

Illicit trafficking of natural psychotropics from Gabon: special focus on Iboga

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ANALYTICAL REPORT



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**** Two versions of this report exist. This report is the public version of the completed analysis, which included police information; where specific police information was used, this information has subsequently been sanitized for public distribution ****

Executive Summary

With this strategic analytical report, INTERPOL, under the European Union funded project ENACT, supports the Gabon Criminal Analytical Unit, to provide an updated overview of the illicit trafficking of *Tabernanthe iboga* ('Iboga') from Gabon.

Iboga grows wild in the forests of Central African countries, and it is most prolific in Gabon where it has been consumed for centuries in religious rituals, particularly for initiation rituals into adulthood conducted by Bwiti community in Gabon. Iboga's root contains psychoactive alkaloids, the majority of which are called ibogaine. The consumption of ibogaine can cause stimulating and aphrodisiac properties, trance, energization and increased alertness and hallucinations. At toxic doses it can produce respiratory arrest.

Ibogaine has become globally notorious in the last ten years for its use to treat substance use disorders. It has been identified as a new psychoactive substance (NPS) of natural origin by scientific scholars, its labelling is as "new" because it became recently available on the market, notably online sites, and its commercialization is not yet regulated in many countries. Iboga is used worldwide in therapeutic clinics, both licensed and unregulated. Available information indicates that the proliferation of online markets selling Iboga allows the commercialization and consumption of the plant in regions where it cannot grow. This, in turn, has most likely fueled the plant's deforestation in Gabon, harming local communities, traditional practices and the environment.

Gabon has banned the exportation of Iboga from the country. Nevertheless, Iboga's regulation on a global scale is diverse. In some countries it is a controlled substance whereas in others, its consumption or commercialization is neither prohibited nor authorized. In many cases, online sellers declare their Iboga's originates in Gabon reportedly because consumer look for Gabonese Iboga due to its sacred properties.

According to several sources, criminal networks involved on Iboga illicit harvesting, trafficking, selling and distribution are composed mostly of nationals from Gabon and Cameroon with connections to Europe and North America, facilitating the flow of Iboga to satisfy the global demand. The plant is mainly sold online in different formats (root bark, root powder, capsule containing root powder, or less common, as ibogaine powder or Iboga seed) mostly by resellers based in Africa, North America and Europe.

Key Findings

The following are the key findings of this report resulting from an analysis of a range of available data sources on illicit trafficking of Iboga from Gabon:

- ❖ Iboga's root contains psychoactive alkaloids, the majority of which are called ibogaine. Lack of awareness on the use of Iboga as a psychotropic and the prohibition of exportation from Gabon, is a common enabler of its illicit trade.
- ❖ Global demand of Iboga, and its alkaloids, has steadily increased in the last ten years. A proliferation of online markets selling Iboga has facilitated the access to the plant in regions where it cannot grow. Often, the online demand specifically requests Iboga from Gabon (and not from other Central African countries) due to its reportedly sacred properties and quality.
- ❖ The plant is mostly used by individuals that offer detoxification therapies in private spaces. Moreover, Iboga is used worldwide in therapeutic clinics, both licensed and unregulated. Some actors, source Iboga from an illicit market, in occasions without even knowing the illicit component of the trade.
- ❖ Regulation on iboga is variable. Some countries strictly ban its use, others allow it under strict medical control and other countries have not yet regulated its consumption or medical use. In Gabon, the exploitation, harvesting and processing of Iboga, is banned without prior authorization from the Water and Forests Administration.
- ❖ In Gabon, Iboga is being exploited by various actors that have specific roles from harvesting the plant, facilitating its illicit extraction from National Parks, selling and distributing the product (mostly online). Uncontrolled exploitation of Iboga in Gabon harms local communities, traditional practices, and the environment.
- ❖ Private announcements usually offer Iboga powder, whereas the rest of online markets (resellers, specialized websites, clinics and pharmaceutical resellers) sell Iboga as root powder, capsule containing root powder, or even more rarely, as ibogaine powder or Iboga seed. Iboga online resellers operate from several countries across Africa, North America and Europe primarily.
- ❖ In some cases, individuals selling Iboga online also commercialize illicit wildlife products, such as pangolin scales. Poaching of elephants hinders Iboga proliferation in Central African forests.

Introduction

Gabon Criminal Intelligence Analytical Unit, opened within project ENACT, has recently collected information on the illicit trafficking of *Tabernanthe iboga* ('Iboga'), a plant that contains psychoactive substances (*ibogaine*) and that, being native to the western part of Central Africa sub-region, is extensively present in Gabon. Iboga has historical traditional uses in Gabon, however, it has been identified as a new psychoactive substance (NPS) by scientific scholars¹ and in 2014 the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that Iboga, among other plants, was increasingly at risk of being illicitly exported to other parts of the world to exploit its hallucinogenic properties².

While mentoring the Gabon Criminal Analytical Unit, the ENACT team provided its expertise and support to the Gabon police during the collection of information. The later has highlighted the opportunity to conduct a crime threat assessment to analyse the transnational organized criminal aspect, as preliminary information indicates that the illicit trafficking of Iboga from Gabon incorporates many member countries as destination and that nationals from other African countries harvest the plant to respond to an increasing global demand of ibogaine. The aim of ENACT INTERPOL contribution is to offer support to the Gabon Criminal Analytical Unit to assess the global scope of Iboga trafficking from Gabon.

Therefore, the EU funded ENACT Project, in collaboration with Gabon Criminal Analytical Unit, has undertaken this assessment on Illicit Trafficking of natural psychotropic from Gabon: special focus on Iboga, to better inform law enforcement at a strategic level.

This report is divided into seven main parts. The first part presents its scope and objectives as well as the methodology employed. The second part aims at explaining what Iboga is, where it grows, the main reasons behind its global demand and consequences of its illicit harvesting for local communities and the environment. The third part is dedicated to review the national and international instruments that regulate the extraction and trade of Iboga. The fourth part assesses the role of the main actors involved in the illicit trafficking of Iboga from Gabon. The fifth part examines Iboga online markets. Finally, the seventh part of the report presents a case study from Central Africa region to illustrate the different dynamics described across the report.

1. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Scope and objectives

The objective of this report is to provide an assessment of the trafficking in *Tabernanthe iboga* (Iboga), a plant demanded by its psychoactive properties, from Gabon. Specifically, this assessment aims to contribute with the identification of trafficking flows and criminal networks specialized in Iboga trafficking outside of Gabon.

The assessment draws upon an analysis of available data and presents the current nature, scope, dynamics, and activities of organized crime linked to the trafficking of Iboga from Gabon. This report intends to provide the concerned countries with actionable strategic intelligence to enable them to devise appropriate countering strategies and to be a tool for eliciting law enforcement cooperation among the countries impacted by this crime and among those which are at risk of being affected in the near future.

1.2 Methodology

This assessment follows an all-source intelligence analysis methodology. It is the result of integrating multiple data sources.

Open sources used in the framework of this report include news articles and reports from various private entities, international organizations and think tanks. This reports heavily relies on open-source information collected by Gabon Criminal Analysis Unit (CAU). Whenever identified, official statistics and data were used and given preference over other sources.

Information from the aforementioned sources was aggregated in order to identify consistencies across all data, patterns and trends, and any identifiable convergences.

2. IBOGA: PSYCHOTROPIC PROPERTIES, GLOBAL DEMAND AND LOCAL CONSEQUENCES OF IBOGA TRAFFICKING FROM GABON

This section summarizes information on *Tabernanthe iboga* (Iboga) origin and psychotropic properties. It then assesses the main factors that fuel its global demand and the consequences of its illicit trade for local communities and the environment. Limited or lack of awareness on the use of Iboga as a psychotropic is a common enabler of its illicit trade. It is therefore important for law enforcement agencies to understand the scope of this illicit market. Further detailed information on illicit flows and relevant actors is provided throughout the report.

