

OBSERVATORY OF ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

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Summary highlights



Bucking the trend: The impact of COVID-19 on drugs markets in the islands of the western Indian Ocean.

Restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 – lockdowns, curfews and states of emergency – have had a significant impact on illicit markets. However, monitoring of drug flows through the Indian Ocean region suggests that the drugs market has been fairly resilient to the impact of the pandemic. Ongoing GI-TOC research across the Indian Ocean island states has also found that drug use may have grown as a result of the pandemic. Yet the impacts – on patterns on use, trafficking use and drug prices – have been complex across the island states and continue to evolve as the pandemic continues.



As decriminalization of cannabis production gathers pace in East and southern Africa, Madagascar's large-scale cannabis market remains a criminal enterprise.

Madagascar is the most significant producer of cannabis in the Indian Ocean island region. Tonnes of cannabis are grown every year in the remote northern highlands of

the Analabe region, providing a significant source of income to some in local communities who are cannabis growers and transporters. However, even as legalization for medicinal and recreational use is fast becoming a reality elsewhere in East and southern Africa, it remains strictly illegal in Madagascar. The cannabis-producing regions are home to armed trafficking groups, which, in the view of local police, are a major challenge to the rule of law. Cannabis production is also a major cause of deforestation in Madagascar's biodiverse northern forests.



The new administration in the Seychelles fought the election on corruption issues. Are they addressing drug-related corruption?

The Seychelles' presidential election in October 2020 was described as a 'political earthquake'. The campaign by the successful opposition candidate, Wavel Ramkalawan, had pledged to tackle corruption and counter drug trafficking, major issues in the Seychelles, the country with the highest level of heroin use in the world. Drug-related corruption is reported to be high among law enforcement, yet no cases of corruption are



currently being prosecuted. At the same time, police strategies have shifted towards a 'zero tolerance' approach to drug use, and behaviour towards people who use drugs appears to have become more aggressive. Time will tell whether the focus of the new administration is really on tackling corruption or rather on penalizing drug use.



Parc Coson: What dynamics in the drug-dealing capital of Mauritius tell us about networks, protection structures and the challenges to responses.

The Mauritian drugs market appears unaffected by COVID-19 containment measures such as lockdowns and border closures. On 10 March 2021, Mauritius entered its second lockdown to counter the spread of the virus and all non-essential businesses closed. Yet in Parc Coson, a slum in the Roche Bois suburb of Port Louis and Mauritius' drug-selling capital, it was business as usual. Stakeholders point to the resilience of the drugs market during border closures and the lack of lockdown enforcement in Parc Coson as further evidence of corruption, which underpins Mauritius'

drugs markets. Scrutinizing dynamics in Parc Coson during both lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021 provides insight into the evolving nature of the networks profiting from the trade, the protection structures underpinning the island's drugs market and the challenges undermining current government responses.



The case of Wandile Bozwana: A killing that epitomizes the role of assassinations in South Africa today.

Wealthy businessman Wandile Bozwana met a violent end when he was gunned down in his car in Pretoria in October 2015. Bozwana's death is not unique, and bears many of the hallmarks seen in other assassinations in South Africa. The alleged mastermind of the killing was a businessman in the taxi industry, a sector notoriously associated with assassinations and hitmen in South Africa. That Bozwana had political connections also reflects a trend of political rivalries being settled through violence. Bozwana's alleged killers are on trial only now, six years after his death, perhaps reflecting the corrosive impact that intimidation and violence has had on South Africa's criminal justice system.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The islands of the western Indian Ocean are known globally as tourism hotspots, as offshore financial centres in the case of Mauritius and the Seychelles, and as hubs of abundant biodiversity in the case of Madagascar. All the islands – which include the Comoros islands and Mayotte, Mauritius and Réunion, the Seychelles and Madagascar – are home to a wealth of natural and marine resources and are tied into centuries-old maritime trading routes around the Indian Ocean and down the East Africa coastline.

However, illegal markets are also a significant part of the political economy of the region, particularly illicit drug markets. The proximity to the significant 'southern route' for heroin trafficking – where heroin cultivated in Afghanistan is trafficked through East and southern Africa for consumption there and for transit to markets in Europe and the US – has made the Indian Ocean islands vulnerable. The Seychelles and Mauritius have some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world, and markets for synthetic cannabinoids have also become established in Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros.

Drugs markets are diversifying as cocaine and methamphetamine trafficking through the region grows.

Madagascar is also home to significant illegal markets in natural resources, from logging to gemstones and endangered species. Mauritius and the Seychelles have been identified as conduits for illicit financial flows. Corruption is a major facilitator of drugs markets and other forms of organized crime and erodes the governance of the island states.

This special issue of the Risk Bulletin aims to cast light on how illicit drugs markets are woven into the political landscape of the Indian Ocean islands. The GI-TOC has been conducting research on the political economy of drug trafficking across the islands since April 2020, which forms the basis of a forthcoming research paper titled 'Changing tides: The evolving illicit drug trade in the western Indian Ocean'.

The final story in this issue looks at what the assassination of South African businessman Wandile Bozwana means for the state of politics, crime and

justice in South Africa today. This story is the focus of a new podcast series from GI-TOC in partnership with News24 that will dive deep into Bozwana's death, a

killing involving top politicians, taxi bosses, assassins and flamingoes.

Bucking the trend: The impact of COVID-19 on drugs markets in the islands of the western Indian Ocean.

Restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 – lockdowns, curfews and states of emergency – have had a significant impact on illicit markets.¹ Now, one year into the pandemic, some of these impacts can be seen in monitoring data. The Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), which tracks illicit maritime activity across the Indian Ocean from its base in Madagascar, reported a 50% drop in maritime-security incidents in the Indian Ocean region between February and March 2020, primarily driven by decreases in illicit flows such as the smuggling of contraband and people.²

Interestingly, the regional drugs market bucked the overall trend. RMIFC incident data, supported by wider intelligence gathering and analysis, shows that drug-smuggling incidents and reported activity remained steady throughout 2020 bar seasonal fluctuations, in line with previous annual trends.³ RMIFC representatives reported that of the maritime smuggling and trafficking activities under their study, only drug flows continued ‘unaffected throughout’ the pandemic.⁴

The islands of the western Indian Ocean (namely Mauritius, the Seychelles, Mayotte, Réunion, Madagascar and the Comoros) are home to well-established illicit

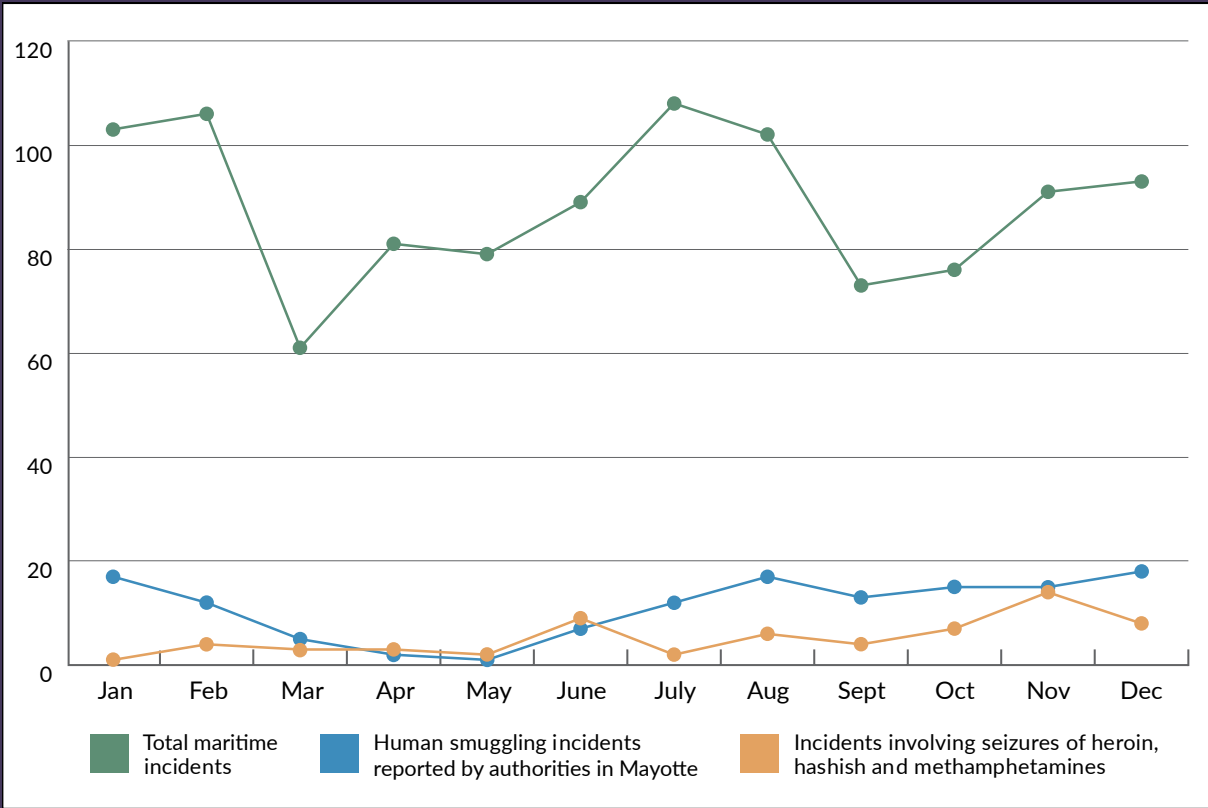


FIGURE 1 Monthly breakdown of maritime incidents reported to RMIFC in 2020.

Source: RMIFC Annual Report 2020

drugs markets. Mauritius and the Seychelles suffer from among the highest opiate consumption rates in the world, synthetic-cannabinoid use has exploded across Mauritius, Mayotte and the Comoros since 2015, and ever-greater volumes of drugs are being trafficked through Madagascar.⁵

The economic impact of the pandemic on the islands has been severe.⁶ The loss of tourism has dealt a significant economic blow to the region, and interviewees across the islands expressed concerns that rising unemployment would further swell the burgeoning drugs market.⁷

GI-TOC research in the region between May and September 2020, and additional field research in the Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius during February and March 2021, explored the impacts of the pandemic not only on drug trafficking routes but also on domestic consumption markets. Preliminary findings underscore the resilience of supply chains, the sensitivity of the market to demand, and the drugs market being seen as offering viable alternative employment opportunities as the pandemic devastates livelihoods.

The impact of COVID-19 on drug supply and price

People who use drugs (PWUD) interviewed across the islands broadly agreed that there had been no major disruption in drug supply. With some exceptions, explored below, prices and purity appear to have remained stable throughout the pandemic, which supports the idea that supply has likewise remained fairly consistent. When asked about the impact of the pandemic on the drugs market in the Seychelles, one PWUD, Carol, concluded: 'Drugs are in abundance; that's why it is cheap.'⁸

The fairly uninterrupted supply is likely due, in part, to maritime traffic, which underpins the majority of drug flows to and between the islands, having been far less affected by COVID-19 restrictions than air and overland transport. The porosity of the island states' borders – long, hard-to-police coastlines peppered with informal coves and landing points – diminishes the impact of imposed restrictions. Cargo shipments continued unimpeded, and according to one customs official in Madagascar, inspections reduced to negligible levels during the pandemic as agents avoided non-essential inspections of goods for hygiene purposes.⁹



Night clubs in Réunion. By June 2020, following pandemic restrictions that forced the temporary closure of clubs, the price of Ecstasy had decreased.

Photo: Walter Bibikow via Alamy stock photo

Some fluctuations in drug prices were reported, many of which were shaped by pandemic trends.¹⁰ In Mauritius, for example, some PWUD reported an increase in cannabis prices during the lockdown period in March 2020, and PWUD in the south of the island, which has a smaller drugs market, reported decreased availability and quality.¹¹ Overland travel restrictions in Madagascar, a key exporter of cannabis to Mauritius, may have restricted the flow from areas of cultivation to ports for export (primarily Toamasina, a key port near the capital, and also Nosy Be to some extent).¹²

However, the price hike also appears to be part of a broader trend of spiralling cannabis prices in Mauritius, which increased almost fourfold between 2015 and 2020 (from €15 to €57 per gram or 800–2 675 Mauritian rupees). As cannabis has become a 'luxury item' in Mauritius over time, dealers may have exploited fears of scarcity during lockdown to hike prices further, and they have remained at 'lockdown levels' since.¹³



Hell-Ville, the main city on the island of Nosy Be in the north-east of Madagascar, is a tourism and drug-consumption hub. By June 2021, the drugs market in the city had contracted, as tourists, who contribute in large part to drug consumption in Nosy Be, faced COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Photo: Michel Renaudeau/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

In contrast, prices for Ecstasy were reported to have decreased (from €15 to €10 per pill) in Réunion in June 2020 following COVID-19 restrictions, with new deals emerging on bulk buys.¹⁴ As Ecstasy is imported to the island via post and by mules on aeroplanes – both of which experienced disruption – prices could have been expected to increase because of limited supply. However, as Ecstasy is widely used as a ‘party drug’ – and therefore less useful amid lockdowns and social distancing restrictions – falling prices may have been driven by a drop in demand.

