

THE CUSTOMS ADMINISTRATION FACING THE ISSUES OF DRUGS AND NARCOTICS IN CAMEROON: FIGHTING AGAINST A HARMFUL PHENOMENON IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

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Abstract: *The consumption of narcotics is taking on worrying proportions in Cameroon. These substances circulate in several forms in young people, who are the main consumers. The social and health consequences of the consumption of these drugs are disastrous for the health of these young people but also for the sovereignty of States insofar as terrorists are in strategic connivance with the criminal and transnational networks of drug distributors. Its circulation is from trafficking networks in all the countries of West Africa and those of Central Africa. In this perspective, the customs administration whose missions oscillate between fiscal, economic and security missions, play a leading role in the fight against the dissemination of drugs in Cameroon through the establishment of the HALCOMI system. Nevertheless, it must be modernized to deal with the logic of bypassing smugglers and mafia and criminal networks selling drugs on Cameroonian territory.*

Keywords: Drugs, Customs Administration, Terrorism, World Customs Organization, Cameroon.

1. Introduction

The consumption of narcotics is taking on worrying proportions in Cameroon. These substances circulate in several forms in young people, who are the main consumers. Indeed, according to statistics from the National Drug Control Committee (CNLD) 21% of the Cameroonian population of school age has already used drugs. 15-year-olds are the most affected with a prevalence of 15%, higher in school settings. In the consumer community, 10% are regular consumers, while 60% are young people aged between 20 and 25 (Mambo, 1995). In addition to growing consumption, Cameroon is seen as a major importer and trans-shipment point for locally produced cannabis destined for other African countries, primarily Nigeria. In 2017, 1476 kg of cannabis and 05.256 kg of cocaine were seized by the police. The phenomenon of drugs and narcotics is therefore a matter of great concern. As much as its traffic is dangerous for society, as much as its consumption is harmful to the organism, which it weakens by destroying its immune system, but also it participates in the illicit enrichment of terrorist groups and criminal armed gangs which weaken the sovereignty of borders national and international states. In this context, one must ask the question what is the role played by the customs administration in the face of the drug phenomenon at the national and international borders of Cameroon? What are the causes of this growing harmful phenomenon in contemporary societies? Is the Cameroonian customs administration able to combat this phenomenon on its own? To resolve this thorny question,

2. Panoramic study of narcotics and drugs in circulation and their consequences in Cameroon

The world knows a variety of drugs and narcotics whose uses, abuses and trafficking have specific characteristics in each area. Thus Cameroon, due to its geographical position, is a crossroads where a panoply of narcotics circulates and whose consequences are numerous in its society.

2.1. Presentation of drugs and narcotics in Cameroon and its trafficking in its neighboring regions

These narcotics can be categorized into three main categories: central nervous system depressants, central nervous system stimulants and finally, central nervous system disruptive products. Among these drugs, there is the prevalence of cannabis which is the main product in Cameroon; psychotropic substances, heroin and cocaine (Mama Fouda, 2014).

a. Cannabis

Cannabis cultivation and consumption are widespread in Cameroon. It is the most consumed drug in Cameroon ahead of tramadol. Cannabis is none other than the Latin name for hemp (canapus), a plant belonging to the family of *Cannabaceae* and to the order of *Urticales*. For a very long time, several species of hemp have been distinguished: *Cannabis sativa* (textile hemp), *Cannabis indica* (Indian hemp), *Cannabis ruderalis*, *Cannabis sinensis*. In fact most botanists today agree that all of these strains are just different chemotypes of the *sativa* species. The differences observed in morphology and chemical composition are consecutive to adaptation to climatic conditions. *Cannabis sativa* is the textile hemp cultivated in Europe for its fibers (fabrics, ropes) and for its oilseeds or hemp seeds (Mambo, 1995). Still called Indian hemp in Cameroon, cannabis would be one of the oldest known plants for cultivation and use. The grass also called "hay" or "quack grass" is a mixture of flowering tops and leaves, dried and reduced to powder. It is the "kif" of Morocco, the "marijuana" in Canada or the United States, the "dagga" of South Africa, the "grifa" of Mexico or the "takrouri" of Tunisia.

The user may experience excitement and euphoria, mental confusion, sinking and depression leading to sleep. The physical effects are manifested by a loss of coordination, a feeling of increased visual acuity, sensory perceptions and sometimes greater sociability.