2.1 What is Iboga and where it grows?

Tabernanthe iboga (Iboga) (Figure 1) is a shrub that grows wild in the forests of Central Africa, notably in Gabon, Congo, Cameroon, Angola and Democratic Republic of Congo (Figure 2). Although the plant can be found in the wild forests of these countries, it is most prolific in Gabon. This plant has been consumed for centuries in religious rituals in countries located in Central Africa and in the Congo basin, particularly for initiation rituals into adulthood conducted by Bwiti community in Gabon.

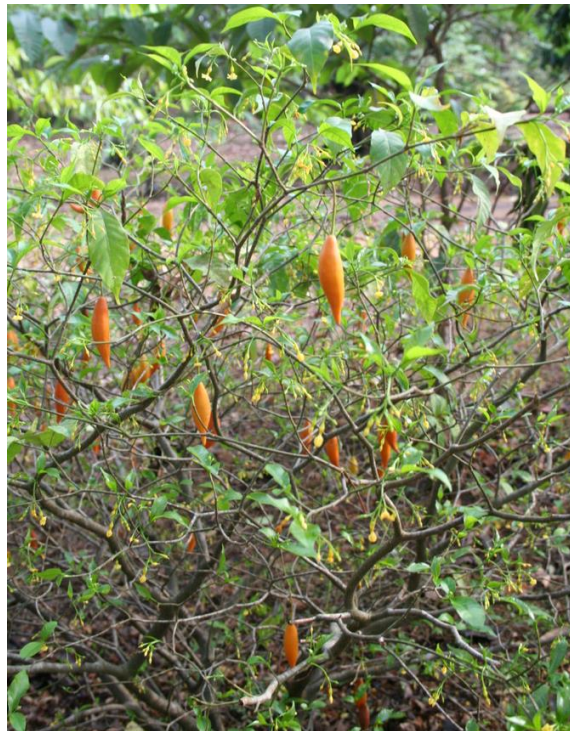


FIGURE 1 TABERNANTHE IBOGA³

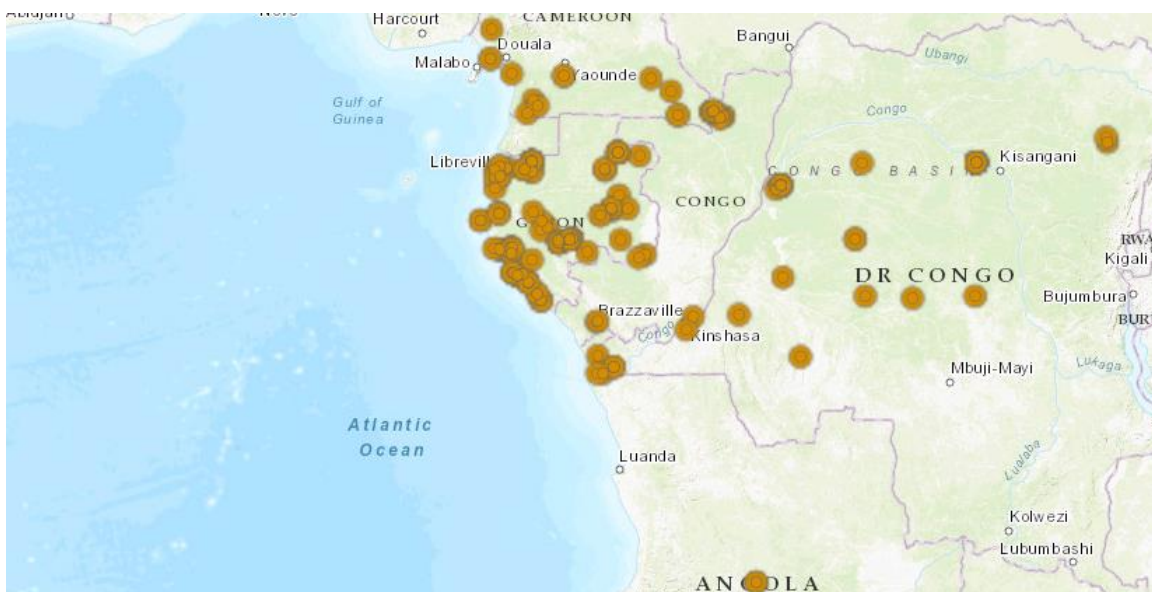


FIGURE 2 IBOGA'S EXISTENT POPULATION. SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE ⁴

Iboga's root contains psychoactive alkaloids, the majority of which are called ibogaine. The levels of indole alkaloids in this plant are in the order of:

- 2-6% in root bark;
- 1 to 2.6% in the total root;
- Less than 2%, in the stem;
- 0.35% in leaves

This alkaloid is concentrated in the roots of mature plants (between three to five years age) and it is harvested either by uprooting the entire plant or by harvesting the root bark from living plants that allow the plant to regenerate although stunting further growth⁵. The latter is more time-consuming.

2.2 Global demand of Iboga: why and where is it most demanded?

Scientific research focuses on the potential use of ibogaine for medical treatment evidence an increased interest on Iboga, and its alkaloids, in the last ten years⁶. In 2021, ibogaine, among other psychotropic, has been identified as a new psychoactive substance (NPS) of natural origin by scientific scholars⁷. Even though this alkaloid has existed long before, it is defined as "new" because it became recently available on the market, notably online sites, and its commercialization is not yet regulated in many countries.

Ibogaine, is consumed orally in the form of hydrochloride (Figure 3), extracts of alkaloids (Figure 4) or by consumption of the dry bark (Figure 5).

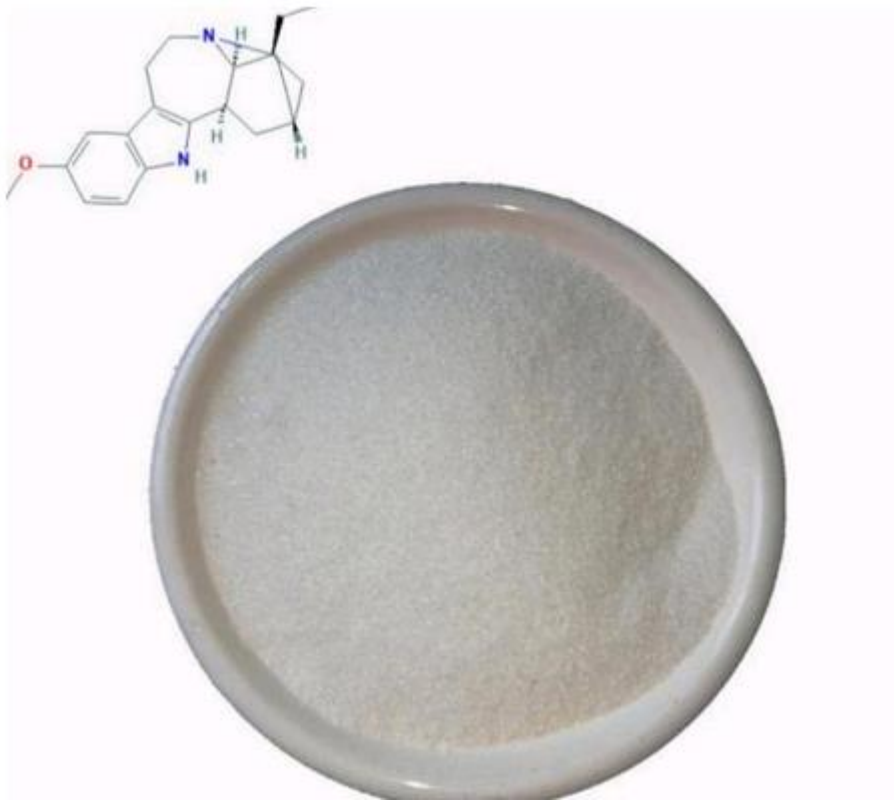


FIGURE 3 IBOGAINE HYDROCHLORIDE (HCL)

