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Mind-blowing: The cannabis trade in Southern Africa

Peter Gastrow

Institute for Security Studies, Cape Town

gastrow@issct.co.za

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Introduction

There is probably no illicit market that benefits Southern Africa's poor more than the thriving market for cannabis (*Cannabis sativa*, commonly known as marijuana, or *dagga* in South Africa). The peasant producers in Tanzania, Swaziland, South Africa, or Lesotho only get a minute slice of what is earned by the sophisticated criminal groups who export the processed crop to Europe and elsewhere. However, for the thousands of primary producers who sell cannabis to middlemen, the modest returns enable them to eke out a living at a time when it is becoming more difficult to do so from conventional cash crops. It is illegal to grow and sell cannabis, but the growing global demand determines that the earnings from supplying cannabis outweigh the risks of doing so. As a result, during the past five years Southern African countries have increasingly become global suppliers of cannabis.

Cannabis is the most consumed drug in the world and therefore the subject of most trafficking.¹ According to the UN's report on illicit drugs trends in 2002,² there was a significant increase in cannabis trafficking worldwide between 1999 and 2000, which is commensurate with the global increase in cannabis use. The UN Drug Control Program (UNDCP) estimated that 147 million people (3.5% of the global population aged 15 and above) used cannabis in 1998-2000.³ In particular, large numbers of young people experiment with cannabis. Cannabis abuse is increasing in many countries, but stabilising in those where it has already reached high levels. It has increased in Europe, the Americas and Africa and decreased in South and South-West Asia.⁴ Overall the international demand for cannabis appears to be growing.

Cannabis is regarded as a relaxant or a mild hallucinogenic drug and has been used by mankind for over 6,000 years. Besides being used as a stimulant or drug, parts of the cannabis plant have also been used as rope fibre, as a livestock food supplement, as cooking oil and as medication. The plant grows wild in many parts of Southern Africa and is cultivated in many rural areas throughout the region, particularly where a moderate climate and sufficient rainfall prevail.

Though the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) argues that there is no reliable scientific evidence of the safety and efficacy of smoking cannabis for therapeutic purposes,⁵ debates about the plant's positive and negative qualities continue. The debate about whether the consumption of cannabis should be decriminalised is also ongoing. This paper does not attempt to address those areas of controversy.

If the international demand is growing, so is the supply. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that global seizures of cannabis increased significantly in 2000,⁶ and regarded this as the most important trend in cannabis trafficking during that



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year. This trend has been evident for at least the past ten years, as is illustrated in Figure 1.



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Figure 1
Global seizures of cannabis according to UNODC

Period	Global seizures: tons per annum
Early 1990s	2,000
1995 to 1998	3,000
1999	4,000
2000	4,500

Of significance for this study is the UN's conclusion that nearly a quarter of the cannabis seizures worldwide between 1999 and 2000 occurred in Southern Africa.⁷ In 2000 the large global increase was mainly the result of seizures in some African countries, specifically South Africa (718 tons), Malawi (312 tons) and Nigeria (272 tons).⁸ The UN further found that Africa's share of global seizures increased from approximately 10% to 32%, while the share of the Americas decreased from about 80% to 61%.

In short, there appears to have been a global upsurge in demand for cannabis and a corresponding increase in supply, increasingly so from Southern Africa. It is therefore appropriate to consider the information available from within Southern African countries in an effort to establish what trends emerge.

Cannabis cultivation and trafficking within the SADC sub-region

Although drug trafficking is not regarded as the most threatening category of organised crime in the Southern African sub-region, there is clearly a concern among police agencies about its significant increase and their inability to stem it. Frequent police raids to destroy cannabis plants in remote areas where peasant farmers grow and sell it are sometimes resisted with force. Many find it difficult to understand why the state should spend so much money on policing and destroying cannabis, when the plant, which is indigenous, has been used for centuries without destroying lives and without its use being criminalised until fairly recently. However, even where growers of cannabis accept the wrongfulness or unlawfulness of their acts, many have no option but to continue if they and their families are to survive conditions of abject poverty.

Most SADC countries have no accurate data available about cultivation of and trafficking in cannabis. Assessments are made on the basis of arrests, seizures, areas under cultivation, research reports and police reports. Even though many conclusions about the prevalence of cannabis trafficking are therefore based on inferences drawn from the available information, it is sufficient to give some substance to them. Cannabis is cultivated in all 14 SADC countries but with differing intensity and outputs. The fourteen SADC countries can conveniently be categorised into three groups:

1. Marginal domestic producers.



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These are SADC countries in which insufficient quantities of cannabis is cultivated to meet even domestic demand. Botswana and Namibia fall into this category. The main factor preventing more extensive cultivation is the climate in these countries, large parts of which consist of semi-desert terrain with a low rainfall. However, where conditions are suitable producers do grow it in these countries.

Botswana:

In Botswana it is grown in small patches, primarily for personal consumption.⁹ Eradication efforts by the Botswana police have contributed to keeping production levels low. In 2002 the authorities seized 1,268 kg of cannabis but most of it was imported by Zimbabwean smugglers or came from Mozambique and Lesotho.¹⁰ However, it remains the drug of choice in Botswana, due to its low price.

Namibia:

In Namibia cannabis cultivation takes place on a relatively small scale and is restricted to the northern part of the country, where rainfall is higher than in the arid south. The bulk of cannabis consumed in Namibia originates from South Africa but some is also imported from Angola and Zambia. Large quantities are smuggled by organised networks, normally on behalf of Cape Town-based syndicates, using furniture removal vans and large trucks carrying bulk goods.

Cultivation of cannabis in Botswana and Namibia is therefore on a small scale, often for personal consumption, and is not enough to meet domestic demand.