Nosy Be: A hotspot for drugs and tourism

When asked about the impact of the pandemic on the drugs market, Nolan, who buys drugs in 67Ha, a suburb of Antananarivo where drug use is prevalent, answered: ‘I think it [supply] is always stable in Antananarivo and in the other towns of Madagascar, because it is not difficult to find drugs.’¹⁵ PWUD and law enforcement officials concurred that drug supply in Antananarivo, the Madagascan capital and the centre of the island’s drugs market, remained unaffected by COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁶

In contrast, the pandemic significantly disrupted the sizeable drugs market in Nosy Be, an island in the north-east of the country. Nosy Be has been both a significant consumption hub and a principal point for exporting heroin to other islands, including the Seychelles, the Comoros and Mauritius. The island is also a tourism hotspot and the two economies are ‘interdependent’, according to Koera, a heroin user who lives on the outskirts of Hell-Ville.¹⁷

In June 2020, both PWUD and law enforcement officers in Nosy Be reported that they had not seen any significant change in the drugs market since the start of the pandemic. In March 2021, however, reports were different. Raherimaminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa, former commander of the gendarmarie unit in Djamandjary, Nosy Be, stated: ‘The drug market in Hell-Ville has been increasing for some time. But I observed during the lockdown that consumption [of heroin and cocaine] has decreased.’¹⁸ In contrast, consumption of cannabis, which is cultivated in the nearby Ambanja region, has increased during the same period.

Koera stated that he 'faces difficulty in finding heroin. I think that during the lockdown, our dealers [did not have] enough stock in the town.'¹⁹ PWUD also reported decreased purity in the heroin and cocaine available.²⁰

PWUD and law enforcement officials conclude that the contraction of the market has primarily been driven by the drop in tourism because 'the tourists are mostly the consumers'.²¹ Tourists are also generally able to afford higher prices than local consumers. Movement restrictions imposed to limit the spread of COVID-19 made it more difficult to transport heroin and cocaine overland from key entry points (such as the principal port of Toamasina via Antananarivo, or Antsiranana, a port city in the north), which seems to have compounded the drop in demand in Nosy Be.

As the market contracted, many dealers reportedly left Nosy Be. This includes nationals from continental Africa and Europe, who control the market in Hell-Ville. Lower-level Malagasy dealers, with 'no merchandise and no customers' reportedly returned to their hometowns.²²

Dealers that remained in Nosy Be have struggled to replace lost income. For example, Miandrisoa reported that as 'the drug market has decreased', a significant dealer in Hell-Ville has 'lost all his international contacts, and he is abandoned by his team... he now has difficulties in paying his rent.'²³

The reported scarcity of drugs in Nosy Be suggests the area may have decreased in prominence as a point for exporting heroin from Madagascar.²⁴ Given that the pandemic shows few signs of waning in Madagascar, this disruption could continue for some time.

Impacts of the pandemic on PWUD across the islands

In Mauritius, Madagascar and the Seychelles, politicians, health professionals, law enforcement officials and PWUD networks raised concerns that the rise in unemployment, due to the drop in tourism and the overall economic impact of the pandemic, will result in a rise in drug use and recruitment into dealing and trafficking networks.²⁵

Officials from the Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation (APDAR) in the Seychelles noted that drug use has increased since the beginning of the pandemic. APDAR also report that demand for their methadone programme has increased in this period;²⁶

this may suggest that PWUD struggling to finance heroin purchases are using the programme to top up their daily dosage. PWUD on the island report an increase in dealers, with more people turning to the drugs market for employment.²⁷

Thomas, a PWUD in the Seychelles interviewed in March 2021, said: 'It is not easy to get a job. The [interviewers] look at you from head to toes, and you can sense that they are searching for any scars from injections. After that, you never hear from them. I do some casual work sometimes, but the money is not enough. During COVID, life is tough.'²⁸ PWUD in both Nosy Be and Antananarivo consistently reported a loss of livelihoods following a year of pandemic-related restrictions.²⁹ In Antananarivo, PWUD reported injecting cheaper prescription drugs when they lacked the funds to purchase heroin.³⁰

In the Seychelles, the impacts of COVID-19 may be compounded by the government's decision to phase out the so-called Unemployment Relief Scheme (URS) payments by the end of February 2021.³¹ Representatives from the Drug Utilization Response Network Seychelles (DURNS) – a civil society organization run by current and former PWUD that advocates for PWUD rights – reported that most PWUD they work with had been receiving support under the URS. DURNS representatives argued that the timing of the decision to end the unemployment scheme 'is not appropriate', predicting that 'these individuals would be without funds, thus more vulnerable and may plunge into further drug use and criminal activities'.³²

In Mauritius, local communities may also become more reliant on support from the drugs business. Before the pandemic, several major drug dealers distributed cash to communities, or helped pay utilities bills, partly in exchange for community support and resistance to police investigations. During the two lockdown periods (in March 2020 and March 2021), drug networks in a number of poorer suburbs have reportedly distributed food to local communities hit hard by the restrictions, strengthening the shadow welfare state provided by the drug networks.³³

The drug market remains resilient

The coronavirus pandemic continues to affect all the western Indian Ocean islands. Although it remains too early to assess the long-term impacts of COVID-19 across the Indian Ocean region, it is clear that drugs

markets are positioned to become even more entrenched in the region's political economy in the wake of faltering formal employment opportunities.³⁴ The economic impact has been severe, particularly because of the loss of employment in the tourism sector, with PWUD, often among the most marginalized in society, struggling to replace lost income.

Our initial findings demonstrate that the impact of the pandemic is not uniform. The drug market remained resilient in some locales, but seems to have declined in

others (such as Nosy Be), and while prices have remained largely consistent across the region, there have been notable exceptions to this trend. The findings highlight the resilience of international drug supply chains (underscoring the difficulties of disrupting them, the aim of most response frameworks), and the sensitivity of the drugs market to demand. Going forward, the pandemic will likely continue to shape the trajectory of the Indian Ocean islands' drugs market.

Notes

- 1 In March 2020, islands in the Indian Ocean region, like most countries around the world, closed maritime entry points and airports to non-essential human movement in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19. A significant proportion of international transport ground to a halt, and domestic movement restrictions were imposed across the islands. In the first quarter of 2021, the region experienced a second wave of COVID-19 cases, triggering a second period of lockdowns, curfews and states of emergency.
- 2 Maritime incidents remained depressed throughout the second quarter of 2020, before recovering in the third and fourth quarters. RMIFC monitors maritime activity across the entire Indian Ocean, not just between the western Indian Ocean islands. Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, Activity Report, 2020.
- 3 Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre, Activity Report, 2020.
- 4 Conclusions shared by Navi Ramgolam, Deputy Director, International Liaison Officer (Mauritius), in: GI-TOC, 'Une plaque tournante': Madagascar's changing role in regional illicit markets, GI-TOC webinar, 7 December 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/une-plaque-tournante-madagascar-webinar/>.
- 5 See: GI-TOC, 'Une plaque tournante': Madagascar's changing role in regional illicit markets, GI-TOC webinar, 7 December 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/une-plaque-tournante-madagascar-webinar/>.
- 6 The islands are at vastly different stages in their respective pandemic responses: the Seychelles has vaccinated almost its entire population, whereas Madagascar is one of the few countries in the world that has not yet begun mass rollout of vaccinations. See <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20210319-seychelles-open-to-all-tourists-as-vaccine-campaign-protects-population>; <https://newsaf.cgtn.com/news/2021-04-16/Madagascar-halts-planned-schools-reopening-following-COVID-19-spike-ZupRJ7sGOc/index.html>; <http://www.health.gov.sc/index.php/2021/01/04/new-measures-effected-as-COVID-19-cases-rise/>; <https://newsaf.cgtn.com/news/2021-04-16/Madagascar-halts-planned-schools-reopening-following-COVID-19-spike-ZupRJ7sGOc/index.html>.
- 7 Drops in remittances have also had an impact, particularly in the Comoros and Madagascar. In the latter, where these losses have been compounded by drought, World Bank figures suggest poverty is rising for the first time in years in an island that already ranks among the poorest in the world. World Bank, Madagascar, Indicators, 2009–2020, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/976141492207282722/data-mdg.pdf>; World Bank, Comoros, Indicators, 2009–2020, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/249791492188156070/mpo-com.pdf>.
- 8 Interview with PWUD (Carol – name changed), Seychelles, March 2021.
- 9 Interview with Rakotomalala Pierrot, Customs inspector at the anti-narcotics division of Malagasy customs, Madagascar, 15 June 2020.
- 10 Some PWUD in the Comoros noted a decrease in dose quantity, although price and purity remained consistent. In Réunion and the Seychelles certain interviewees reported a rise in cocaine prices following border restrictions being imposed in March 2020. Although this could be linked to the decreased air traffic, given that cocaine imports generally rely on air mail and mules travelling on aeroplanes, the availability of cocaine was reported to have increased throughout 2020 and into 2021, calling into question disruptions in supply.
- 11 Interviews with PWUD, June–July 2020, Mauritius. Although the exact increases reported varied, they were consistently reported as at least MR300 per gram.
- 12 Heroin is also imported into Mauritius from Madagascar by sea, and heroin prices remained stable. However, heroin is primarily imported into Toamasina, requiring less overland transport for export.
- 13 Interview with an NGO in Mauritius that runs a needle-exchange programme for PWUD, Mauritius, July 2020; interviews with PWUD, Mauritius, March 2021.
- 14 Interview with Jacques Navon, Psychologue clinicien du Réseau Ôté, Réunion, 19 June 2020; Observatoire Français de Drogues et des Toxicomanie, Spécificités des Usages et Dynamique D'offre de Drogues dans les Outre-Mer: Un État des Lieux de L'ofdt, 26 June 2020, <https://www.ofdt.fr/publications/collections/rapports/thema/drogues-et-addictions-dans-les-outre-mer-etats-des-lieux-et-problematiques-thema/>
- 15 Interview with 25 year old PWUD 24 February 2021.
- 16 Interview with 21-year-old PWUD from 67Ha, Antananarivo, 4 March 2021; interview with 25-year-old PWUD, 67Ha, Antananarivo, 24 February 2021; interview with Colonel Ramaromisamalala, Antananarivo, 27 February 2021.
- 17 Interview with Koera, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, 27 February 2021.
- 18 Interview with Colonel Raheiraminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa, former commander in the Gendarmerie Nationale unit in Djamandjary, Nosy Be, 24 February 2021.
- 19 Interview with Koera, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, 27 February 2021.
- 20 Ibid.; field notes shared by Riana Randrianarisoa, who conducted interviews in Nosy-Be on behalf of the GI-TOC.
- 21 Interview with Koera, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, 27 February 2021.

- 22 Interview with Raherimaminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa, commander in the Gendarmerie Nationale, 24 February 2021.
- 23 Raherimaminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa reported that this dealer had been arrested but released within a few weeks, allegedly because bribes were paid for his early release. Interview, Nosy Be, 9 June 2020.
- 24 Colonel Ramaromisamalala, chief of the anti-drugs trafficking unit in Antananarivo, noted that nascent evidence suggests that traffickers may be using the Port of Ehoala in Talagnaro, a town in the far south of Madagascar, for drug imports and exports. Interview, Antananarivo, 27 February 2021.
- 25 Dr M Gungapersad (Second Member for Grand' Baie & Poudre d'Or), Seventh National Assembly, Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), First Session Wednesday 10 June 2020; interview with representatives of the Drug Utilization Response Network Seychelles, February 2021; interview with Yvan Theresine, APDAR, 12 March 2021; interview with Capitaine Mahavihasina Daudet, commander of the gendarmerie nationale company based in Nosy Be, 9 June 2020.
- 26 Interview With Yvana Theresine, APDAR, 12 March 2021.
- 27 Interview with PWUD (Jane – name changed), Mahé, February 2021.
- 28 Interview with PWUD (Thomas – name changed), Mahé, February 2021.
- 29 Interview with Koera, Hell-Ville, Nosy Be, 27 February 2021; interview with 21-year-old PWUD from 67Ha, Antananarivo, 4 March 2021; interview with 25-year-old PWUD from 67Ha, Antananarivo, 24 February 2021.
- 30 PWUD reported these drugs made them feel calm – this is likely because the prescription drugs are tranquilizers. These drugs are also sold by dealers in 67Ha, and reportedly include Rivotril (and similar chemical compounds). Interview with 21-year-old PWUD from 67Ha, Antananarivo, 4 March 2021; interview with 25-year-old PWUD from 67Ha, Antananarivo, 24 February 2021.
- 31 Christophe Zialor, URS to officially end in February, Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, Seychelles, <http://www.employment.gov.sc/media-centre/publications/356-urs-to-officially-end-in-february-by-christophe-zialor>.
- 32 Interview with representatives of the Drug Utilization Response Network Seychelles, February 2021.
- 33 These include the areas known as Parc Coson in the Roche Bois suburb of Port Louis, Labonne in Cité Barkly and Goodlands in Cité St Claire. Interviews with numerous stakeholders (including former senior intelligence officer, police officers, rehabilitation workers, PWUD and journalists) in June 2020 and February–March 2021.
- 34 Jason Eligh's analysis of four key historical disruptions to the global drugs supply chain concludes that 'in each case, drug markets and organizations adapted and grew', leveraging the relevant crisis as an opportunity to expand and entrench operations. See: Jason Eligh, Crisis and opportunity, GI-TOC, May 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Crisis-and-Opportunity-Jason-Eligh-GITOC.pdf>.

