

## Transnational Drugs Trafficking from West Africa to Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Vietnam

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### Abstract

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In recent years, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes (UNODC) has examined and verified that West Africa has become a prominent region for methamphetamine manufacture, which is then trafficked either directly or via Southern Africa and Western Europe to East and Southeast Asia. Although closed proximity to the Golden Triangle, as one of the major concerns drug production's sources in region, Vietnam has been faced the emerging phenomenon of foreigner' drug traffickers' groups from outside mainland Southeast Asian to commit, West African Drug Syndicate Networks (WADSNs) are not exception. Based on case studies as primary data, this study approaches content analysis' methods to analyze distinct characteristics of this syndicate in Vietnam. The key findings were identified that 1) the WADSNs utilize frequently with the diverse modus operandi to collect and transport illegal drugs between states via Southeast Asian countries as transit points; 2) women, including Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese' citizen, has been dominated as potential targets of the WADSNs to focus on recruiting; and 3) the sophistication and complexity of WADSNs' activities in terms of illicit narcotics have been continuing to expose for challenges with law enforcement of Vietnam and its neighbored countries in the Southeast Asian region when moving forward "drug free zone" in 2015.

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**Key words:** Drug trafficking, West African Drug Syndicate Networks (WADSNs), Vietnam

### Introduction

Over the past two decades, the 'Revolution Period' (known as *Doi Moi* in Vietnamese) has brought a general increase in living standards in Vietnam.<sup>2</sup> However, while economic growth and international integration have contributed to bring many positives such as the increased mobility of goods, services, people and money, they also provided opportunities for transnational crimes to threaten human security in Vietnam ([AIPA, 2010a](#)). In particular, transnational drug trafficking, one of the dangerous transnational organized crime' activities expanded their subjects of activities, taking full advantage of the differences in the legislative regulations and the scientific and technological approaches and experiences of the law enforcement organs of countries to commit offences ([Lloyd, 2012](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> The Sixth Party Progress of Communist Party of Vietnam (1986) considered and firmed that the Policy of *Doi Moi* consists of three inter-related fundamental pushes, including 1) shifting from a bureaucratically centralized planned economy to a multi-sector economy operating under a market mechanism with State management and a socialist orientation; 2) democratizing social life and building a legal state of the people, by the people, and for the people; and 3) implementing an open-door policy and promoting relations between Vietnam and all other countries in the world community for peace, independence, and development

Additionally, improving in infrastructure, communication, and transportation created chances for illicit drug traffickers to operate across border ([Gilman, Goldhammer, & Weber, 2013, p. 3](#); [Shelley, 2002, p. 85](#); [Williams, 2013, p. 15](#)). Furthermore, close proximity to the Golden Triangle region (Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand) and combined with porous national borderland and long coastline have led a vast of potential conditions amenable for trafficking illicit drugs into Vietnam ([Vuving, 2010, p. 174](#)). More particularly, with the mountainous landscape, climate conditions and lack of transport infrastructure at these areas have taken advantageous environment to cultivate illicit crops and to avoid law enforcement agencies' preventing and detecting ([Chouvy, 2002, 2013](#)). Therefore, for these reasons and factors, the amount of drug-related cases from aboard entry Vietnam, particularly for two main types of drug, namely heroin and amphetamine-type stimulants, increased considerably over the last decades with respect to both the number of seizures made and of people involved in trafficking.

The goals of this current paper focus on two main points. One is to draw overview the West African drug trafficking groups and its operations to and through Southeast Asian nodes, such as Malaysia, Philippine, and Thailand. Other is to analyze case studies of Vietnam to illustrate its organization structure and modus operandi.

### **West African Drug Trafficking Activities to and through Southeast Asian region**

Alongside with Eastern and Americans' contributions, the Southeast Asia was now home to one-half of the world's amphetamine-type stimulants users (ATS) and the use of ATS continues to be a major concern in many countries in this region ([G. Lewis, 2012](#)). The prevalence increases in almost all countries and "ATS are now the main illicit drugs threat for the whole region. There has been a significant expansion in the manufacture, trafficking and use of methamphetamines in the past five years. ATS production is no longer a 'cottage' industry: we are seeing strong trafficking links to powerful transnational organised groups. And this is not a problem which any country can tackle alone." ([quoted by Gary Lewis, former Representative of UNODC Southeast Asian and the Pacific, cited in Janssens, 2012a, p. 32](#)). As a result, it was also particularly attractive for transnational organized criminal syndicates, including internal and external groups, to exploit and operate at this region. According to the recently updated report on 2014 Global Synthetic Drugs Assessment, including ATS and New Psychoactive of [UNODC \(2014\)](#) warned that West African drug groups have been becoming as an apparent threat and unprecedented challenge for drug control and prevention at almost regions around the world. Even, in recent years, the West African Drug syndicate' roles has been recognized "as an intermediary in the cocaine trade between Latin America and Europe", "as a prominent region for methamphetamine trafficked to East and Southeast Asia" and became an "unprecedented internationally attention" ([Ellis, 2009, p. 171](#); [UNODC, 2007, p. e: 2014, p. 13](#)). In addition, apart from traditional markets at Southern Africa, Western Europe to East and Oceania, ATS has been trafficked from West Africa either directly or via and South-East Asia, which is a growing market for methamphetamine ([UNODC, 2014, pp. 11, 13, 25](#)).

It can be seen obviously that there are more specific evidences and documents to prove appearance, existence, and operation of West African criminal networks at overseas' regions, particularly with respect to drug-related crimes. Its involvements in international drug trade has been become an undeniably truth and even, more apparent increases with dynamic drug trafficking networks at different nations ([Ellis, 2009, p. 171](#); [Mazzitelli, 2007, pp. 1075-1077](#)). For example, as early as 1952, Lebanese smugglers' transportation heroin to the United States and Nigerian and Ghanaian' exporting African-grown marijuana to European region in 1960s has been recorded by law enforcement authorities ([Ellis, 2009, pp. 172-173](#)). In particular, Nigerian drug trafficking groups with their involvement in international cocaine, heroin, and marijuana at the United States, European, and Southeast Asian nations had become noticeable changes since after 1982 ([Ellis, 2009, p. 177](#); [Klein, 1994, p. 660](#)). Furthermore, Nigeria remains a worldwide hub of narcotics trafficking and money laundering activity ([Department of State, 2000, p. 100](#)). As [Ellis \(2009\)](#) analyzed and assessed that "over the years, West Africa's most prominent traffickers, the Nigerian, developed footholds in many other countries where imported narcotics could be stored and repacked for onward travel with truly global scale" ([pp. 183-184](#)).

