



Illicit drug prohibition framework in Nigeria: Statutory lacunae enforcement aberrations and strategies for regulatory effectiveness

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Abstract

The study assessed legal and institutional factors affecting the control of illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria. The study analyzed national and international frameworks, including the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Act, the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, alongside regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS collaborative operations. The research method was doctrinal, involving detailed review of statutes, case law, policy documents and scholarly literature related to drug control, enforcement practices, judicial procedures and cross-border cooperation. Findings of the study showed that poverty and unemployment created conditions for youth recruitment into trafficking networks. Weak border surveillance, insufficient personnel and inadequate logistics enabled smugglers to exploit national frontiers. Corruption among law enforcement officials disrupted enforcement operations and reduced the effectiveness of prosecution. Judicial delays and inconsistent sentencing allowed convicted traffickers to return to illegal activities. Furthermore, transnational networks supported by international demand facilitated movement of illicit substances, while poor inter-agency coordination hindered intelligence sharing and operational efficiency. NDLEA-led initiatives, alongside cooperation with police, customs and foreign agencies, had limited success due to these constraints. The researchers recommended increased personnel and logistical support, transparent oversight to reduce corruption, expedited judicial procedures and strengthened inter-agency collaboration. The research concluded that effective control depended on combined legal enforcement, judicial efficiency and social interventions to disrupt trafficking networks and reduce drug abuse in Nigeria.

Keywords: Illicit drug trafficking, nigeria, legal enforcement, institutional constraints, youth vulnerability, transnational networks

Introduction

Illicit drug trafficking remains a persistent challenge for many nations, generating far-reaching consequences for public health, security and social order. According to Ukwayi, Okpa, and Akwaji (2019) ^[31], the international community has reported escalating drug-related crimes such as organized criminal activities and the funding of violent groups, which have disrupted local economies and governance structures. Countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas face growing pressure from the proliferation of narcotics such as cocaine, heroin and cannabis, which are produced, transported and consumed at alarming rates. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) ^[7] identifies Nigeria as one of the key transit points for these illicit substances, where both consumption and trafficking are linked to rising criminal incidents and societal instability. The continuous flow of drugs along international corridors exposes vulnerable populations to addiction, violent offenses and economic exploitation (David, 2021) ^[7].

Nigeria occupies a distinctive role in the global drug trade due to its geographic location and extensive borders. Ukwayi, Okpa, and Akwaji (2019) ^[31] noted that the country commercial hubs, especially Lagos, have become crucial points for the transshipment of narcotics from Latin America, Southeast Asia and other regions to Europe. This position is compounded by porous borders, insufficient enforcement mechanisms and widespread corruption, which make the country susceptible to organized criminal networks seeking to exploit these weaknesses (Kobusingye,

2015) ^[18]. Nigerian nationals have historically participated in the international trafficking of cocaine and heroin, establishing networks in countries such as Brazil, Thailand and the United States, which facilitated the movement of drugs across continents (UNODC, 2021) ^[7]. Reports from the International Narcotics Control Board (2012) indicate that nearly half of the African drug couriers arrested in Europe were Nigerian and Nigeria remains a major transit route for heroin entering Europe (Henry, 2007) ^[12]. The combination of these factors has increased both the scale and sophistication of trafficking activities in the country.

The influence of illicit drugs on Nigerian society extends beyond international transit, directly affecting citizens at all levels. Widespread drug abuse is especially prevalent among youths, who constitute the highest population (Ogunlana, 2023; Idowu *et al.*, 2023) ^[24]. Substances such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine have become accessible in urban centers, rural communities and educational institutions, fueling addiction and contributing to the growth of criminal behavior (Jide, 2021; Ezomo, 2023). According to Jide (2021) ^[7, 11], incidents of robbery, kidnapping, banditry, insurgency and cult-related violence often involve perpetrators who are under the influence of narcotics. Such activities place additional pressure on law enforcement agencies, which face challenges in controlling the volume of drug-related offenses while attempting to maintain public safety (The Punch, 2023) ^[30]. The economic and social implications of this trend are severe, including increased healthcare costs, disrupted family structures and lost productivity, which together hinder national development (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31].