As decriminalization of cannabis production gathers pace in East and southern Africa, Madagascar's large-scale cannabis market remains a criminal enterprise.

The rural commune of central Antsahabe in northern Madagascar is a fertile region for agriculture: cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, and the vanilla for which Madagascar is famous are all produced here. Yet there is another crop that is a major source of income for communities in the region: cannabis.

Despite Madagascar being a large-scale producer of cannabis, with high levels of domestic consumption, cultivation, sale and consumption of cannabis are strictly illegal in Madagascar. The situation remains even as legalization for medicinal and recreational use is fast becoming a reality elsewhere in eastern and southern Africa.¹

'At the economic level, cannabis could be a very profitable source of revenue for local authorities,' said Mr Armel, the mayor of Antsahabe. 'The risk lies in management at the level of public health and local consumption.'² Currently, Armel's administration draws no benefit from the cannabis market, which in the Antsahabe commune alone is estimated to produce at least 200 tonnes per year.³

The mountainous region Analabe, part of the Ambanja district where Antsahabe is located, is one of the primary regions of cannabis cultivation in Madagascar. Yet Armel's wish that cultivation could be transformed into a profitable and regulated legal market faces challenges: political resistance to cannabis legalization, the environmental impact of cannabis production and insecurity in remote cannabis-producing areas.

Regional trends towards decriminalization

In 2017, Lesotho became the first country in Africa to issue licenses for the production of medicinal cannabis, which has quickly led to large-scale international investment to develop the sector in the landlocked mountain kingdom.⁴ In April 2021, one Lesotho-based

cannabis producer received the first approval for an African company to sell medicinal cannabis in the EU.⁵

Other countries in eastern and southern Africa have since followed suit. In October 2020, Rwanda became the latest country in the region to approve medical cannabis production for export,⁶ following in the footsteps of Uganda,⁷ Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia.⁸

South Africa, which in 2018 became the first country in the region to legalize cannabis production and consumption for recreational use (but not for sale) through a ruling by its Constitutional Court, recently released a draft national master plan for the development of the commercial cannabis market, for both local consumption and export.⁹

In the Seychelles, cannabis use for medicinal purposes (but not cultivation as a crop) was approved by law in July 2020.¹⁰ The development was welcomed by some activists in the island nation as a step towards liberalizing the law and the potential future approval of cannabis for recreational use.¹¹ In the lead-up to presidential elections in late 2020, Alain St. Ange, leader of the One Seychelles party and former minister of tourism, argued that the Seychelles could benefit from 'cannabis tourism' by legalizing it for recreational use,¹² which sparked debate in local media.¹³ Likewise, there is a significant lobby for legalization in Mauritius, although cultivation and use remain criminalized.¹⁴

These developments have led to optimistic analysis that the crop could be a new 'green gold' for Africa.¹⁵ A report by the cannabis-industry research group Prohibition Partners estimated that, by 2023, the cannabis market across the whole of Africa could be worth approximately US\$7.1 billion.¹⁶ Another analysis, from strategy consultancy Birguid, estimated that the cannabis market in southern Africa alone generated just

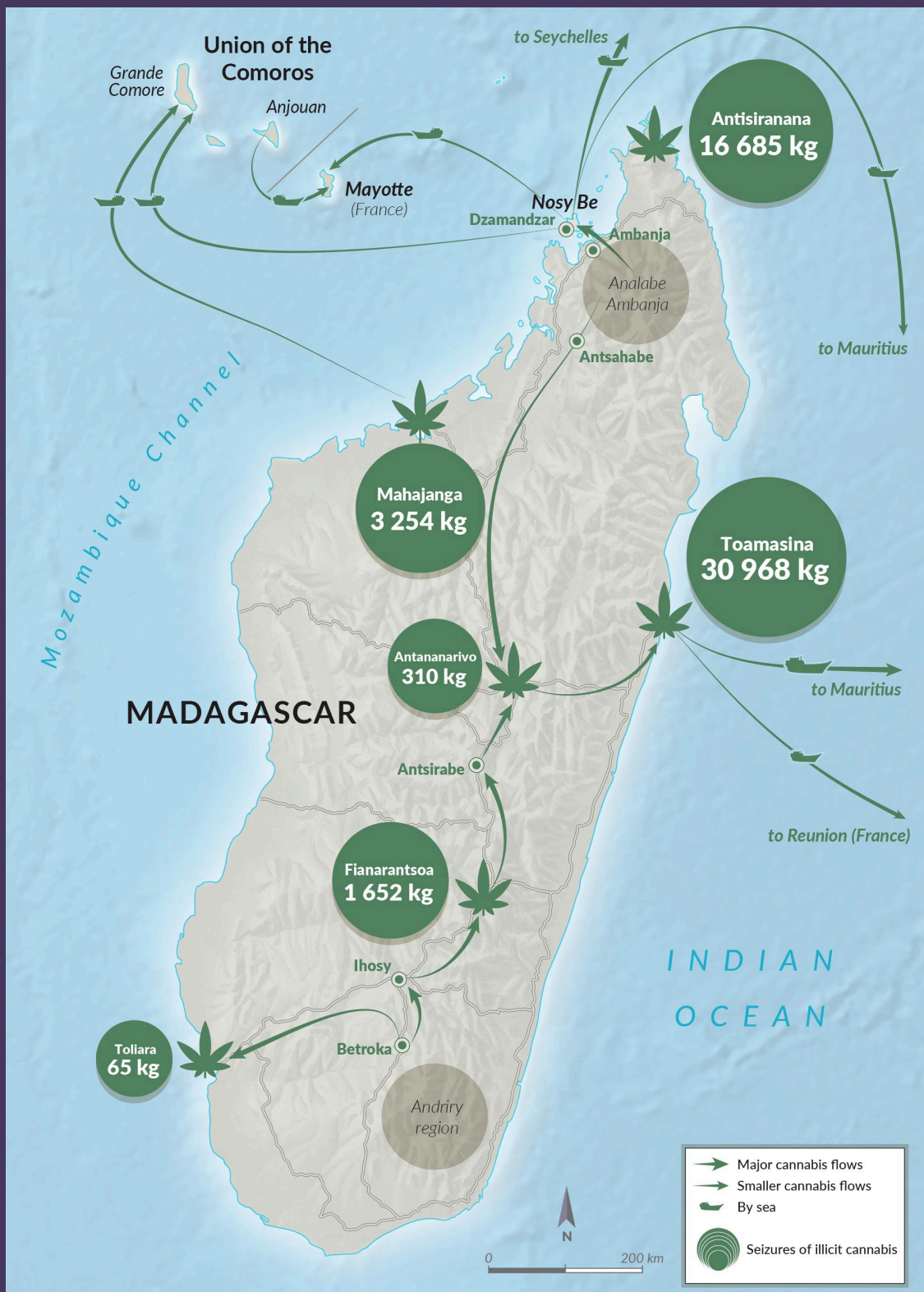


FIGURE 2 Cannabis production hotspots and trafficking flows in and from Madagascar, and quantity of cannabis seized in each region by the Gendarmerie Nationale in 2020.

Note: The Gendarmerie is not the only authority that makes drugs seizures in Madagascar: the national police and customs authorities also make seizures in their respective jurisdictions. The Gendarmerie seizures, however, are indicative of major cannabis production areas and trafficking points.

Source: Madagascar Gendarmerie Nationale.

Mean cannabis price per gram, 2020, USD

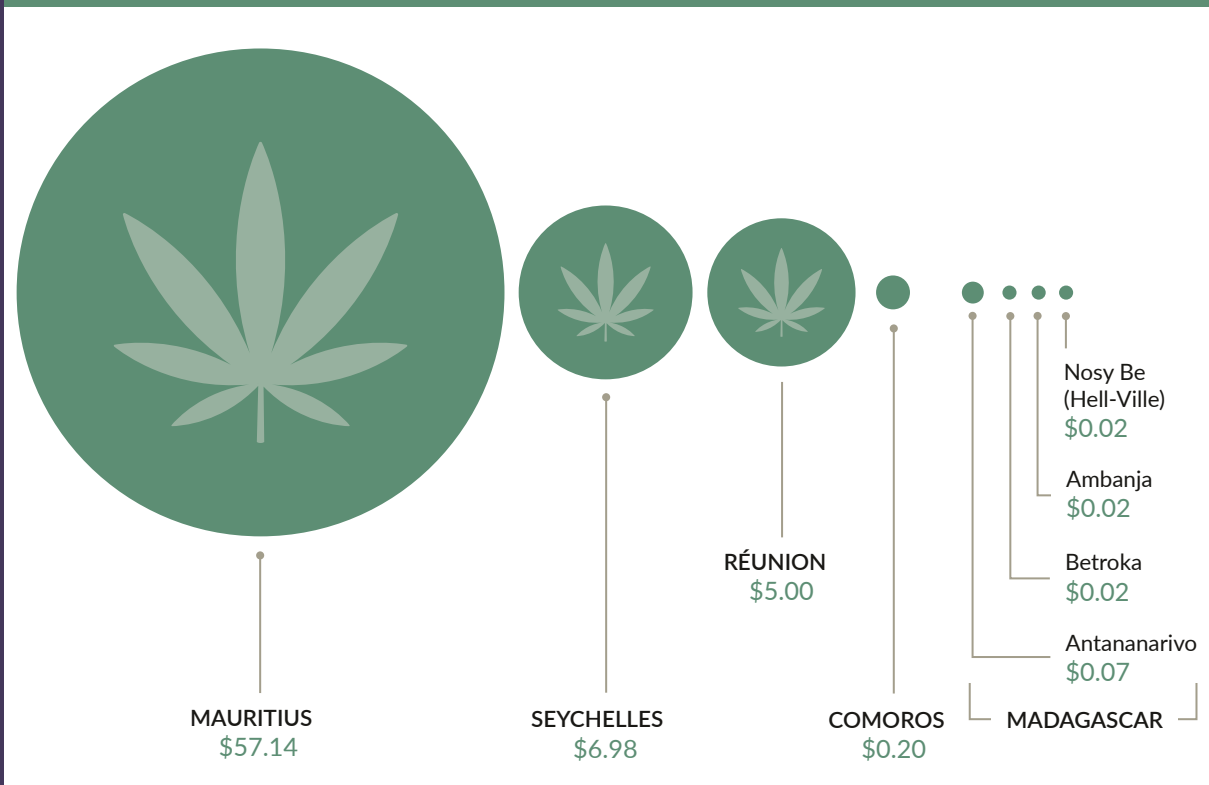


FIGURE 3 Cannabis prices in the Indian Ocean islands, 2020.

Note: GI-TOC drug pricing surveys in Indian Ocean islands found that cannabis prices in Madagascar were on average 0.03 USD per gram in 2020, the lowest recorded in the islands. This reflects the large supply of cannabis grown domestically in Madagascar. In Mauritius, cannabis prices have risen significantly in recent years to the point it is described as a 'luxury' item.

Source: Based on findings from GI-TOC drug pricing surveys in the island states, 2020.

over US\$1 billion in revenue in 2019, primarily from the illegal recreational market.¹⁷

In several ways, the cannabis market in Lesotho parallels that of Madagascar. The mountainous ranges of both countries provide environments well suited to growing cannabis. In both countries, cannabis was grown traditionally for many years before being criminalized under colonial rule, and cultivation then continued as an illicit market supplementing the incomes of subsistence-farming communities.¹⁸ Politically, however, it seems that Madagascar is showing no sign of following Lesotho's lead.