More particularly, West African Drug Syndicates has been expanding their organization and operation in the mainland Southeast Asian region with more complicated and sophisticated than ever in the past. As a prospective destination and transit' point, many countries in this area has been targeted to expand illicit markets of drug trafficking networks in recent times ([Caballero-Anthony, 2010](#); [INCSR, 2011](#); [Janssens, 2012b](#); [G. Lewis, 2010](#)).

Accordingly, Nigerian organized drug trafficking networks have been recorded as one of the dominating presences through spreading throughout this region in the late 1980s to early 1990s ([G. Lewis, 2012](#); [Patin, 2012](#)). To some extent, based on law enforcement agencies' annual reports, in this current study, their criminal activities are also considered as empirical evidences in trafficking illicit narcotics at the Southeast Asian region. First, in Thailand, the Nigerian illicit narcotics trafficking' activities are an evident delight to expose their modus operandi in stockpiling and transporting to avoid law enforcement's deterrence ([AIPA, 2012a](#)). In the past, almost of Nigerians have been migrating to Thailand in larger numbers since the 1980s with commercial motivations, but quite a few come to commit in illegal activities, particularly with drug trafficking ([Howard, 2011](#); [Patin, 2012](#)). Nigerian traffickers frequently base their heroin trafficking operations in Thailand to ship parcels to the United States or send Thai mules to China ([G. Lewis, 2012](#)). Nearly two decades in the past, since 1996, the first Nigerian heroin-smuggling syndicate, based in Bangkok and run from Nigeria, operated and controlled almost of shipping heroin's networks from Southeast Asia to the United States ([Chouvy, 2013, p. 45](#)).

At that time, beside the drug syndicates in the sub-region, Thailand is facing West African drug syndicate networks that actively involved in shifting of heroin, cocaine, and crystallized methamphetamine (ICE) in South East Asia, and Iranian syndicates' networks that traffic in ICE ([AIPA, 2012a](#)). Accordingly, organizers of these rings located at either Nigeria or Thailand where they were likely to order and control all their operation's networks through their sub-hubs at both of countries, and even as the tentacles of an octopus to catch up with nodes in Europe, the United States, and Mexico as well ([Margasak, 1996](#)). In addition, drug couriers were recruited and required to ship illegal drugs, often, from two sources, Nigerian mules or foreigners with mostly are female couriers those whose travelled to Thailand to pick up heroin before joined by 'controllers' to ensure where they will go and transit ([DEA, 1996](#); [Patin, 2012](#)). The smugglers such as Philippines, Malaysians, Vietnamese, Ghanaians, Gambians, Kenyans, Nigerians, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and China were arrested at the Thailand airports ([AIPA, 2012a, pp. 1, 7](#); [Chouvy, 2013, pp. 45-46](#)). As a result, to some extent, it makes the pattern of drug trafficking and smuggling in Thailand much more complicated than in the past.

Secondly, in Philippine, traffickers took advantages of this country with long and porous maritime border to use as a transit point for high-grade cocaine, heroin, and ATS shipments. Only one year, from January 2010 to June 2011, at least, there are 23 drug couriers associated with African drug trafficking organisations were arrested ([Janssens, 2012b](#)).<sup>3</sup> Transnational drug groups, with particularly the West African Drugs Networks, also continue to recruit and control Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as drug mules (or couriers) to smuggle and transport illegal drugs to China, Malaysia, and Vietnam ([Martel, 2013](#)). Several those offenders, mostly women, are arrested abroad for drug-related crimes at host countries, and face harsh sentences, including the death penalty in countries such as China and Vietnam ([INCSR, 2010, p. 509](#)).

According to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), the African Drug Syndicate had recruited more Asians to become drug couriers to server their ring's illegal drug delivery activities ([AIPA, 2013c](#)). Among of these victims, female students from Northern Luzon has become as potential target by the West African Drug Syndicate (WADS) in Philippine ([AIPA, 2013c](#); [Martel, 2013](#)). Basically, those potential partners will be persuaded by drug network members to become their de fact marriage and later on convince these Filipinas to become drug mules ([Dumlao, 2012](#)). Based on analysing and controlling databases and profiles regard to these WADS, the PDEA also noted that the emerging modus operandi of the syndicate is to send their member to the Philippines and enrol as a foreign exchange student and during his stay, courts female students and turns them later into drug mules ([AIPA, 2012c](#)). In addition, after those victims accepted to accompany with them, they engaged in travel and tour businesses or agencies to arrange airline and hotel bookings, and used to fraudulent materials to recruit drug couriers.

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<sup>3</sup> Three weeks before the 23-year-old was sentenced, a 48-year-old Malaysian woman was arrested at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport with almost five kilograms of ice (the street name of crystalline methamphetamine) in her luggage, with a street value of more than \$500,000, as she arrived from Benin. Two weeks later, Adelina Ononiw joined her in prison in Bangkok. The 31-year-old South African, who had travelled from Nairobi, Kenya, was found to be carrying three kilograms of the same drug. While the list goes on, this small selection of people serves to illustrate the surge in methamphetamine smuggling between Africa and Southeast Asia since 2008.

Even, recruiting poor African women those who catch up with HIV/AIDS or other contagious diseases to join their rings has been considered as one of the distinct characteristics of ADS's operations ([Dumlao, 2012](#)). It led to barriers and difficulties with law enforcement agencies to deal it due to "these infected drug mules will not be detained in jails, because the authorities will opt to deport the disease-infected couriers rather than lock them up, so as to prevent contamination and the spread of such diseases" ([quoted by Ronald Allan Ricardo, Regional director of PDEA in Dumlao, 2012](#)).

Thirdly, transnational organized criminal groups continue to target Malaysia as both a destination and transit country for the trafficking of illicit drugs, primarily methamphetamine and heroin. According to the National Anti-Drugs Agency of Malaysia (NADA) and the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), in 2011, a record number of West African nationals were arrested for drug-related offences ([NDDA & RMP, 2011](#)). Transnational organized criminal groups from Africa and the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to traffic significant quantities of methamphetamine and heroin into and through Malaysia, primarily via air passengers, although some quantities are also trafficked to Malaysia in air cargo ([Ministry of Home Affairs, 2014](#)). In particular, with respect to Nigerian drug trafficking networks, their illicit amphetamine, ecstasy, and cocaine' operations run up with the cohesive structure between hosted countries and other overseas' dotes ([Janssens, 2012b](#); [Patin, 2012](#)).