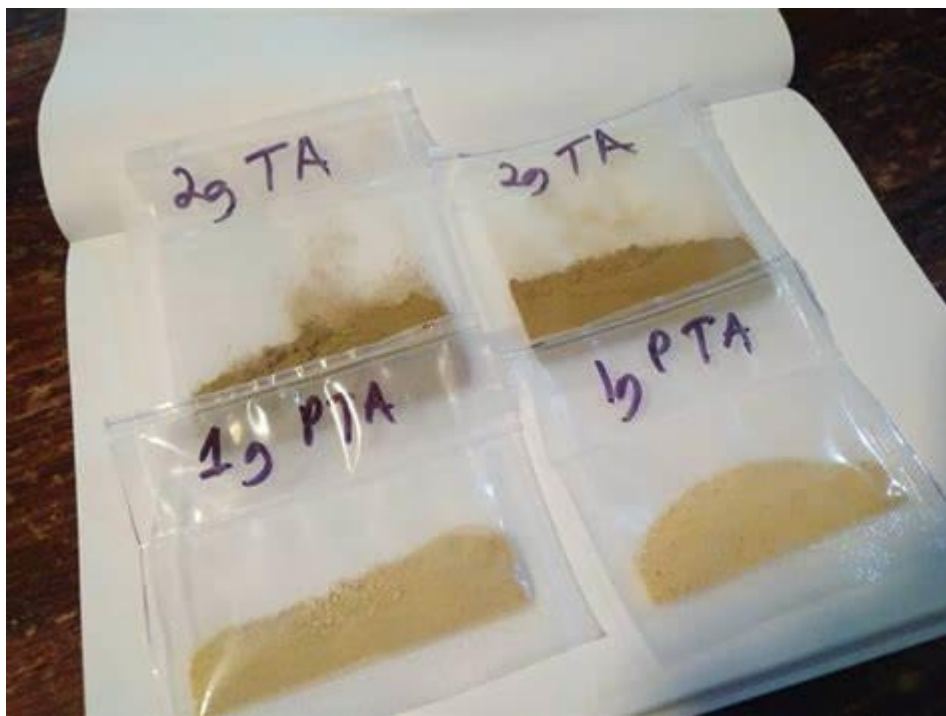


FIGURE 4 IBOGAINE TOTAL ALKALOID (TA)



FIGURE 5 IBOGA'S BARK

Other formats for Iboga and ibogaine commercialization includes capsules of Iboga powder (Figure 6) and seeds (Figure 7). When consuming, users experience stimulating and aphrodisiac properties, trance, energization, and increased alertness. The consumption of this substance also causes hallucinations⁸. At toxic doses, convulsions, bradycardia, hypotension, paralysis, and respiratory arrest occur⁹. Hence, research for more effective and safer structural derivatives has been encouraged among the scientific community¹⁰.



FIGURE 6 IBOGA POWDER CAPSULES



FIGURE 7 IBOGA SEEDS

Medical experimentation with iboga started in the 19th century already, in Europe and in the 20th century in the United States. Ibogaine was first used as a neuromuscular stimulant in 1939, and it was sold in France (under the commercial name Lambarène) on 8-mg ibogaine tablets that were recommended for illness related with fatigue, depression, and infectious disease. The product was removed from the market in 1966 due to adverse effects and iboga has been prohibited in France¹¹.

Iboga has increasingly gained and become notorious for its effects to treat substance use disorder in the last ten years. A scientific study that assessed the ibogaine medical subculture, identified a fourfold increase on ibogaine consumption in 2006, compared to 2001. Data from the study highlights that 68% of the total having taken it for the treatment of a substance-related disorder, and 53% specifically for opioid withdrawal¹².

The plant is mostly used by individuals that offer detoxification therapies in private spaces such as retreats and hotels. Moreover, iboga is used worldwide in therapeutic clinics, both licensed and unregulated, that provide alternative treatments for substance use disorder. In addition, a proliferation of online markets selling iboga has facilitated the access to the plant in regions where it cannot grow, increasing its global demand¹³.

Iboga is becoming less available, particularly in its wild state, due to a growing illicit exploitation fuelled by a global demand.

2.3 Iboga's deforestation: implications for local communities and the environment

Deforestation of Iboga in Gabon harms local communities, traditional practices and the environment. Previous reports evidenced that the plant is becoming less available, particularly in its wild state, due to a growing illicit exploitation fuelled by a global demand. In 2018, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species (IUCN), an organization that gathers information on the global extinction risk status of animal, fungus and plant species, has listed *Tabernanthe iboga* as a plant of concern, although not yet as endangered^{14 15}.

Ibogaine's extraction from its natural sources has reportedly become difficult due to a low content of the alkaloid in the root bark and its high demand by the community that provide ibogaine therapy for substance use disorder in several therapeutic centers around the world¹⁶. Its uncontrolled exploitation and over-harvesting threaten the availability of the plant for the Bwiti community¹⁷, affecting its traditional use.

Poaching of animals that spread iboga seeds also threatens the plant availability in Central African forests. Gabon is reportedly the country that concentrates the highest elephant's population in Central Africa sub-region¹⁸. Elephant's consumption of iboga fruits facilitates the spreading of the plant near elephant's trails. The country's wealth on natural resources attracts criminal networks involved in animal poaching¹⁹. It is very likely that poaching of elephants, a crime that affects Gabon²⁰, hinders Iboga proliferation in Central African forests²¹.

3. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS TO CONTROL IBOGA'S EXPORTATION AND USE

3.1 Gabonese legal framework for the exportation of Iboga

In Gabon, the exploitation, harvesting and processing of Iboga, a non-timber forest product, is banned without prior authorization from the Water and Forests Administration²², except for village communities which enjoy their customary rights, subject to compliance with the regulations in force²³. This prohibition is regulated by a national decree adopted in 2004 to control the exploitation, processing and marketing of non-timber forest products²⁴. In national parks (Figure 8) and protected areas, Iboga harvesting is strictly prohibited²⁵.



FIGURE 8 MAP OF NATIONAL PARKS IN GABON

Considered a cultural asset in Gabon, because it is widely used in the context of Bwiti cultural rites of initiation, Iboga is also protected by Gabonese Law N. 2/94, regulating the protection of cultural property, destruction, alteration, transformation, excavation, alienation, as well as illicit export and import²⁶. In addition, Gabonese legal framework establishes that natural resources, such as Iboga, must be preserved and used in a sustainable manner through the establishment of national policies on the protection and improvement of the environment²⁷.

A global raise in the demand for Iboga and Ibogaine²⁸, has increased the pressure on the biodiversity and wild populations of Iboga species in Gabon. In 2019, the Ministry of Forestry and the Environment, responsible for the Climate Plan, issued a decree that temporarily suspended the export of Iboga²⁹. Exportation of the plant from Gabon is therefore illegal³⁰. Moreover, as a conservatory measure, the country has request to place Iboga under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and, by extension, the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity³¹.

Natural resources conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in Gabon are also regulated by the international legal instruments that the country has ratified, such as the ones listed in the table below (Table 1).

International Instrument	Objective	Gabon's ratification date
Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro, 1992)³²	Conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of biological diversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources	14 March 1997
Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change³³	Reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere in order to enable ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change	12 December 2006
Treaty on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa and to Establish the Central African Forests Commission³⁴	Harmonize forest policies among countries of the sub-region sharing the same forest ecosystems	February 2005
Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity³⁵	Share the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way	11 November 2011

TABLE 1 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS ON NATURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION RATIFIED BY GABON

3.2 International regulation of Iboga

Regulation on iboga is variable. Some countries strictly ban its use, others allow it under strict medical control and other countries have not yet regulated its consumption or medical use.