The Nigerian government, through the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), has responded with multiple interventions designed to curb the growth of illicit trafficking and abuse. Since the establishment of the agency under Decree 48 of 1989 [28], measures have included the installation of X-ray machines at airports, public awareness campaigns, rehabilitation programs and educational initiatives targeting youth (NDCMP, 2015). Collaboration with international organizations and foreign governments has enhanced intelligence sharing and enforcement capabilities, exemplified by technical support and training provided by the United States and the launch of the AIRCOP initiative at Murtala Muhammed International Airport (Esoimeme, 2016). In the view of Balogun *et al.* (2018); Ogundele (2018) [4, 10], these interventions aim to intercept traffickers and reduce the supply of drugs entering Nigeria, but ongoing challenges such as poverty, unemployment and limited resources hinder their overall effectiveness.

Drug trafficking and abuse have also shaped public perceptions of Nigeria on the international stage. Arrests of Nigerians in foreign jurisdictions for drug-related offenses, sometimes resulting in severe penalties, reflect the global concern surrounding the country involvement in the drug trade (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) [31]. High-profile seizures, such as the arrest of a Nigerian with heroin valued at N564 million at Abuja International Airport, illustrate both the scale of trafficking operations and the risks posed to young people who may become involved in smuggling or abuse (Jerome-Mario, 2021 [7]; NDLEA, 2021). Reports also link proceeds from illicit drug activities to funding for violent extremist groups, further destabilizing fragile communities and heightening the cycle of crime and insecurity (The Punch, 2023) [30].

Patterns of drug abuse among youth and adults have continued to spread across Nigeria. Studies revealed that while males constitute the majority of those engaged in drug use, female involvement is increasing in urban areas (Jerome-Mario, 2021; NDLEA, 2021). According to The Pointer News (2025), Ezomo (2023) [11, 29] and Okereke (2019), students in schools, traders and working adults encounter easy access to substances, creating additional public health concerns, and the social consequences include violence, domestic instability, reduced workforce productivity and educational disruptions. These issues present the complex link between drug abuse, national security and socioeconomic development, necessitating coordinated action from government agencies, communities and international partners.

Efforts to strengthen the regulatory environment have included stricter legal penalties, targeted enforcement operations and the publication of photographs and names of convicted traffickers to deter participation (Ogundele, 2018) [4]. Youth-focused initiatives, such as the establishment of Drug-Free Clubs in schools and the integration of drug education into curricula, aim to reduce susceptibility to substance abuse (Ijaiya & Akinsanya, 2019) [14]. Law enforcement agencies have also adopted technology-driven surveillance and intelligence strategies to disrupt trafficking networks, reflecting the adaptive nature of drug crimes in response to global enforcement pressures. Despite these actions, the scope of the problem continues to expand, indicating the persistence of underlying socioeconomic and governance challenges that facilitate trafficking and abuse.

Nigerian experience elucidates the intertwined effects of geographic vulnerability, organized crime and youth exposure in shaping the country drug landscape. The combination of international trafficking routes, weak enforcement and high youth involvement has produced a situation in which drug abuse and illicit trade pose risks to security, public health and economic stability (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) [31].

The continual flow of narcotics, along with the activities of local and international traffickers, has created conditions in which criminal networks and addicts exploit systemic weaknesses, leading to cycles of violence, addiction and social disruption (Ezomo, 2023) [11]. These realities point to the need for comprehensive intervention strategies that engage law enforcement, educational institutions, community structures and international partners in curtailing the problem. This study therefore seeks to assess the factors responsible for illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria.

Overview of Illicit Drug Trafficking and Abuse in Nigeria

The history of illicit drug trafficking in Nigeria traces back to the post-Second World War era where Nigerian soldiers who fought in India and Burma (now Myanmar) returned home with seeds of cannabis, which they initially cultivated for personal use (Adeniyi, 1993). Adeniyi (1993) [3] further stated that favorable climatic conditions and fertile soil encouraged commercial cultivation, establishing the foundation for the local drug economy. From the 1970s onward, Nigeria evolved from a primarily cannabis-producing country to a transit hub for international drug traffickers, serving as both a consumption and a distribution country. The rise of organized trafficking networks coincided with urbanization, population growth and increasing youth unemployment, which expanded local demand for illicit substances (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) [31].

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), established in 1990, created a legal framework to counteract trafficking and abuse (Dike, 2025). Records from the NDLEA indicate that cocaine is imported from Latin American nations including Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Brazil and the Caribbean. Heroin and synthetic psychotropic substances are sourced from Asia, primarily India, Pakistan, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar and Afghanistan. Locally, cannabis remains the most widely produced and abused substance, cultivated illegally across several states in Nigeria (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) [31]. In the same view Ukwayi, Okpa, and Akwaji (2019) [31], stated that the accessibility of these substances has increased, with cocaine, crack, heroin, morphine and similar drugs readily available on urban streets.