In the event of heavy consumption, cannabis can cause hallucinations, anxiety or panic, with the possibility of alteration of certain cells, disturbance of memory and estimation of time and distances, cardiovascular problems, impaired reproductive function, eye and bronchopulmonary conditions, reduced immune resistance. In adolescents, we can note a triple danger, namely: appearance of the amotivational syndrome that is to say that the young person shows passivity and demotivation. There are also adverse effects of insomnia, instability, loss of appetite, nausea and tremors. In terms of cannabis, there are very rare cases of tolerance. There is no physical dependence;

b. The heroine

The heroine has long been a stupefied very dangerous and widely used throughout the world. Heroin is taken in several ways, the most common: injected — you "prick" yourself either into a vein (intravenous injection or "shoot"), into a muscle (intramuscular injection) or under the skin (subcutaneous injection); inhaled through the nose or inhaled or smoked (dragon hunting). This method involves heating heroin on an aluminum foil, over a small flame, and breathing in the smoke and vapors released through a tube. In its purest form, heroin is a fine white crystalline powder with a bitter taste that dissolves in water. When sold on the street, its color and consistency vary depending on how it is made and the additives incorporated into it. Street heroin is sold as a white powder, a brownish sometimes gritty substance, or a sticky, dark brown gum, and its purity varies from batch to batch. Certain additives, such as sugar, starch or powdered milk, are used to increase weight for retail sale. Other drugs can be added to increase the effects (<https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/index-on-mental-health-and-addiction/heroin>). Injecting heroin immediately causes a sharp, sharp, intense reaction of pleasure, euphoria and well-being. It's the "flash". Then follows a phase of relaxation and relaxation, with psychomotor inhibitions and a feeling of withdrawal. It is the "planet" which lasts depending on the case from 2 to 6 hours. Snorted or smoked, these effects are much weaker. Heroin leads to tolerance, physical and psychological dependence. In the short term, the pupil of the eye shrinks, the heroin addict has nausea and presents with depression of the respiratory centers, with risk of coma and death, slowing of the heart rate, hyperthermia (Mambo, 1995).

c. Cocaine

Cocaine is undoubtedly, with the mobile phone, one of the commodities emblematic of the second economic globalization. Indeed, in the space of twenty years, its consumption, which mainly affected only the North of the American continent (United States, Canada), developed massively on a world scale, in a first time in Europe, then in certain emerging countries of Latin America, and of the African and Asian continents; its use in the middle classes generated by economic development constituting a symbolic marker of the entry into the society of mass consumption (Gandilhon, 2016: 34-49).

Cocaine is a stimulant that pushes back the limits of fatigue. In general, shortly after taking, it generates a state of euphoria, self-confidence and well-being suggesting greater activity of intellectual functions. However, the repeated use of cocaine quickly generates a state of agitation and instability, leads to impaired judgment and behavior. Physiologically, there is an increase in temperature, with dilation of the pupils and profuse sweating. Initially, the consumer's general condition deteriorates and, at high doses, convulsions appear with the possibility of death by cardiac arrest or respiratory arrest. In the long term, perforation of the nasal septum or chronic rhinitis (Mambo, 1995).

As with other illegal trafficking, the links between sub-Saharan Africa and drug trafficking are not new. The oldest evidence of the involvement of West Africa as a transit zone for the cocaine trade dates back to 1952: American agents identified mules used by Lebanese criminal organizations to transport heroin on commercial flights in departing from Kano (Nigeria) and Accra (Ghana) and bound for New York. Moreover, the first information on marijuana produced in Nigeria and destined for the European market dates back to the 1970s. During the following decade, these same Nigerian traffickers used pilgrims to transport cannabis to Saudi Arabia.

Faced with the growing phenomenon of these drugs in Cameroon, what is the security position of the customs administration which is supposed to monitor the international borders in Cameroon?