In the countries that have embraced the development of cannabis markets, whether for medicinal, industrial (such as for hemp production) or recreational purposes, the policy shift is widely expected to bring economic benefit. Yet regulating the sector has its challenges. In Lesotho, for example, small-scale local growers have faced steep fees for cannabis-production licenses, which some say sways the market in favour of multinational companies and forces smaller growers onto the black market.¹⁹ Allegations have also emerged of corruption in the allocation of licenses.²⁰

In Zambia, Peter Sinkamba, president of the opposition Green Party, summed up how the benefits of cannabis production may also bring risks: 'Depending on how properly this is done, this could just change the face of Zambia's economy,' he said in an interview with Reuters. 'This could be a blessing or a curse, like diamonds and gold, depending on the policy direction.'²¹

Cannabis production in Madagascar

Madagascar is the most significant producer of cannabis among the western Indian Ocean islands. The major regions of production – Betroka in the south and Analabe in the north – largely supply domestic markets, particularly Madagascar's urban centres, including the capital, Antananarivo. Some cannabis is also smuggled to other island states, including the Seychelles, Mauritius, the Comoros and Mayotte.²² GI-TOC research has found that at around US\$0.03 per gram (in 2020), cannabis prices in Madagascar are far lower than in the other island states (as shown in Figure 3), reflecting a plentiful domestic supply.²³

Consumption and sale of cannabis in Madagascar are widespread. Reliable estimates of consumption are not widely available, but figures do suggest high levels of recreational use. The latest statistics reported by the Malagasy government to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's annual data-gathering exercise indicate a 9.1% prevalence of cannabis use among the adult population;²⁴ which would place Madagascar among the highest rates in Africa. This figure, however, dates from 2004. Cannabis research consultancy New Frontier Data reported in 2019 that 14.2% of the adult population of Madagascar had reported using cannabis in the past year,²⁵ which would

equate to over 2 million people and place Madagascar as having the ninth highest rate of use in Africa.²⁶

Estimates for the amount of cannabis produced in Madagascar are also elusive, yet reports from law enforcement operations give a sense of its scale. Madagascar's Gendarmerie Nationale seized close to 53 tonnes of cannabis in 2020,²⁷ which included multiple seizures of more than 1 tonne.²⁸ In May and June 2020, an operation by the gendarmerie unit of Antsiranana, which oversees the region of Analabe Ambanja, seized more than 16 tonnes of cannabis and 21 litres of cannabis oil, destroyed over 80 000 individual cannabis plants, and led to the arrest of 80 people.²⁹

'Millions, even billions, of ariary of profit are circulating in the sector, especially in the production zones of Analabe in the Ambanja district and that of the district of Betroka. Likewise, for the consumption zones like Antananarivo, cannabis brings in profit for big bosses and dealers,' said Tantely Ramamonjisoa, commissioner of the antinarcotics division of the national police. 'Big sums of money are at stake, which leads to the difficulty of eradicating this danger from society,' he concluded.³⁰

Analabe Ambanja: A centre for cannabis production

According to Armel, the Analabe region attracts trafficking networks from across the country. 'There are traffickers coming from Mahajanga, Antananarivo and other provinces of Madagascar,' he said.³¹ Testimony from residents of Antsahabe and the surrounding area confirmed that hundreds of traffickers operate clandestinely in the area.³²



Madagascar's Gendarmerie Nationale carry out an operation to destroy cannabis fields in Analabe, Ambanja district, in the north of Madagascar. In this operation, which took place in July 2020, over 100 hectares of cannabis were burned and more than a dozen cannabis farmers were arrested.

Photo: Gendarmerie Nationale, Madagascar



A bottle used to inhale cannabis oil, Analabe Ambanja, February 2021.

Photo: Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa



The mountainous region of Analabe Ambanja, in northern Madagascar, is a hub for cannabis production. Here, a local resident demonstrates how cannabis oil is inhaled through a bottle.

Photo: Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa

Although some residents collaborate with law enforcement officials, serving as informers or guides in remote areas, a significant proportion of the population cooperates with trafficking networks. Local young people work with cannabis producers in cannabis fields or participate in transporting cannabis to and from collection points, using their knowledge of the local terrain.³³ Cannabis production is a source of revenue for many residents in the region.³⁴

Cannabis is transported on foot, with journeys continuing for two days or more. Produce is taken from the fields to either trucks (for transport to urban markets) or warehouses in neighbouring cities such as Ambilobe. 'For the transit from Analabe to Ambanja town, there are several options. Either over land, by car or on foot, or transferred by river. Finally there is the sea route for exports destined to the Comoros, Mayotte and other Indian Ocean islands. These journeys earn money, and there are enormous sums invested,' said Arnel.³⁵ The gendarmerie unit in Ambanja also reported that there are artisanal factories that produce cannabis oil in the region, yet these locations have not been identified by police.³⁶

Those in charge of trafficking networks invest large sums to purchase cannabis, transport it and secure safe delivery. According to members of the local community in Analabe, local farmers may sell a kilogram of green cannabis at 20 000 ariary (AR). This is reportedly comparable to prices for cocoa, which depending on the season will sell for around AR25 000. Traffickers' expenses for ensuring safe transport of the product to warehouses (for example, in Antananarivo) can amount to more than that sum per kilogram. 'But this amount varies, according to the trafficker involved,' explained Tombo Simon, a young dealer based in Ambanja. 'In our experience, from time to time and especially when we have more orders than usual, the transporters and farmers raise their prices. They also play on the rule of supply and demand,' he added. When finally sold to consumers, a kilogram of cannabis can earn a trafficker between AR100 000 and AR150 000.³⁷

'They shoot without warning'

Local government figures such as Arnel and members of the community expressed their support for creating a legalized cannabis market as a way of regularizing the profits and livelihoods that the trade brings to the local area.³⁸ However, creating a controlled and regulated market would face serious challenges. Slash-and-burn

agriculture, as used in cannabis production, has been identified as a leading cause of deforestation in Madagascar's northern reserves. These forests are home to many endangered species, several of which are unique to Madagascar.³⁹

Communities also report that cannabis trafficking groups in Analabe are heavily armed and impose their own rule of law in production areas.⁴⁰ Lieutenant Tahiana Antrefinomenjanahary, coordination officer at the Gendarmerie Nationale in Ambanja, said 'law enforcement do not dare venture into this region [Analabe]. These are truly cartels who don't hesitate to kill.' This was confirmed during focus group discussions with local members of central Antsahabe.⁴¹ Research by the GI-TOC has previously identified similar dynamics in Betroka in the south of Madagascar.⁴²

Colonel Mamy Marly Ramaromisamalala, head of the counter-narcotics unit in the high command of the Gendarmerie Nationale, gave more details. 'In the case of Analabe Ambanja, even the *gendarmes* cannot venture into the forests, because the traffickers have Kalashnikovs. They shoot without warning ... all military interventions in these regions demand specific precautions. We are very careful, because the traffickers benefit from their mastery of the terrain and support of the surrounding inhabitants.'

Lieutenant Tahiana Antrefinomenjanahary regards the cannabis market as a major factor in criminality and insecurity in the Analabe region. In his view, and also that of other law enforcement bodies in the region, the fight against organized cannabis-trafficking groups is one of their key priorities.⁴³ In contrast, other drugs markets in Madagascar, such as for heroin and cocaine, are not associated with high levels of violence. Previous GI-TOC research suggested that, at a national level, countering drugs markets has not been as high a priority for law enforcement as, for example, illegal trade in natural resources and wildlife.

Police resources in Madagascar are limited, which have rendered it difficult for police to control a vast and criminalized cannabis market effectively. In Madagascar's cities there is, on average, only one officer of the national police for every 3 000 inhabitants; in rural areas, where the Gendarmerie Nationale has jurisdiction, there is one *gendarme* for every 4 000 residents.⁴⁴



Colonel Mamy Marly Ramaromisamalala, head of the counter-narcotics unit in the high command of the Gendarmerie Nationale, displays a seized container filled with cannabis oil, February 2021.

Photo: Riana Raymonde Randrianarisoa

According to Raherimaminirainy Zoly Miandrisoa, former commander of the Gendarmerie Nationale brigade at Djamanjary on the island of Nosy Be, law enforcement in Madagascar does not have sufficient means to pursue cases of international export of cannabis. 'For the moment, we are content with local arrests of consumers and dealers,' he reported.⁴⁵

One widely used argument in favour of creating legal cannabis markets is that it could free up overstretched police resources to be used in countering more serious and violent crimes. Yet in Analabe, creating an effective regulated market would mean confronting groups involved in the cannabis market who present a violent challenge to the rule of law.

Not a political possibility in the near future

The legalization of cannabis in Madagascar, for any purpose, does not seem to be a major political possibility in the near future, in contrast to the situation in other countries in the region. The optimism of the population of Analabe and local political leaders has not yet resulted in a political shift at the national level. If Madagascar

were to follow the example of other eastern and southern African countries, any new policy would face a complex balance between the potential economic benefit to rural communities, governance issues endemic

in cannabis-producing regions, and concerns about the effect on biodiversity and the unique ecosystems of Madagascar.

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The new administration in the Seychelles fought the election on corruption issues. Are they addressing drug-related corruption?

In October 2020, a landmark presidential election took place in the Seychelles. Opposition candidate Wavel Ramkalawan unseated the incumbent, Danny Faure, in what was described as a 'political earthquake': the first victory for an opposition party in a presidential election since the Seychelles' independence from the UK over four decades ago.¹

Tackling corruption and illicit drugs markets were major themes in the election campaign. The Seychelles is home to a booming illegal drugs market, principally for heroin. The small island nation reports the highest rate of per capita heroin consumption in the world,² and there is a common public perception that corruption is widespread, which underpins the flourishing drugs market.

Several months into the new administration's term, questions remain as to whether they are taking action on corruption, and whether the new approach to addressing the drugs market is effective or rather doing harm to PWUD.

Corruption has moved up the political agenda

Countering corruption has long been a prominent issue in newly elected president Ramkalawan's political campaigning. As opposition leader, he pledged to eliminate corruption, nepotism and drug trafficking³ and accused the former president, James Michel, of inaction against known drug traffickers.⁴ Following the opposition's majority win in parliament in 2016, the Finance and Public Accounts Committee (FPAC), led by Ramkalawan, revealed



People queue to receive methadone at a mobile clinic in the Seychelles, November 2019.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

several anomalies in public spending, which helped put corruption on the political agenda.⁵

The FPAC revealed irregular payments amounting to 90 million rupees (US\$6.2 million) that involved the Financial Intelligence Unit and the National Drugs Enforcement Agency, now called the Anti-Narcotics Bureau (ANB). The payments were made to two offshore companies based in Mauritius.⁶ The Irish nationals managing these agencies at the time left the Seychelles among accusations of misconduct prior to these revelations.⁷

The 2020 election manifesto of Ramkalawan's party, LDS (the Linyon Demokratik Seselwa or Seychelles Democratic Alliance), argued 'it is clear that corruption has undermined government and society in our country. It has betrayed good governance principles, the rule of law and justice, and fairness in access to opportunity.' The party consequently pledged to investigate cases of corruption and implement new policies for combatting drug trafficking.⁸

These campaigns are thought to have resonated with the Seychelles electorate. 'The new government

campaigned on eradicating corruption in the last election. They probably won because of these promises,' said Andy Labonte, a member of the now-ruling LDS party in the National Assembly.⁹

Clive Camille, a journalist with the Seychelles broadcast network, TéléSesel, agreed: '[Since] the revelations by FPAC in parliament, corruption has been the talk in the country. Many people are angry about these allegations and want to see justice done.'¹⁰ Corruption and drugs markets have become high-priority policy issues in discussions on social media platforms among Seychelles' voters. In 2017, a survey by the Seychelles Anti-Corruption Commission found that 82.8% of the 15 000 participants considered corruption to be very high in the Seychelles.¹¹

Luciana Sophola, chairperson of the Seychelles civil society organization Association for Rights Information and Democracy, argued that investigations into corruption – relating not only to drugs but also to public-sector corruption as a whole – were often met with resistance. 'Before, with the old government, there were lots of *laissez faire* [approaches to corruption issues]. I am not blaming the president, but human



PWUD participating in the Seychelles methadone programme receive medication on Mahe island, Seychelles, November 2019.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

beings who could not care less'. She added that, in her experience, there had been many cases when people had reported corruption where the investigation would reach a certain level of seniority before being blocked with no action taken.¹²

The roots of this corruption can be traced back decades. Former president France Albert René, who came to power in a 1977 coup, reportedly ruled through systems of patronage and cronyism. René was accused of illegally confiscating land and property to put it into the hands of powerful families connected to his party, and of jailing and assassinating political rivals at home and in exile.¹³

René's strategies for maintaining power included illegal land grabbing from political opponents and misusing public money for political campaigns. The legacy of this era continues to shape political life in the Seychelles. Commenting on the recent election, Seychelles journalist Patrick Muirhead argued that the incumbent president 'was unable to distance his party's campaign from mounting evidence of past political murders, torture and corruption when Seychelles was still a one-party state'.¹⁴ Restricted media freedom in the Seychelles has, however, rendered it difficult for corruption to be widely discussed publicly and for journalists to investigate allegations of corruption.¹⁵

'Corruption is part of this national history, ingrained in the culture,' said Labonte. 'It will take some time to make people realize that this is not good practice and should stop.' Now that he is in office, Ramkalawan has reiterated pledges that his government will take firm action on drug trafficking and corruption.¹⁶

The Seychelles' drugs markets are a significant driver of corruption

Heroin is the most significant illegal market in the Seychelles.¹⁷ The number of heroin users has grown rapidly in recent years, with the Agency for the Prevention of Drug Abuse and Rehabilitation (APDAR) having estimated the number of users at 5 000–6 000 by November 2019, equivalent to around 10% of the island's working-age population.¹⁸ Other drugs, such as crack cocaine, are now also becoming more commonly used.¹⁹