2. Substantial domestic producers

This includes those SADC countries that produce substantial quantities of cannabis but whose cross-border trafficking of the drug to neighbouring countries appears to be insignificant. Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Mauritius, Seychelles, Zambia and Zimbabwe fall into this category. The lack of information in a number of SADC countries about crime levels in general, and cannabis cultivation and trafficking in particular, is an important limiting factor when considering into which of the categories a country should be placed. For example, hardly any information is available about the extent of cultivation and trafficking in the DRC and it may well be a country from which significant quantities are exported to neighbouring states. However, until more information becomes available, it is categorised as a substantial domestic producer and not (yet) a major exporter. Substantial domestic producers all have a suitable climate and a geography that will allow for expansion of production should the market require it.

Angola:

Angola is slowly emerging from civil strife and war that stretched over more than two decades. It has not produced any official statistics on the cultivation of or trafficking in drugs, but cannabis is cultivated for local consumption and is widespread in the central highlands, the east and north-eastern areas of the country.¹¹ The north-east of Angola has



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produced cannabis for local consumption and trafficking for many years. Before independence in 1975, the area's cannabis was sold to visiting ships in Luanda.¹² More recently, authorities have started to take steps against traffickers, as illustrated by the public burning of approximately 300 kg of cannabis on International Day to Combat Drugs in 2001.¹³

The climate in large parts of Angola is suitable for cannabis cultivation and as stability returns to the country and its international trading routes expand, a significant expansion in cultivation and trafficking can be expected. The supply potential is enormous in a large country with a relatively small population and a lack of resources to police large parts of it.

Democratic Republic of Congo:

Very little information on cannabis cultivation and trafficking is available from the DRC but it is thought that it is widespread. According to the UNODC, cannabis appears to be replacing staple crops such as maize in the provinces of Kasai, Bandundu and Lower Congo because it is far more lucrative.¹⁴ The DRC is an enormous country with ideal geographic and climatic conditions for cultivation of the drug, but it has been ravaged by war for many years. There is a likelihood that substantial increases in production and trafficking will occur if the country stabilises and the violent conflicts end.

Mauritius:

The island state of Mauritius also has a climate that is conducive to cannabis cultivation. However, it is relatively small with a population of approximately 1.4 million people and over many years the police have taken steps against both growers and traffickers. According to the Mauritius police, drug abuse is confined to cannabis and heroin, with cannabis being the most popular. It is cultivated mainly in sugar cane fields and in the woodland areas. In 1994 some 281 people were arrested for possession of cannabis (or *gandia*, as it is called locally) but by 1997 arrests had grown to 667. Police statistics suggest that cultivation increased during the 1990s but the numbers of reported cases of cultivation, arrests for cultivating and plants uprooted by the police, all declined after 2000.¹⁵

This could be a result of increased police operations, which raised the risks for those involved. However, an alternative and less risky method of meeting the Mauritian demand for cannabis now appears to be its importation into the country. Police reported no cases in the 1990s but 12 cases of importation were reported in 2000 and eight in 2001. According to the police, the imported cannabis originated from the neighbouring islands of Madagascar and Reunion.

Seychelles:

The small island complex of Seychelles, with a total population of approximately 80,500 people, is also a member country of SADC. Hardly any information about drug trafficking is available. However, cannabis is grown in mountainous and inaccessible parts of the island and appears to be consumed locally but not exported. The police



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nevertheless regard the cultivation as a priority crime, as it is the main illegal drug consumed in Seychelles.¹⁶

Zambia:

The main drugs abused in Zambia are alcohol and cannabis. The latter is grown as a cash crop in many parts of the country, primarily by subsistence farmers who plant it alongside other crops for income. The climate in many parts of Zambia is well suited to its cultivation. A lack of information about cannabis trafficking makes it difficult to assess the possible extent of the trafficking across Zambia's borders to neighbouring countries. According to the US Department of State, most of Zambia's cannabis crop is exported to other countries. Substantial seizures, 13 tons during 2001 and 12 tons during 2002, support the view that large volumes are produced and that trafficking across borders is probably more extensive than available information suggests.¹⁷

Zimbabwe:

Zimbabwe is both a producer and a transit country for cannabis (where it is called *mбанje*). In the west it is produced in areas such as the Binga region while in the Eastern Highlands the main areas are Ruangwe, Nyanga, Chipinge and Chiredzi. Cultivation is also rife in Mtolo, in the north-east. Small-scale growers often cultivate the crop as a survival mechanism in a country where the economy has declined dramatically. Police refer to the recent emergence of 'big time' traffickers who source cannabis from border regions such as Binga.

According to police and other estimates, Zimbabwean-produced cannabis is not sufficient to satisfy domestic demand and the bulk is therefore imported from Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa.¹⁸ The US Department of State estimates that 80% of the cannabis in Zimbabwe is imported.¹⁹ A significant component of the imported cannabis is earmarked for transit by road through Zimbabwe to, for example, Botswana and South Africa. Some recent seizures confirm this: in November 2002, Zimbabwean police confiscated 48 kg of cannabis from the top of a bus that was planning to travel to the city of Bulawayo. According to the police it had been transported into Zimbabwe from neighbouring Mozambique and was to be partly sold in the Bulawayo area and partly exported to countries such as Botswana. Two Mozambicans were arrested.²⁰

Some Zimbabwean-grown cannabis is also destined for export abroad. The UK and Europe are some of the destinations where packaged forms of the compressed drug have been intercepted while in transit by air.²¹

3. Major international producers.

This category of countries produces substantial crops of cannabis for local consumption and trafficking to neighbouring countries and the international market abroad. The countries include Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland and Tanzania. They constitute the main source of supply from Southern Africa for the international cannabis market.



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Lesotho:

Lesotho is a small, mountainous, landlocked country, completely surrounded by South Africa. It is one of the poorest countries in the region and impoverished farmers in its mountainous areas grow cannabis as a cash crop in the absence of any other viable agricultural product. Despite regular attempts by the police to locate and destroy cannabis crops, cultivation is flourishing.

