

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 three, namely Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa, are covered in this volume. The first volume, which is published simultaneously, contains chapters on Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Swaziland.

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.

In Chapter 1 of this volume, Charles Goredema provides an in-depth report on organised crime and the penetration of state and business structures in Zimbabwe. The chapter illustrates how the expansion of organised crime was influenced by the concomitant rapid deterioration of the Zimbabwean economy. In addition to examining the main kinds of organised criminal activities such as armed robberies, theft of motor vehicles, extortion rackets and the smuggling of diamonds and gold, the chapter also considers the opportunities for organised crime that arose with the exploitation of resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo by the Zimbabwean government following its intervention in the conflict in that country. It also surveys the criminal activities that accompanied and became part of the invasion of land and corporate institutions from the first quarter of 2000.

An important part of the chapter focuses on the penetration of organised crime into both the formal business sector and government structures. Zimbabwe is a state undergoing a deep economic and social transition and therefore provides opportunities for organised criminal groups, including senior bureaucrats and entrepreneurs from the private sector, to exploit weaknesses and opportunities.

Joint venture partnerships, involving participation of state functionaries in private enterprise and often involving partners with strong foreign links are not uncommon in Zimbabwe. Included among some of the partners have been criminals and black market experts who are well versed in bid rigging or in using state bureaucrats to protect them from competitive tender processes. The chapter provides a number of case studies to reinforce the some of the propositions made by the author and to illustrate instances of money laundering.

Chapter 2 focuses on Botswana. Despite its relatively stable democracy and an effective law enforcement agency, Botswana has experienced an increase in organised crime—but is the country that is probably the best equipped to contain it effectively. Gideon Nkala briefly sketches some of the main organised criminal activities in the country, such as the theft of motor vehicles, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. The spillover of organised crime from neighbouring South Africa is significant. The destination of trafficked drugs other than cannabis tends to be the lucrative criminal market of South Africa, making Botswana a transit country for drug trafficking as well as for other illicitly obtained goods such as diamonds. Its relatively small and well-policed population provides only limited opportunities for the development of a lucrative criminal market. Organised criminal groups are the first to realise this and many have therefore focused more on neighbouring countries in which the risk is lower and the returns higher.

It is common cause that organised criminal activities in South Africa have burgeoned over the past ten years and that a notable element has been the growing impact by groups with international links. In Chapter 3, Jenni Irish and Kevin Qhobosheane focus on the wide range of organised criminal groups that are active in South Africa, and the many criminal activities in which they engage. The growing significance of organised groups or networks with international links is illustrated. The CIA and FBI description of South Africa as “an important centre for international criminal activity” may sound somewhat dramatic, but Chapter 3 provides some of the reasons why such conclusions are drawn.

The penetration of state structures in South Africa has clearly succeeded at lower levels of state departments such as the South African Police Service and the

Department of Home Affairs, which deal with visas, passports and refugees. The more senior level bureaucrats and politicians, while certainly not immune to linking up with organised criminal groups, have thus far not evidenced the same propensity to become involved as has been experienced in many other developing countries. However, public perceptions of corruption in government remain high and there have been some scandals involving senior officials and politicians.

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 co-operation 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.



Source:
University of Texas at Austin, UT Library Online, <www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africazimbabwe_pol_2002.jpg>.
Accessed 27 May 2003.