

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Enhancing the information base on organised crime in Southern African countries is a prerequisite for a better understanding of the phenomenon and for more effective policy and operational decisions to both prevent and counter it. To contribute towards that objective this monograph provides studies on organised criminal groups and their activities in seven Southern African states, of which four, namely Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Swaziland, are covered in this volume. The second volume, which is published simultaneously, contains chapters on Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa.

The country studies illustrate how organised criminal networks have succeeded in establishing a common criminal market for illicit goods that covers the entire Southern African sub-region. In the legitimate business world, entrepreneurial spirit and the development or exploitation of markets are crucial to increased profits. The same applies to the illicit economy. However, organised crime constitutes a serious threat to societies, among other reasons because it corrodes good governance, undermines transparent economic activities and is closely associated with corruption and violence. Some of the country studies in the two volumes provide examples of how organised criminal networks have colluded with, or penetrated, state structures. In developing countries with under-resourced and weak governments, this can have consequences that further exacerbate poverty and distrust for democratic government.

Chapter 1 of this volume is the only one that is not country specific. It offers a perspective of the historical development of organised crime in the region. It suggests that the turmoil and dislocation that occurred during some of the post-independence periods provided new opportunities for smuggling activities between countries in the region. From such relatively small and unsophisticated beginnings, criminal networks linked up with others throughout the region and new illicit markets were identified and developed. The region became a relatively low-risk area for criminal groups as weak governments struggled with transforming their societies, and as economic output declined and violent conflicts

absorbed resources. Cross-border organised crime expanded almost unnoticed by law enforcement agencies.

By the time that the gravity of the situation was recognised by police chiefs in the early 1990s, organised criminal groups were flourishing throughout the region. Criminal groups with international connections had become active and a level of sophistication had been developed with which law enforcement agencies were not immediately equipped to deal.

Each of the remaining four chapters has a different emphasis. This was determined not only by the fact that different contributors were responsible for them, but also by the different circumstances that exist in the four countries.

Chapter 2 on Namibia, written by John Grobler, illustrates that while organised criminal groups in Namibia engage in some 'conventional' activities, such as the theft and smuggling of motor vehicles and trafficking in narcotics, the key organised crime threat to Namibia stems from the illicit trade in its most valuable natural resource, namely diamonds. Well-known international dealers with dubious reputations have become active in the diamond trade in Namibia and the enormous financial rewards that are reaped enable such diamond networks to buy off or penetrate the highest circles in government and business. It is an almost invisible and 'victimless' criminal activity, except that its consequences could seriously undermine both good governance and the criminal justice system. The chapter describes some of the links between the diamond trade and individuals associated with the Italian Mafia.

Chapter 3 on Mozambique, by Peter Gastrow and Marcello Mosse, is based on a paper that they presented at an ISS regional seminar in Pretoria in April 2002 on governance and organised crime and corruption in the SADC region. The successful penetration of some state structures by criminal groups in Mozambique is now common knowledge. Corruption, bribery and coercion are the key methods relied upon by organised criminal groups to do so. The major threat posed by organised criminal groups in Mozambique is their ability infiltrate and place under their influence key state functionaries and sectors of government departments, particularly in the criminal justice system. The revelations at the more recent trial of the Cardoso assassins seem to have had a salutary impact on both civil society, which has become more vigilant, and the state, which has evidenced a greater determination to address organised crime and corruption and to strengthen the criminal justice system.

The chapter on organised crime in Tanzania by Prince Bagenda is a first attempt to record the nature and extent of the phenomenon in that country. Indigenous Tanzanians involved in organised criminality focus mainly on stock theft, the cultivation of cannabis and armed robbery. Cannabis cultivation appears to be the most widespread and lucrative illicit activity. It is grown primarily by peasant farmers who struggle to survive from traditional cash crops. International criminal groups are increasingly involved in coordinating the production and the marketing of cannabis crops and in providing access by Tanzanian cannabis to markets abroad.

Although it is debatable whether the organised killing of 'witches' constitutes organised crime, this activity is briefly described because it is an ongoing blight in more than one SADC country. Other forms of organised crime in Tanzania such as drug trafficking, theft of motor vehicles, the smuggling of gems and of small arms, increasingly involve members of international criminal groups who have access to the illicit goods or to the markets for them in countries beyond Tanzania. In a country with vast land and sea borders that are virtually impossible to patrol effectively, the flow of illicit goods across borders remains a relatively low-risk activity.

Swaziland serves more as a transit country for organised crime than as a major generator of it. It is a small, landlocked, and poor country that is used as a main transit route for illicit commodities trafficked between its neighbours, South Africa and Mozambique. In Chapter 5, Simon Pillinger focuses on these activities. Its indigenous criminal groups appear to play a supportive role for those who use Swaziland as a transit country, and for the trafficking of locally grown marijuana. It has become a major producer of high-quality cannabis and has attracted middlemen and organised criminal groups from outside Swaziland to clinch their deals as close to the producers as possible.

The country studies in both volumes of the monograph illustrate how organised criminal groups have turned the entire Southern African sub-region into their field of operations, with South Africa providing the most lucrative component. Borders are ignored and a virtual free flow of illicit goods occurs. The implications for combating organised crime are that closer cooperation between law enforcement agencies in the region is essential, legislation should be harmonised, extradition treaties and mutual legal assistance agreements between states need to be concluded and joint regional initiatives against organised criminal groups need to be undertaken. There has been some progress in these areas but the serious resource constraints that most countries experience makes it a very slow and fragile process.

Corruption of senior officials and politicians is the Achilles heel of poor and developing countries. It is a crime that is largely invisible but its consequences can be far reaching. Sophisticated and wealthy organised criminal networks know about this. More information is required to find out who those groups are, how they operate, why they are successful and how their activities can be curtailed. It is hoped that this monograph will make a contribution towards achieving these objectives.