According to the NDLEA (2010), trafficking involve production, cultivation, manufacture, procurement, storage, importation, exportation, transportation, distribution, sale, peddling and handling of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control. Trafficking is distinct from drug abuse, though the two are interlinked. Trafficking focuses on the illegal supply chain, while abuse addresses the consumption and its effects on health, education, work and social life (Jide, 2021) [7]. Abuse leads to addiction, psychological dependence, social maladjustment and mental and physical disorders, including liver and kidney damage, heart disease and sudden death

(The Punch, 2023) ^[30]. Trafficking networks in Nigeria operate as organized crime syndicates. NDLEA (2008) classifies traffickers into four categories:

1. **Procurement syndicates:** Based in source countries, responsible for securing and supplying narcotics.
2. **Courier syndicates:** Low-ranking carriers of various nationalities tasked with transporting drugs across borders.
3. **Overseas distribution syndicates:** Manage the sale of drugs at the destination countries where substances are consumed.
4. **Local merchandising syndicates:** Transport drugs from source countries and sell to other local syndicates, which may export them abroad (NDLEA, 2010).

An important feature of illicit drug enterprise in Nigeria lies in the methods used to hide prohibited substances from detection. Reports from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency show that traffickers employ a wide range of concealment techniques designed to evade routine inspection (NDLEA, 2010). Drugs have been discovered in everyday consumables such as roasted chicken, canned drinks, kola nuts and dry fish. Other items used include engraved wood, sealed cylinders, diapers, photo albums and coffins. Concealment has also been detected in clothing accessories, false-bottom suitcases, refrigerator parts, vehicle components, television sets, yams, bread, tomato tins, toothpaste tubes and cooking stoves (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31]. These methods rely on disguising illicit substances within objects that attract little suspicion during transit.

Human carriers remain central to concealment practices. Individuals ingest drug pellets or insert them into body cavities to avoid detection during screening processes. This method has been linked to both male and female couriers, with ingestion recorded as a preferred option due to its ability to bypass physical searches. Drugs are also hidden in prepared food, clothing linings, belts, handbags and household items. Other reported concealment points include moulding machines, floor tiles, cement bags and textile bales (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31]. Additional techniques involve hiding drugs in stethoscopes, sewing materials, ceramic containers, cosmetic kits, laptops, jewellery and balloons. Ukwayi, Okpa, and Akwaji (2019) ^[31] noted that a further tactic involves removing identification tags from luggage to delay tracing, after which accomplices retrieve the items later within airport environments.

Drug movement into and out of Nigeria follows identifiable routes. Land borders with neighbouring countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger provide entry points due to weak surveillance systems. Substances including cannabis, heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine are moved through these routes in large quantities, concealed in goods such as ceramics, hair attachments, bags and woven materials or carried internally by traffickers (Otu, 2013) ^[27]. Online platforms also serve as a medium for drug transactions. Orders are placed through internet channels, after which substances are packaged and transported to buyers through delivery networks. Parcels are disguised as

ordinary goods such as cartons, food containers and personal luggage (Abiola, 2014) ^[2].

Air transport remains another route. Traffickers either ingest drug pellets before travel or conceal them in luggage compartments. An incident at Murtala Muhammed International Airport led to the arrest of four suspects linked to the importation of cocaine from Brazil, with a total weight of 3.455 kilograms recorded (Esoimeme, 2016) ^[10]. These patterns show the persistence of concealment and movement tactics within the Nigerian drug trade. Legal records highlight the enforcement of Nigerian anti-trafficking framework. In *Eze v. Federal Republic of Nigeria*, a defendant was arraigned for unlawful possession of tramadol under Section 19 of the NDLEA Act (CA/YL/68C/2015 [2016 ^[10, 18] NGCA 47). The prosecution submitted evidence, including certificates of test analysis, which the defendant did not oppose. The court affirmed the conviction, highlighting that unchallenged evidence of narcotics and chemical analysis suffices to sustain prosecution. This case illustrates the mechanisms by which Nigerian courts handle drug-related offenses and underscores the importance of adherence to evidentiary procedures (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31].