Again, as in some other SADC countries, alcohol and cannabis are the main source of substance abuse in Lesotho. Although cannabis is smoked on a large scale, alcohol is by far the source of most substance abuse.²² Cannabis is smuggled to South African destinations across mountain passes and through the many porous border areas. Information relating to seizures is not available but Lesotho has been a well-known source of high quality cannabis to South African consumers over many decades. The UNODC as well as the US Department of State believe that some shipments may be trafficked to Europe.²³

Malawi:

Malawi is one of the largest producers of cannabis (known locally as *chamba*) in Southern Africa. As mentioned above, the UN reported that during 2000 a total of 312 tons of cannabis were seized in the country. Figures supplied by the Malawi police suggest that figure for 2000 was slightly lower, at 288.8 tons, and that a substantial drop occurred during 2001 to 60.3 tons.²⁴

According to the 2001 Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which measures a country's achievements in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income, Malawi is one of the 15 least developed and poorest countries of the 162 listed.²⁵ It has been categorised as a 'least developed country' along with five other SADC member states.²⁶ Poverty has therefore led many Malawians to engage in the cultivation of *chamba*. Large parts of the country are well suited for its cultivation and it does not require additional farming inputs, as is the case with other crops. Most importantly, it fetches better prices than other cash crops. Income from the cultivation of the cannabis has transformed many former staple and cash crop farmers in the central and northern regions into regular suppliers of cannabis for a ready market.²⁷ That probably explains why the cultivation, consumption, and trafficking of cannabis constitutes the largest type of illicit activity in Malawi. Women are frequently involved at the production or cultivation level, while men generally undertake selling and trafficking.²⁸

International organised criminal groups have employed individual Malawians or Malawian families to purchase cannabis from local producers. The drug is transported to Blantyre and from there onwards to Zimbabwe and South Africa, mostly on trucks that carry export commodities from Malawi.²⁹

According to the Malawi police cannabis production is steadily increasing and there is no sign of it being reversed. They estimate that during 2000, it was being cultivated on 175,000 hectares of land throughout the country.³⁰ It is cultivated on a large



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scale in the Nkhotakota district along the banks of Lupache river, in the Mzimba district's Likwawa hills, and to a lesser extent in the Ntchisi, Kasungu Ntcheu and Dedza districts. In October 2000, the police carried out an operation in the Nkhotakota and Mzimba areas, destroying 31.5 tons of the crop, growing on an area of 51.75 hectares. The Malawi police have taken active steps to try and counter production over a considerable period of time and have produced statistics that show the magnitude of the problem that they face.

Mozambique:

Although the government of Mozambique has no estimate of the size of the cannabis crop in the country as a whole, it has produced some seizure figures that clearly point to substantial quantities being cultivated and a substantial increase in seizures during the past five years. They differ somewhat from the figures provided by the UN, in that the Mozambique police figure for 2000 is 3.7 tons seized while the UN figure is 1.7 tons. The police figures also indicate that 2001 seizures increased to 8.1 tons.³¹ It is difficult to know whether increases in seizures should be attributed to increased cultivation or to increased police action. That more than eight tons that were seized in 2001 indicates large-scale cultivation in Mozambique, as the police in that country are known to have very limited resources and large parts of the country are not policed effectively.

There have been reports that ex-combatants, who found themselves without gainful employment after years of civil war, are cultivating plantations of cannabis for commercial purposes in the forested regions of Mozambique. It is believed that they produce the bulk of Mozambique's crop and that exports of the drug stem largely from these enterprises.³² Cultivation also occurs on a smaller scale on small plots in large parts of the country, particularly in the provinces of Tete, Safala, Monica, Maputo, and Cabo Delgado. Although local consumption is considerable, exports of cannabis do occur to neighbouring countries, primarily to South Africa.

South Africa:

According to Interpol, South Africa is one of the top four cannabis (or *dagga* as it is termed locally) suppliers in the world. The US Department of State and the UNODC in Pretoria also rank South Africa among the world's largest producers,^{33 34} Seizure figures do not necessarily support those conclusions, but cannabis seized by authorities probably only constitutes a fraction of the amounts that are actually trafficked. During 2000, the South African Police Service (SAPS) seized 718 tons of the drug—16% of the world total confiscated by police.³⁵ In 2001, 496 tons of cannabis worth US\$64 million was seized³⁶—considerably less than the previous year's seizure and than the more than 700 tons seized in 1994. Of significance is that most of the cannabis confiscated in the UK during 2001 and 2002 was South African in origin.³⁷

The main export market for South African cannabis is known to be continental Europe, the UK, Ireland and countries in the East such as South Korea. This is based on available documented cases and it would not be surprising if the market extends to far more than those areas.



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An accurate assessment of the area under cultivation in South Africa is more likely to provide a realistic production projection than seizure figures. However, it is notoriously difficult to do so in many parts of the country due to the difficult topography. Aerial surveillance and photographs have been used in South Africa but information on the results could not be obtained. Current estimates put the area of land under cultivation in South Africa at 1,000–1,200 hectares.³⁸ Estimates in the past varied greatly: in 1992 South Africa estimated that cannabis was cultivated on 6,000 hectares and for the next two years it informed the UN that the figure was dropping. However, the United States Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that cannabis cultivation had in fact increased to between 20,000 and 30,000 hectares between 1992 and 1993.³⁹ A UN report commented as follows:

If correct, this would have been more than all cannabis cultivation in Latin American (16, 000ha to 17,000ha) in that period. In 1994 a SAPS report identified 56,000 acres [22,700ha] under cannabis cultivation (0,1% of the arable land).⁴⁰

By 1995 South African authorities were placing the area under cannabis cultivation at 82,734 hectares. However, according to the UN report, current estimates during 2002 were that only 1,247 hectares were under cultivation.