PWUD interviewed by the GI-TOC in 2020 made repeated allegations that corruption is widespread among law enforcement structures. Some reported incidents of drug dealers being arrested but then

released after a payoff was made;²⁰ others reported instances of seized drugs being resold by police officers.²¹ According to interviewees from the Seychelles prison authority, street-level corruption among law enforcement officers has become increasingly brazen and 'normalized', with police officers having been witnessed taking bribes openly in front of colleagues and the public.²² Several interviewees – including former ANB officers and representatives of the prison service – specifically identified the ANB as being affected by corruption issues, and the problem extending to a high level.²³

Several months after the election, PWUD in the Seychelles report that these trends continue. 'Drug dealers are highly protected by government officials and police, as well as the drugs community. We know them,' said John. 'If the law enforcement and government official say they don't know who the big dealers are, they are telling you lies because those people are in their circle.'²⁴

'Brother, dealers are well protected by the police. Even if you know them, you cannot say anything,' agreed Thomas, another PWUD. Many PWUD echoed these statements, noting that certain traffickers benefit from police protection while investigations are targeted at their rivals.²⁵

Representatives of the Drug Utilization Response Network Seychelles (DURNS), a civil society organization run by current and former PWUD, support these claims.²⁶ DURNS representatives asked: 'Are you telling me the government cannot trace or do not know these people [major drug traffickers]? The small country that we are? No way.'²⁷

Raymond St. Ange, Superintendent of Prisons, acknowledged that corruption is also an issue among prison staff and that entrenched corruption may take a long time to change. 'Some people do not want to let go of the benefits of their corrupted activities,' he said. Given the cost of living in the Seychelles, he argued that the incentive to make money from corrupt activities is high and noted that '[many staff] are used to selling cigarettes [and] lighters and smuggling drugs inside the prison'. 'This is also the case for other government officials,' he noted. 'Many law enforcement officers let themselves get trapped in these activities.'²⁸

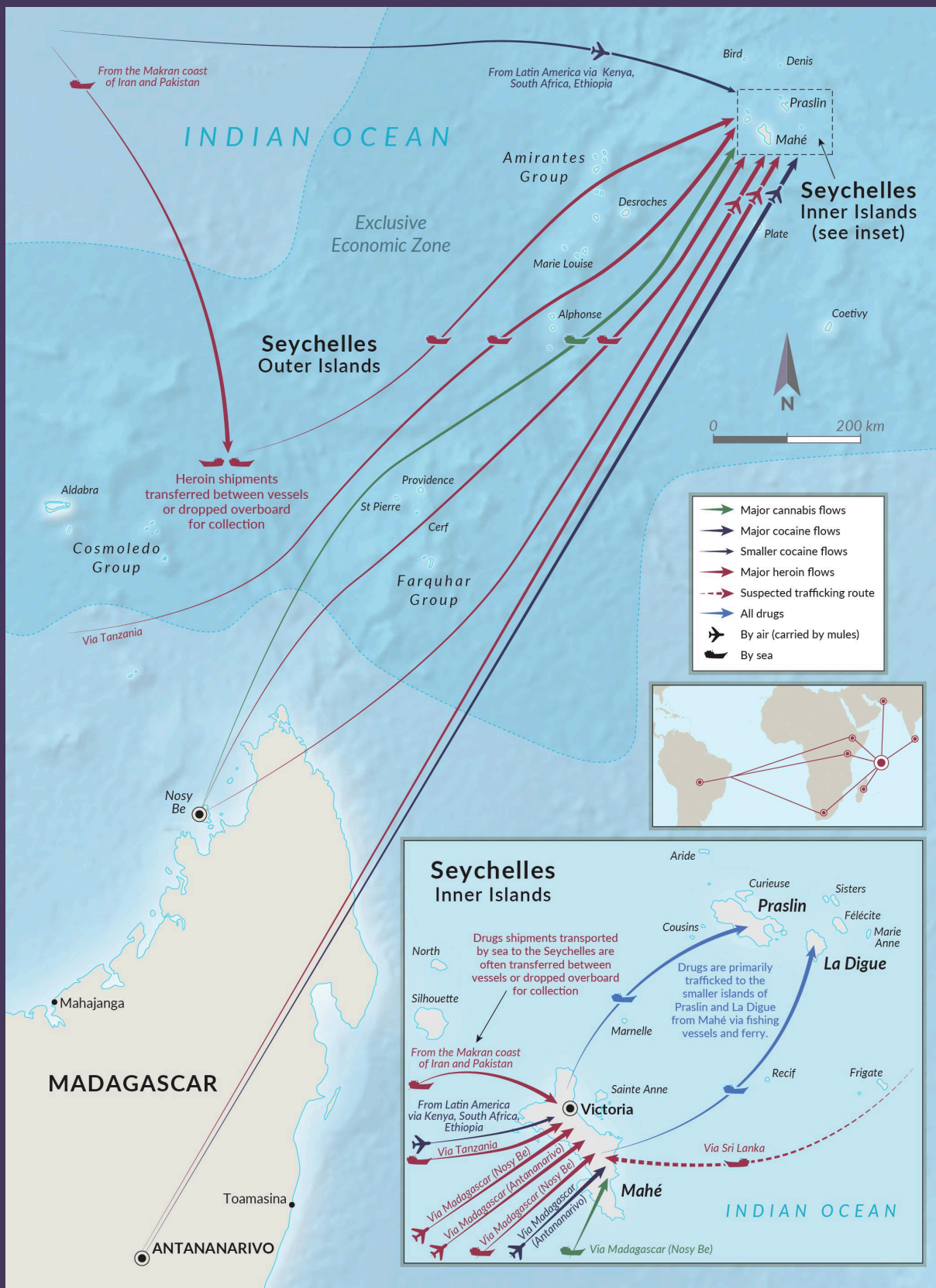


FIGURE 4 Drug flows in the Seychelles, 2020.



An anti-drug message daubs a wall in Mahe island, the largest in the Seychelles. A sharp rise in heroin use in the past decade means that, today the Seychelles has some of the highest rates of heroin use in the world, equivalent to nearly 10% of the national workforce.

Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP via Getty Images

The Seychelles' response to reported corruption

Reports of drug-related corruption and rising public frustration about corruption in government have not yet translated into criminal investigations and prosecutions. The Anti-Corruption Commission of the Seychelles reported to the GI-TOC that, as of March 2021, no cases of corruption have yet been criminally prosecuted or passed to the attorney general for criminal investigation.²⁹ The commission was created following new anti-corruption legislation that was passed in 2016. However, they report that to date no cases active under their mandate have picked up corruption allegations relating to drugs issues.³⁰

According to Clive Camille of TéléSesel, the lack of prosecutions does not reflect well on the new administration's claims to be acting on corruption. 'As a journalist I see this as a political tactic used by the political party in power to get more credibility and discredit the previous administration,' he said. 'We are just hearing "corruption, corruption", and yet no one has been prosecuted and sentenced.'³¹

But other commentators, including Sophola, pointed out that the new administration is in its infancy. 'Most people [expect action on corruption] to happen overnight. It is to be remembered that it has been only five months since the change in government,' she noted. Sophola argued that the new administration has been taking steps in the fight against corruption that would not have been politically possible before. For example, the president has encouraged greater freedom of information and transparency with the media by ministers, which is hoped to bring about a culture change in government.³²

The Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group report published in 2018 identified a number of deficiencies in the Seychelles' financial sector, which led to the country being included on the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions in 2020.³³ Although the country remains on the list following an update in February 2021,³⁴ the new administration has passed amendments to several pieces of legislation to address these deficiencies. The amendments include legislation to promote transparency about beneficial ownership of

companies and to facilitate information sharing between enforcement agencies investigating corruption and money laundering.³⁵ These changes have been welcomed by Transparency International Seychelles, which stated that such legislation has 'a defining role in strengthening efforts to prevent, curb and penalise corrupt activities'.³⁶

PWUD report more police harassment

Although it may be too early to fully assess the new administration's action on corruption, one change was consistently reported since the new administration took office. PWUD and DURNS representatives report that police patrols at street level have increased and police behaviour towards PWUD has become more aggressive.

'Now you see them [police] three to four times a day in the ghetto [area where drugs are used]', said Thomas. 'They come to harass us, taking away our syringes, which have just been given to us by APDAR, legally. They are more aggressive and abusive in their approach' he said.³⁷

Jane, another PWUD, agreed. She noted that ANB officers have become particularly aggressive towards the drug-using community. According to her, the situation has become 'worse than before', with officers confiscating and throwing away syringes used for injecting heroin, and using tear gas on PWUD.³⁸

These reports suggest that the new administration's tough stance on corruption and trafficking has driven a parallel law enforcement crackdown on PWUD. This follows claims in the LDS manifesto to 'eliminate' drug use in the country.³⁹ PWUD feel that they are being used for 'political mileage' by the new administration, in pursuit of policies that will increase the harm of drug use.⁴⁰

DURNS representatives said that PWUD they work with 'have expressed concern about the new way of doing things by the police: harassment and abusive behaviour. There is the fear that the policy would regress to zero tolerance like before.'⁴¹ 'Like before' refers to the period before 2016, when reforms were made to the Misuse of Drugs Act, and the subsequent establishment of APDAR. With these reforms, the Seychelles shifted towards a drug-use policy focused more on 'harm reduction' and established initiatives such as an extensive methadone programme. Before this shift, however, a 'zero tolerance' approach criminalized drug use. Jane concluded: 'Drug users are political tools, like pieces on a chessboard.'⁴²

It remains to be seen whether investigations and prosecutions into drug-related corruption will gain any traction under the new administration. In contrast, aggressive actions targeted at PWUD, such as confiscating syringes, undermine harm-reduction work by agencies such as APDAR, and do not address the links between drug trafficking and corruption.

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- 18 Figures for 2019 reported by APDAR and cited by the BBC: Kanika Saigal, Why Seychelles has the world's worst heroin problem, BBC, 21 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-50488877>; Addiction in paradise: Seychelles battles heroin crisis, France 24, 20 February 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200220-addiction-in-paradise-seychelles-battles-heroin-crisis>.
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- 21 Interview with an opposition party activist, 14 July 2020.
- 22 Interviews with: Mr. Raymond Saint-Ange, superintendent of prison services; Mr. Samir Ghislain, deputy superintendent; and Ms. Elsa Nourrice, principal probation officer and head of prison rehabilitation service, 26 May 2020.
- 23 One higher-level former officer described a culture within the ANB of falsely reporting on officers who are not corrupt to obstruct their career progression, interview with a former army and police officer, 26 June 2020. The ANB was uniquely identified in this respect by other sources in the Seychelles criminal justice system: Interview with Mr. Raymond St. Ange, superintendent of prison services, Mr. Samir Ghislain, deputy superintendent; and Ms. Elsa Nourrice, principal probation officer and head of prison rehabilitation service, 26 May 2020; interview with representatives of the Anti-Corruption Commission Seychelles, 16 June 2020; interview with a former police officer, Victoria, Mahe, 16 June 2020.
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- 25 Interviews with PWUD, Seychelles, in June–August 2020 and March 2021.
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- 27 Interview with representatives of DURNS, March 2021.
- 28 Interview with Raymond St. Ange, Victoria, Seychelles, 11 March 2021.
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- 33 The EU now lists 12 nations owing to concern that their policy environments support tax fraud or evasion, tax avoidance and money laundering. The EU's decision followed that of France adding the Seychelles to its own list some months before. Seychelles named to EU's tax-haven 'blacklist', Africa Times, 20 February 2020, <https://africatimes.com/2020/02/20/seychelles-named-to-eus-tax-haven-blacklist/>.
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- 37 Interview with PWUD, Thomas (name has been changed), Seychelles, March 2021.
- 38 Interview with PWUD, Jane (name has been changed), Seychelles, March 2021.
- 39 LDS 2020 General Elections Manifesto, p. 8 and p. 17, available at: <https://lds.sc/images/2020/PDF/Manifesto-LDS-25th-September-2020-Web-version.pdf> (accessed 13 April 2021).
- 40 Interview with representatives of DURNS, March 2021.
- 41 Interview with representatives of DURNS, March 2021.
- 42 Interview with PWUD, Jane (name has been changed), Seychelles, March 2021.

Parc Coson: What dynamics in the drug-dealing capital of Mauritius tell us about networks, protection structures and the challenges to responses.