2.2. The Cameroonian customs administration faced with the phenomenon of drugs and narcotics

In the missions of the Cameroonian customs, the surveillance of the territory and the fight against narcotics are part of its sovereign missions.

a. Customs duties

Customs is an administration that is responsible for carrying out a large number of intertwined missions, a phenomenon that results from a historical accumulation as well as a strong sensitivity to economic developments. The Cameroonian institution, we realize that by scrutinizing the history of Cameroon, it has contributed to the policies of surveillance and control of the external borders but also to internal security. Customs work is also organized around "objects", sectors of intervention, considered central (Domingo, 1998 : 479-500). It specifically aims to fight against commercial fraud, the trafficking of various goods (animals and plants threatened with extinction, arms and ammunition, waste, narcotics and precursors, etc.), VAT fraud and other taxes, the illegal immigration, concealed employment, money laundering, etc. (Domingo, 2001: 213-232). constitute so many heterogeneous "customs missions" which make difficult any attempt to seek general coherence, a priori rationality, in the arrangement of the powers assigned to customs and the tasks performed daily by customs officers. The control of goods, which constitutes both a customs power and a customs mission, takes on particular significance when it is linked to the concept of "prohibited goods", or one of its logical equivalents ("fraudulent goods", "sensitive goods", "contraband goods", narcotics, counterfeits, etc.). It then serves as an interface between customs logic and internal security logic and acts as a "transition operator" between the two types of logic. It is on this logical structure that the

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With regard to contemporary Cameroonian customs, its missions oscillate between fiscal, economic and security missions. Specifically, these missions are broken down into four main points:

b. The tax mission

It is for the Administration to proceed with the determination, the liquidation and the fair and equitable recovery of the customs duties and taxes payable as well as any other deduction provided for by the regulations in force, the implementation of measures with a view to control of tax expenditure (control of the preferred destination), optimization of the collection of new revenue.

The Cameroon Customs Administration contributes to the mobilization of budget revenue to the tune of 33% of the State's non-oil revenue, or about 18% of the total budget. This trend has experienced a slight decline since 04 2016, the year of the implementation of the dismantling of tariffs between Cameroon and the EU

c. The economic mission

The Customs Administration plays a key role in the implementation of national economic policy. It is notably responsible for protecting the national economic space and improving the competitiveness of the economy. As such, it participates in:

- Trade facilitation;
- The implementation of economic regimes;
- The fight against fraud, smuggling, counterfeiting and illicit trade;
- The production of foreign trade statistics;
- The control of competition rules by the fight against compensatory measures;
- The mastery of the rules of origin of the goods.

d. The mission of protecting society

Due to its position at the land, sea and air borders, the Customs Administration participates in the protection of the economic area against flows that are harmful to the environment and the health of citizens. This mission is exercised through the controls carried out by the Customs Units present in the said borders. Specifically, these are:

- The fight against the trafficking of protected species, counterfeit drugs, psychotropic products and other dangerous products;
- The fight against the traffic of toxic waste and other products harmful to the environment and public health.

e. The security mission

In view of the national and international security context marked by the resurgence of conflicts, the Customs Administration is called upon to make its contribution in controlling the circulation of certain products used in conflicts (Essomo, 2014). These include in particular:

- The fight against organized cross-border crime;
- The fight against terrorism and the trafficking of Improvised Explosive Devices;
- The fight against financial crime and money laundering;
- The fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition;
- The fight against illicit trafficking of dual-use goods (Essomo, 2014).

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that Cameroonian customs has a role that lies at the interface between economic missions and security missions. Thus, we can try to show the intimate link on a diachronic perspective between the customs administration and the army in Cameroon.

3. The positioning of customs in the fight against drugs and narcotics in Cameroon

The problem of drugs as a whole remains today a complex subject of society which affects multiple fields as different as they are complementary, interconnected and therefore inseparable; prevention, information, communication, research, security, health, repression, and international action. Thanks to a complete marking of the territory, the Cameroonian Customs can ensure an effective positioning in the fight against drugs and psychotropic products. Between November 1993 and September 2018, various seizures reflect the resurgence of drug trafficking in Cameroon. Indeed, significant quantities of herbal cannabis in particular and other psychotropic substances were seized within the national territory, in the luggage of Cameroonians boarding at airports or landing abroad (Paris notably). These drugs are in most cases hidden in fresh food in order to thwart the vigilance of drug detection dogs, or agents responsible for checking packages.