Cannabis grows wild in South Africa and is a traditional crop in many rural areas, particularly in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. However, many other parts of the eastern half of the country are well suited for cultivating it. In some areas it is possible to produce three crops per year. Large quantities of the drug are smuggled to and from neighbouring countries, either in large plastic bags or in compressed bricks. South Africa not only has the largest domestic market for cannabis in Southern Africa, it is also the gateway for international trafficking, for example in containers by air or sea. Cannabis grown, dried, and compressed in Swaziland is smuggled in large quantities to Johannesburg or Durban in South Africa where it is initially stored and then subsequently exported to Europe and other destinations. At the same time, South African cannabis is also trafficked to those neighbouring states that are not in a position to produce sufficient to meet their own domestic demand, such as Namibia and Botswana. The country has therefore become the main Southern African clearing house for supplying the international cannabis market. Five brief documented cases of cannabis smuggling from South Africa provide an indication of its reach, the smuggling methods, and routes:

Dublin, Ireland: A South African man was arrested at Dublin Airport after the discovery of £50,000 worth of cannabis resin and herb. The 26-year-old man had arrived from South Africa via Paris.
Irish Times, 13 October 2001, p 6.

Johannesburg: Detectives from the South African Narcotics Bureau arrested a man after 22 kilograms of dagga was found in his bag at the Johannesburg International Airport.



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The 38-year-old was arrested while on board a flight that was due to depart for Paris, France. Police said that four other people, including a police inspector and an airport security official, were arrested on the same charges more than two weeks earlier. They were arrested while trying to smuggle a large amount of compressed dagga to Europe. Two of them were couriers.

SAPA Domestic News Wire, 26 October 2001.

South Korea: Dealers attempted to smuggle 43.3 kg of marijuana from South Africa.
The Korea Herald, 13 May 2002.

Dublin, Ireland: The largest single amount of herbal cannabis yet found in the State has been seized in Dublin. The find involved almost four tonnes of high-quality herbal cannabis with an approximate street value of £14 million. It was uncovered by Customs officers in Dublin Port yesterday morning...It is understood that another five tonnes of herbal cannabis may have passed through Dublin Port in recent months...A Revenue spokesman said the 3,992 kg of drugs put on display yesterday had been hidden in a consignment of dried fruit. The consignment had arrived from South Africa a few days ago in what has been described as a highly-organised operation. "It's a very significant find of this particular drug," the spokesman said. "You wouldn't get amateurs with this volume. You simply wouldn't get amateurs involved at that level." The drugs were hidden in a shipment of dried prunes inside a 40-foot metal container...Customs officers understand that a portion of the drugs was meant for the Irish market. The rest was destined for the UK. The spokesman said the estimated street value of £14 million was a "conservative estimate". Yesterday's seizure is the largest of a spate of recent significant hauls of cannabis at Dublin Port and Airport. A revenue spokesman said the incidents, which involved supplies of cannabis coming from South Africa, could be linked. Customs officers have seized more than 8.5 tonnes of herbal cannabis with a street value of more than £29 million since July of this year. In July, three tonnes of cannabis worth £11 million was discovered at Dublin Port...The shipment, which originated in Durban, South Africa, was on its way to Britain.
Irish Times, 27 October 2001, p 3.

Johannesburg: Detectives on Friday arrested a 39-year-old South African woman who tried to smuggle 8.9kg of dagga, worth about R13,000, to Paris.
SAPA Domestic News, 31 May 2002.

The US Department of State is of the view that at present, the substantial exports of cannabis from South Africa do not have a significant effect on the United States.⁴¹

Swaziland:

Swaziland, a small, poor, land-locked country, has a climate and soil that is conducive to the growing of cannabis. Most is grown in the north of the country, which is steep and hilly and not easily accessible by road. This has limited the police's ability to effectively



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patrol and enforce the law in that region. Swazi-grown cannabis is internationally known to be of a high quality and is a sought after commodity in South Africa, Europe and in the UK. Taking into account that almost 40% of the Swazi population lives in relative poverty, it is not surprising that cannabis is widely grown as a cash crop and that the country is one of the largest cannabis growing areas in the Southern African region.

Close co-operation between the Royal Swazi Police and the SAPS has led to frequent attempts to curtail the cultivation of the crop by way of aerial spraying with the help of South African helicopters. However, even with South African assistance the joint operations appear not to have made much of an impact. The Commissioner of the Police in Swaziland has acknowledged that the repeated destruction of large fields of cannabis plants has not produced any concrete results.⁴²

Of the cannabis that is harvested, the best quality is earmarked for compression into one or two kilogram blocks that are smuggled via South Africa and Mozambique to Europe and the UK. Once the cannabis has been compressed, it is vacuum-packed in plastic bags or sealed with paper wrap and bound with adhesive tape. Pepper and curry powder have been known to be sprinkled on the packages to prevent sniffer dogs from identifying the contraband. Middlemen linked to South African criminal networks, both domestic and international, are frequent visitors to Swaziland to negotiate transactions.

The compressed cannabis earmarked for export is first transported to Johannesburg, Durban or Maputo. Nigerian criminal networks, some of them based in Swaziland, have moved into the dominant position in the Swazi cannabis trade during the past few years, and the proceeds of their sales in Europe are used to pay for cocaine purchased in South America, which is then smuggled to South Africa and elsewhere. Numerous unguarded linkage roads and routes between South Africa and Swaziland are used to transport the cannabis to the markets. Once the compressed cannabis arrives in Johannesburg or Durban, it is stored in homes or warehouses from where it is distributed to couriers or loaded onto containers to be shipped or flown abroad. The containers often contain other 'legitimate' cargo, such as furniture, so as to conceal the compressed cannabis. Because of clampdowns, mainly by British customs officials, the smuggling of cannabis by sea has become more risky. An increasing share of export cannabis is therefore being sent through Johannesburg by couriers or as airfreight.