According to Henry (2007) ^[12], illicit drug trafficking encompasses substances such as cocaine, heroin, cannabis, methamphetamine, tramadol and other psychotropic compounds. Cocaine, sourced from Latin America, is associated with cardiovascular disorders, addiction and violent behavior. Heroin, imported from Asia, creates high addiction potential and severe withdrawal effects. Cannabis, cultivated locally, is the most widely abused drug and contributes to mental health disorders, poor school performance and delinquent behavior (Jerome-Mario, 2021). Methamphetamine, increasingly produced locally, results in cognitive impairment, aggression and cardiovascular damage (Nnorom, 2018) ^[22]. Prescription drugs and alcohol are also abused illegally, often combined with other substances to amplify their effects (The Pointer News, 2025) ^[29]. The evolution of drug trafficking in Nigeria demonstrates the transformation from localized cannabis cultivation to the establishment of international criminal networks. Traffickers exploit corruption, weak regulatory systems and economic vulnerabilities to move narcotics domestically and internationally (David, 2021) ^[7].

Demand for illicit drugs continues to rise among Nigerian youth due to peer pressure, social dislocation, unemployment and urban poverty (Jide, 2021) ^[7]. Drug abuse affects physical, psychological and social well-being, leading to educational failure, workplace underperformance and family disruption (Jerome-Mario, 2021). Types of drugs most prevalent in Nigeria demonstrate the diversity of the trafficking problem:

1. **Cocaine:** Transported primarily from Latin America, sold in urban centers and associated with violent behavior and addiction (Henry, 2007) ^[12].
2. **Heroin:** Imported from Asia, causes severe addiction and withdrawal complications (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31].
3. **Cannabis:** Locally cultivated, widely abused, leading to mental disorders, school dropouts and social maladjustment (Jerome-Mario, 2021).

4. **Methamphetamine:** Emerging local production, with psychological and physical consequences including aggression and cardiovascular strain (Nnorom, 2018)^[22].
5. **Tramadol and psychotropic substances:** Misused for recreational purposes, often combined with other drugs, causing addiction and mental health disorders (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019)^[31].
6. **Alcohol and prescription drugs:** Illegally sold and abused, sometimes mixed with other substances to enhance effects (The Punch, 2023)^[30].

Institutional Framework in Combating Drug Trafficking

The control of drug trafficking in Nigeria operates within a network of international, regional and national institutions. Nigeria aligns its anti-drug policies with international standards, participating in global conventions and working with organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The United Nations drug control system aims to reduce illicit drug cultivation, trafficking and consumption worldwide. Through international monitoring, information exchange and policy guidance, this framework allows member states to adopt measures tailored to local contexts while maintaining compliance with global standards (The Punch, 2023)^[30]. The United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)^[32] provides legal and operational tools for controlling transnational drug activities (UN, 1988). It obliges member states, including Nigeria, to criminalize production, distribution and possession of illicit drugs while promoting cooperation on seizure, prosecution and extradition matters. This convention supports Nigerian efforts to disrupt organized trafficking networks and prevents illicit substances from entering or leaving the country (Okereke, 2019; David, 2021)^[7]. The convention also emphasizes the importance of regulatory control over precursor chemicals and addresses the financial proceeds of drug trafficking, providing a basis for asset seizure and forfeiture.

Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC, 2000) and its supplemental protocols addressing human trafficking, migrant smuggling and illicit firearms. UNTOC requires states to strengthen judicial and law enforcement cooperation and establish mutual legal assistance mechanisms. For Nigeria, this convention reinforces the country commitment to combating not only drug trafficking but also the interconnected activities that facilitate organized crime. Compliance with UNTOC ensures that Nigeria can pursue joint investigations, coordinate arrests with foreign agencies and share intelligence effectively. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) facilitates collaboration between member countries through joint patrols, training and policy harmonization. Nigeria participates in regional intelligence networks that monitor trafficking routes and respond to emerging threats. Cross-border collaboration addresses the limits of national jurisdiction, enabling coordinated operations against traffickers and reducing the ability of criminal networks to exploit porous borders (Esoimeme, 2016)^[10].

Legal cooperation extends to extradition and mutual legal assistance, which allow Nigeria to request the return of fugitives or the transfer of evidence for prosecution. These

mechanisms are particularly relevant for transnational drug cases, where offenders may operate in multiple jurisdictions. Through bilateral agreements and international treaties, Nigeria can secure cooperation from countries involved in drug production, transit, or consumption, reinforcing domestic enforcement (David, 2021)^[7]. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provides the legal foundation for anti-drug enforcement. Section 214 grants the federal government authority over matters related to customs, excise and criminal law, which includes regulation of narcotics. This constitutional authority ensures that national legislation on drug trafficking, prosecution and rehabilitation operates in a recognized legal framework, supporting both preventive and punitive measures (Okafor *et al.*, 2026)^[25].