On 10 March 2021, Mauritius entered its second lockdown to counter the spread of COVID-19 and all non-essential businesses closed. Yet in the area known as Parc Coson (Creole for ‘pig park’), a slum in the Roche Bois suburb of Port Louis and the drug-selling capital of the island, it was business as usual. Similar trends were seen in March 2020, when the drugs market boomed throughout lockdown. While vegetable prices soared owing to scarcity, heroin prices remained steady as supply appeared unaffected.¹

Both PWUD and academics at the University of Mauritius point to the resilience of the drugs market during COVID-19 and the lack of lockdown enforcement in Parc Coson as further evidence of corruption, which is the single greatest structural enabler of the island’s longstanding drugs market.²

The drugs market is by far the largest illicit economy in Mauritius. The country has long suffered from extremely high opiate consumption and falls only slightly behind the neighbouring Seychelles, which is afflicted by the highest opiate consumption rate in the world. Reports from the National Drug Observatory since 2016 point to a sustained increase in overall drug use year on year.³ Stakeholders interviewed during 2020 and early 2021 corroborated this, and pointed to an acceleration particularly in heroin use in 2020.⁴

Scrutinizing dynamics in Parc Coson during the two COVID-19 lockdowns in Mauritius provides insight into the evolving nature of the networks profiting from the trade, the protection structures underpinning the island’s drugs market, and the challenges undermining current government responses.



A queue to buy drugs at a key distribution point in Parc Coson, a drug-selling hotspot in Port Louis, Mauritius, October 2018. Although sheds identified as key distribution points have been destroyed since, sales have merely shifted elsewhere in the area, which remains the centre of the island’s drug economy.

Photo: Vel Moonien



Parc Coson is a key drug selling spot in Mauritius, and many PWUD travel to the area to buy drugs.

Photo: Vel Moonien

Dealing dynamics in the Mauritian drugs capital

Many PWUD travel to Parc Coson, near the port area of the capital, to buy drugs, making it the most profitable drug-selling spot on the island. Ali, who lives in Plaine Verte, a suburb close to Roche Bois, buys his doses of psychotropic pills and synthetic cannabinoids in Parc Coson. 'Drugs are available since early morning till late at night. Even during this second lockdown ... you can have your dose. Even the watchers are still on the lookout at Parc Coson'.⁵ Ali concluded that local police patrols are busy elsewhere enforcing lockdown.

Lookouts, known as 'martins' after a small bird common to Mauritius, are typically paid in drugs or between 1 000 and 1 300 rupees per day (US\$25–37); this amount is similar to the daily wage of a skilled manual labourer such as a stonemason.⁶ Access to Parc Coson is tightly controlled, and the lookouts will shout *crapaud!* ('toad' in Creole and French) to warn of approaching police.⁷ Casual observers looking to enter the area report being told that access is blocked by construction work, and purposefully steered away.

'The drug peddlers prey on deprived areas to run their business,' said Marie, a social worker in Parc Coson.⁸ Most residents of Parc Coson live in shacks with corrugated tin roofs propped up by eucalyptus poles, in stark contrast with the rapid development seen elsewhere on the island.

Parc Coson was 'drug and crime free long ago ... a kind of haven for the needy, who could not afford a house,' says Marie. Now 'there is some kind of stigmatization in the Mauritian society with regard to people living near



Mascarene martins are a species common to Mauritius. A 'martin' is also a term used in Mauritius to mean a lookout working for a drug dealer.

Photos: Dick Daniels via Wikipedia

this hotspot. No taxi will venture in this area at night, even if it's an emergency.'

Many Parc Coson residents are Rodriguans, who have emigrated from the nearby island in search of work and represent some of the poorest demographics in Mauritius. Rodriguans are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by drug networks and are prevalent among the lower echelons of networks in Parc Coson, finding employment as low-level dealers, 'go fasts' (who deliver drugs and transport money) or lookouts.⁹

The profitability of the Parc Coson's drugs trade has attracted many networks and dealers. However, growing demand keeps competition between networks in check, and players purportedly act like a cooperative, pooling finances to import drugs in bulk, with each then taking their share once the stock arrives on the island.

Four key players are under surveillance in Parc Coson: one individual entrepreneur, Hansley Selvanaden Moothoosamy, and three networks, namely Demolition, Suicide Squad (believed to operate as a subunit of Demolition) and Lekip Prelart ('Tarpauline Team').¹⁰ Moothoosamy is more commonly known as 'Gros Quart', after the generous 'quarter gram' of heroin he purportedly sells.

One of the most long-standing and powerful networks in the Mauritian drug trade, Demolition, has been operating for over a decade. The founders originally specialized in heroin trafficking, but later diversified their operations to include a broader range of drugs, such as



Members of the network known as the 'Suicide Squad', celebrating with bottles of Johnnie Walker Red Label. This brand of whisky, together with the heavy golden jewellery sported by some members, are typical trappings of the flashy lifestyles of the 'new generation' of dealers in Mauritius.

Photo: Social media

synthetic cannabinoids. The founders, two cousins, operate discretely, making efforts to avoid the flashy trappings of wealth.

In contrast, Gros Quart, Suicide Squad and Tarpauline Team typify a new generation of dealers, who sport flashy lifestyles evidenced by heavy gold jewellery, gold teeth, luxury SUVs and expensive liquor (Johnnie Walker Red Label whisky is a particular favourite).¹¹ Stories of dealers flaunting their wealth abound: one Parc Coson dealer reportedly used two bottles of champagne (each costing approximately 10 000 rupees) to clean the windscreen of his Porsche Cayenne and to bathe his flip-flopped feet.¹²

The Anti-Drugs and Smuggling Unit (ADSU) arrested Gros Quart on 27 February 2021, being in possession of over 1 million rupees in cash, gold jewellery and 2.4 grams of cannabis.¹³ Charged with money laundering, Gros Quart remains in jail pending full trial. The use of money laundering charges against Gros Quart is in line with a broader strategy leveraged by ADSU and the Independent Commission Against

Corruption (ICAC) to prosecute suspected mid- and higher-level dealers, who are often difficult to catch with large amounts of drugs.

Corruption in Parc Coson

Although Parc Coson has been a key drug distribution point for over a decade, its notoriety surged in 2018 following a media report showing a queue of over 50 people lining up at a shed in the area to buy drugs (see the photograph on page 19).¹⁴

This triggered ADSU to bulldoze the shed and Aadil Ameer Meea, opposition MP of Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East's constituency, to repeatedly raise the issue of drug trafficking in Parc Coson in Parliament.¹⁵

'The situation hasn't change since 2018,' stated Meea, interviewed in February 2021. 'Why can't the police arrest the drug peddlers? Is there collusion between them and the local ADSU team? ... Is there a lack of will to stop them?'¹⁶ Meea's questions were repeatedly echoed by stakeholders interviewed in Parc Coson and elsewhere in Mauritius.

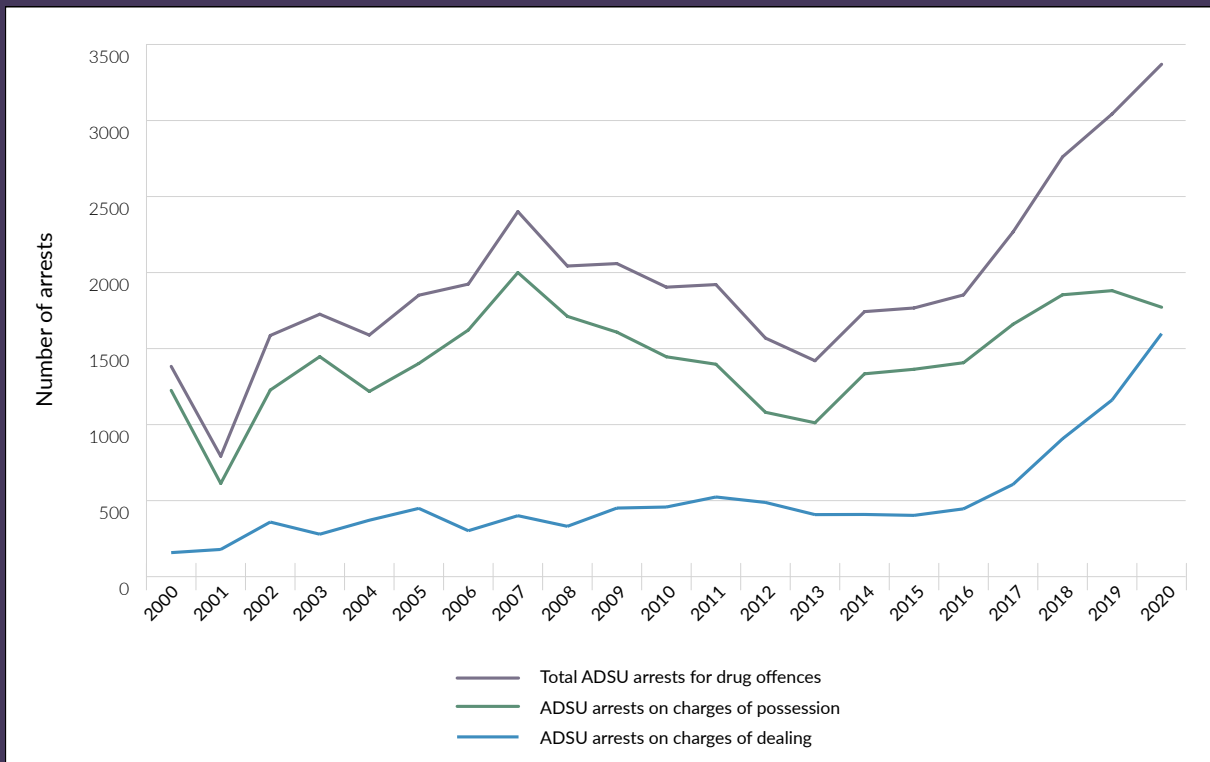


FIGURE 5 ADSU arrest data from 2000 to 2020, disaggregated by arrests for possession and arrests for dealing.

Source: ADSU

Marie suggested that ‘some officers [in Parc Coson] are doing their job. You can’t blame all the police force for one rotten apple.’¹⁷ However, PWUD, prison officials and lawyers interviewed in 2020 and early 2021 were consistent in their observations that corruption is widespread within the ADSU, with one ICAC official dubbing the unit ‘rotten’ owing to corruption.¹⁸

Corruption is particularly acute in units tasked with patrolling highly profitable drugs hotspots; two members of the ADSU unit patrolling Parc Coson, including a senior officer, are currently under investigation by ICAC for allegedly conspiring to transport drugs in police vehicles.¹⁹

The Constitutional Commission of Inquiry found corruption to be endemic across Mauritius’ criminal justice infrastructure, and recommended disbandment of the ADSU in 2018.²⁰ Like the vast majority of the 460 recommendations made by the commission, this recommendation has not yet been implemented,

engendering widespread frustration at a perceived stagnation in the government’s response to the drugs market.²¹ Many commentators point to high-level protection of the drugs market, not only in law enforcement but also across other state institutions, as the most significant obstacle to an effective response.

State response to the drugs market

The government’s response to the drugs market is heavily premised on interdiction,²² as reflected in ADSU arrest figures increasing from 1 767 in 2015 to almost 3 400 in 2020 for drug-related offences.²³ However, despite the increase in arrests there has been an ‘upsurge in drug trafficking’ since 2015.²⁴ Stakeholders interviewed for this research emphasized that arrests have little impact and that the response is increasingly falling behind.²⁵

Meea suggested one reason for the limited impact of growing arrests: ‘We only see PWUD being arrested for

possession of drugs.²⁶ PWUD similarly argue that the focus of ADSU is on arresting PWUD, not higher-level dealers.²⁷

These observations are supported by ADSU arrest statistics in Roche Bois, the suburb encompassing Parc Coson: the vast majority of arrests are for possession of heroin, and only 16% for dealing.²⁸ However, despite ADSU arrest statistics across Mauritius evidencing greater rates of arrests for possession, they also reflect a sizeable and growing proportion of arrests for dealing: 38% of arrests in 2019 and 47% in 2020.²⁹ ADSU officials state that, particularly since 2019, the unit has been focused on arresting dealers, in part as a strategy to dissuade the youth from entering the drugs market.³⁰

A move away from arrests on possession charges, which typically involve PWUD, is to be lauded. However, approaches centred on interdiction are doomed to fail, particularly in the context of Mauritius' drugs markets, which have been highly fragmented since 2015.

The explosion of trade in synthetic cannabinoids since 2015 has fundamentally transformed the structure of the drugs market, which was originally built around profits from heroin trafficking.³¹ While heroin trafficking requires connections with overseas suppliers, synthetic cannabinoids and their precursors can be purchased online and imported by mail order, lowering dealers' barrier to entry. This prompted 'a democratization of the [drugs] trade'³² and a spike of new entrants, attracted by the lucrative profits.

A growing number of PWUD and small-scale dealers became *ti patron* (Creole for 'small kingpins') and formed independent but interconnected networks that grew in parallel to existing networks, expanding the drugs marketplace.³³ In the words of one ADSU official: 'Everyone can be a kingpin today.' This undermines the impact of ADSU arrests, as one 'kingpin' is quickly replaced by another.³⁴

Notes

- 1 Telephonic interview with a former drug dealer, Rose-Hill, July 2020; interviews with PWUD across Mauritius between May and September 2020, and in February 2021.
- 2 Interviews with PWUD across Mauritius between May and September 2020, and in February 2021; interview with academics at the University of Mauritius, January 2021, by phone.
- 3 Republic of Mauritius, Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, National Drug Observatory Report, March 2018,

Conclusion

Despite COVID-19 lockdowns and border closures, Mauritius' drugs market is booming. The dramatic expansion of the drugs marketplace since 2015 materially increased the scale of drugs profits, and shaped the island's emerging 'gang culture'.