In 2014 the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that Iboga, among other plants that contain psychoactive substances, was increasingly at risk of being illicitly exported to other parts of the world to exploit its hallucinogenic properties³⁶.

Scientific research reported that ibogaine is used as an anti-addiction drug in alternative medicine, even though it is not licensed as therapeutic drug and despite evidence that ibogaine may disturb the rhythm of the heart³⁷. Treatment centers that use ibogaine are more likely to settle in countries where Iboga is unregulated.

In some countries the use, possession and selling of Iboga is illegal, such as in the United States, Belgium, Denmark, France, Sweden and Switzerland³⁸. Other countries have enacted policies restricting the use of ibogaine, like Ireland, Hungary, Israel, and Australia³⁹.

Medical use of Iboga is permitted under health professionals' surveillance and control in certain countries. Such is the case for New Zealand, Brazil and South Africa⁴⁰. In South Africa, ibogaine is a listed medicine under Schedule 6 of the Medicine and Related Substances Act, Act 101 of 1965 – for controlled medicinal use. It is used under control of medical health professionals in the drug rehabilitation treatment area.

4. MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ILLICIT TRAFFICKING OF IBOGA FROM GABON

This section examines the various dynamics of some of the OCGs found to be engaged in the illicit trafficking of Iboga from Gabon. It highlights how criminal networks connect across the region, facilitating the flow of Iboga to other regions in the world, notably Europe and North America. It focuses on the online component of the Iboga market and how it feeds the increasing demand of the plant at a global level. Where possible, it draws attention to specific criminal networks and outlines how they organize and operate locally, regionally, and transnationally. Based on available information, this section summarizes the profiles of the main illegal actors operating at each stage of the illegal supply chain and, when possible, their links with counterparts within and beyond the region.

4.1 Structure of networks involved in the illegal exploitation of Iboga

Information on illicit flows of Iboga is scarce, mainly due to limited awareness on the plant properties by law enforcement agencies in regions outside Africa. This, combined with a lack of harmonized regulation on Iboga trade, contributes for illicit flows to go undetected and hence underreported.

In the past, Gabonese authorities have arrested individuals in connection with Iboga smuggling from Gabon into Cameroon⁴¹. It is highly likely that Cameroon is a transit country for Iboga with Europe and North America as final destinations.

Analysis of multiple sources of information indicates that, in Gabon, Iboga is very likely being exploited by several criminal networks. These networks are integrated by various actors that have specific roles from harvesting the plant, facilitating its illicit extraction from National Parks, selling and distributing the product (mostly online). Certain actors, such as some laboratories and members of the medical subculture (clinics, Iboga-therapy facilitators, Iboga-entrepreneurs), operate in

Certain actors source Iboga from an illicit market, in occasions without even knowing they illicit component of the trade.

environments where their activities are legal but not completely regulated and they source Iboga from an illicit market, in occasions without even knowing they illicit component of the trade.

The request for pure ibogaine is highly likely satisfied with the connivance of laboratories that transform the Iboga's root bark on psychoactive alkaloid (ibogaine). Information on laboratories synthesizing Iboga is scarce and it has represented a major limitation for the analysis of this section.

The link chart below summarizes the main actors involved or related to the illegal exploitation of Iboga (Figure 9). In some instances, the role of these actors can overlap. For example, information indicates that wholesalers can become online resellers.

Detailed analysis on the role of each actor is provided separately in the following sub-sections.

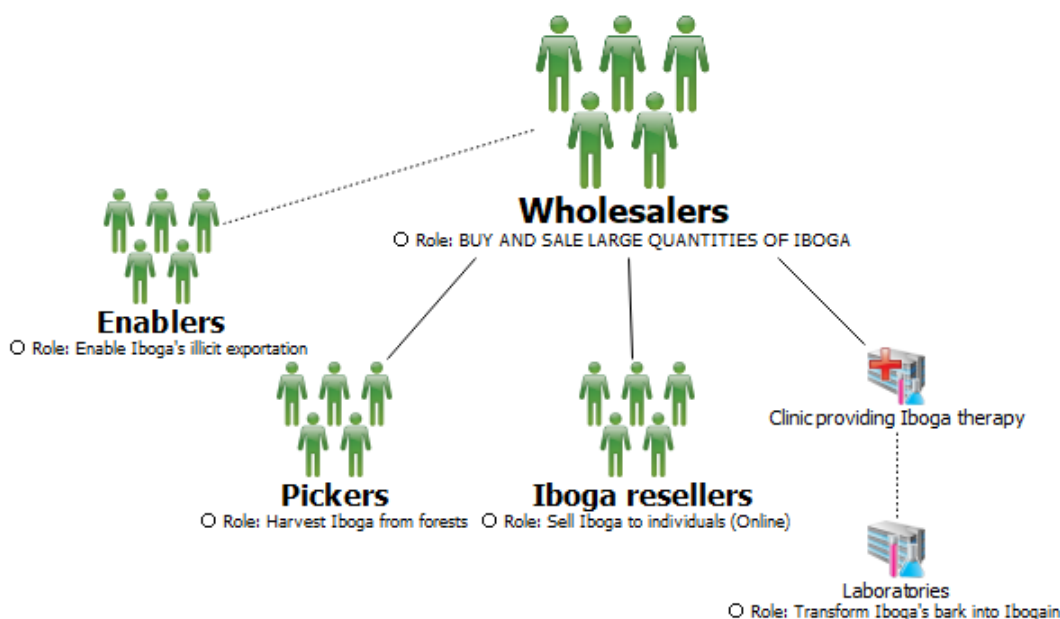


FIGURE 9 MAPPING OF ACTORS INVOLVED IN IBOGA'S ILLICIT EXPLOITATION

4.2 The role of wholesalers

Wholesalers are most often opportunistic poachers, usually of Gabonese or Cameroonian nationality, who obtain large quantities of Iboga with the assistance of local pickers. Information indicates that they enter Gabonese forests and prey on local pickers to harvest large quantities of Iboga. It is highly likely that wholesalers connive with civilian and military authorities to illegally export Iboga across the border with Cameroon.

In some instances, wholesalers of Gabonese nationality are also pseudo-initiators of the traditional rite of Bwiti and when they introduce tourist to Bwiti sell them Iboga.

4.3 Iboga pickers

They are generally individuals from local towns and villages from Gabonese forests who, most often, harvest Iboga. As they are in the first step of the supply chain, it is very likely that they are only a small fraction of the profits from this illegal activity. Analysis on Iboga prices is provided under section 5 (Online Market Analysis) of this report.

Utilization of local pickers appear to be opportunistic and there are suspected risks that their utilization falls under traffic in human beings' cases. Available information on this aspect of the market is limited and exploitation cases could go underreported.

4.4 Online resellers' profile

Proliferation of online profiles selling Iboga evidence that online resellers are a key element of the Iboga supply chain. It is very likely that they are in contact with wholesalers in the sub-region who source the plant for them. In some cases, they also commercialize illicit wildlife products, such as pangolin scales⁴². Information on the convergence of wildlife crime and Iboga smuggling is suspected to be underreported, as the plant is not widely known and therefore most likely not identified during seizures.

Since Iboga is an endemic plant that grows on the tropical climate of Central Africa only, and in Gabon particularly⁴³, it is highly likely that online sellers' supply originates in the region. Data suggests that they purchase Iboga to wholesalers or during Bwiti "initiatory" trips conducted in Gabon. Moreover, there is a specific online demand for Iboga from Gabon (and not from other countries in Central Africa where the plant grows) due to its reportedly sacred properties and quality, according to available information.

