to maximise its impact (Rajab & Jega, 2019).

Table 1: Summary of Arrests between 2018 and 2020

Year	Number of Arrests	Quantity of Drugs Seized (Metric Tons)	Major Drug Types Seized
2018	9,831	315	Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Methamphetamine
2019	11,532	612	Cannabis, Cocaine, Tramadol, Heroin
2020	14,152	950	Cannabis, Tramadol, Cocaine, Methamphetamine

Source: NDLEA (2019, 2020, 2021) Annual Reports

Table 1 indicates that between 2018 and 2020, the NDLEA seized approximately 1,877 kilograms (1,877 tons) of illicit substances. In the same timeframe, the agency arrested 35,515 drug traffickers.

Table 2: Interdiction Score Card from 2020 to 2023. The period shows a transition from relatively modest interdiction outcomes in 2020 to significantly higher volumes of drug seizures, arrests, convictions, and destruction of illicit drug farms between 2021 and 2023.

INTERDICTION SCORE CARD FROM 2020 TO 2023									
Year	DRUG SEIZURES					Total	ARRESTS		
	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin	Others			Male	Female	TOTAL
2000	272,260.02	53.42	56.6	234.28		272,604.32	2,253	132	2,385
2001	317,950.20	195.82	46.63	308.84		318,501.49	2,693	136	2,829
2002	506,846.09	35.35	55.62	791		507,728.06	2,549	108	2,657
2003	535,593.75	134.74	87.58	937.41		536,753.48	2,316	174	2,490
2004	68,310.07	124.47	90.94	233.83		68,759.31	3,382	318	3,700
2005	125,989	395.91	70.42	88.72		126,543.65	3,181	292	3,473
2006	192,368.30	14,435.88	33.09	515.57		207,352.84	5,883	440	6,323
2007	210,262.90	393.678	120.638	699.735		211,476.00	5,891	477	6,368
2008	335,535.34	365.4904	11.6054	530.4033		336,442.84	7,584	315	7,899
2009	114,700.71	392.05	104.71	712.77		115,910.24	6,700	342	7,042
2010	174,661.59	706.433	202.08	2,550.62		178,120.73	6,296	492	6,788
2011	191,848	410.81	39.752	2,985.45		195,283.90	8,072	567	8,639
2012	228,794.13	131.89	211.03	3,905.45		233,699.60	7,510	542	8,052
2013	205,373	290.2	24.53	134,280.38		339,968.11	8,324	519	8,843
2014	53,878,194.52	226.04	56.45	7,562.49		53,886,039.50	8,332	494	8,826
2015	871,480.32	260.47	30.09	31,442.86		903,624.56	8,143	635	8,778
2016	187,394	305.17	66.28	79,826.04		267,591.49	7,720	537	8,257
2017	191,084.19	92.26	85.36	117,143.20		309,356.31	9,387	622	10,009
2018	273,249.08	124.86	59.62	44,331.29		317,764.85	9,129	702	9,831
2019	602,654.49	113	23.89	10,112.10		612,903.48	8,535	909	9,444
2020	124,473.30	105.65	7.55	20209.27		144,795.67	9,181	734	9,915
2021	469,246.40	326.05	122.55	110435.5		580,130.50	11,314	992	12,306
2022	2057020.05	2,540.01	65.19	85041.15		2,145,336	13,026	1126	14,152
2023	1,231,965.81	513.50	205.79	374,564.08		1,607,249.19	12336	1328	13,664
Total	63,367,255.17	22,673.15	1,878.00	1,029,442.44		62,816,689.93	169,737	12,933	182,670

Source: NDLEA (2024) Annual Report

Table 3: Summary of Arrests between 2021 and 2023

Year	Number of Arrests	Quantity of Drugs Seized (Metric Tons)	Major Drug Types Seized
2021	12,306	3,480.368	Cannabis, Cocaine, Heroin, Methamphetamine
2022	14,152	2,145.336	Cannabis, Tramadol, Cocaine, Heroin
2023 (Jan-Sep)	9,638	1,043.261	Cannabis, Cocaine, Methamphetamine

Source: NDLEA (2023, 2025) Annual Reports

Tables 1 to 3 above show that the NDLEA has demonstrated a marked improvement in intercepting illicit drugs and apprehending traffickers during the period following the initiation of the Offensive Action Programme in 2021 to 2023, compared to the three years (2018 to 2020) preceding it. Between January 2021 and September 2023, the NDLEA apprehended over 36,096 drug traffickers, including 40 who were recognised as drug barons, and collected roughly 6,668,965.17 kilograms (6,668 tons) of illegal drugs. It also obtained 6,043 convictions throughout the period under review, according to an additional report.

After 2021, there was a notable rise in both the number of arrests and the amount of drugs seized, suggesting improved enforcement effectiveness. These developments are in line with the goals of the Offensive Action Programme, which seeks to deploy more resources and strategic operations to step up the battle against drug abuse and trafficking. The figures from 2021 to 2023 also show a significant improvement in the NDLEA's operational results, including an increase in arrests and seizures.

Therefore, it is plausible that the implementation of the Offensive Action Programme in 2021 has greatly enhanced the NDLEA's capacity to apprehend traffickers and intercept illegal drugs, surpassing the achievements of previous years. The program's increased performance attests to its effectiveness in supporting Nigeria's drug control initiatives.