In many cases, they sought and recruited drug mules from various nationals to transport the drugs either into Malaysia or using Malaysia as transit point ([AIPA, 2013a](#); [Zolkepli, 2013](#)). Not to disclaim that in pursuit of the good life, Malaysians especially the women voluntarily have been become drug mules for Nigerian drug networks, although most of them were aware of what they carry ([NDDA & RMP, 2010](#)). Regarding to these modus operandi to recruit drug mules, the NDDA intelligent documents noted that they spot and meet someone those who would be potentially selected as drug couriers through the internet and social networking sites ([NDDA & RMP, 2011](#)). After that, they will befriend with them and admit him/her into a team with full services when go to abroad as tourists, including plane tickets and hotel accommodations, and pre-pay of money for couriers. According to NADA and RMP, in order to keep on 'package' during transporting, drug mules were often concealed their illegal cargo in secret compartments of their suitcase, shoes, books or clothes they are wearing; otherwise, placing them in the bottom part of luggage, in shoeboxes, inside handbag, parcels, and bottles ([NDDA & RMP, 2010, 2011](#)). Even in some special cases to avoid detection, either they wrapped or swallowed the drugs around their body through undergo minor surgery just to put it inside their body or ingest by themselves ([NDDA & RMP, 2011](#)). Malaysian drug law enforcement affirmed that only in 2012, there are 159 Nigerians offenses were arrested for drug related offences in Malaysia, meanwhile, 167 Malaysians were arrested overseas with 49 offenders of them as drug mules ([AIPA, 2013a](#)).

To shortly sum, it can be seen clearly that meantime most people considered the harsh sentence as one of the world's most unforgiving drug laws in play,<sup>4</sup> eagle-eyed observers saw it as further evidence of a strengthening West African-Southeast Asian drugs connection ([Ferrett, 2008](#)). To ignore the death penalty's abilities to catch up with drug trafficking at this region, the WADSNs have continued to challenge to law enforcement in this battle.

## **Vietnam's Routes departed from West Africa: an Initial Analysis**

### ***Overview of Drug Situation in Vietnam***

Since establishing the United Nations on Drugs and Crime's liaison office (UNODC) at Hanoi in 1994, with important mission is to contribute to the achievement of security and justice for all by making the world safer from drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism, critically analyzing drug situation in Vietnam, the UNODC observed drug-related crimes in Vietnam that:

With efficient opium poppy eradication efforts, it is estimated that as much as 95% of illicit drugs being transported inside Viet Nam, for either transit or domestic consumption, have been smuggled in *from neighboring countries*. Cross-border and domestic drug trafficking have been increasingly organized and sophisticated methods. The traffickers take advantage of the long and porous land borderline and the coastline. Heroin, opium, and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are smuggled into Viet Nam across the northwestern, central-northern, and southern borders.

<sup>4</sup> According to Amnesty International (2014), all of four above countries in this paper, Malaysia, Philippine, Thailand, and Vietnam are retentionists the death penalty for drug-related crimes in their criminal code.

Heroin and cannabis are trafficked from Viet Nam into China. Inside the country, drug hot spots are mainly located in the cities (pp. 6-7). In practice, although Vietnam has been considering increasingly as transit and destination' routes of transnational drugs trafficking in recent years, the official statistic of authorities was not specific to analyze and evaluate based on international standard (UNODC, 2005).

One of the main reasons is that their current processes which are not either effective or inadequate, particularly the dearth of a structured system to improve the speedy flow of data between agencies with all levels, provinces and internationally the effectiveness of any initiative is faced to practical difficulties and potential challenges as well (UNODC, 2005, 2009). As a result, the lack of academic researches and journal articles to gauge drug trafficking and its operation in Vietnam's context can be unavoidable consequences that it also hampered to comprehensive understanding about overall illegal narcotics' situation and its specific drug trafficking' activities in Vietnam, involving both transnational and domestic market.

Notwithstanding, according to drug enforcement agencies of Vietnam, at the current time, illegal narcotics and its drugs abusers and trafficking' activities, seemingly, have spread across the whole of countries with sixty-three cities and provinces, including rural and urban domain, from metropolitan to mountainous areas, no distinguishing between economic or poor conditions (AIPA, 2012b; SODC, 2013). In recent years, a small number of illegal manufacturing facilitates for ATS and other synthetic drugs have been seized in the Vietnam (INCSR, 2011, 2012, 2013). In fact, most methamphetamine found in Vietnam is trafficked from cross-border nations by all of three routes, by land, by sea and increasingly by air (UNODC, 2013a). In other words, under the direct and indirect impact of the regional illegal narcotics' flows, transnational drug trafficking in Vietnam still remained complicated with the whole of national scale, focused mainly along four border routes in North-west and Central-northern, North-east, and South-west (AIPA, 2008, 2009, 2010b, 2011b, 2012d, 2013b). Moreover, domestic and transnational organized criminal groups, particularly with West African drug trafficking groups, continue to trafficking illicit narcotics and their precursor chemicals through Vietnam to international markets (UNODC, 2013a, p. 135).

### ***From West Africa to Vietnam: Reality?***

According to the Vietnam's Country Report at the AIPA Fact-Finding Committee to Combat the Drug Menace (AIFOCOM), the increasing of international drug criminal gangs, especially ones from Africa has been considered as one of new trends of drug crime in Vietnam since early the 2000s (AIPA, 2011c, pp. 15-16). In addition, Vietnam's authorities affirmed that a number of drugs trafficking and transport cases had been discovered, where Vietnamese and foreigners collaborated, or foreigners smuggled drugs into Vietnam since over one last decades (UNODC & SODC, 2012). Amongst of them, a number of typical cases was committed by West African Drug Syndicate Networks (WADSNs) who organized rings to smuggle drugs into Vietnam and their complicities with various participants involved (MPS, 2012). In only 2012, Vietnamese authorities also discovered 21 cases of drug trafficking with 32 offenders related WADSNs those who were arrested at two metropolitan cities, namely Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013).

Data includes of samples from punishing records in the Supreme People's Court of Vietnam (SPC) that manage and monitor all of jurisdictions trial drug trafficking cases in the whole of Vietnam's territory. In which, the current paper focuses on statistical data of the SPC on drug trafficking offenses to analyze "Vietnam Route" departed from West Africa. A relatively large sample was drawn by Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City's jurisdictions are the most populous cities with the highest percentage to judge drug trafficking related foreigner' factors. In addition, these locations are also considered two of the major areas on the Vietnam route either from the West Africa to or through Vietnam to transit into third countries. More particularly, primary data were collected from two main resources, including the SPC's indictments and Vietnam's Country Report at the Meeting of AIFOCOM be provided by drug enforcement agencies. In addition, some of case studies in appendixes re-cited in the Vietnamese's magazine articles and websites as secondary data that will be supported and supplemented for the both above resources.



