

An Overview of Crime Prevention at the International Level

by

OLIVER STOLPE

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Oliver Stolpe¹

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1. Introduction

a. UNODC - Overview

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, is the lead agency of the United Nations in the fight against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism. Established in 2003 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention, UNODC operates in all regions of the world through an extensive network of field offices. UNODC is mandated to assist the international community through the development of international law, standards and norms as well as the conduct of research and analysis with a view to increasing our knowledge and understanding of threats and trends posed by organized crime, illicit drugs, corruption, the trafficking of persons, terrorism, as well as emerging forms of crime, such as cyber crime. Moreover, UNODC is among the prime providers of technical assistance in these areas, in particular, to developing countries and countries emerging from conflict. Technical cooperation projects aim primarily at strengthening countries' legal frameworks as well as their institutional and professional capacities to handle more effectively the challenges posed by drugs, crime and terrorism as well as to assist victims of crime and building national capacities and knowledge in the treatment and reintegration of offenders.

b. History of crime prevention within the system of the United Nations

The realisation that traditional criminal justice systems alone are not capable of effectively reducing crime, led also within the United Nations to a greater emphasis on the development of preventive systems and strategies. The first signs of a new approach which sought to balance traditional law enforcement strategies with preventive measures dates back into the 1950ies. However, it was only in the 1990ies that the issue of crime prevention emerged forcefully on the agenda of the United Nations, with the adoption of the 1990 "Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency ("The Riyadh Guidelines", GA Res 45/112, Annex), the 1995 Guidelines for the Prevention of Urban Crime (ECOSOC Res.1995/9) and the 1997 "Declaration on Crime and Public Safety".

Most recently, the focus on crime prevention within the United Nations system cumulated in the adoption of the 2002 "Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime" (ECOSOC Res. 2002/13).

These latest guidelines promote a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to

¹ Prepared with the support of Anika Holterhof, Intern, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

crime prevention combining elements of social and situational crime prevention with community based crime prevention and the prevention of recidivism. Aimed at advancing the well-being of people and the encouragement of pro-social behavior, the guidelines unite social, economic, health and educational measures, with a particular emphasis on children and youth, and a focus on the management of risk and protective factors associated with crime and victimization.

The guidelines emphasize also the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in crime prevention providing a platform of constructive engagement for all segments and levels of government to come together with civil society and the private sector.

2. The UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime and their implementation

In 2007, 5 years after the adoption of the 2002 Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime, the Secretary General of the United Nations reported on their implementation by Member States. 42 Governments had followed the invitation of the Secretary General and submitted reports on the use and application of the guidelines at national level. The responses focused on five key areas:

1. The strategic planning of crime prevention;
2. The structuring of institutional responsibilities for crime prevention;
3. Different national crime prevention approaches
4. Implementation issues, including good practices and lessons learned; and
5. International cooperation, networking and technical assistance.

The replies provided important insights into the experiences of States from all five regions, including developed countries, countries with economies in transition and developing countries.

a. A Knowledge-based approach to crime prevention

The Guidelines identify the regular assessment of crime and crime trends as well as the systematic evaluation of approaches, costs, outcomes and results of crime prevention measures as a key component of successful crime prevention.

The responses received by Member States, re-emphasised the importance of data gathering and analysis as part of the development of crime prevention policies. Most respondents reported to have introduced some form of data gathering systems, including the sharing of such data at different levels of Government and its analysis, typically by some central structure. Such data is then primarily used to determine causes for repeated victimisation and persistent offending and to identify high crime areas. While most countries rely in this context on their national systems of criminal justice statistics, some countries reported the use of specific crime surveys seeking to gather additional information on such issues, like the prevalence of drug-abuse and other

risk-prone behaviour among youth, the perception and experiences of corruption or general crime victimisation surveys.

Most countries use this information for the purpose of analysing crime problems, their prevalence, causes, risk factors, and consequences. This analysis then constitutes the foundation for the identification of thematic and geographic priority areas and the design and planning of future interventions, as well as the evaluation of past policies and measures.

Several respondents underscored the importance of building multi-stakeholder coalitions already during the early phase of problem identification and policy formulation with a view to creating consensus around the analysis of crime problems and hereby provide the basis for the creation of synergies among the efforts of different Government departments, civil society, community representatives as well as international development partners.

