

# (IL)LICIT LIVELIHOODS IN AFRICA DRUG POLICY AND REPRODUCTION OF POVERTY

Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe

## Background

- Drug policies in Africa are rarely designed from a development lens.
- Small operators involved in cannabis and tramadol are often prevented from making a livelihood, as their activities are criminalised.
- State policy view these substances as dangerous drugs to society when not regulated and clamps down on their usage in African societies.
- However, it is often the case that the state fails to provide basic development services, forcing these smallholder producers/operators to produce and/or trade drugs to meet their basic needs.
- Illicit livelihoods are an alternative way of inducing 'positive change' in people's lives, that is contrary to the narrow state and international visions of 'development' which is not attainable for most.
- Attempts to liberalise the drugs sector have produced policies that promote the interests of corporate agribusinesses with limited role or participation of smallholder operators.
- Thus, drug policies contribute to the reproduction of poverty in the affected communities/societies.

## Aims & Objectives

- To illustrate the impact of African drug policies on local communities.
- To highlight the development issues that are often neglected when implementing measures associated with the global war on drugs.
- To examine the impacts and tensions arising from the criminalisation of drug-linked livelihoods.
- To bring to light the narratives of small-scale operators contesting these interventions and their perception of the licit and illicit.

## Qualitative methods

- Research on policies regulating psychoactive substances in four African countries: tramadol (Nigeria) and cannabis (Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe);
- In-depth interviews to gather the narratives of small producers/operators, government officials, international organizations and civil society representatives;
- UN and government reports/statistics on drugs, media sources related to tramadol in Nigeria and cannabis in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe;
- Archival material;
- Data from published material;
- Historical and thematic analysis.

## Preliminary Findings



The criminalisation of drug-linked activities in the absence of alternative means of livelihoods exacerbates poverty in Africa.



Current legalisation of cannabis production for medical and scientific purposes promotes corporate capture while limiting the participation of small producers/operators.



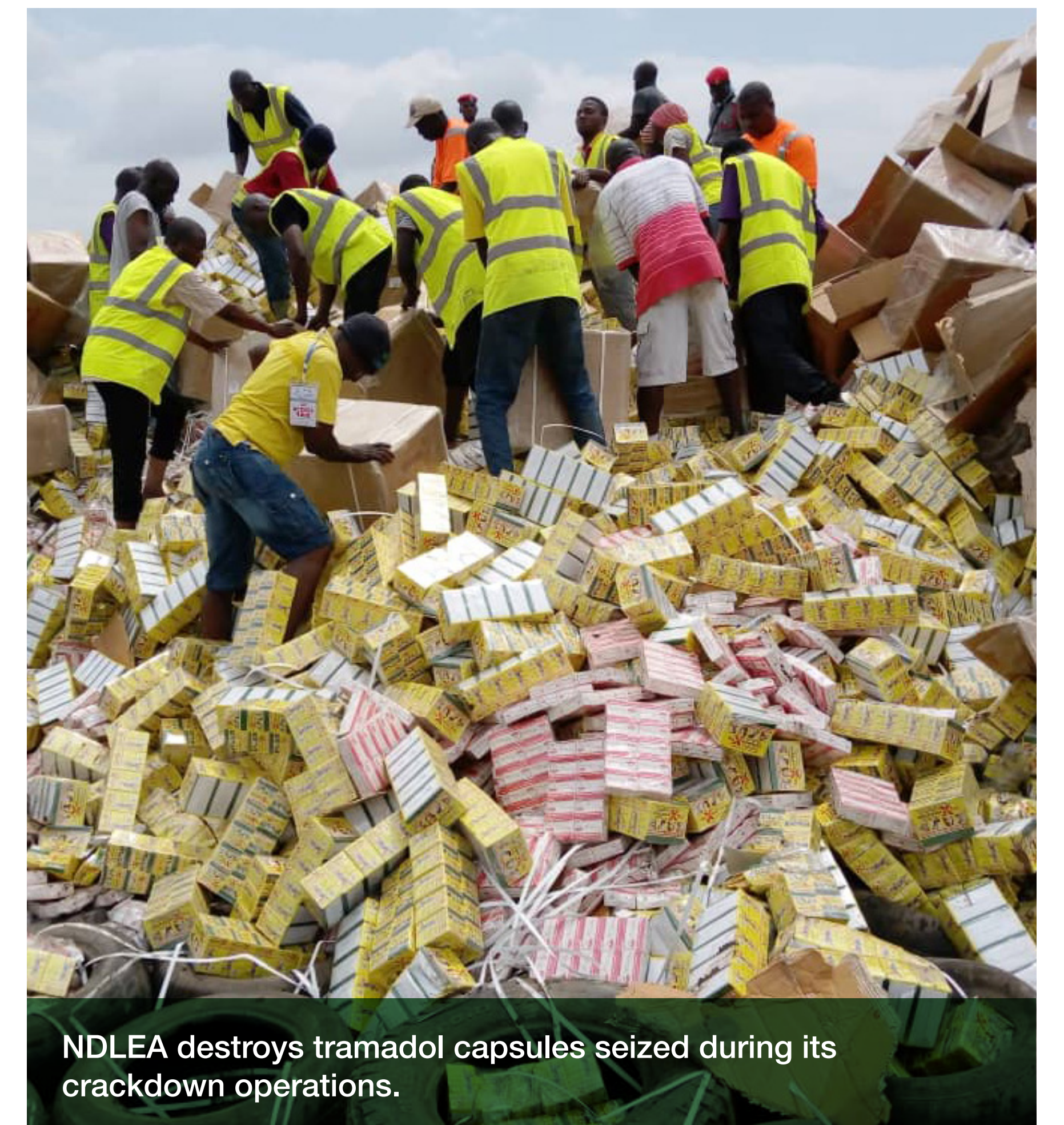
Uneven distribution of benefits deepens economic inequalities.



Marginalised small-scale operators tend to be disproportionately affected by criminalising measures which entrap them into a circle of poverty.



Small producers/operators challenge the legitimacy of these policies noting the blurred line between licit and illicit.



NDLEA destroys tramadol capsules seized during its crackdown operations.

## Policy recommendations

- Rethink orthodox approaches to drug policy in Africa which currently focuses on criminalisation rather than development;
- Ensure the participation of small operators when developing drug policy reforms;
- Provide impoverished communities with access to health care and education to lessen reliance on (il)licit activities;
- Legal cannabis production should not be limited to medical and scientific purposes, but inclusive policies should accommodate the current activities of smallholders in cannabis production and trade in tramadol.

Images credit: Nigerian National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)

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## Projects

Hidden Narratives of Il/licit Livelihoods in West Africa

Cannabis Africana: Drugs and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

## Partners

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