The paper particularly emphasizes three main issues regards to 1) types of drugs and its sources; 2) drug traffickers' profile, including organizers and their drug mules/couriers' characteristics; and 3) modus operandi to unlawful stockpiling, transporting, and trading.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Type of Drugs and its Sources*

With respect to types of illegal drugs, apart from the traditional types of illicit drugs such as heroin, cannabis, and opium poppy, Vietnam has been facing an increasing prevalence of ATS and its diverse forms from both external and internal providers with more enormous contributions from international routes than domestic productions since in recent years ([INCSR, 2013, p. 318](#); [UNODC, 2013c, pp. 52-53](#)). In fact, the heroin has been dominated the whole of Vietnam's territory in terms of addicted abusers and its smuggling and trafficking during around the two decades and until now ([Van & Scannapieco, 2008, p. 539](#)). Findings from a survey carried out by Ministry of Labour, Invalid, Social Affair (MOLISA) in 2001 noted that from the late 1990s, about two-thirds (66.8%) of drug addicts in Vietnam used primarily heroin, 29.3% preferred opium, 1.5% used ATS and approximately 2.4% used other types of drug, such as cannabis, cocaine, sedatives or tranquilizers; with particularly, in metropolitan cities, such as Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City, more than 90% of drug addicts used mainly heroin ([cited in Van & Scannapieco, 2008](#)).

Although later appearance than heroin market in Vietnam, ATS have been gaining popularity among affluent youth in major cities since the late 1990s, and quickly spread the rest of places, including urban and rural areas ([UNODC, 2013a, p. 135](#); [UNODC & SODC, 2012, p. 9](#)). To date, both of these drugs' types are proportioning with the highest usages and become an attractive illicit market with international and domestic drug trafficking, in which noticeable changes from WADSNs might be recognized to create heroin and ATS' scales in Vietnam more various and complex than ever before ([INCSR, 2012, pp. 123, 348](#); [UNODC, 2013c, p. 56](#)). Thus, it is not surprised that these two types of drugs are main targets of WADSNs to focus on Vietnam scenario. According to law enforcement agencies of Vietnam, there are around 97% of 88 kilograms of illicit narcotics seized from cases related to WADSNs, including heroin and ATS (with methamphetamine in crystal form), with 31,6 kilograms of heroin and 53,8 kilograms of ATS, respectively ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)). The rest is only 2,06 kilograms of cocaine that was considered one of the first cases in Vietnam that represented at above case study 2 ([tuoitrenews, 2014](#)).

Regarding to source of above type of illicit drugs, depending on individual drugs, it has either collected or produced from different resources by African offenders. In other words, three types of illicit drugs covered by WADSNs that come from three different sources. Firstly, with cocaine, although it is not produced in Africa, the rapid increase in seizures suggests that the continent, and in particular its Western region, is growing in importance as a transit area for cocaine trafficking between Latin American countries and Europe ([UNODC, 2007, p. 3](#); [2013b, p. 3](#)) and started to forward on East and Southeast Asia in recent times ([G. Lewis, 2012](#); [S. Lewis & Soenthrith, 2012, p. 23](#); [UNODC, 2012c, pp. 20-21](#)). In Vietnam context, the Court' profile confirmed the cocaine's source of Chaimongkol Suracha (case study 2) hidden in her luggage that come from Brazil<sup>6</sup> as one of the first cases committed by foreigner offense in Vietnam. According to drug law enforcement, she arrived on a flight from Dubai, where she transited after flying from Brazil to Ho Chi Minh City. During the check examination, customs officers caught her hiding four bags of white powder in two albums packed in her luggage, which covered approximately over 2 kilograms of cocaine.

Secondly, with heroin' routes, although Vietnam's authorities had to face with hardly sufficient proofs to demonstrate where are original sources of heroin's packages be transported by WADSNs and their cabinets to and through Vietnam, except for their confessions with Courts, they have convinced that there are likely to collect from three main routes ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Based on the purposes of this study, the drug trafficking' profiles include valuable data on sources and destinations of illicit drugs in which they were being transported, and the types of drugs in each case. The data also cover information on offender profiles, such as the nature of the organization, major types of criminal behaviors under the article 194, 1999 Criminal Code of Vietnam (CCV), and the socio-demographics of the offenders involved. In addition, basic information of drug mules those whose will be considered within both criminal and its victim' roles, are also analyzed and evaluated as well.

<sup>6</sup> According to UNDOC's report (2013), Brazil is not popular routes to flow cocaine from South American, in contrast, its transition to West Africa comes from all three source countries: Colombia, Peru, and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Most of the largest air and sea shipments detected recently have originated in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Venezuelan authorities report that all of the cocaine transiting their country comes from Colombia. However, smaller containerized shipments have proceeded both directly from Peru and from Ecuador, a transit country for Peruvian cocaine (p.11).

One is take heroin from South American countries and deliver to Malaysian airports before finding suitable times, routes, and ways to transport into Vietnam through flight directly or transit other nations ([INCSR, 2012, pp. 74, 308; 2013, p. 235](#)). Other is to purchase heroin at the Golden Crescent region, between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan before transit third nation or transport directly to Vietnam ([INCSR, 2014; Vietnam Customs, 2012](#)). The rest comes from the Southeast Asian countries, particularly in Golden Triangle region, where they took heroin to order their couriers transport from Malaysia to Vietnam before delivering to China ([SODC, 2012](#)).