In 2000, three tons of compressed cannabis was seized in the UK in a container emanating from Swaziland. The following year, police in Swaziland seized a further 3.9 tons in a single raid. The police are of the view that it was destined for export to the UK, where its street value would have been in the region of £15.6 million.

Tanzania:

In the past Tanzania has not featured as a significant producer of cannabis, but indications are that extensive cultivation and trafficking does in fact take place. As is the case in so many of the poorer Southern African countries, many of Tanzania's peasant farmers have turned to cannabis cultivation because of grinding poverty and the fall in commodity prices for traditional cash crops such as coffee, cotton, cashew nuts and sisal. Ordinary peasant families are the basic production unit for cannabis in the country, both



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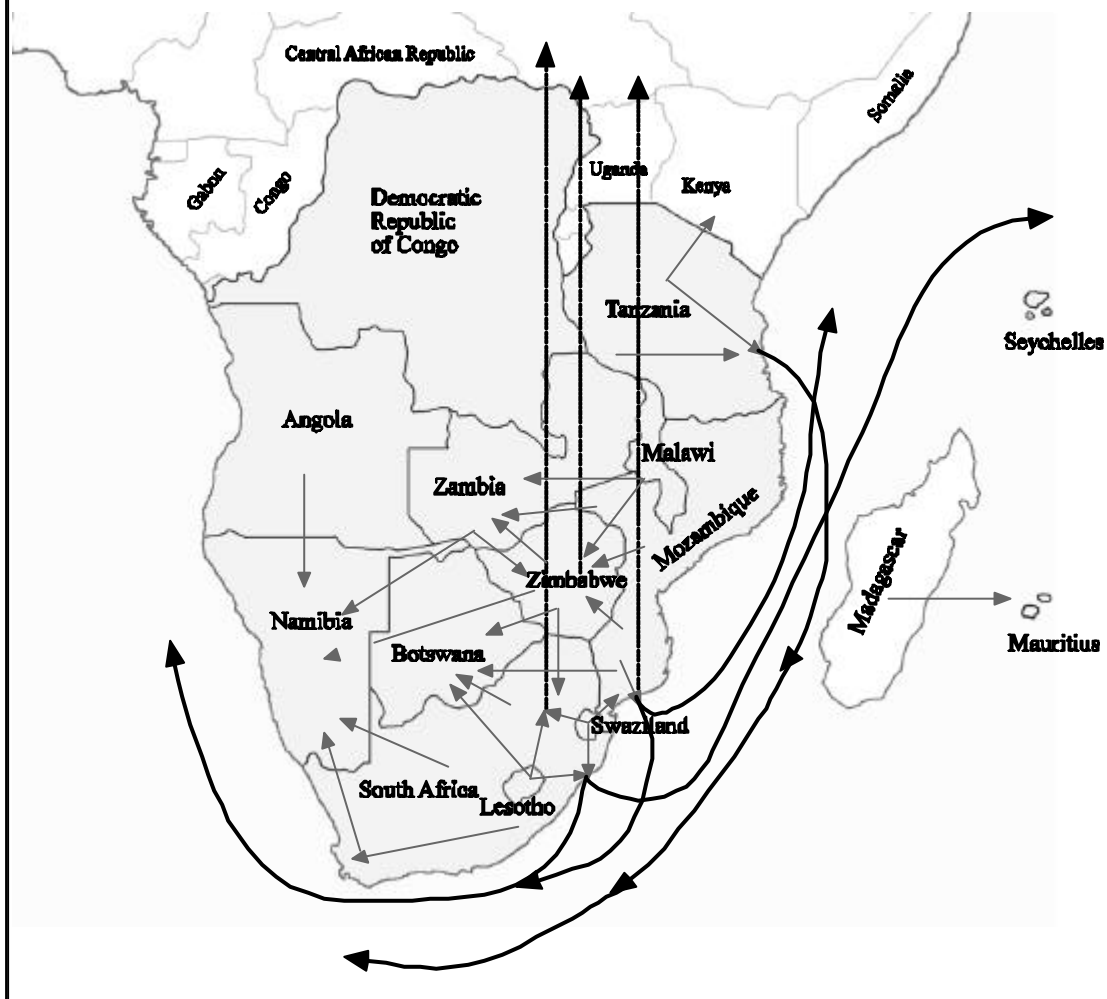
for consumption in Tanzania and for sale across its borders. Often, however, the paymasters and those who supervise the transportation are people of Somali or Arab origin. Nationals from other countries, especially Kenya, have also played a role in contracting peasant farmers in north-eastern Tanzania. In these, more organised processes, families are recruited by drug dealers and provided with advance payment for the cultivation of one or two acres of land.⁴³

Cannabis is cultivated in 10 of the 20 regions of mainland Tanzania, especially in those that border on the neighbouring countries of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the DRC, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. Cultivation on contract for the illicit domestic or international markets has been expanding significantly. Peasant farmers are given an advance payment of up to TSh200,000 per acre, compared to the TSh4,000–10,000 that they would normally earn from an acre of coffee plants. The police have undertaken seek-and-destroy operations against cannabis farms, using helicopters to identify and destroy the crops. Police statistics indicate that in 2001, 356 acres of ripe cannabis were identified and destroyed. In the same year, 265 tons were seized and destroyed.⁴⁴ This suggests an almost ten-fold increase over the 2000 figure of 24.3 tons supplied to the UN and referred to below.