As concerns monitoring and evaluation of past efforts, most Member States reported on the conduct of rigorous appraisal exercises aimed to determine what worked; and whether policies and measures had resulted in reduced levels of victimization and fear of crime. Some countries evaluation systems try also to assess potential unintended consequences, yet, only very few countries venture into a cost-benefit analysis. Mostly, countries use both quantitative and qualitative assessment methodologies in the monitoring and evaluation process.

b. Crime Prevention Strategies

The majority of States reported that they had adopted specific crime prevention strategies at the national level, and some even at regional and local levels, in accordance with the specific crime prevention needs.

Some states reported that their action plans targeted specific criminal behaviours, such as illegal carrying of weapons or drug-related offences; while others focused their strategies on specific locations or target groups at risk, such as public transportation, schools, jewellery shops, taxi drivers or youth.

Mostly national crime prevention plans were enshrined in law and in some cases they were part of broader plans focusing on crime control or national security in general.

c. Institutional responsibility and community involvement

In line with the recommendations contained in the Guidelines, most Member States appear to have created permanent institutional focal points for crime prevention. Typically these are located within the ministry of the interior, the police or the ministry of justice. In addition, most countries reported that they had established inter-ministerial or inter-agency task forces with the mandate to provide overall policy guidance, con-

duct regular evaluations and ensure proper coordination among the different members of the task force. Respondents confirmed that setting up horizontal and vertical linkages and coordination between relevant government agencies is key. However, despite the emphasis posed by the Guidelines on community involvement, only half of the Member States reported on specific attempts to actively involve civil society organizations, neighbourhood watch committees, professional associations and traditional institutions. Indeed many identified community involvement as one of the challenges in the effective implementation of the crime prevention policies.

Moreover, only a few countries seem to involve private sector stakeholders. Taking into account the considerable impact of crime on the business environment, this would appear to be one of the short-comings of current crime prevention approaches internationally.

d. Crime Prevention Approaches

The Guidelines refer to various approaches, such as social, community-based and situational crime prevention, as well as the prevention of recidivism. They aim to promote the well-being of people and encourage pro-social behavior with a particular emphasis on children and youth. The Guidelines highlight the need to address the risk factors of crime and victimization by advancing protective factors through comprehensive and non-stigmatizing social and economic development programmes, including health, education, housing, and employment. They also urge State to take measures that redress marginalization and exclusion, promote positive conflict resolution, and foster a culture of lawfulness and tolerance.

The majority of respondents have established programmes that focus on children and youth at risk of offending and victimization. Such programmes target typically the risks of drug and alcohol abuse, gambling and violence, in particular as relates to gangs and the use of weapons. In this context, beneficiaries become increasingly younger, with programmes focusing on very young children who already demonstrated aggressive behavior, or who have been subject to abuse, violence or neglect. Others aim to address the needs of children who have shown behavior which, if they were not under the age of criminal responsibility, would bring them into conflict with the law.

Member States also reported having launched programmes focusing on vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities, elderly, single parents, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, homeless people, immigrants and drug addicts.

The concrete measures range from the use of sports, to drug-free campaigns, to constructive conflict resolution, to providing useful information to immigrants on their legal situation and services at their disposition. Many States have also incorporated alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in their legal systems, allowing for offen-

der-victim mediation for certain types of criminal offences.

The majority of respondents also reported having introduced community based programmes designed to change the conditions that influence offending, victimization and insecurity in neighborhoods. Such programmes comprise providing access to basic social services, cooperation with NGOs and neighborhood watch groups, increased police presence, improvement of health services and programmes for the early detection and management of risk factors in families and schools.

As concerns situational crime prevention approaches, respondents reported on a range of measures aimed to reduce the opportunities for offending and victimization, increase the risk of being apprehended, and minimize the benefits of crime. Measures include improvements in the environmental design through crime-risk sensitive urban planning and housing, increased surveillance of risk areas (*public spaces, roads, and sporting events*), encouraging the design of consumer goods that are more resistant to crime and the “hardening” of typical crime targets (*e.g. jewelry shops, credit entities, firearms sellers, pharmacies, lottery stands, gambling institutions, deposits of valuables*).

