

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Introduction

This text has presented the role that computerisation may take in assisting criminal justice practitioners in their work, offered strategies for information management, and outlined guiding principles to be considered when formulating policy for computerisation in criminal justice.

This text is a compilation adapted from the papers prepared for the Interregional Training Course “United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network: Providing Information to and from Developing Countries”. The first section provided an overview of criminal justice information in the Information Age. The second section introduced strategies for information management, while the third centred on key issues in introducing information technology in criminal justice, and discussed the United Nations assistance to Member States. The fourth section discussed the United Nations Crime and Justice Information Network, (UNCJIN), and the United Nations On-line Crime and Justice Clearing-House, (UNOJUST). The fifth section provided an in-depth discussion on legal and security issues in information management in criminal justice. The sixth presented the current status of computerisation in the host country of the Interregional Training Course, namely the Republic of Korea.

This section both concludes the text by reviewing the presented issues, and identifies some key issues for the future raised by the participants during the Training Course.

2. Improving the Quality of the Criminal Justice System

The ability to improve the efficiency and management of the criminal justice system is greatly influenced by available resources. All too often, efforts to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system are placed low on the agenda of national and regional priorities.

Therefore, it is essential to teach policy makers to view the efficient management of the criminal justice system through, inter alia, the application of computerisation, as a basic requirement of good governance. Senior management in criminal justice may be sensitised to see that computerisation is a means to improve to the quality of the criminal justice administration.

2.1 Need for Training and Demonstration Projects

Member States who are entering into the process of applying computerisation in the administration of criminal justice, need to learn from the experiences of those countries that have had the opportunity to focus on the upgrading of the criminal justice system by means of the introduction of computerisation. In addition, they also need to see and hear of successful projects within their region. It is much easier to gauge the probability of success when a similar country has undertaken and completed a project of like dimensions.

There is a real need for training courses on computerisation of criminal information systems at the regional level, as well as for the creation at the regional level of demonstration projects that can provide a guide to those countries who are considering following that path. In a well-designed project, observers from perhaps two other countries could closely monitor the project as it proceeds from design to implementation. By observing the process, these representatives would be familiar with the problems that arise, the options discussed, the solutions proposed, and the full dynamic process of computerisation. Understanding the process is the key and that can only be observed over time and not by reviewing the final results.

The exchange of information is the most common starting point to establishing international cooperation. To this end, the Internet has become the standard medium for providing and exchanging information in the field of criminal justice. Therefore, having an Internet presence and, in particular, having access to the United Nations Criminal Justice Information Network (UNCJIN) and the United Nations On-line Crime and Justice Clearing-

House (UNOJUST), is increasingly important for developing countries and those in transition.

2.2 Need to Develop Funding Alternatives for such Projects

It is important to identify alternative funding sources that may finance entire domestic computerisation projects or perhaps provide funds to augment the internal resources. Perhaps the best way to identify potential donors is to identify projects that have been accomplished elsewhere and to investigate how they were funded.

The Institutes comprising the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme Network, like the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI), the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI) and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) are potential sources of such information. Clearly there have been projects funded by the United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services (DDSMS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition, there are projects funded by Member States, e.g. the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC), and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

In addition to funding options, there are clearly development options that might lower project costs. For example, it is not unusual to find one or more Governments or agencies in a region joining together to share the development costs of a particular system. The savings can be significant.

3 Conclusion

Early in this text it was noted that computerisation in criminal justice can and does yield considerable benefits which justify the investment of time and resources. There are enormous challenges and opportunities ahead for criminal justice administrators. However, the success or failure of computerisation depends on several factors. Those agencies which take note of the leading issues reviewed in this text will be less likely to face the challenges caused by poorly introduced, managed, planned or executed projects.

Computing and computers can be seductive. How often have we seen a demonstration of some technology only to learn after purchase that it does not fill our requirements? While assessing needs and planning can be tedious, it is likely to lead to a system that is right for the particular organisation.

There will be cases where the result of assessing needs and planning is to suggest the purchase of an existing commercial solution. In other cases, the adoption of an existing system from a similar agency may be the most sensible option. In other situations, a total systems development process may be indicated. In still other cases, a mixed solution may be appropriate.

Finally, at the very least, the authors hope with this document has sensitised the reader to the fact that computerisation projects in criminal justice should learn from past experience. Lessons should be drawn from lessons learned elsewhere.