OSINT analysis conducted in March 2023 by the Criminal Intelligence Analysis Unit from Gabon registered nearly 85 wholesalers specialized on Iboga, most of them based in Cameroon⁴⁴. Wholesalers either directly sell the Iboga online or supply online resellers.

The subsections below provide a deeper analysis of online resellers.

Convergence of wildlife crime and Iboga trafficking from Gabon is suspected to be underreported

4.4.1 Increasing number of online resellers

There has been a steady increase in the number of online resellers over the last years (Figure 10). Even when oldest online profiles could have been deleted, information shows that in 2023 the number of resellers almost quadrupled compared to 2021. This increase highly likely reflects the growing interest on Iboga consumption (and most likely more awareness on its potential benefits), which inevitably leads to an increase in illegal exports. In addition, online criminal activity has steadily increase since 2020 as consequence on increasing online activity related to the Covid 19 pandemic. This has most lilkely impacted the numbers of online sites selling Iboga.

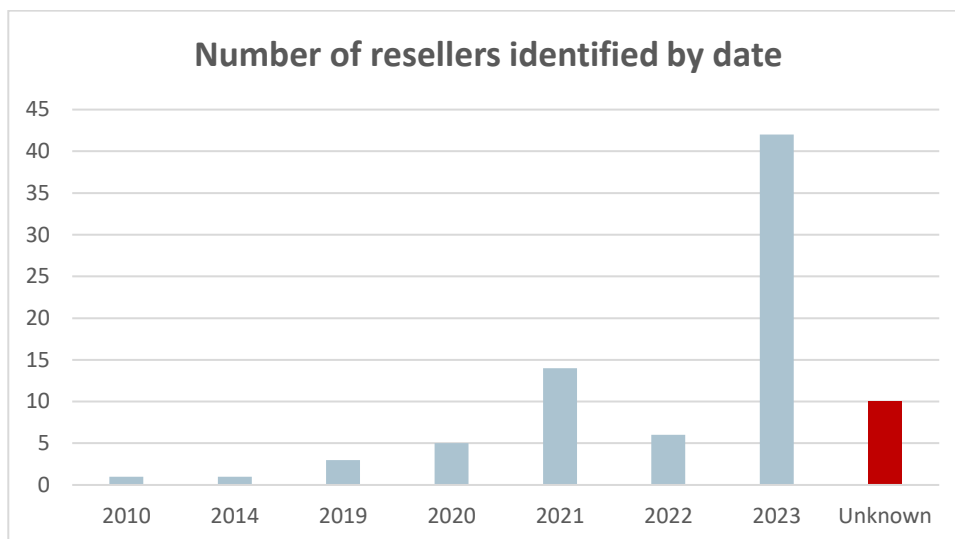


FIGURE 10 EVOLUTION ONLINE RESELLERS' PROFILES

4.4.2 Online resellers' geographical distribution

Iboga online resellers operate from several countries across Africa, North America and Europe primarily (Figure 11). Most of them are based in Cameroon and the United States, followed by Australia and United Kingdom. Although the information available shows the location from where resellers operate, it cannot be assumed that they are nationals from these countries. Detailed information on resellers' nationalities is scarce, with the exception of those who announce being Cameroonian in their online profiles.

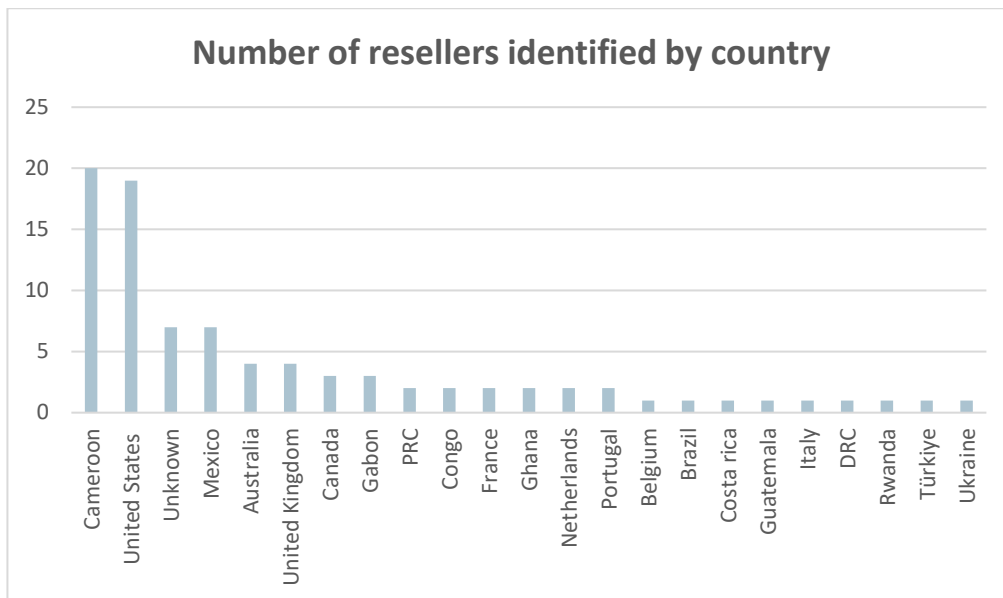


FIGURE 11 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF ONLINE RESELLERS

Available data suggests that dealers from Cameroon source their Iboga directly from Gabon whereas for dealers operating in other countries, Iboga is either supplied by wholesalers or purchased on small quantities during “Bwiti initiation” trips to the sub-region in general and in Gabon in particular.

4.5 Laboratories synthesizing ibogaine

N.B: When referencing to laboratories, this report does not refer to laboratories that synthesize ibogaine for official scientific research and investigation purposes.

Synthetic ibogaine produced with existing precursors (without the need for plant components) was discovered in 1966. It was designed to be non-hallucinogenic, while retaining anti-addictive properties. However, its clinical trial was not funded and synthetic ibogaine (without using Iboga) is not yet developed on a large commercial scale. Several sources indicate that a fully synthetic ibogaine will eventually contribute to address some of the concerns about the ethics around Iboga sustainable development⁴⁵.

In order to synthesize the ibogaine contained in the plant, it is necessary to have a specific knowledge of chemistry, as well as appropriate material. Direct extraction from natural sources or semi-synthetic preparations are the methods of choice to obtain ibogaine and related analogues in a preparative scale. Therefore, ibogaine supplied in treatment clinics as well as provided by online sellers, has been most likely synthesized from the plant. It is relevant for law enforcement agencies to understand how and where ibogaine is synthesized to identify potential diversion to illicit markets.

OSINT analysis identified three laboratories located in Popular Republic of China/PRC, the United States and Canada, respectively.

It is highly likely that Iboga-based treatments and retreats proliferate in countries where Iboga is unregulated

4.6 Iboga’s treatment clinics and therapeutic retreats

The importation, use and possession of Iboga is unregulated in many countries, as section 3.2 of this report shows. Iboga’s psychoactive element and its potential use to treat substance use disorder has fueled the opening of treatment centers worldwide. It is highly likely that Iboga-based treatments and retreats proliferate in countries where Iboga is unregulated. Scientific research reported that most often Iboga-based treatment clinics and retreats lack of clinical and pharmaceutical standards⁴⁶, increasing the risk for patients.

In 2019, the International Center for Ethnobotanical Education, Research and Service (ICEERS) registered more than 80 clinics⁴⁷ offering Iboga therapies worldwide. Given that treating a client in such clinics requires an average of 10 g of ibogaine, which corresponds to less than one kilogram of root, hence an adult tree (3 to 5 years old), it can be estimated that to supply the clinics listed above, with one client per clinic, more than 80 adult trees are needed. Since Iboga grows in Central African forests, notably in Gabon, it is highly likely that most of the clinic’s supplies of ibogaine originates in Gabon.