Police believe that as many as half of the families in the country's ten regions are involved in cannabis cultivation. The harvested crop is packed into sacks and taken to other destinations for further processing and eventual cross-border trafficking. Very little information about end destinations is available, but the trafficking does go beyond the neighbouring states to international destinations further afield. Recent seizures indicate that markets as far away as Canada have already been penetrated: in June 2002, police seized approximately two tons of cannabis in Dar es Salaam, which was about to be exported to Canada.⁴⁵ Police also confirmed that in 1991 they seized five tons of cannabis. Tanzania therefore has the potential to become a key international supplier of the drug: it has the climate, a large impoverished rural population, vast and difficult to control borders, a good harbour and a long shoreline to facilitate exports.

The brief outlines above indicate that extensive trafficking of cannabis takes place within the SADC region and that airports and harbours are used to export it to the UK, Ireland, Europe, South Korea, and North America. The trafficking routes sketched in Figure 2 are based solely on the information set out above and should not be regarded as presenting the full picture. The trafficking routes are likely to be more extensive than Figure 2 suggests.

Figure 2
Trafficking routes for cannabis cultivated in Southern Africa



Conclusions

An intricate network of cannabis traffickers operates throughout the Southern African region on a scale that is much larger than has been accepted until now. Very little field research has been undertaken into the full extent of cultivation and trafficking and the reality is therefore likely to be more complex and extensive than depicted in Figure 2. The volumes seized every year do not necessarily bear a direct relation to what is cultivated, sold and consumed. The explanation for increased seizures could be a growth in the cultivation of cannabis, more effective policing, or a combination of both.



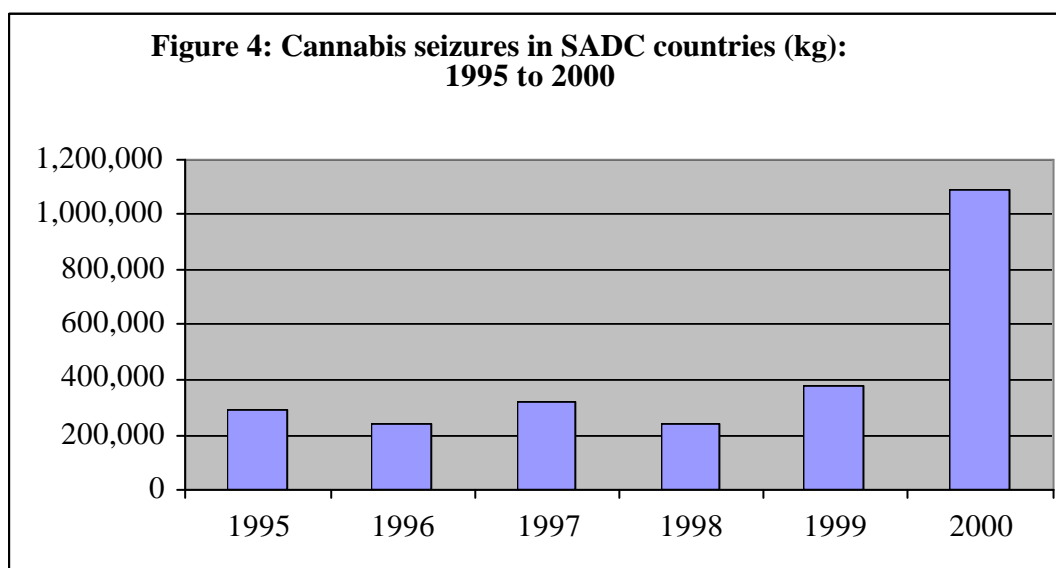
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However, all indicators are that towards the end of the 1990s, and particularly in 2000, there was a substantial increase in the production and trafficking of cannabis in Southern Africa. Seizure figures provided by the United Nations illustrate this.

Figure 3
Cannabis seizures in SADC countries (kg): 1995–2000⁴⁶

Country	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
Angola	2,223	64	518	2	2,829	4,734	10,370
Botswana	1,349	1,588	1,446	1,186	1,229	0	6,798
Lesotho	0	15,390	10,472	21,584	7,244	0	54,690
Malawi	39,911	8,453	10,320	5,202	27,142	312,472	403,500
Mauritius	4	9	18,435	3	6	22	18,479
Mozambique	0	0	184	462	894	1,701	3,241
Namibia	0	0	299	361	282	303	1,245
Seychelles	1	0	0	2	1	22	25
South Africa	238,813	203,354	171,929	197,116	289,944	717,702	1,818,858
Swaziland	0	440	11,303	5,943	33,284	14,947	65,917
Tanzania	4,012	0	82,540	4,618	6,021	24,293	121,484
Zambia	4,291	7,794	11,176	3,256	7,001	7,318	40,836
Zimbabwe	3,935	2,429	4,667	6,117	1,816	3,046	22,010
Totals	294,539	239,521	323,289	245,852	377,693	1,086,560	2,567,453

* A zero indicates that no figures were supplied to the UN.





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It is likely that a major expansion in the production and exportation of cannabis from Southern Africa will take place during the next few years. Factors that favour such an expansion are:

- suitable climatic and agricultural conditions in large parts of the region;
- poorly resourced law enforcement and border control agencies, which means that cultivators and traffickers can operate in relatively low-risk environments;
- long and porous borders that are difficult to patrol effectively;
- export facilities through harbours such as Durban (South Africa), Maputo (Mozambique) and Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), and through international airports at Johannesburg, Maputo, Harare, and Dar es Salaam;
- the addition of two large countries with a major potential for cultivation and exportation of cannabis to those already doing so, with the probability that stability and peace might return to Angola and the DRC;
- the presence of millions of impoverished rural peasant farmers who have already resorted to cannabis cultivation as a cash crop in order to eke out a living, and are likely to do so in increasing numbers in future;
- the political difficulty in a number of SADC countries of justifying the large-scale destruction of peasant farmers' cannabis crops when they have no other source of income;
- the wide acceptance by the general population of the unlawfulness of cultivating and trafficking in cannabis, but not of its wrongfulness—as an indigenous plant cannabis has had traditional uses for centuries and a relatively low moral blameworthiness is therefore attached to its production or use;
- the internationally accepted high quality of cannabis from Southern Africa, particularly from the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, and from Lesotho, Swaziland, and Malawi, which is likely to mean further increases in international demand for it;
- the involvement of skilled, strategic and internally experienced organised criminal networks—for example, Nigerian networks—in the trafficking of cannabis from Southern Africa to other parts of the world, who are elevating the illicit trade to a more 'professional' level than it has been in the past; and
- the vast profits that can be made, which will persuade many to take the risks involved.