Thirdly, with ATS' routes, it is divided into two main directions to its trafficking to East and Southeast Asia, one is produce at one of West African countries before transport and other is bought at a third nation to carry in the Southeast Asian region, including Vietnam, by both West African and their drug mules/couriers' networks ([UNODC, 2013c, p. 56](#)). With the first way, in fact, illicit manufacture of ATS has not been new source to South Africa since the early years of 2000s; however, the first case manufactured illicit manufacture of ecstasy (MDMA) has been investigated at Guinea, one West African nation, in 2009 ([UNODC, 2012c, p. 10](#)). To date, Nigeria has considered as the first and, so far, only country in West Africa to officially report illicit methamphetamine manufacture ([UNODC, 2012c, p. 11](#)). Both of these ATS' sources were likely to transport to Vietnam via air from West African case studies investigated and prosecuted by law enforcement agencies ([SODC, 2013; UNODC, 2013a, p. 139](#)). Particularly, with Nigeria and Benin' routes, according to UNODC, these two destinations are the main ATS trafficking routes for methamphetamine from West Africa to East and Southeast Asia, including Vietnam market ([UNODC, 2012c, pp. 22-23](#)). With the second way, those traffickers utilized their drug trafficking network' nodes at other nations in Southeast Asian region, namely Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Philippine to trade and transport to other destinations, no except for Vietnam scale ([INCSR, 2014, pp. 72, 231, 253; UNODC, 2013a, pp. 11, 92](#)). Given this way, organizers often concentrate on their cabinets at overseas where they have already recruited potential mules/couriers, mostly are women, to connect and manage their drug trafficking' route will be done ([SODC, 2012](#)). They are not appear directly to involve the whole of closed cycles, instead of the drugs' sources will order from third countries to transfer for drug mules/couriers through one bridge's nodes as be described and analyzed by case studies in Appendixes ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)).

### *Drug Traffickers Profiles*

The current study divides drug traffickers' profile into two main groups in WADSN' cases, including drug organizers and drug mules or couriers. In this context, the former is identified those who are leader to control, manage, and order to different offenders in their syndicates; meanwhile, the latter is judged those who were colluded directly or indirectly with the former. In any circumstances, they must be sentenced under the current criminal code of Vietnam as "complicity",<sup>7</sup> although there are exist the different approach based on legal regulation of individual nations, either crime or victim of crime ([EMCDDA, 2012, p. 3; Kensy, Stengel, Nougier, & Birgin, 2012, p. 4; Martel, 2013, p. 21; PDEA, 2013](#)).

### *Organizers*

According to drug law enforcement agencies' reports, almost of organizers in West African rings to execute, control, and manage drug trafficking' networks at Ho Chi Minh City come from Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013; SODC, 2013; Tuyen, 2013](#)). There are different explanations and overviews to analyze and evaluate to reasons West African groups involved the drug trafficking syndicates at overseas domain and its methodologies to commit.

Firstly, the historical experience of many West African nationals is of poverty, political instability, exploitation, and corruption which made a different human security's conceptualizing in West Africa where is considered as one of the world's most sensitive and volatile areas ([Mazzitelli, 2007, p. 1072](#)).

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<sup>7</sup> According to Article 20, the 1999 CCV, complicity is where two or more persons intentionally commit a crime. The organizers, executors, instigators, and helpers are all accomplices. The executors are those who actually carry out the crimes. The organizers are those who mastermind, lead, and direct the execution of crimes. The instigators are those who incite, induce, and encourage other persons to commit crimes. The helpers are those who create spiritual or material conditions for the commission of crimes.

Thus, unlawful conceptions, including drug trafficking' activities inside and outside their territories, "is not necessarily a deterrent to the pursuit of profit and a better standard of living" ([Jackson, 2002, p. 15](#)). Secondly, [Kavanagh and Walker \(2013, p. 8\)](#) argued that one of the undeniable reasons is affect negatively of the high unemployment rates, particularly among the youth groups those who cover the majority of the population in most countries. To some extent, needing to improve their life in an effort to earn a living, to some extent, they had to followed and pursued to drug trafficking' activities with ignore "social stigma" and punitive sanctions in both of their hosted nations and international places where they are new comers ([Ellis, 2009, p. 178](#)).

Furthermore, thirdly, with the higher profits of drug trades at potential regions than West Africa areas, sophisticated criminal groups – dominated by Nigerian criminal organization syndicates – operate in partnership with international drug trafficking network to moving methamphetamine to markets in Europe and Asia ([Maiga & Tompkins, 2014, p. 2](#)).

Regarding to methodologies employed by the WADSNs, in order to overcome detection of international law enforcement and hosted nation's authorities for the purpose of committing further crime, West African nationals were likely to make claims for refugee status or utilize technological information and its application of convenience at many developed countries such as the United States, European states, and Australia ([Jackson, 2002](#); [Kavanagh & Walker, 2013](#); [UNODC, 2013b](#)). While in Vietnam, West African targets have been to avoid being tracked by seeking and recruiting drug mules/couriers to establish their networks' nodes to transport illicit drugs to either Vietnam or transit there to come third parties (as the whole of seven case studies illustrated at Appendixes). For example, with Nigerian groups, basically, they are mostly expatriates from Nigeria residing in Vietnam for business or economic purposes due to poor economic conditions in their homeland ([Peach, 2009a, 2009b](#)). Apart from the larger population to abide Vietnam's legislative regulations, partial Nigerians have been involved in drug trafficking, fraud, cyber fraud and other illegal activities in recent ten years ([Francis, 2009](#)).

In particular, they are involves directly to order and control drug trafficking syndicates' network from their homeland to Vietnam ([AIPA, 2011a](#); [SODC, 2012](#)). In addition, these drug trafficking' networks operating worldwide with ramifications through their connections, with dominated by drug mules/couriers ([UNODC, 2012b, pp. 8-9](#)). Among of them are not only contribute as organizer/bosses to arrange and manage their rings to stockpile, transport, and trade illegally drugs in Vietnam, but also recruit foreigner mules/couriers from other countries to deliver narcotic to and through Vietnam ([AIPA, 2013b](#); [General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)). Accordingly, the majority of those are also immigrated into and lived at Saigon with the variety of reasons such as 'lost' or expired passport ([Uoc, 2013](#)). Those traffickers were often entry unlawfully into Ho Chi Minh City via either unofficial ways or small roads from borderland's provinces with Cambodia, including Tay Ninh, Long An, and Binh Phuoc ([Sang & Duc, 2013](#)). One considerable point is they used to these areas to escape from law enforcement authorities' investigative operations ([Sang, 2013](#)). To some extent, thus, it is explained partly that why "Nigerian travelers are often subjected to rigorous search each time they travel abroad" ([quoted by a Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information official, cited in Ellis, 2009, p. 175](#))

#### Drug Mules/Couriers

In recent over decades, the recruitment of women as drug mules/couriers by foreigner-related criminal organizations has been growing as worried concerns in drug control policies at international and national scale. At global, as the first resolution on women and girls' participation in the international drug trade, Resolution No.55/1 made by the [UN Commission on Narcotics Drugs \(2009\)](#) titled "promoting international cooperation in addressing the involvement of women and girls in drug trafficking, especially as couriers" highlighted key issues related to women's involvement in the illicit drugs industry, with particular emphasis on women as couriers. The report on the resolution estimated that about 20 per cent of drug traffickers who were involved in drug seizures worldwide, based upon drug seizure reports of 30-50 countries ([UN Commission on Narcotics Drugs, 2011](#)).