3. Conclusions

When analysing the responses provided by Member States, key elements of successful crime prevention policies seem to include:

- The establishment of a central unit, department or other institutional arrangement charged with the implementation of the national programme on crime prevention and tasked to coordinate the efforts of central and local government as well as non-governmental actors;
- The regular review and evaluation of strategies with a view to establishing their strength and weaknesses and making continuous adjustments to national and local crime prevention programmes;
- The institutionalization of programmes and interventions targeting youth and children;
- The production of guides, manuals and other tools that assist in the dissemination of knowledge and skills relevant to crime prevention; and

The survey also revealed that while it is key to build broad based multi-disciplinary coalitions for the implementation of crime prevention strategies including NGOs, traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, professional associations and the private sector, most States encountered difficulties in getting people on board and, even more so, in keeping them on board.

Other challenges include the cost of crime prevention which are often perceived as being too high. However, this conclusion may be as much a reflection of the actual

cost of crime prevention, as it may be explained by the absence of a proper impact assessment or cost-benefit analysis of the crime prevention programme concerned. One Government indeed observed that: “Crime prevention may appear very costly in the beginning, but over the long term, it is less expensive than its alternatives, in terms of quality of life and direct expenses of crime.”

Moreover, specific programmes to target first-time offenders or recidivists have proven very effective, as the beneficiaries have already “identified” themselves for their criminal tendencies. Their re-integration into society is both promising and can be very effective. However, in particular in developing countries, where many problems compete at the same time for the attention of policy makers and public resources, programmes that benefit offenders are difficult to promote and to sustain.

Moreover, as knowledge based approaches to the planning of crime prevention strategies are essential to the success of such strategies, countries should, where necessary, seek to improve their national systems for the collection, dissemination and analysis of crime data; and complement these systems through the use of victimisation surveys and similar instruments.

4. The way forward

In conclusion, it would appear that countries in general have benefited from shaping their respective crime prevention approaches in line with the recommendations contained in the UN Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime. However, it would also appear that developing countries, and more specifically least developed countries, face significant challenges in following suite. While resources at national level are simply not available or invested into other priority areas, development partners remain mostly absent.

The reluctance of international donors to support crime prevention initiatives is somewhat surprising. Already in 1997 the World Bank noted that “...crime and violence have emerged in recent years as major obstacles to the realisation of development objectives in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

Yet, today, twelve years later we cannot really claim that this realisation has in any significant way changed the situation of many countries in the region. On the contrary, crime continues to work as a kind of “anti-development” in many developing countries eroding the already weak social and human capital, in particular of those countries that are least able to effectively tackle the problem or deal with its consequences.

Violence is particularly costly in poor countries where social safety nets are weak and the loss or incapacitation of a bread-winner can determine the fate of entire families, condemning them to remain caught in the vicious cycle of poverty. At the same time victimisation and the fear of crime often drives those to leave who can afford to do so;

meaning primarily those who are educated and skilled.

Moreover, crime and corruption are the two primary obstacles to doing business in many developing countries. E.g. in El Salvador, one of the Central American countries that have been severely affected by crime in recent decades, a study estimated the total cost of violence at 11.5% of the GDP.

Even worse is the situation in Africa, where Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is lower than in any other region of the world, and amounts to only 2.4 % of the regional GDP. This has not always been like that. In the 1970 Africa was attracting higher percentages of FDI than Asia or Latin America. At the same time, crime, corruption, insecurity are contributing to the world's highest incidence of capital flight with 40% of private wealth being held outside the continent.

A 2007 business survey conducted with the support of UNODC in Nigeria, revealed that more than 70% of the respondents rated crime and corruption as the major obstacles for doing business in the country, by far more significant than over-regulation or taxation

Most importantly, the prevalence and fear of crime can severely affect the trust of citizens in their governments. Failing to provide for the security of its citizens, exposes governments to severe criticism and potentially may even provoke nostalgia for authoritarian rule.

In view of the negative impact of crime on development, it is therefore crucial that development partners do not only acknowledge crime as a development issue, but start to streamline crime prevention into their technical cooperation policies and development interventions.

The international community has done this before. In the 1990ies the World Bank declared corruption and mismanagement in the public sector as “the single biggest obstacle to development?”. This led to the establishment of an entire new field of technical cooperation - the field of democratic governance. Twenty years later, roughly a quarter of all development interventions and resources are targeted at governance related reforms.

Today we are at a similar cross-road. We need to reshape our thinking and promote the integration of crime prevention into all development interventions. Only if we are able to put crime and crime prevention prominently on the minds of policy makers in the developing world, and more importantly among developing partners, we will be able to enhance the effectiveness of development interventions for the ultimate benefit of the citizens of our countries.

Thank you very much

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