According to the Organised Crime Unit of the SAPS (and confirmed by an expert police official), the different prices paid for South Africa cannabis at the time of writing (May 2003) from cultivation to final consumption are as set out in Figure 5. Experts stress that there are no fixed prices for cannabis; prices vary depending on a range of factors, including demand and supply, quality, the method of packaging or the location where the transaction takes place.

The average prices prevailing in South Africa and in the UK/Europe in the first half of 2003 are set out in Column 1 of Figure 5. As a hypothetical but interesting exercise an attempt is made in Columns 3 and 4 to attach a monetary value to the 718



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tons of cannabis that were seized in South Africa during 2000. If they had not been seized, producers would have received approximately R179 million (\$22.8 million) had they sold the crop in loose-leaf form, and R269 million (\$34.3 million) had they sold it in a compressed form. The amounts of money involved would have become staggering if this cannabis had reached the shores of the UK or Europe: traffickers would have been paid more than R11 billion (more than \$1 billion). These figures indicate why the cannabis trade is lucrative and why many along the transaction chain in Southern Africa benefit from it. As is to be expected, the more sophisticated international traffickers—the ‘multinationals’ of the illicit economies—claim the largest share of the profits.

Figure 5
Average prices during first half of 2003 for South African cannabis: From producer price to street price in UK/Europe*

	1	2	3	4
	Per kg (ZAR)	Per kg (US\$)**	Total value of 718 tons (ZAR)	Total value of 718 tons (US\$ million)
Producer price (loose leaves)	R250	\$32	R179,500,000	\$22.98
Producer price (compressed)	R375	\$48	R269,250,000	\$34.46
‘Street price’ in South Africa	R850	\$108	R610,300,000	\$77.54
Delivery price in UK	R16,062	\$2,049	R11,532,516,000	\$1,471.18
‘Street price’ in UK/Europe	R44,974	\$5,714	R32,291,332,000	\$4,102.65

* Supplied by the Organised Crime Unit of the South African Police Service, Durban, May 2003.

** US\$/ZAR exchange rate on 19.5.2003 at USD1=ZAR7.84.

Cannabis prices for Swaziland cannabis, also referred to as ‘Swazi gold’ if it is of good quality, appeared to be marginally higher during the same period. A police expert provided the following prices per kilogram for the first half of 2003:

Figure 6
Price per kilogram for the first half of 2003 for ‘Swazi gold’: From producer price to street price in UK/Europe

	Price per kg (ZAR)
Producer price (loose leaves)	R250–R400
Producer price (compressed but loosely packed)	R400
Producer price (vacuum packed)	R700–R1,000
‘Street price’ in South Africa	R850
Delivery price for ‘Swazi gold’ in UK/Europe	R16,062 to R17,990 (£1,250 to £1,400)
‘Street price’ for ‘Swazi gold’ in UK/Europe	R44,975 to R57,825 (£3,500 to £4,500)

For policy makers and law enforcement agencies in the region the likely expansion of the cannabis trade presents very real and difficult challenges. A report on a radio interview with Commissioner Hillary, the Police Commissioner of Swaziland, gives some indication of the difficulty that law enforcement agencies face:



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Hillary said the country is experiencing problems with *dagga* [cannabis] cultivation and trafficking, and the UN has not done enough to assist in curbing the problem...He says in Swaziland they have a problem of marijuana cultivation, and it is a known fact that the drug is being made a cash crop. The police commissioner said the UN should first start by attempting to solve the root cause of the issue. He added that putting measures to punish drug traffickers can be a second step, but the main aim should be to prevent the manufacturing of drugs...He says the police have now and again destroyed [huge fields] of *dagga* in the country, but this does not seem to be the solution.⁴⁷

In poverty-stricken countries the potential political backlash that will result from increased raids will be borne in mind by politicians, while many law enforcement officers will ask themselves whether the use of very scarce resources should not rather be focused on those criminal activities that constitute a real and immediate threat to society. Violent crimes, hard drugs, motor vehicle theft and corruption are examples. Can the use or sale of cannabis really constitute anything like the threat that those crimes pose? A sense of futility can creep in if, despite highly unpopular and frequent attempts to destroy cannabis crops, both the demand and supply keep on increasing. A sense of futility will also develop if governments in some developed countries increasingly take a more tolerant view towards the smoking of cannabis. The most recent example stems from Canada where, in May 2003, the government introduced legislation to decriminalise possession of small amounts of cannabis, although stricter penalties were set for traffickers.⁴⁸ The Canadian Prime Minister, Jean Chretien, has publicly come out strongly for decriminalisation. If the demand in such countries is not kept in check by governments, but is allowed to increase, should the police in poor and least developed countries, where cannabis is indigenous, has been used for centuries and is grown by many to survive, be expected to use their scarce resources to fight against its supply?

Clearly, decriminalising production, or turning a blind eye towards the supply of cannabis, is not that simple. As is the case with alcohol abuse, the abuse of cannabis does cause societal damage. According to the UN, cannabis accounts for about 15% of all drug treatment demand globally. For Southern African policy makers, an important additional factor is that international obligations make it imperative for them to demonstrate that they are taking steps to combat drug trafficking, including trafficking in cannabis.