Although comprehensive data on the percentage of female drug traffickers and smugglers worldwide are not frequently available and UNODC suggested that the involvement of women and girls in trafficking has not increased disproportionately in comparison with men ([Campbell, 2008](#); [Kensy et al., 2012](#)), at least, this available statistics show that women's participation in drug trafficking has increased remarkably in recent years. Therefore, the importance of collecting and analyzing data relating the use of women and girls as couriers in drug trafficking' cases should be acknowledged more specific.



At national, in Vietnam, the role of female as drug mules/couriers play more considerable than male, especially in West African Drug Syndicate Networks (WADSN). It can be seen clearly that one of the noticeable trends in percentage of drug couriers recruited by drug trafficking syndicates has dominated considerably of female in comparison with male. From above table shows that amongst of 30 arrested, there are only 4 male, accounting for 12.50% whereas, the prevalence of females involved drug mule is an obvious trend and six-fold times with male, with 28 women, proportion of 87.50%.

**Table 1:** The gendered rate of drug mules/couriers in Vietnam in 2012

Gender	Offender	Percentage (%)
Male	4	12.50
Female	28	87.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

(Source: the Supreme People's Court of Vietnam; Country of Report of Vietnam at the Meeting of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Fact Finding Committee (AIFOCOM), 2012)

In fact, most of drug law enforcement agencies in Southeast Asian regional and others consider that women are usually targeted by syndicates since they generally generate mild suspicion from authorities ([Allen, Levenson, & Garside, 2003](#); [Kensy et al., 2012](#); [Pieris, 2014](#); [Sentencing Council, 2011](#)). In addition, the female body has more cavities possible to insert the drugs in, therefore posing less detection risk ([Martel, 2013, p. 28](#)). In respect of nationality of those drug couriers, often, organizers focus and forward on two main categories, one is host citizen where they will courier drug to or through their territories; other is foreigners from third countries to be recruited or coercive to serve them. In Vietnam context, amongst of twenty-six female arrested, the first group contributed to 17 offenders, accounted for approximately 60.71%, and the rest of women belonged to second group, with 11 subjects come from different nationalities, around 39.29%, respectively.

Regarding to drug offender' profiles, more particularly, according to drug law authorities of Vietnam, composition of the former is very diverse background and different situations. There are includes either students or divorced those who they are difficult economic conditions, the lack of romantic feelings, and particularly they have knowledge of English's communication, like discovery new places, and love to travel no cost as female drug couriers at case study 1 and 2 ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#); [Hai, 2014](#)). On the other hand, with the latter, they are often either Vietnamese women living overseas to visit their relatives or foreigners into Vietnam for travelling, conferences, seminar, or join economic activities but in essence, they were hired to transport illegal narcotics to or through Vietnam ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)). One of the common characteristics between both of those groups is that after recruiting and accepting to deliver drugs for the WADSNs they are usually offered airplane tickets, hotel accommodation, and huge amounts of money to employ their routes, such as case study 6 and 7. In some instances, members of syndicates were befriended or married potential recruit then later turn her into a courier or cohort, case study 5 is a specific example. According to drug enforcement agencies of Vietnam, the WADSN had believed to be behind the alarming increase of Vietnamese drug couriers arrested at Vietnam and abroad in recent times, they delivered drugs to their connections in different points in Asian region and others. Furthermore, through online social network and its applications on the Internet, they seeks and targets on new recruitment whose are proficient in English and well versed, very persistent and are generally friendly which makes them recruit potential victims easily. By doing this, they could be avoided detection and investigation of authorities and be instructed drug couriers to prevent the risk of being caught themselves.

#### *Modus operandi*

To date, almost of sources illicit drugs narcotic is mainly transited from international markets, including shared borderland such as Cambodia, China, and Laos and non-shared borders such as from West African countries, to and through Vietnam with many different forms. The *modus operandi* of transporting these drugs' networks is changing day-by-day with its scopes and complexities that it often requires devising new methods of detection and adequate controls. Regarding to WADSNs in Vietnam context, they utilizes to transport illicit drugs with the variety of tricks, including by land, by air, and by post.

### **By land**

Regarding to this route, drug-related offenders in WASDNs often recruit and use their complicities' networks via flexible nodes. There are two main directions by land that was explored by those drug traffickers. First way, they contracted to non-Vietnamese citizen to transport drug from one West Africa nations and transit to Vietnam before transport third country by land. Basically, they identified countries shared borderland areas with Vietnam to focus, including Cambodia, China, and Laos. Given this direction, they recruited foreigner's mules from nations in the Southeast Asian region to transport in order to avoid complication of visa procedure due to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)' citizens are not required to visa travel between countries in the region. Accordingly, the WASDNs are often focus on these female' groups who are easy to approach and persuade to follow their rings in lieu of looking for couriers from other region. For example at case study 7, one Cambodian woman was engaged to transport illicit drug from Benin to Vietnam via Qatar before carrying to Cambodia route. Second way, through Vietnamese's organizer node at Vietnam, the WASDNs colluded with them to recruit drug mules/couriers' networks to transport illicit drug into Vietnam via land road. To employ their tricky operations, with this way, they often look for and persuade both Vietnamese and foreigners involve their network. Accordingly, those mules/couriers will be ordered and guided their routes and its implementations to deliver illicit drugs as smooth as possible to avoid inspection of drug enforcement authorities in Vietnam. Both of these groups are required to use land route to carry out narcotic concealed in their luggage from Vietnam to other countries such as Cambodia and Laos before flew to third nations via air. It was considered one of the changeable modus operandi of the WASDNs in Vietnam after many case studies was investigated and prosecuted by law enforcement agencies. It also described and analysed in case study 6 at Appendixes.