The government's response to the drugs market is undermined by endemic corruption, which weakens law enforcement and is reported to penetrate the higher echelons of the state. In addition, the continued focus on interdiction as a core pillar of the state's response appears to yield few results, similar to the scant success of such strategies elsewhere. A strategy focused on arrests, typically of low- or mid-level players, is flawed. At best arrests have little impact; at worst they do significant harm to PWUD, drawing them into the criminal justice system and minimizing opportunities for licit employment in future.

A pivot in approach and greater recognition of corruption within state infrastructure are required. ADSU's shift away from arrests for possession should be accelerated and arrests of PWUD avoided. Interventions in the drugs market should seek to offer alternative employment opportunities to vulnerable and marginalized segments of society, who, like the Rodriguan population, are often at heightened risk of recruitment as consumers and dealers. Such interventions are urgently required given the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism, a key pillar of the island's economy and a prominent source of employment.

Further, greater resources should be directed to ICAC, not only to bolster follow-the-money approaches but also to encourage investigations into mid- and high-level corruption within state institutions, which underpins the flourishing drugs market.

https://health.govmu.org/Documents/Main Page/New/NDO_MOH_FINAL_JOSE_VERSION_05July_2018_Brown.pdf.

- 4 Interview with former senior police officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with rehabilitation worker, Mauritius, June 2020; interviews with PWUD across Mauritius between May and September 2020, and in February 2021.
- 5 Interview on 7 February 2021, Plaine Verte.
- 6 Interview with PWUD, Upper Plaines Wilhems, June 2020.
- 7 Interviews with PWUD, Port Louis, 13 June 2020.

- 8 Interview 14 March 2021, by phone.
- 9 Interview with Marie, 14 March 2021, by phone; interview with an investigator at the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), 4 July 2020; interview with senior prison official, 23 May 2020; interview with rehabilitation worker, 18 June; telephonic interview with PWUD, 13 July 2020.
- 10 Discussions with officials at ADSU, February–March 2021; interviews with PWUD, Parc Coson, February–March 2021.
- 11 When ICAC started identifying expensive cars in their investigations into money laundering linked to drug traffickers, some dealers sold their flashy models and purchased more modest ones. Similarly, while gold or platinum teeth were a key trend, they became less popular (with some dealers actually removing them) after the ICAC reportedly declared that they were suspicious. Moothoosamy's social media presence shows all the trappings of this flashy lifestyle: gold teeth, heavy gold jewellery, clubbing and liquor.
- 12 This marks a departure from the more discrete operations of dealers a decade ago, some of whom continue to be prominent, particularly in the higher echelons of the wholesale heroin market. This has caused stakeholders to lament an emerging 'gang culture' in Mauritius, associated with an aspiration pull among youngsters. ICAC has used these trappings of wealth to their benefit in bringing money laundering charges against dealers such as Gros Quart. Interview with X7, senior prison official, Mauritius, 22 May 2020.
- 13 Moothoosamy was previously arrested in 2019 and 2020, and was on bail awaiting trial at the time of his arrest in 2021. Although Moothoosamy is believed to live in Cité Roche-Bois (the social housing estate of Roche Bois), he was cornered in his bungalow in a wealthier area in Péreybère, a coastal tourist village in the north of Mauritius. Defimedia.info, Opération de l'Adsu à Péreybère: un maçon pris avec Rs 1,1 M, de la drogue et des bijoux, 2 March 2021, <https://defimedia.info/operation-de-ladsu-pereybere-un-macon-pris-avec-rs-11-m-de-la-drogue-et-des-bijoux>.
- 14 Around ten years ago, many dealers operated in the nearby Karo Kalyptis area. However, with the slums in this area being replaced by social housing, a significant proportion of dealing shifted to Parc Coson. Interview with Marie, social worker in Parc Coson, 14 March 2021, by phone; ION NEWS, 5 October 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iC88I52qpVQ>.
- 15 Meea is MP for the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), currently in opposition. For an example of the parliamentary questions raised by Meea, see: Parliamentary Debates, 13 September 2019, <https://mauritiusassembly.govmu.org/Documents/Hansard/2019/hansard3019.pdf>.
- 16 Interview, 8 February 2021.
- 17 Interview, 14 March 2021, by phone.
- 18 Interview with an ICAC investigator, 4 July 2020.
- 19 The initial investigation was fuelled, in part, by an anonymous letter sent to ICAC in December 2019 regarding payment of protection money by drug traffickers operating in of the neighbouring areas of Karo Kalyptis and Parc Coson.
- 20 Republic of Mauritius, Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking, report, July 2018, <http://cut.mu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Commission-of-Enquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-Report-optimized.pdf>.
- 21 The government reported fast-paced implementation of the commission's recommendations – an official government press release stated that 80 had already been implemented by October 2018. However, interviewed stakeholders unanimously disagreed, stating that nothing has been done. Many interviewees suggested that only two minor recommendations had been implemented by mid 2020, namely the banning of cigarettes, which are used as currency, and postal money orders in prison. Government Information Service, Prime Minister's Office, Mauritius, Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Drug Trafficking contains some 460 recommendations, says Prime Minister, 17 October 2018, <http://www.govmu.org/English/News/Pages/Report-of-the-Commission-of-Inquiry-on-Drug-Trafficking-contains-some-460-recommendations,-says-Prime-Minister.aspx>; Lucia Bird and Julia Stanyard, Changing Tides: The evolving illicit drug trade in the western Indian Ocean, Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, forthcoming.
- 22 Arrest figures of 'consumers and traffickers' are tracked as an 'indicator' across several of the pillars of the strategy for addressing the drug market, Mauritius National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023.
- 23 Arrest figures shared by ADSU, and set out in: Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/NationalDrugControlMasterPlan_Master_04092019.pdf. As of 2019, there were 5 496 persons on the methadone programme, and 47 needle-exchange programme sites. See Mauritius National Observatory Report 2019, <https://mroiti.govmu.org/Communique/Nationaldrugobservatoryreport2019Final.doc> 11.pdf.
- 24 The 'upsurge' in drugs trafficking was unanimously identified by interviewed stakeholders, and also mentioned in the National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/NationalDrugControlMasterPlan_Master_04092019pdffinal.pdf.
- 25 Interview with senior prison official, 22 May 2020; interview with academic at University of Mauritius, January 2021, by phone. Lawyers, law enforcement officers, PWUD and rehabilitation workers interviewed between May and September 2020, and in February 2021, repeated these sentiments.
- 26 Interview with Aadil Ameer Meea, opposition MP of Port Louis Maritime & Port Louis East's Constituency, 8 February 2021.
- 27 Interview with former PWUD, who now works as a social worker Upper Plaines Wilhems, 12 June 2020.
- 28 This is also reflected in ADSU's 2020 arrest statistics for Plaine Verte, another suburb in Port Louis, and across ADSU arrest data more broadly. It should be noted that arrests do not necessarily result in convictions, which are often more difficult to achieve on dealing charges. Illustratively, in 2019, 92% of convictions for drug offences were for either possession or use, with only 4% relating to dealing or importation. Mauritius National Observatory Report 2019.
- 29 Arrest figures shared by ADSU, and set out in: Republic of Mauritius, National Drug Control Master Plan 2019–2023, https://dha.govmu.org/Lists/DocumentsLinks/Attachments/15/NationalDrugControlMasterPlan_Master_04092019.pdf.
- 30 The proportion of arrests for dealing charges has been growing year on year since 2018 (when dealing constituted 33% of arrests). Interview with ADSU officials, 13 April 2021, by phone. Arrest data shared by ADSU.
- 31 Interview with senior counsel, State Law Office, Mauritius, 17 June 2020; interview with senior prison official, 22 May 2020.
- 32 Interview with Jérôme Boule, former chairman of the Fact-Finding Committee on Drugs and former MP, Mauritius, 19 June 2020; interview with high-ranking ADSU officer, Mauritius, June 2020; interview with senior counsel, State Law Office, 17 June 2020.

- 33 Interview with senior prison official, 23 May 2020.
- 34 Interview with high-ranking ADSU officer, June 2020. By mid 2020, ADSU reported having arrested 20–25 'high-level kingpins'.
Interview with senior ADSU official, 11 July 2020.

The case of Wandile Bozwana: A killing that epitomizes the role of assassinations in South Africa today.

Assassinations, politics, the taxi industry and big business are interlinked in South Africa. This nexus is embodied by the case of Wandile Bozwana, who was killed in October 2015 while stopped at a traffic light in the country's capital city, Pretoria. He was shot nine times and died a billionaire, having built his fortune acquiring government contracts.

Bozwana's death was one assassination among many. The GI-TOC's work monitoring assassination trends in South Africa has recorded a total of 1 822 hits in the country between 2000 and 2020. In Gauteng, the province where Bozwana was killed, 200 assassinations have been recorded between 2015 and 2020.¹

Assassinations, or 'hits' – by which we generally mean targeted killings that involve a hired hitman, carried out for economic, personal or political gain – have an extremely detrimental impact on South Africa's ongoing democratic project and often fragile institutions, creating fear, uncertainty and instability.

The taxi industry and its role in South Africa's assassinations

Vusi 'Khekhe' Mathibela, the person accused of arranging the hitmen who killed Bozwana, is currently on trial. Mathibela has built a formidable empire for himself in the taxi industry. He is from Mamelodi, an informal settlement north-east of Pretoria.

Mathibela was arrested after one of his co-accused identified him on CCTV and pointed out Bozwana, who was shopping at the luxurious Sandton City in Johannesburg with his partner on the day he was killed. In statements from his co-accused, Mathibela is said to have organized and paid for the hit. However, the statements have since been withdrawn by the co-accused, saying that they were obtained under duress.²

The taxi industry is a big part of South African culture, but has also long been linked to violence.³ It started as a grey market that provided transport and economic opportunities to black South Africans during the apartheid regime. The industry remains the core means of transport for the country's workforce. It is estimated that this part of the transport industry has 200 000 minibus taxis,⁴ generates R90 billion in revenue annually,⁵ and provides employment to hundreds of thousands of people.

However, the industry has long been notorious for its violence and lack of control by formal regulation. Assassinations in the taxi industry can be linked to competition for taxi routes or leadership battles within associations. It also provides a recruitment pool from where hitmen can be hired for assassinations outside the taxi industry.⁶



Police officers in Pretoria attend the scene where South African businessman Wandile Bozwana (left) was shot dead in his car in October 2015.

Photos: Facebook; Thapelo Maphakela/Gallo Images.

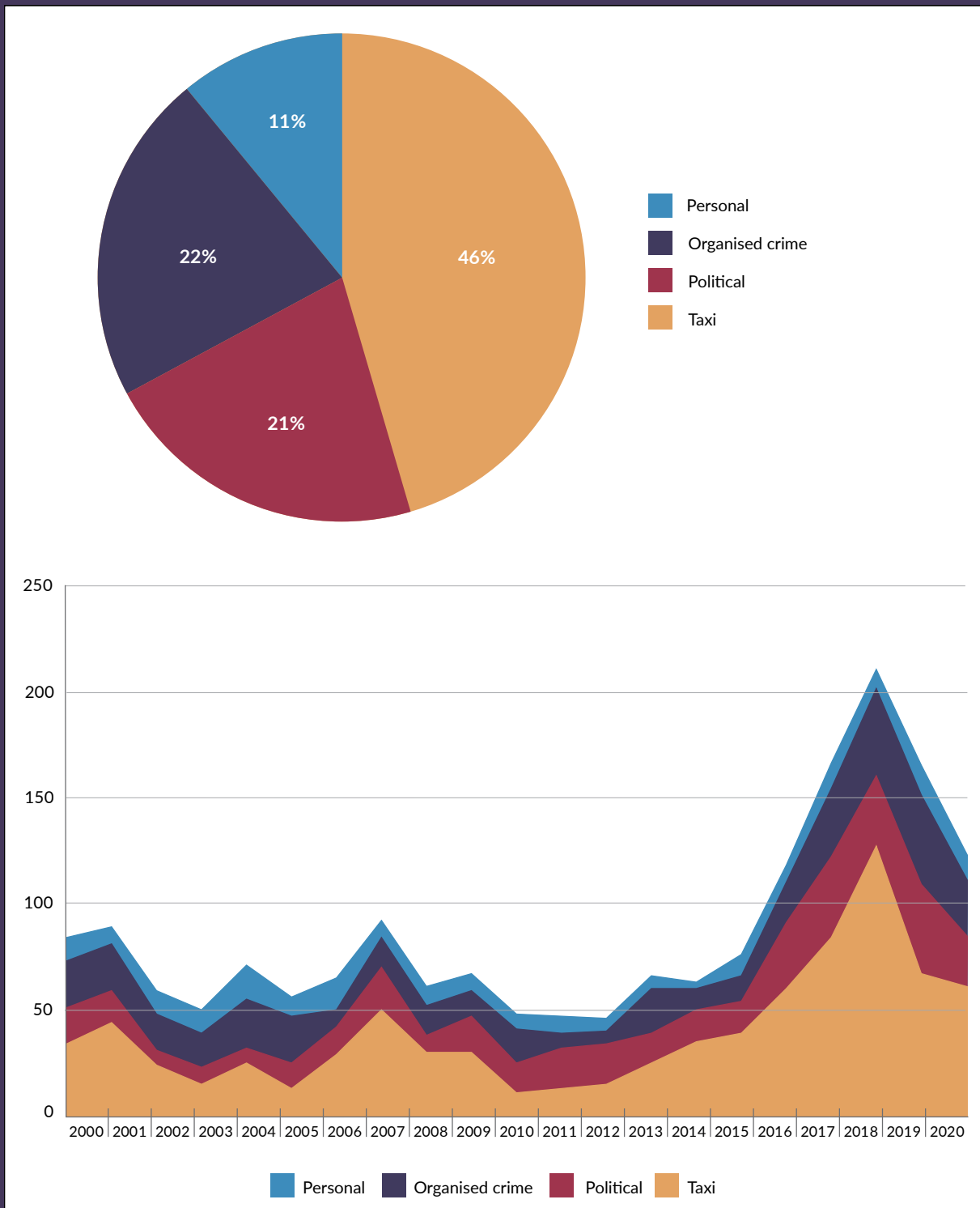


FIGURE 6 Assassinations in South Africa 2000–2020, broken down by category and by year.

