EDITORIAL

CRIME AND DEVELOPMENT

A contentious nexus?

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The overarching theme of this issue of the *African Security Review* is 'Criminal business on the African continent' with particular focus on organised crime, money laundering and corruption. Though highly pertinent, this is a controversial topic. Critics argue that juxtaposing 'criminal business' and Africa contributes to the negative image already imprinted amongst many international financiers, donor countries and agencies, the press and other stakeholders.[2]

Yet, a 2005 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report on "Crime and development in Africa" contends that high levels of crime may be delaying Africa's development. The report refers to crime as "these unspoken development constraints", which "aggravate the suffering of the African people, make the poor even more vulnerable, distort economic values, rob national budgets, dampen the entrepreneurial spirit, discourage foreign investment, promote capital flight, and perpetuate human suffering. These are some of the problems that derail Africa's development."[1]

Vast areas of the African continent are considered amongst the least developed and poorest in the world. The UNODC report[2] groups the underlying factors linked to Africa's poverty (besides crime) under the following headings: historical causes, economic and trade barriers and health conditions.

Historically, Africa has suffered centuries of exploitation at the hands of the slave trade, colonialisation and Cold War manipulation. Geographically, the continent is distant from major northern markets. Similarly, trade barriers and tariffs have negatively impacted on Africa's upward mobility. While low agricultural productivity, periodic droughts and primary resource dependence affect economic growth on the one hand, African nations are struggling to recover from structural adjustment programmes and crippling debt burdens on the other. HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and a host of other afflictions impact upon the poorest peoples and economies on the continent.

The Lomé Declaration of the African Union Assembly of 12 July 2000 agrees in principle with the observation made by the UNODC.[3] The declaration states that "cross border crime, illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism constitute serious threats to security and stability. They hamper the harmonious economic and social development of the Continent."

However, despite such declarations, the view that crime obstructs development remains a contested one. Its proponents argue that adverse conditions combined with crime are undermining socio-economic development programmes on the continent, thereby fueling a vicious cycle. Opponents refer to the paucity of data to corroborate the link between crime and underdevelopment. As elsewhere in the world, crime is conducted away from the public glare and victims often fail to report crimes perpetrated

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against them.

Traditionally, the key function of the state has been to ensure law and order and the security of its citizens within its boundaries. Thus, the inability to protect its citizenry from crime undermines the very foundation of the nation-state. A similar reasoning has more recently been applied when assessing the impact of terrorism and transnational organised crime on national security around the world. In that instance, analysts argue that the forces of globalisation have provided organised criminals and terrorists with the springboard to expand their operations from a domestic to a global terrain. Thus, in the aftermath of the Cold War, countries mostly hailing from the northern hemisphere have identified terrorism and organised crime as the latest and most acute threats to national security. [4]

Suffice it to say that the theme of this *African Security Review* has come at a timely point in the debate around development and crime. This ASR contains some of the work undertaken by researchers and academics from Southern Africa.

Readers are introduced to the nature and extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering activities on the continent, and their threat and impact. Gail Wannenburg explores the development of organised crime in West Africa and the political, economic and social conditions that encouraged the growth of this phenomenon. Charles Goredema discusses how the proceeds of market-based economic crimes, encountered in Southern African countries, are dealt with. He argues that market-driven economic crime is significantly organised. He contends that economic crime is able to compete with lawful activity in both developed and developing economies, and can even penetrate and undermine such activity.

Other contributors focus on national efforts at combating organised crime, corruption, money laundering and terrorism. These include an examination of the effectiveness of national laws, institutional capacities, and policies targeted at challenging criminal groups and terrorists. Daniel Scher looks at the repatriation of looted African assets as an important element of anti-corruption efforts. His article addresses the history and context of asset recovery on the continent. The experiences of two African states, Kenya and Nigeria, are assessed. Both states have attempted to repatriate some of their lost wealth while facing significant obstacles at home and abroad. Gladwell Otieno traces and analyses the development of Kenya's anti-corruption campaign and the challenges it had to face. Mustafa Kennedy Hussein argues that since the advent of multi-party democracy in Malawi in 1994, the fight against corruption has taken centre-stage. His essay examines the effectiveness of structural and institutional mechanisms that have been put in place to combat corruption in Malawi. He suggests that political-legal and institutional bottlenecks that constrain the effectiveness of the established mechanisms and institutions need to be addressed pragmatically to ensure effectiveness in the fight against corruption.

Andile Sokomani introduces a new area of research to the sub-region, political party financing. He contends that party financing, private funding in particular, is a *laissez-faire* business in most Southern African countries. Thus, there is a real risk that interest groups and wealthy individuals would buy influence in political parties and in so doing, erode public confidence in the political system. Left unchecked, the party funding scenario will continue to be a serious indictment of the sub-region's democratisation projects, crippling democracy and stunting economic development.

It is hoped that this issue opens new perspectives on criminal business on the African continent. Some of the contributions demonstrate the progress achieved in combating organised crime, corruption, money laundering and terrorism. Others highlight challenges, threats and the impact of these types of criminality on the development of the continent. It is certainly encouraging that many African nations have put their weight behind national, regional and global initiatives to fight the ills that delay overall development of the continent.

Notes

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime , “Crime and Development in Africa”, June 2005, <http://www.unodc.org> accessed 29 September 2005.
2. Ibid.
3. Cited in the UNODC report “Crime and Development in Africa”, op cit, p V.
4. Annette Hübschle, “Assessing the links between organised criminals and terrorists in Southern Africa”, ISS Paper 93, Institute for Security Studies, October 2004.