### **By air**

Both the United Nations on Drugs and Crimes ([UNODC, 2013a](#)) and International Narcotics Control Strategy Report ([INCSR, 2013](#)) concerned that there has increased in criminal activities of international drug criminal gangs in Vietnam in recent years, especially through air traffic at metropolitan cities. Some drug trafficking and sale networks from overseas to Vietnam and to the third country operated by Africa-rooted criminal groups continue working in Southern provinces and cities, mainly in Ho Chi Minh City ([AIPA, 2011a, p. 1](#)). Under evaluations of law enforcement authorities showed that characteristics of drug smuggling via air, including Nigerian offenders, are relative diversity of ages, occupations, and mainly operates under groups or networks with the variety of types of illegal drugs transported such as heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and synthetic drugs ([Tuyen, 2013](#)). The way of hiding drug transport by air of sophisticated criminals and constantly changing, causing difficulties for the force function in the process of detection and arrest ([Nam, 2013](#)). Furthermore, according to the Aviation Security - Civil Aviation Administration of Vietnam Airlines, in order to evade detection by law enforcement forces, those drug dealers are often utilize "innovative ways" to conceal drugs through many subtle transformations and tricky operations under various trickeries ([P. Hoang, 2013](#)). Amongst of them, here is the methods of concealment of arrested couriers at both Noi Bai International Airport (Hanoi) and Tan Son Nhat International Airport (Ho Chi Minh City) identified and explored by detective officers, including hidden in luggage or suitcases; ingestion or swallowing; placed in shoes; placed in bottom part of luggage; placed inside handbag; undergoing minor operation; and placing in shoeboxes, books, bottles, parcels and so on. Regarding to cases related WADSNs, they concealed drugs in sandals as case study 1, in albums to pack in luggage as case study 2, in suitcases with false bottoms as case study 3, or in metal cylinders and a laptop adapter as case study 4.

### **By post**

Within West African Drug Syndicate Networks' scenarios, apart from these above formations, they took advantages of legitimate postal services to ship drugs international without having to leave their own countries. It can be seen clearly that drug trafficking through the mail is not complicated by other routes, such as by land, sea, and air, but now, the criminals have been thoroughly abusing the development of postal networks and services of the industry comes to perform criminal acts. In fact, many letters and packages are sent every day that it is impossible for law enforcement to inspect even a small fraction of them. Through the mail, the criminals find ways of hiding drugs in different classes of mail, parcel, postal and transport to consumption, for example, they often use express delivery because the increased pressure for quick delivery means even fewer packages are checked ([Tuan, 2014](#)).

For example, as case study 5 at Appendixes, is one of the typical examples for this modus operandi of Nigerian drug traffickers in Vietnam, offenders concealed around 200 grams of white crystal substance that was examined and clarified as one of the ATS' forms, into two batches nylon bag and hidden in calabash's pots.

According to drug enforcement authorities, with the legitimate mail services' routes, it has been created with the advantage of certain conditions for drug offences ([General Department of Vietnam Police, 2013](#)). Firstly, with the forms of ATS that can be easily concealed within the classes of mails and parcels. The numbers of drugs are transported more or less depending on weight, size of classes of mails and parcels that were transferred from abroad into Vietnam ([Nhat Xu, 2012](#)). Secondly, the level of "safety" of drug smuggling by mail is also higher due to just send objects through the post offices in the country or the courier company without having direct bearing drug to the point of consumption. In addition, thirdly, offenders are also easy to conceal identity by claiming dubious or fraudulent name or address of the sender and the receiver on letters or parcels and parcels that it led to difficulties and challenges to drug enforcement officers ([T. Hoang & Tuan, 2014](#)). Finally, the cost of shipping, frequently, is low and drug offenders only have to pay fees according to the weight and size of these kinds of letters, parcels and parcels; meanwhile, if they are directly transported or shipped by hiring the other way, the cost will be much greater ([Tuan, 2014](#)).

## Conclusions

The UNODC has pointed out that West African Drug Syndicate has become a prominent region for methamphetamine manufacture, which is then trafficked to East and South-East Asia by either transport directly, or via Southern Africa and Western Europe. They can involve directly operating the whole of drug rings; otherwise, they also can recruit indirectly drug mules via look for the potential partners and its victims from diverse nations, including Malaysia, Philippine, Thailand, and Vietnam. In fact, it is likely to affect negatively and even deteriorate for regional integration and transportation plans in Southeast Asian and the Greater Mekong Subregion forwarding in the future. As other regions in the world, all of nations this region is deeply concerned about illicit drug productions, transnational organized crime syndicates, and vulnerable borders.

To restate that although the current paper focuses on the WADSNs to and through Vietnam as an evident highlight, further research is needed to compare and analyze its organizational structure and modus operandi between countries. In particular, sharing information related operations of WADSNs and its modus operandi in the region should be enhanced and improved between all of states' authorities more than individual nation's role. By doing this, to some extent, it can assist to reach a comprehensive understanding of the implications on regional cooperation of national authorities in Southeast Asia when moving forward a "drug free zone" post 2015.

## Appendixes

### Case study 1:

According to court's indictment, Ozogu Jone, Nigerian man, 28-year-old was identified as organizers to control and manage one transnational drug trafficking from India and Pakistan to Vietnam and from Vietnam to China, in which Vietnamese woman was selected to recruit as drug courier for his syndicate. To serve his network has six complicities that were arrested by law enforcement on same time with him or later. He and his de facto wife, Pham Thi Thanh Trang was explored and arrested at room number 303, Gia Phu's Hotel, Tan Ky Tan Quy street, Tan Binh District, Ho Chi Minh City with 600 grams of heroin that was concealed in her sandals before they prepare to transport by air from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi. The rest of offenders has been also arrested at room number 304, two Nigerian complicities, Ben Blessed and Oguasu Michael. According to personal statement's record, after divorce, Ms Trang lived as de fact with Ozogu John who has ordered her to drug courier between India and Vietnam with several times in the past. In addition, he guided and consulted to her to manage by ruse and tricks during concealing and transporting drugs from India or Pakistan to Vietnam. Based on his sharing experiences, she also covered responsibilities to seek and recruit other potential women to join her partner's rings.

Following up opener operation, anti-narcotics police force investigated and arrested two different members in this syndicate, namely Anyanwu Chima Stanly and Mwankwo Sunday Mathias, Nigerian bearer as well at other place in Ho Chi Minh City where they hired on small room to hell shoes with empty soles for the purposes of concealing illegal drug. Accordingly, at this scene, law enforcement seized 400 grams of heroin in sandal's sole. Apart from those offenders, law enforcement have enough lawful evidence to search and seize around 1 kilogram of heroin conceal in 68 buttons of T-shirt at other female' house who lived as de facto with Ben Blessed.

