

Box 1.1 West Africa Coast Initiative

The West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) was launched on 9 July 2009 as part of a broader initiative by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the “Regional Action Plan to Address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Drug Abuse in West Africa for 2008–2011.” WACI coincided with the release of a UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, “Transnational Trafficking and the Rule of Law in West Africa: A Threat Assessment,” which identified the numerous areas of illicit activities in the region and their broader impact. The report revealed that progress toward regional stability was severely undermined by smuggling of oil, arms, toxic waste, diamonds, people, and drugs, combined with rampant corruption and weak state institutions.

WACI is a joint technical assistance program aimed at helping states address criminal networks and illicit activities by strengthening national and regional

capacities in rule of law. It incorporates the collective expertise of regional actors and contributing partners with the expertise of national actors as a way of mitigating and diminishing the threat of organized crime in the region and globally. The initiative is a unique collaboration between ECOWAS, UNODC, the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) through its peacekeeping operations in the region (UN Operation in Côte d’Ivoire [UNOCI], UN Mission in Liberia [UNMIL]), the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL).

The broad initiative proposes to strengthen national rule of law capacities by implementing capacity-building programs in four postconflict countries—Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire—with the possibility of adding Guinea as a fifth. In these countries, WACI teams will establish

transnational crime units (TCUs), a model based on previous successes and lessons learned from the UNODC’s activities in other regions. TCUs will help build and develop national intelligence bodies, international coordination, surveillance, and investigation with five other programs operating separately yet in coordination with the TCUs. These programs will focus on specific components of the rule of law system: judiciary and prosecution, forensics, law enforcement and capacity building, border management, and money laundering.

Ultimately, WACI’s effectiveness will be measured by its ability to adequately enhance state institutions in practice. The initiative is ambitious in terms of the level of coordination required from the multitude of actors involved. Nevertheless, the implications for leaving these threats to regional stability unaddressed could have severe global impacts.