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) Act (1989)^[28] formally established the NDLEA as the primary body for drug control in Nigeria (NDLEA Regulations, 1989)^[28]. The agency is responsible for investigating, prosecuting and preventing drug-related crimes, coordinating rehabilitation efforts and collaborating with other national and international bodies (NDLEA Regulations, 1989)^[28]. The NDLEA operates with a board chaired by a government-appointed official and includes representatives from the police, customs and military intelligence, ensuring multi-agency oversight (NDLEA, 2020). Under the NDLEA Act and subsequent amendments, trafficking, possession and manufacturing of hard drugs are criminalized, with sentences ranging from long-term imprisonment to the death penalty for large-scale offenders (Bartlett, 2014)^[5]. Courts have handed down varied penalties, including life imprisonment, reflecting the seriousness of drug offenses in the Nigerian legal system (Elumoye, 2025)^[9]. Recent high-profile convictions, including the seizure of heroin valued at hundreds of millions of naira, demonstrate enforcement under these statutes (Jerome-Mario, 2021)^[7].

The NDLEA leads national operations targeting drug cultivation, transportation and sale, conducting arrests and dismantling networks. Jide (2021) stated that law enforcement extends to other agencies, including the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigeria Customs Service, which monitor border points, ports and airstrips to prevent smuggling. Joint operations such as Operation Eagle illustrate collaboration between NDLEA and foreign partners to intercept illicit consignments and target trafficking syndicates (David, 2021)^[7]. These operations combine intelligence gathering, field enforcement and judicial coordination to maximize effectiveness. The UNODC provides training, technical support and funding for operational programs. Agencies such as the United States' DEA, the UK Border Force and European law enforcement partners assist in intelligence sharing and capacity development (Elumoye, 2025)^[9]. Such collaborations allow Nigeria to respond to evolving trafficking methods, including synthetic drugs and novel substances and extend its reach beyond national borders (Okereke, 2019)^[14]. Awareness campaigns, supported by NDLEA and UNODC, complement enforcement by educating the public about the dangers of drug abuse. National surveys conducted with UNODC assistance provide data on drug use trends, guiding preventive strategies and rehabilitation programs (Jide, 2021). These initiatives aim to reduce demand and strengthen community resilience against drug-related activities.

Legal and Institutional Constraints to Effective Enforcement

- 1. Poverty and unemployment:** Drug trafficking in Nigeria persists due to intertwined social, economic and institutional factors. Poverty and unemployment leave many individuals, particularly youths, vulnerable to involvement in the trade. Many young people seek financial stability and may enter the drug trade for income that exceeds what formal employment offers (Nnorom, 2018) ^[22]. Jerome-Mario (2021), maintained that high rates of unemployment combined with economic hardship increase susceptibility to peer pressure, encouraging engagement in drug distribution and consumption. Some youths use trafficking as a temporary means to escape financial pressures or family difficulties, which reinforces the cycle of involvement.
- 2. Weak border control:** Weak border control contributes to the ease of smuggling drugs into and out of Nigeria. The country shares borders with Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, which are porous and difficult to monitor effectively (Otu, 2013) ^[27]. NDLEA reports indicate that traffickers exploit these gaps to move substances in vehicles, agricultural products and other goods with minimal risk of detection (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019) ^[31]. Limited personnel and infrastructure at checkpoints reduce the capacity to inspect shipments thoroughly, while informal local monitoring lacks the training and resources needed to identify sophisticated concealment methods.
- 3. Corruption in enforcement agencies:** Corruption within law enforcement agencies undermines efforts to curb trafficking. Bribes and collusion between traffickers and some officials create opportunities for smuggling to continue unchallenged (Elumoye, 2025) ^[9]. Corruption extends beyond the operational level, affecting policy implementation, resource allocation and prosecutorial processes. The diversion of funds intended for enforcement weakens agency capacity, leaving gaps in monitoring, interdiction and investigation (David, 2021) ^[7].
- 4. Global demand and transnational networks:** International demand for illicit drugs sustains trafficking networks. European and American markets drive the production and movement of substances, providing financial incentives for organized groups (INCB, 2002). Transnational networks facilitate logistics, financing and communication, allowing traffickers to circumvent local enforcement and exploit global supply chains. Limited cooperation and information sharing with other countries further restrict Nigerian capacity to detect and intercept shipments before they reach international markets (NDLEA Regulations, 1989) ^[28].
- 5. Youth vulnerability:** Youth vulnerability is another factor affecting enforcement outcomes. Jerome-Mario (2021) ^[7], stated that adolescents and young adults are at high risk of both consumption and participation in trafficking due to social pressures, broken homes and lack of parental guidance. Drug traffickers often recruit