#### **Case study 2:**

Chaimongkol Suracha was sentenced to death on charges of "illegally transporting drugs" by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Court in the first-instance trial on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2013. She was arrested on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012 at Tan Son Nhat International Airport after customs officers caught her hiding four bags of white powder in two albums packed in her luggage. She arrived on a flight from Dubai, where she transited after flying from Brazil. Tests later confirmed that the powder was cocaine, and the smuggled drugs weighed 1.983 kg. At her first instance trial, Suracha told the court that she befriended an African man named Fosta in 2012, and the man introduced her to a person known as Mieara, who promised to find Suracha a job at a car exporting company. On August 12, 2012, Mieara took Suracha to Vietnam after telling her that she would be introduced to the boss of the company. The two and they later flew from Vietnam to Brazil, where the company was apparently located.

Mieara later gave Suracha \$1,000 to cover her expenses. During Suracha's stay in Brazil, Suracha met some other people, who later bought a ticket for Suracha to fly back to Vietnam, and told her that she would meet the company's boss again later. One of these people gave Suracha two albums and asked her to bring them to Vietnam. Suracha told the court that she had not known there was cocaine hidden in the two albums, but the jury rejected her statement, concluding that she had "illegally transported drugs".

#### **Case study 3:**

According to the indictment of Court's recording, Ms. Palacio, Pilipino, 61-year-old, was hired by her Philippine friend named Joselyn to transport the contraband from Bamako, the capital of Mali, to Vietnam for a fee of US\$3,000. Palacio received two suitcases containing the drugs under their false bottoms from a man of African descent in Bamako. At court, Ms. Palacio stated that it was the first time to illegal traffic into Vietnam, those other times was purely for travel purposes. However, law enforcement verified that she has been entered into Vietnam 8 times in the past in which, at least, there are 6 times in-and-out continuously procedure. It means that this could not first time she comes to Vietnam. Therefore, anti-narcotics police force was not likely to allege to her due to lack of lawful evidences. Whereas, Joselyn, her "complicity" is still at large.

#### **Case study 4:**

Ejiogu Benjamin Ikechukwu has smuggled a large quantity of drugs and the crime is considered "extremely serious" with more than 3.4 kilograms of methamphetamine from Thailand into Vietnam. Ikechukwu was arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012 when he was entering Vietnam through the Tan Son Nhat International Airport. Customs officers found he had hidden the methamphetamine inside 16 metal cylinders and a laptop adapter. He confessed he was transporting the cylinders and adapter for a man named Onyekachi, who is still at large. This man told him that someone would find him to receive the consignment.

#### **Case study 5:**

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2012, the law enforcement agencies was accompanied with the Import and Export Logistics Department, Ho Chi Minh City's Office Post to check delivered mailer sent from Kenya for Mrs. Dang Thi Tuyet Nga. There are includes two calabash's pots, two wooden horses, one basket, one wooden statue. After inspective scenario, they discovered two batches nylon bag into calabash's pots with containing a white crystal substance that was examined and clarified as one of the ATS' forms. She confessed that these logistical packages belong to her *de fact* partner, Mr. Anthony, Nigerian man, who has "promised" to married and take care her and her children if cooperate with him to transport and trade drugs between Nigeria and Vietnam. In particular, it will be handed over him at HL hotel when they meet. One month later, this case was investigated successfully by Anti-Narcotics Police Forces; both of them arrested with nearly 200 grams exhibits the same drug. According to Court Indictment, at least over one time in the past, with similar modus operandi, they have stockpiled, transported, and traded unlawfully narcotics from Kenya to Vietnam via Express Post.



**Case study 6:**

In Hanoi, police arrested Pham Thi Lien, 43, as she was receiving 18 brick-shaped packs of heroin weighing six kilograms from a person known only as Pornpirom, a 30-year-old Thai national, at a motel in Soc Son District, Hanoi. Pornpirom was also arrested later. Lien confessed that she was hired to deliver the drugs to Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang, a 49-year-old woman residing in Ho Chi Minh City. In Quang Ninh Province, meanwhile, police arrested Tran Minh Tri, 22, Bui Van Tu, 23, and Le Xuan Phu, 28, in possession of 59 heroin bricks weighing 18 kilograms when they were about to board a boat at a local port. The men said they received the drugs from Lien and were about to bring the drugs to China. Several days earlier another member of the ring, Nguyen Thi Lanh, 43, of HCMC was caught carrying 2.6 kilograms of methamphetamine after arriving at Tan Son Nhat International Airport from an African country. Under Trang's guidelines, she went from Ho Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh via Moc Bai International Board Gate and transit to Philippine before flight to Cotonou, Benin. At there, Lanh received one suitcase contained drugs and ticket return Cambodia in order to avoid detection's process of Vietnam's law enforcement agencies if come back directly to Vietnam first.

Based on those offenders and other lawful documents, police have enough material evidences to arrest Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang. Accordingly, they seized 11 passports and 15 mobile phones from a hotel room she was using. Trang is the ringleader who hired people in need of money to transport drugs for the gang. According to Court's Indictment, she arranged all of her couriers with tricky operations and "flexible approaches" to unlawful stockpiling and transporting drugs through two main routes. Firstly, her drug mules/couriers will be came Cambodia by land and transit to either Malaysia or Philippine before flight to one West African country to take illicit drugs and return Vietnam with the similar routes began. Secondly, they will receive illicit narcotics' packages at Malaysia or Philippine and come back Vietnam via Cambodian borderland areas.

To sum, seven members of transnational drug smuggling ring and seized 24 kilograms of heroin and more than two kilograms of methamphetamine

**Case Study 7:**

Hom Kosal, 35-year-old, was born and lived at Phnom Penh, Cambodia and serving at City Bar, Phnom Penh. Through Thailand's bridge, she knew and made friend with African man, so called "anh Trai". He invited her come Benin for travelling, at least three times with the purpose for transporting illicit narcotics from there to Phnom Penh. According to Court's Indictment, in first two transportations, Kosal had implemented successfully to take drugs via map road from Cambodia to Thailand by road and then flew from Thailand to Benin. To third time, "anh Trai" took her meet Tony, other African node, who given one suitcase with two bags contained around 5 kilograms of heroin. In particular, Tony required her take this suitcase to Vietnam and transport to Cambodia by land. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012, after receiving the drugs, she flew from Benin to Vietnam, with a layover in Qatar, a Middle Eastern country. Kosal intended to bring the drugs from Vietnam to Cambodia by road. However, Hom Kosal was caught hiding an amount of white powder in her suitcase when she arrived at the airport last Saturday on flight QR608 from Qatar, where she transited after departing from Benin. The powder was immediately sent to the Criminal Technical Institute for testing and the results showed that it was methamphetamine, a kind of synthetic drug, police said. Kosal told police that she was hired by a man to bring the drugs from Benin with transit in Vietnam, for US\$2,000.

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