Clinics that propose Iboga-based treatments most often report in their websites that therapies’ facilitators have been initiated into the Missoko Bwiti of Gabon ceremonial rituals. Some of them, state that Iboga used at the centers are harvested in Gabon’s wild forests. As exportation of Iboga from Gabon has been temporarily banned, contacts between individuals who run the clinics and Iboga wholesalers residing in Gabon or Central Africa sub-region are therefore suspected.

According to ICEERS data, there is a large number of clinics based in Mexico⁴⁸, most likely due to the proximity of a large market of patients from the United States^{49 50}. Between 2007 and 2016 the number of ibogaine centers in Mexico had increased from 2 to 20, illustrating a growing market and interest on Iboga⁵¹. Moreover, available open source information also indicates that Iboga centers and therapies proliferated in Europe, notably in Portugal and Spain.

5. ONLINE MARKET ANALYSIS

In most of the cases, Iboga is advertised online through private advertisements published by individuals (online resellers) worldwide, followed by Iboga resale sites, websites that sell psychotropic, treatment clinics and pharmaceutical products’ resellers (Figure 12).

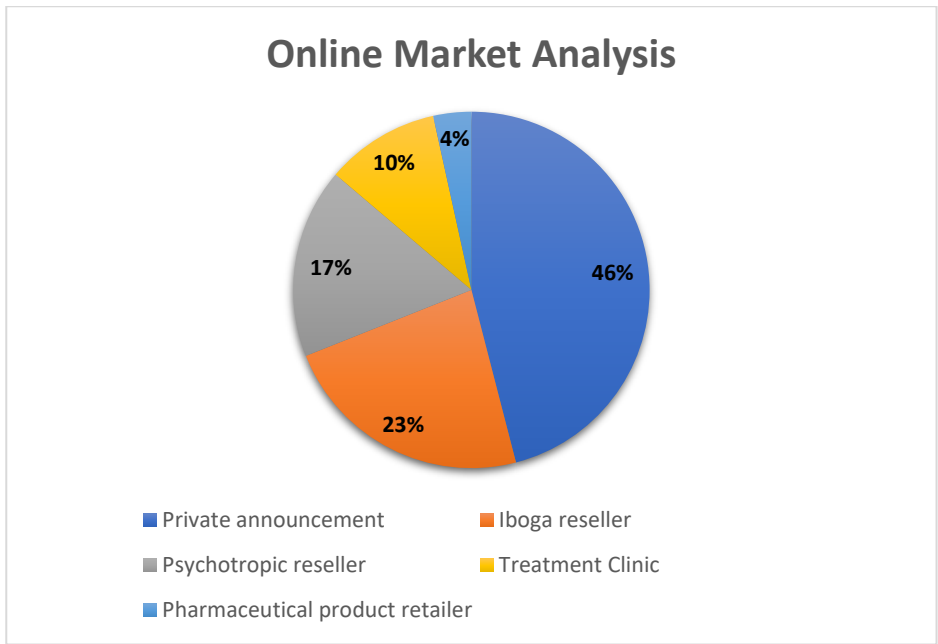


FIGURE 12 RESELLER PROFILE

Private announcements usually offer Iboga powder, whereas for the rest of online markets (resellers, specialized websites, clinics and pharmaceutical resellers) Iboga can be sold as root powder, capsule containing root powder, or even more rarely, as ibogaine powder or Iboga seed. They use social networks and advertising platforms and send the parcel most likely via shipping companies (Figure 13).



FIGURE 13 – EXAMPLE OF PARCELS PREPARED TO BE SHIPPED VIA EMS FROM AN ONLINE RESELLER BASED IN CAMEROON

Available information indicates that online Iboga’s prices fluctuate greatly (Table 2) depending on market’s location and Iboga forms of commercialization (Figure 14), and it goes from 5 Euros for a

capsule of 300mg to 1.500 Euros for a kilo of Iboga’s bark. Price fluctuation is also affected by the pureness of Iboga, with prices varying from 400 Euros for a gram of ibogaine hydrochloride (ibogaine HCl) to 140 for a gram of Iboga TA (total alkaloid, which contains around 70% of ibogaine). It is worth noting that the price for 100 grams of Iboga’s bark in Gabonese local markets is reportedly of 7.5 Euros.

As described in the section 4, ibogaine treatments in clinics requires an average of 10g of ibogaine. According to available information, prices to buy 10g of ibogaine will fluctuate between 20 to 4.000 Euros depending on the format and pureness of iboga.

There is limited information however on the economic profit that different actors (Pickers, Wholesalers, Resellers) obtain from these transactions but since the plant is often illicitly harvested is very likely that Wholesalers and resellers get the largest profit.

Website location	Price in Euros for 1g	Type	Comments
Cameroon	1.5	Iboga's Bark	
The Netherlands	1.8	Iboga seed	
United States	2.5	Iboga capsule	0.3 g
United States	3	Iboga capsule	1 g
United States	3	Iboga capsule	0.3 g
United States	4	Iboga's Bark	
United States	4	Iboga capsule	1 g
United States	5	Iboga capsule	0.3 g
United States	5	Iboga Powder	
United Kingdom	43	Iboga Powder	
Australia	56	Iboga Powder	
Australia	62	Iboga plant	
United States	69	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Cameroon	100	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
United States	100	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
United States	140	Ibogaine Total Alkaloid	
India	148	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Mexico	164	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Cameroon	168	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
United States	170	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
United States	206	Ibogaine Total Alkaloid	
The Netherlands	213	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
France	225	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Ghana	400	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Unknown	2	Iboga capsule	0.6 g
Unknown	3	Iboga Powder	
Unknown	94	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Unknown	150	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Unknown	225	Ibogaine hydrochloride	
Unknown	228	Ibogaine hydrochloride	