Source: Forthcoming GI-TOC report on assassinations in South Africa, 2000–2020. For previous GI-TOC monitoring, see Assassinations Witness, <https://assassinationwitness.org.za>.

In the GI-TOC's data gathering on assassinations in South Africa, the taxi industry merited its own category because of the sheer prevalence of assassinations in this business. Of the hits recorded between 2015 and 2020, 51% were connected to the industry.⁷

In practice, Mathibela ran the Mamelodi Amalgamated Taxi Association (MATA). He rose to power because his uncle was in the industry and, as his own members have testified via affidavit, he was extorting money out of taxi drivers and inciting violence towards those who did not comply with payment.⁸ The association was put under administration as a consequence of the violence and his influence has since diminished.

The current administrator of MATA, Hettie Groenewald, has been involved in the taxi industry for decades and describes in a practical way how to manage this volatile industry: 'Keep your members happy. Let them feel they are part of an association. So when they think violence will erupt, then they will come to me,' she says. This prevents splinter groups from forming. 'No one assists these people,' she says, which includes the local (Mamelodi) police. 'We try to prevent violence before it gets out of hand.'⁹

Political influence and assassinations

Bozwana was a businessman with prominent political connections. One of the most compelling set pieces of the Bozwana story is a boxing match between Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao in Las Vegas in May 2015 (before Bozwana's assassination). This fight was billed as 'the battle for greatness'. Bozwana allegedly lent a prominent South African politician, Fikile Mbalula, a large sum of money in order to attend. Mbalula strongly denied this after it had been reported by several newspapers.¹⁰ If the allegation were true, it would point to how intertwined Bozwana was with key figures in the ANC, South Africa's governing party.

A more curious matter is a meeting between Bozwana, Mbalula and Mathibela at Emperor's Palace, a casino complex not far from the Johannesburg International Airport – just two days before the assassination. The soon-to-be-murdered Bozwana, the then minister of police, and the man who would eventually be arrested for organizing Bozwana's assassination – all together at a casino. Mbalula spoke at Bozwana's funeral: 'He was a generous man. He was one person I would abuse financially. And sometimes for political reasons,' he

said.¹¹ Mbulala has admitted to being friends with Bozwana, and with his alleged assassin.

Bozwana also saw another high-ranking politician, Supra Mahumapelo (and a long-standing member of the ANC), as an adversary. Mahumapelo was the premier of South Africa's North West province before being ousted amid violent protests against him in 2018. Mahumapelo has repeatedly been accused of being the person who ordered the hit against Bozwana. Mahumapelo has vehemently and repeatedly denied these accusations. Themba Gwabeni, one of Mahumapelo's most vocal opponents, has stated that Bozwana was killed because he opposed the North West government, and Mahumapelo in particular, for being involved in business while serving as a politician.

What makes Gwabeni's accusation of Mahumapelo's ordering the murder more compelling is that it was echoed by one of the hitmen – a gang member – upon his arrest. The man turned state witness and filed an affidavit with the Gauteng police's Provincial Investigations Unit in which he claimed that Mahumapelo ordered the hit on Bozwana. Mahumapelo has strongly denied this in the media.¹²

Politically connected hits are a major phenomenon in South Africa. The GI-TOC's analysis of reported assassinations covers four major categories: taxi industry, organized crime, political and personal. A total 338 political hits were recorded between 2015 and 2020, reaching a peak in 2019.¹³ Hits related to politics and organized crime often overlap, as disputes emerge over government tender allocations. Political and organized crime hits in Gauteng, where Bozwana was killed, saw an increase from 2016 to 2018, and then declined again in 2019 and 2020.¹⁴

The history of the ANC is rife with political killings, as different factions have been known to turn to violence to settle disputes. These have been particularly concentrated in KwaZulu-Natal, where rates of political assassinations dwarf those elsewhere in the country. Between 2015 and 2020, 103 assassinations were recorded here, more than five times what has been recorded in any other province in South Africa.¹⁵

The GI-TOC's analysis shows that assassinations in KwaZulu-Natal tend to peak around election times, or in key municipalities where community protests are prominent or where local councils are in financial

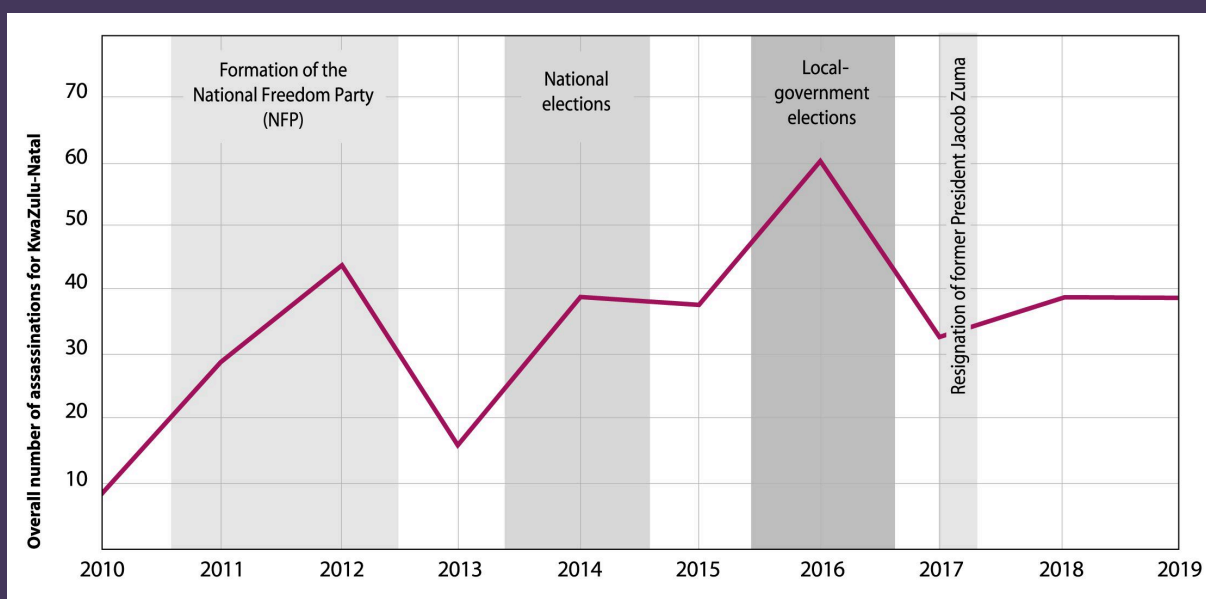


FIGURE 7 Assassinations of political leaders, office holders, state officials, community leaders and activists in KwaZulu-Natal from 2010 to 2019, correlated to election periods.

straits.¹⁶ The circumstances of the killings suggest that some may be interfactional battles for control of local government positions – which present opportunities for unscrupulous officials to enrich themselves by controlling lucrative government contracts. During the 2016 local government elections, at least 60 people were assassinated across the province. In other cases, protest leaders are systematically targeted to silence their (usually justified) demands for improved service delivery and an end to corruption.

Assassinations seem to occur where political and business interests clash. The mining industry in KwaZulu-Natal has seen increased opposition to its operations among neighbouring communities. It seems that this conflict has evolved into deadly violence, making mining the new frontier of assassinations in KwaZulu-Natal: there have been at least 38 assassinations and 14 attempted assassinations in mining localities since 2016. Activists and community members opposing mining interests as well as local political officials have been targeted.¹⁷

An eternal dispute

In October 2021 it will be six years since Bozswana's murder. Bozswana's alleged assassins are still on trial and there is no sign that the political actors in the case will be held accountable.

South Africa's criminal justice system has not been immune to the scourge of assassinations, with a number of cases involving the assassination of magistrates, judges, attorneys or witnesses in trials. Since 2016, there have been at least six assassinations or attempted assassinations of criminal lawyers in South Africa.¹⁸ In the most recent example, three gang members were jailed in April 2021 for an attempted hit on William Booth, a prominent Cape Town lawyer who has represented high-profile criminal figures.¹⁹

The violence and threats of violence in this sphere create a pervasive climate of fear, which may have far-reaching consequences. Judges, lawyers and magistrates may feel compelled to compromise their professional integrity, for example by influencing other members of the criminal justice system. Witnesses may also be intimidated and so retract crucial evidence.

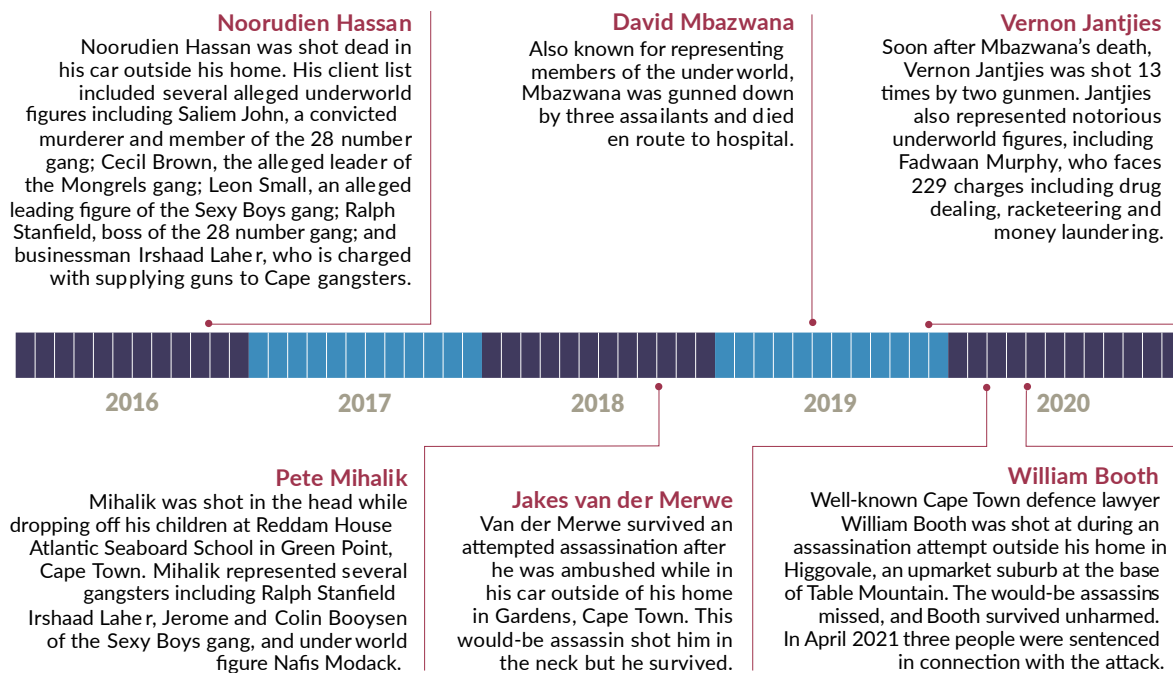


FIGURE 8 Assassinations and assassination attempts on South African lawyers from 2017 to April 2021.

Source: Compilation of media reporting.

Assassinations have similar impacts across all sectors of society. This form of murder is used to manipulate and exert power over politics, business, the criminal justice

system and personal relationships. The case of Bozswana, a prominent politically connected businessman, shows this in action.

'Too Many Enemies' explores the assassination of a billionaire. Brought to you by The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, in partnership with News24 and produced by Volume. Over six episodes, 'Too Many Enemies' will look at what the assassination of Wandile Bozswana means for the state of politics, crime and justice in South Africa today. It's a story involving top politicians, taxi bosses, assassins and flamingos. Available at: <https://player.captivate.fm/episode/72975320-cd8c-4043-9006-d731eba432f2>.



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