A policy debate should take place among police chiefs and social welfare experts in Southern Africa to develop a clear sub-regional response to those who are directly or indirectly fuelling the demand for cannabis, mainly in countries in the developed world. Do they really expect poor supply countries to continue spending scarce resources on combating cannabis production when their countries fuel demand or do little to curtail it? The fact that trafficking routes criss-cross Southern Africa (see Figure 2) means that the issue of cannabis production is now more than merely a national issue for individual countries in Southern Africa. A sub-regional strategy and response is required.



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- ¹ www.interpol.int/Public/Drugs/cannabis/default.asp, accessed 28 April 2003.
- ² UNODC, Global illicit drug trends, 2002, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/global_illicit_drug_trends.html (accessed 24.4.03) p 125.
- ³ UNODC, supra note 54, p 254
- ⁴ UNODC, supra note 54, p 7.
- ⁵ International Narcotics Control Board, Annual Report – 2001, Chapter II, p 25, www.incb.org/e/ind_ar.htm (accessed 1.07.03)
- ⁶ UNODC, World situation with regard to drug abuse, in particular the spread of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) through drug injection: Report of the Secretariat, 2002, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/cnd_session_45.html (accessed 24.04.03).
- ⁷ UNODC, op cit, p 125
- ⁸ Ibid, p 27.
- ⁹ UNODC, supra note 34, p 30.
- ¹⁰ US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Narcotics control report, 2002, www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2002/pdf/ (accessed 11.04.03).
- ¹¹ UNODC, supra note 34, p 27.
- ¹² Interview by the author with peasant farmers in northeastern Angola in 1973. The author also observed local cultivators selling large plastic bags full of cannabis to passing motorists.
- ¹³ J Chagas, unpublished ISS research paper on organised crime in Angola, 2001
- ¹⁴ UNODC, supra note 34, p 30.
- ¹⁵ Unpublished report presented by a representative of the Mauritius Police at the “Regional Strategic Programme Framework Conference on Drugs and Crime Prevention Priorities in Southern Africa”, organised by the UNODC, Johannesburg, 5–7 August 2002.
- ¹⁶ Unpublished report presented by a representative of the Seychelles Police at the “Regional Strategic Programme Framework Conference on Drugs and Crime Prevention Priorities in Southern Africa”, organised by the UNODC, Johannesburg, 5–7 August 2002.
- ¹⁷ US Department of State, op cit.
- ¹⁸ UNODC, supra note 34, p 52.
- ¹⁹ US Department of State, op cit.
- ²⁰ *The Daily News/All Africa Global Media* via COMTEX, \$4m Mbanje on bus lands Mozambicans in trouble, 11 October 2002.
- ²¹ Unpublished report presented by a representative of the Zimbabwe Police at the “Regional Strategic Programme Framework Conference on Drugs and Crime Prevention Priorities in Southern Africa”, organised by the UNODC, Johannesburg, 5–7 August 2002.
- ²² UNODC, supra note 34, p 32.
- ²³ US Department of State, op cit.
- ²⁴ Unpublished report presented by a representative of the Malawi Police at the “Regional Strategic Programme Framework Conference on Drugs and Crime Prevention Priorities in Southern Africa”, organised by the UNODC, Johannesburg, 5–7 August 2002.
- ²⁵ UNDP, Human development report 2001, <http://www.undp.org/hdr2001/presskit.pdf> Countries falling into the ‘medium human development category’ are Mauritius (63), South Africa (94), Namibia (111), Swaziland (113), Botswana (114), Zimbabwe (117), and Lesotho (120). The least developed countries, or those with a low human development index are: Tanzania (140), Democratic Republic of Congo (142),



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Zambia (143), Angola (146), Malawi (151) and Mozambique (157). (The 2001 *Report* does not mention Seychelles.)

²⁶ Tanzania, DRC, Zambia and Mozambique.

²⁷ UNODC, *supra* note 34, p 35.

²⁸ D Mzembe, unpublished ISS research paper on organised crime in Malawi, November 2001

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹ Unpublished report presented by a representative of the Mozambique Police at the “Regional Strategic Programme Framework Conference on Drugs and Crime Prevention Priorities in Southern Africa”, organised by the UNODCCP, Johannesburg, 5–7 August 2002.

³² UNODC, *supra* note 34, p 38.

³³ US Department of State, *op cit*.

³⁴ Country Profile on Drugs and Crime: South Africa 2002, UNODC, Pretoria, p 14.

³⁵ *Ibid*. p 22

³⁶ US Department of State, *op cit*.

³⁷ *Mail & Guardian*, South Africa is an international hub of the drug trade, 8 November 2002.

³⁸ UNODC, *supra* note 34, p 38.

³⁹ *Mail & Guardian*, *op cit*.

⁴⁰ UNODC, *supra* note 93, p 13

⁴¹ US Department of State, *op cit*.

⁴² *BBC Monitoring Service: Africa*, Police Commissioner urges UN to assist in fight against drugs, 21 March 2000. The Commissioner is reported to have told Radio Swaziland on 18 March that “...the country is experiencing problems with *dagga* [cannabis] cultivation and trafficking, and the UN has not done enough to assist in curbing the problem... [the country has] a problem of marijuana cultivation, and it is a known fact that the drug is being made a cash crop”.

⁴³ P Gastrow (ed), *Penetrating state and business: Organised crime in Southern Africa*, ISS Monograph Series 86, September 2003, Chapter 4, Tanzania, Prince Bagenda, at p 81.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ *Xinhua News Agency Bulletin*, Two tons of drugs seized in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, 5 June 2002.

⁴⁶ UNOCP, *supra* note 54, p 130.

⁴⁷ *BBC Monitoring Service: Africa*, *ibid*.

⁴⁸ *International Herald Tribune*, Canada proposes laxer marijuana laws, 28 May 2003.