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

1. Findings

From the assessment of the Offensive Action of the NDLEA and its role in drug trafficking prevention and control in Nigeria, several key findings emerged:

- a. **Increased Drug Seizures and Arrests:** The NDLEA has been quite successful in catching traffickers and intercepting massive amounts of illicit substances. The agency successfully apprehended several criminals and seized thousands of metric tons of drugs between 2021 and 2023.
- b. **Enhanced International Collaboration:** The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Interpol are just a few of the international organisations with whom the NDLEA has deepened its ties. These partnerships have improved both operational efficiency and intelligence exchange.
- c. **Persistent Challenges of Corruption and Inadequate Funding:** Despite its successes, NDLEA still faces problems like inadequate financing, a shortage of personnel, and internal corruption. These difficulties make it harder for the agency to successfully conduct extensive anti-drug operations.
- d. **Porous Borders and Drug Smuggling:** Notwithstanding its successes, NDLEA still faces challenges such as inadequate financing, a shortage of personnel, and internal corruption. These obstacles make it more difficult for the agency to carry out extensive anti-drug operations successfully.
- e. **Growing Drug Abuse Among Youths:** NDLEA has stepped up efforts to decrease drug abuse, especially among youth, in addition to fighting trafficking. However, socioeconomic variables like unemployment and poverty still play a role in the growing incidence of drug addiction.
- f. **Legal and Policy Limitations:** Traffickers take advantage of the inadequacies in Nigeria's current drug control legislation. Ineffective legal procedures and lax punishments for violators diminish the efficacy of anti-drug laws.

2. Discussion of Findings

The evaluation of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency's (NDLEA) Offensive Action Programme reveals both notable operational successes and ongoing difficulties in Nigeria's drug control initiatives. NDLEA demonstrated the efficacy of intelligence-driven, offensive operations between 2021 and 2023 by successfully intercepting substantial amounts of drugs and apprehending several traffickers (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019). Although these results show good operational performance, long-term decreases in drug availability may not be fully captured by seizures and arrests alone, underscoring the necessity for supplementary demand-reduction tactics.

Through intelligence sharing, capacity building, and coordinated enforcement measures, NDLEA activities have been further reinforced by increased coordination with international agencies such as UNODC, DEA, and INTERPOL. Given Nigeria's dual role as a drug transit and consumer nation, these collaborations are especially important, highlighting the significance of international cooperation in the fight against illicit trafficking (UNODC, n.d.; INTERPOL, n.d.).

Despite these achievements, NDLEA still faces structural issues that impede large-scale enforcement operations and lower institutional efficiency, such as inadequate budget, a shortage of personnel, and internal corruption (Rajab & Jega, 2019). Furthermore, Nigeria's porous borders make it easier for illegal substances to be smuggled, weakening the agency's interdiction efforts and highlighting the necessity of technological surveillance and integrated border security measures.

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Lastly, the deterrent effect of current drug laws is diminished by flaws in the legal system, such as shoddy court procedures and insufficient sanctions for traffickers. To improve NDLEA's ability to enforce compliance effectively, laws must be strengthened, and court procedures accelerated.

Although NDLEA's Offensive Action Programme has generally improved operational performance, a multidimensional strategy that incorporates strong enforcement, legal reform, socioeconomic solutions, international cooperation, and public health measures is necessary to achieve a sustainable impact. To achieve long-term reductions in drug misuse and trafficking in Nigeria, such an integrated paradigm is crucial.

Conclusion

The NDLEA is still a major player in Nigeria's fight against drug abuse and trafficking. Even with its notable achievements, it still faces some challenges. The Agency's long-term effectiveness depends on addressing issues such as weak legal frameworks, porous borders, corruption, and a lack of resources. Implementing a comprehensive strategy that integrates law enforcement, legal reforms, public awareness, and socioeconomic development will enhance the effectiveness of the fight against drug trafficking. Future research should build on the successes of the Offensive Action Program and focus on innovative ways to enhance drug enforcement and reduce drug demand in Nigeria.

3. Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in preventing and controlling drug trafficking in Nigeria, the following policy-oriented recommendations are advanced:

1. **Improved Border Security and Surveillance:** Targeted investments in contemporary border-control technologies, such as drones, biometric identification systems, and integrated surveillance platforms, are required to improve interdiction and monitoring capabilities, given the role that porous borders play in aiding drug trafficking.
2. **Legal and Judicial Reforms:** To ensure that traffickers face appropriate but severe consequences, current drug control legislation should be reviewed and tightened. Furthermore, the swift prosecution of drug-related offences through expedited legal procedures will strengthen the rule of law and increase deterrence.
3. **Strengthening Community-Based Drug Prevention Initiatives:** Promoting preventative education, awareness campaigns, and early intervention techniques targeted at lowering drug demand, especially among young people, requires increased involvement with schools, religious institutions, and community-based organisations.
4. **Leveraging International Cooperation and Capacity Building:** To enable intelligence sharing, specialised training, and access to best practices in drug interdiction and investigation, ongoing cooperation with international drug control and law enforcement organisations should be given top priority.

Together, these suggestions highlight the necessity of an all-encompassing, multi-sectoral strategy that integrates treatment, prevention, enforcement, and socioeconomic initiatives in order to achieve long-term decreases in drug trafficking and the negative effects it causes in Nigeria.

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