At the national level, significant seizures are made throughout the territory. These seizures concern both narcotics and psychotropic substances. Between January 1993 and September 1994, 356,400 kg of cannabis and 41 psychotropic tablets were seized from 2nd) men and 2 women, i.e. 26 Cameroonians and 5 foreigners were seized. In Mora, for example, 41 tablets of psychotropic substances were seized. In Limbe, 400 kg of cannabis were seized from Cameroonian women leaving for Nigeria (Mambo, 1995). In Garoua, in December 1993, 6,300 kg of cannabis were seized. Between February and July 1994, 150 tablets of psychotropic substances in this case Mimifon were found on one hundred Nigerians, 4,600 kg of herbs and 1, as part of the celebrations marking International Customs Day in January 2012, a forum was held from January 25 to 27, 2012, which consisted of bringing together all the players from "Member countries and international and regional organizations" in charge of the fight against narcotics and chemical precursors and to exchange best practices and current experiences (Report of the World Customs Organization, 2011). It is in this perspective that the

Cameroonian customs administration has increased its commitment to the fight against drug and narcotics trafficking on its territory. In fact, since at the turn of the century, sub-Saharan Africa acquired an important role in international drug trafficking, becoming an intermediate stage for the transfer of various narcotic and illegal substances from producing countries to consuming countries. This mainly concerns heroin produced in Asia and consumed in Europe and North America, South American cocaine destined for Western Europe and cannabis derivatives produced in many African countries and consumed in the rest of the world (Report of Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies 2012; Military Institute for Evaluation and Prospective Documentation 2012). The most worrying of all these flows, by the receipts that represent, is that of cocaine. The integration of sub-Saharan Africa into the world drug market has been caused by various realities and events, some of them exogenous and others endogenous. Between the exogenous or external aspects of the African continent, the combination between the growing increase in the demand for drugs in North America and Europe and the pressure exerted by the authorities on drug trafficking activities, which obliges traffickers to explore new transit routes, including those crossing sub-Saharan Africa. The endogenous factors which have contributed to promoting drug trafficking activities in sub-Saharan Africa are varied and correspond to the political, economic and social problems and deficiencies which have traditionally affected this region (Report of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012; Military Institute for Evaluation and Prospective Documentation 2012). The main problems are the fragility of government institutions and the scarcity of resources available to repress criminal activities: endemic corruption, the underdevelopment of most sub-Saharan countries, and porous borders. This combination of factors has encouraged the proliferation of local criminal groups and has attracted sub-Saharan Africa to transnational criminal organizations and the porosity of borders. This combination of factors has encouraged the proliferation of local criminal groups and has attracted sub-Saharan Africa to transnational criminal organizations and the porosity of borders. This combination of factors has encouraged the proliferation of local criminal groups and has attracted sub-Saharan Africa to transnational criminal organizations.

Photo 1: Seizure by elements of the Ekok Customs Mobile Brigade of 9,000 tramadol tablets from Nigeria on 08/06/2022



Source: Customs Review, n° 32, 2022.

Photo 2: Seizure by elements of the Ekok Customs Mobile Brigade of 9,000 tramadol tablets from Nigeria on 08/06/2022.



Source: Customs Review, n° 32, 2022.

Photo 3: Seizure of 7.9 kg of cocaine pellets at Yaoundé airport, on 06/07/2022



Source: Customs Review, n° 32, 2022.

Photo 4: Seizure of 7.9 kg of cocaine pellets at Yaoundé airport, on 06/07/2022



Source: Customs Review, n° 32, 2022.

Photo 5 : Seizure of 7.9 kg of cocaine pellets at Yaoundé airport, on 06/07/2022



Source: Customs Review, n° 32, 2022.

The fight against the trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances has been a real fact in Cameroon for several years. All the administrations concerned put a little of their goodwill into it to achieve satisfactory results; hence the increasingly large seizures made throughout the national territory. From this perspective, in April 2019, customs intercepted in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon, a truck containing 200,000 tramol tablets and 7,000 liters of contraband fuel (Soustras and Charon, 2020). Last fall, a shipment of tramadol flown in from India at Douala airport lay abandoned in bonded warehouses... revealing that the recipient was impossible to identify. The import, apparently legal, was not.

Faced with the growing phenomenon of Islamist terrorism in the northern regions of Cameroon since 2013 with the terrorist movement Boko Haram, tramadol seizures are frequent there: 600,000 tablets were intercepted in April 2017, 36,000 in May 2018. fake drugs is part of the trafficking that fuels security crises, as it generates illicit funds to finance criminal actions, such as terrorism", explains Joseph Kpoumie, director in charge of the special customs intervention group. The years 2020-2022 can be considered as golden ages for this illicit trafficking. All the border points recorded significant seizures of drugs and psychotropic products. Among these major seizures, we have the seizure at Douala Nsimalen International Airport of a large stock of 7.9 kilograms of cocaine pellets which, coming from Nigeria, was about to embark on an Ethiopians flight bound for Asia (Custom Review of Cameroon, 2022). Likewise, on 05/22/2022, elements of Operation Halcomi (Stop Illicit Trade) intercepted a shipment of 100 kilograms of cannabis hidden in travel bags; it was about to be sold in the city of Douala. For the 2020-2022 period alone, Cameroon Customs seized approximately 2,000 shipments of drugs and psychotropic products (Custom Review of Cameroon, 2022 2022).