TABLE 2 INDICATIVE IBOGA'S PRICE FLUCTUATION

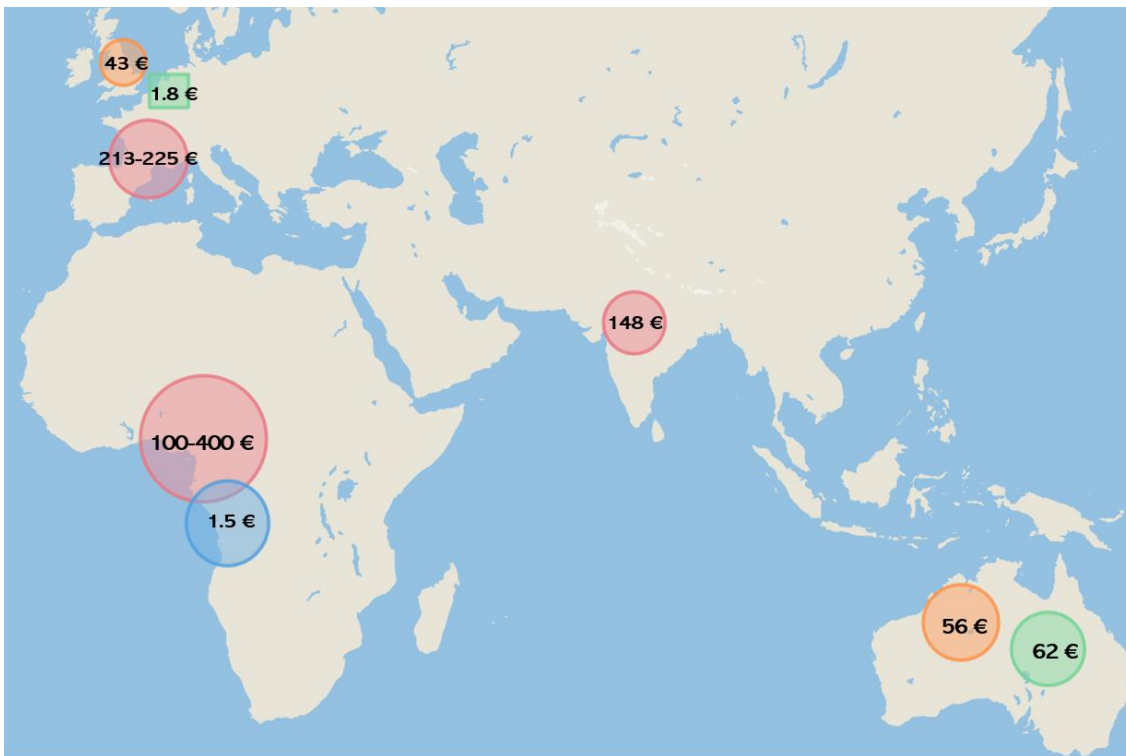
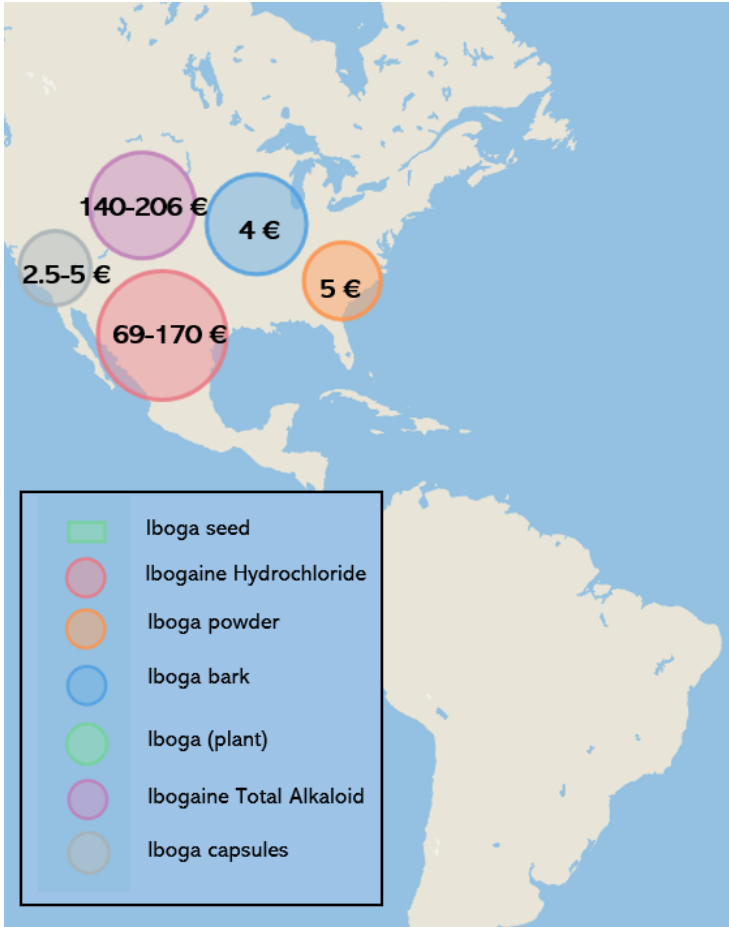


FIGURE 14 GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF PRICE'S FLUCTUATION IN EURO PER GRAM AND PER IBOGA'S FORMAT

5.1 Private announcement

Private announcement offering Iboga, or ibogaine, are most advertised in Cameroon, United States and Gabon. For private announcement published in Cameroon, data indicates that the advertiser source its Iboga directly from Gabonese forests, echoing the findings obtained for online resellers' profile.

It is very likely that for private announcements published in regions other than Africa (such as North America and Europe) the plant is sourced directly in the Iboga growing area, or through wholesalers residing in Central Africa sub-region.

5.2 Websites selling Iboga

Websites specialized in Iboga, or ibogaine, are most prominent in Cameroon, United States, Ghana and United Kingdom (Figure 15). These websites are run by individuals, or groups of individuals. For some of them the country has not been identified at the time of drafting this report.

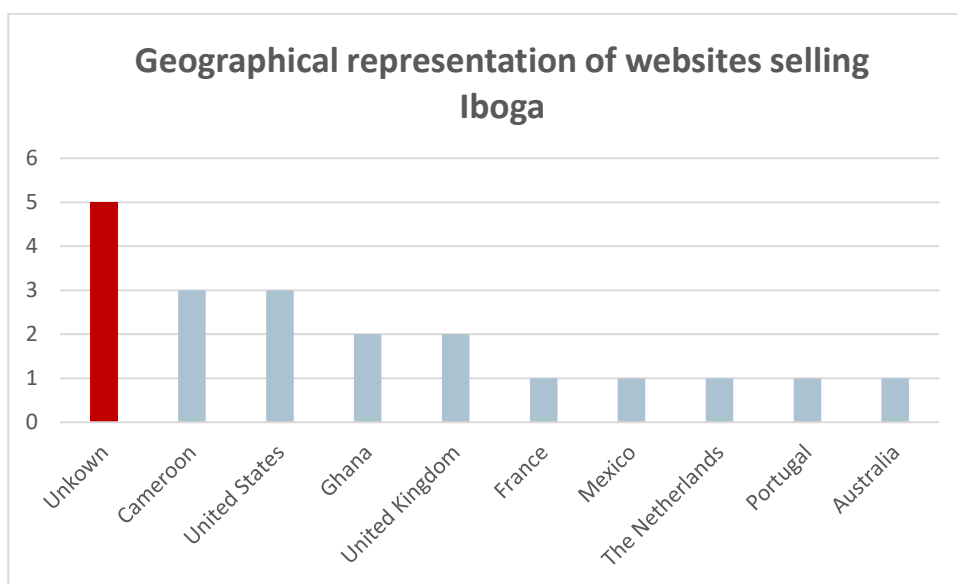


FIGURE 15 DISTRIBUTION OF WEBSITES SELLING IBOGA BY COUNTRY

5.3 Websites specialized in psychotropic selling Iboga

Analysis shows that some websites specialized on psychotropic products (such as hallucinogenic fungi) sell Iboga as well. These websites are primarily based in the United States and Australia (Figure 16). Since they are not Iboga specialists, selling a wide range of psychotropic products, it is most likely that they mainly source Iboga through wholesalers.

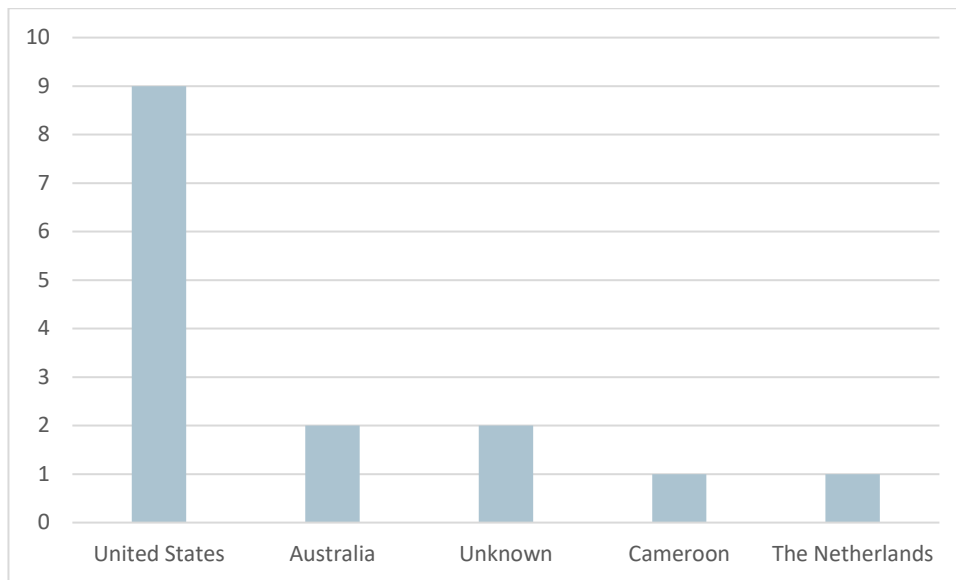


FIGURE 16 WEBSITES SPECIALIZED IN PSYCHOTROPIC SELLING IBOGA BY COUNTRY

5.4 Pharmaceutical Products Reseller

These are small laboratories for the manufacture and sale of pharmaceutical products (distilled water, pipette, LS-Lymphocyte separation, etc.) which have websites for the resale of pharmaceutical products and ibogaine. Since research into the manufacture of synthetic ibogaine is not advanced, these dealers have most likely to supply themselves via wholesalers or online resellers.