individuals with limited education or low income, offering quick financial gain and peer acceptance. This recruitment strengthens domestic networks and ensures a continuous supply of personnel for distribution.

- 6. Inadequate funding and logistics:** Inadequate funding and logistics constrain anti-trafficking operations. NDLEA and other enforcement agencies often lack vehicles, surveillance equipment and trained personnel necessary to cover extensive routes and border areas (NDLEA, 2010). Limited operational resources reduce the frequency and effectiveness of raids, inspections and surveillance operations. Training programs for personnel are irregular, leaving gaps in knowledge on emerging trafficking techniques, concealment methods and cross-border coordination (Okereke, 2019).
- 7. Judicial inefficiencies:** Judicial inefficiencies hinder prosecution and deterrence. Slow trial processes, procedural delays and inconsistent sentencing allow convicted traffickers to resume operations quickly after release (David, 2021) ^[7]. Weak enforcement of drug laws, combined with procedural loopholes, reduces the risk perception among traffickers. Some individuals evade prosecution entirely due to administrative delays or lack of evidence gathered during weak investigations.
- 8. Poor inter-agency coordination:** Poor inter-agency coordination limits the effectiveness of enforcement. Responsibilities overlap among NDLEA, police, customs and border authorities, creating confusion over jurisdiction and investigative authority (David, 2021) ^[7]. Cases sometimes stall due to lack of communication between agencies, while intelligence sharing is often irregular or incomplete. This fragmentation allows traffickers to exploit gaps and continue operations without immediate risk of detection.

Strategies to Curb Legal and Institutional Constraints

1. The Federal Government, Ministry of Youth and Sports and non-governmental organizations should implement youth empowerment programs and provide sustainable employment opportunities to reduce incentives for drug trafficking.
2. The NDLEA, Nigeria Customs Service and Nigeria Immigration Service should enhance border surveillance infrastructure, deploy trained personnel and adopt modern monitoring technologies to prevent cross-border drug smuggling.
3. NDLEA, Police, Ministry of Justice and anti-corruption agencies like EFCC and ICPC should establish robust anti-corruption measures, transparent accountability systems and regular audits to prevent collusion and diversion in enforcement.
4. NDLEA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international partners including UNODC and INTERPOL should strengthen cooperation, intelligence sharing and joint operations to disrupt transnational drug supply chains.
5. Schools, community leaders, NDLEA, NGOs and Ministry of Education should expand mentorship programs, community outreach and school-based drug awareness campaigns to reduce youth susceptibility to trafficking and abuse.

6. Federal and State Governments, NDLEA and donor agencies should increase budget *allocations*, invest in equipment and optimize operational logistics for effective coverage of trafficking routes.
7. Ministry of Justice, Courts and National Judicial Council should streamline legal procedures, provide specialized training for judges and prosecutors and enforce consistent sentencing to enhance deterrence.
8. NDLEA, Police, Customs, Immigration and the National Security Adviser's office should establish integrated task forces, centralized intelligence sharing and clear jurisdictional protocols to improve collaboration.
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Conclusion

The study assessed factors limiting the effectiveness of drug control in Nigeria, focusing on legal provisions, enforcement practices and institutional coordination. Findings of the study showed that poverty and unemployment contributed to youth involvement in trafficking, while weak border monitoring allowed illicit substances to enter and exit the country with minimal detection. Corruption among some law enforcement officials reduced the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions. Judicial delays and inconsistent sentencing allowed offenders to resume criminal activities. Transnational networks and international demand sustained trafficking operations, while limited coordination among NDLEA, police, customs and other agencies hindered intelligence sharing and joint operations. Legal provisions regarding precursor chemicals and asset forfeiture required consistent enforcement to disrupt criminal networks. The study addressed socioeconomic drivers, enforcement accountability, border surveillance and inter-agency cooperation essential for reducing drug trafficking in Nigeria.

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