4. How to combat the phenomenon of drugs and narcotics in Cameroon and Sub-Saharan Africa: a collective pooling of national and international forces

The success of customs action in the fight against drug trafficking and its consumption depends on a certain number of measures that will have to be implemented or reconsidered. The question that can be asked on this point is whether the customs administration has the necessary means to enable it to act effectively. If these means exist, what are they? If not, what can this administration do to improve its work? In this chapter, we will try not only to propose strategies for the fight, but also to talk about money laundering which is a logical corollary of the phenomenon of drug is trafficking.

4.1-Strengthening drug control strategies in Cameroon

The fight against the trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic substances has been a real fact in Cameroon for several years. All the administrations concerned put a little of their goodwill into it to achieve satisfactory results; hence the increasingly large seizures made throughout the national territory. However, to the traditional methods generally used, more modern and simpler techniques could be added to improve the results already obtained.

4.2. Need to set up state-of-the-art infrastructure

The development of modern infrastructures allows for an increase in seizures. Thus, for example, in our international airports, modern search systems using X-rays or sophisticated devices must replace the manual search which is unfortunately still practiced in these airports. The development of these modern techniques responds to new methods of concealing drugs, especially so-called "in corpore" drugs. Airports must have drug screening security features. This equipment of our airports in materials or devices to fight against the illicit traffic of drugs will deter any attempt of trafficking especially if repressive measures come to support the preventive action. The material resources made available to customs services for greater efficiency can be diverse and varied. Thus, for example, Cameroon could adopt the narcotics detection methods used in several developed countries and which are bearing fruit (Mambo, 1995: 51-52).

Thus, the detector portal is a means intended to detect the presence of narcotics transported by travelers or containers. X-ray or Gamma devices are radiology devices that allow rapid checks to be carried out without opening luggage or packages. Endoscopies are devices allowing the control of means of transport. This equipment uses a lighting and visualization system using optical plugs and facilitates the exploration of parts that are difficult to access by vehicles. The detection of narcotics in the urine and in the blood makes it possible to discover the people transporting them incorporated or having ingested them. This process could involve the use of a double-beam photometer, equipped with a halogen quartz lamp and a microprocessor, a standard and control reagent diluter. For better use of these devices, customs officers must undergo special training to enable them to perform at their best. Training seminars should be organized from time to time on new narcotics screening techniques and on sensitizing agents and public opinion on the use and the perverse effects of drug consumption. Customs officers must also have product identification devices. This is how identification kits or boxes make it possible to carry out tests on the spot and to know the nature of suspect products.

4.3. Strengthening the powers of customs officers

It is desirable that an office in charge of narcotics be created within the customs department. This office would give more responsibility to customs officers in need of feeling or inclined to allow themselves to be corrupted by traffickers. The creation of this office would make it possible to recognize special powers for the services and agents responsible for the fight against drugs, not only in airports, but also throughout the national territory. Thus, for example, the customs officer in the fight against drug trafficking may well be a judicial police officer with special competence, have the possibility and authorization to practice controlled delivery and above all, have the right to control those who 'we call traditionally "Very Important Personality" (Mambo, 1995: 53).

In addition to national bodies and bilateral cooperation, generally between African countries and the United States or major European countries, the fight against cocaine trafficking and, more generally, illicit narcotics, also takes place within a multilateral and regional framework (Mambo, 1995: 53).

5. Conclusion

In less than a decade, West Africa has indeed become an important transit zone for South American cocaine. Because of its scale and the generous profit margins that the main players in this trade allow themselves, cocaine smuggling has certainly become the most destabilizing narcotics trade in the sub-region. Marked by a great capacity for adaptation, in particular by a constant change of routes and methods of transport, drug trafficking proves to be particularly difficult to combat. In terms of the fight against drug trafficking, we have to recognize the dominant role of the Defense and Security Forces, the major international agencies (UNODC, Interpol, etc.) and Western powers (The United States, EU, etc.).

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