6. CASE STUDY: IBOGA ILLEGAL EXPORT NETWORK FROM GABON TO CAMEROON

The following flow chart (Figure 17) illustrates the main actors of an illegal export network specialized in Iboga. At the center is an individual based in Cameroon, a reportedly large supplier of Iboga from Gabon. In one of the exchanges, he declared to be able to smuggle goods across the Gabon-Cameroon border with the help of accomplices.

The case shows that, individuals pretend to be shaman to enjoy from customary rights and smuggle Iboga across the Gabonese-Cameroon border.

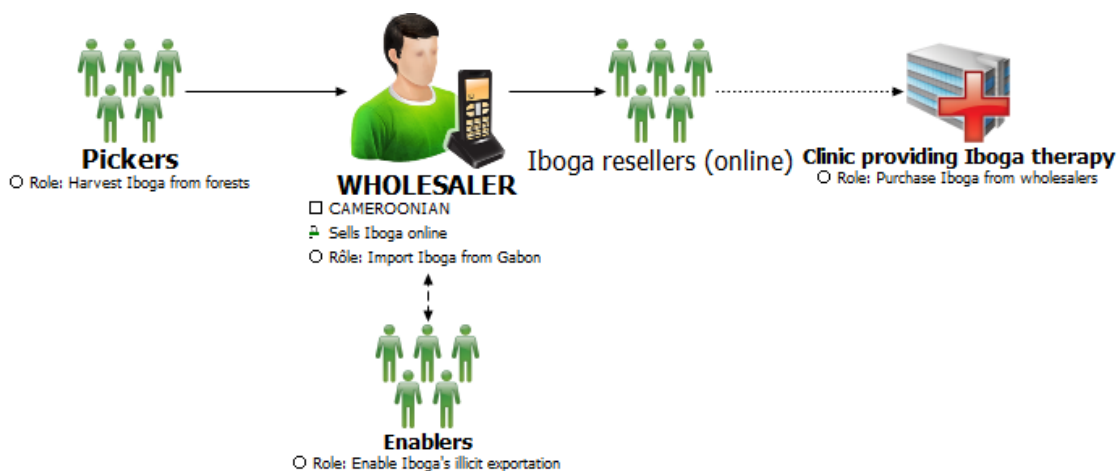
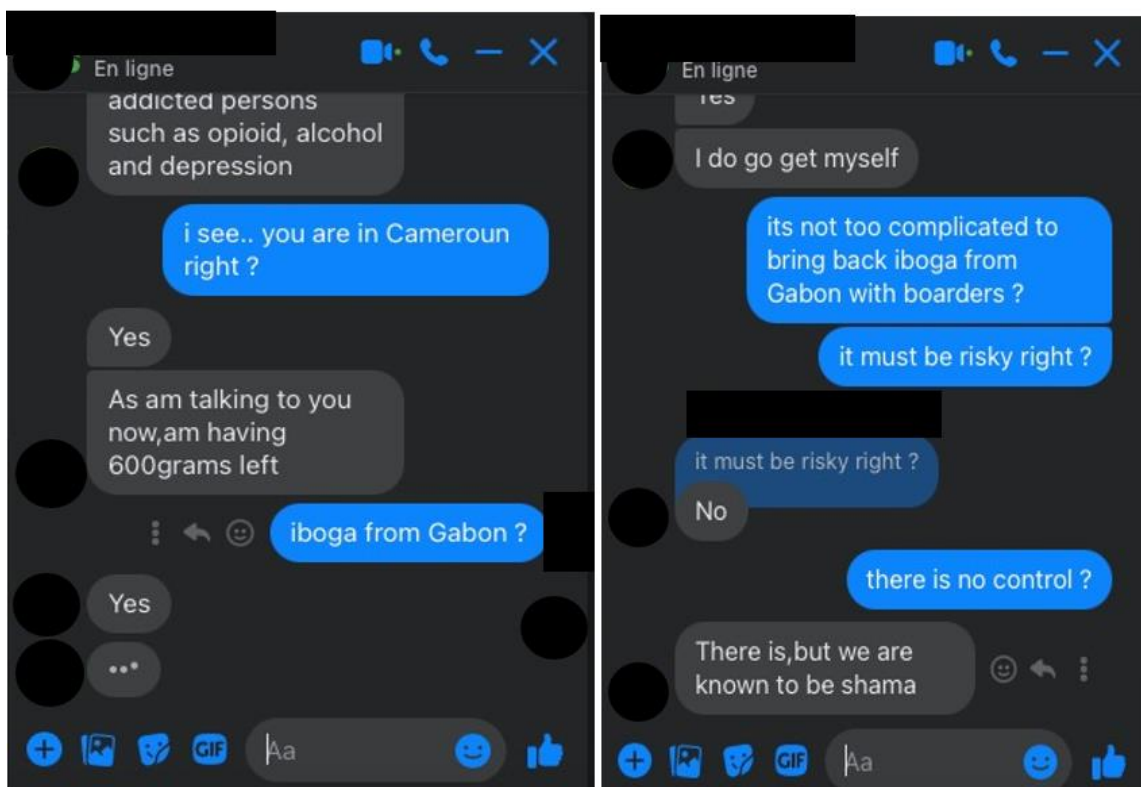


FIGURE 17 IBOGA FLOW GABON - CAMEROON

The screenshots below are excerpts of conversations with the wholesaler and capture some of the modus operandi described across this report.



7. CONCLUSIONS

This assessment provides an updated overview on the illicit trafficking of Iboga from Gabon based on available information. It describes the plant's psychotropic properties, traditional uses in Central Africa and the impact of its deforestation for local communities that have traditionally used the plant. It highlights that the plant grows most prolifically in Gabon and that declaring that Iboga originates from Gabon represents a quality seal among online sellers and consumers.

It draws attention to the steady increase of the global demand for Iboga and its alkaloids. Ibogaine has become notorious in the last ten years for its effects to treat substance use disorder and the plant is mostly used by individuals that offer detoxification therapies in private spaces, notably in Europe and North America. It also reveals that a proliferation of online markets selling Iboga has facilitated the access to the plant in regions where it cannot grow.

The assessment also examines legislation on Iboga's exportation, possession, commercialization, and use. It notes that regulation on Iboga is not harmonized on a global scale and that, although Gabonese legislation ban Iboga exportation, making exportation from this country illegal, the plant is being commercialized in several continents. Lack of harmonized regulation on Iboga combined with a lack of awareness on the plant properties by law enforcement agencies in regions outside Africa enable its illicit trade.

The assessment analyses the increasing number of Iboga online markets and suggests that Iboga is sold online in different formats by resellers based in Africa, North America and Europe primarily. It suggests the presence of several networks that traffic Iboga from Gabon to other regions of the world. These networks are integrated by various actors that have specific roles from harvesting the plant, facilitating its illicit extraction from National Parks, selling and distributing the product using online services and legal shipping companies.

Finally, the assessment also draws attention to the fact that certain actors involved in the commercialization and administration of Iboga operate in environments where their activities are legal but not completely regulated. These actors often ignore that they source Iboga from an illicit market.

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