

Global Programme
Assessing Transnational Organized Crime Groups:
Dangerousness and Trends
Presentation to the Donors Meeting
16 December 1999

Introduction

The Global Programme “Assessing Transnational Organized Crime Groups: Dangerousness and Trends” has been designed in the framework of several resolutions emanating from the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council which call upon the Secretariat to collect, analyze and disseminate information and data on transnational organized crime.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which is currently under discussion in Vienna, also incorporates the widely felt need for in-depth knowledge on transnational organized crime and requests the regular collection, analysis and sharing of comprehensive information on organized crime.

1.The problem

Globalization is not a single set of processes and does not lead in a single direction. It produces solidarity and common interests in some quarters, and it destroys them in others. It may produce economic opportunities in some place and reduce such opportunities in others.

Globalization is a very contradictory process: it produces aggregation and at the same time fragmentation.

Along with these contradictions, globalization develops opportunities for transnational criminal organisations, who take advantage of the growing economic interdependence.

The last decade has also experienced relevant changes in the structure and strategies of organized crime groups at the international level. On the one hand, there has been the establishment of alliances and the strengthening of links among organized groups. On the other hand, criminal enterprises have developed more flexibility and a decentralized structure.

The current trends indicate the emerging of criminal networks rather than mafia-type syndicates. These criminal networks establish forms of cooperation both with illegal and legal actors.

Think of money laundering, trafficking in human beings and trafficking in arms which may encourage alliances between official economic actors, politicians and organised crime.

Hence, the creation of joint-ventures which make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between traditional forms of organised crime, corporate and white collar crime.

2. Objectives & Outputs

The Assessment Project intends to build a body of knowledge on the major and emerging organized crime groups and provide reliable and updated information on the phenomenon at national, regional and international level.

The project also aims to identify trends and predict new areas of illicit activity and new demands for illicit goods and services.

Support and technical cooperation will be provided to governments in order to help them identify trends and problem areas for prevention, intervention and strategy development.

The project also intends to assess the level of dangerousness and threat posed by these groups.

Some thought should be given to this point, as categories of dangerousness are controversial. For example: do we take the number of people victimised as a measure of dangerousness of specific criminal groups? Do we focus on the material damage caused to the economy? And how do we measure such damage? Can we claim that organised crime distorts the mechanisms of the free market and 'fair competition'? How do we measure this? Are there cases in which the victims of organised crime can be regarded as its customers? Is dangerousness linked to the particular consensus organised crime generates in civil society or to the corrupt practices it enhances in political decision making?

The project will also develop maps that geographically place groups, locate their trafficking lines worldwide, with a view to forecasting future developments and more adequate responses at institutional and social level.

3. Method of Work

Firstly, background information on legislation, debate, investigation tools, sociological and legal definitions will be gathered. Discrepancies among these identified. Loopholes at national and international level will be highlighted.

Secondly, qualitative and quantitative information on organized crime groups will be gathered.

Thirdly, a number of experts, research institutions, NGOs and national correspondents in the field have already been contacted. They will be actively involved in the assessment of organized crime at national and regional level.

Finally, the findings of the project will be analyzed, reviewed by our national correspondents and international experts and disseminated through publications.

4. Status of implementation

Since last March, when we launched this global programme, we have started a Pilot Survey on transnational organized crime groups which currently covers 12 countries, in different parts of the world, and 1 Region: The Caribbean.

We have established a network of national correspondents in the field who are assisting us in gathering all the information in each of these countries.

Further, we have recently finalized a project proposal on Nigerian organized crime groups active in Western Africa - in the ECOWAS Region - which should start at the beginning of the new year. This project intends to generate information on the activities carried out by Nigerian organized crime groups and their international network.

5. Time frame & Budget

The Global Programme on Transnational Organized Crime is a five-years project, with an estimated budget of 4.5 million US\$.

We are now implementing the first phase of the Programme, which will last until September 2000, with an available budget of 228,000 US\$.

The results of this first phase will be collected in a Preliminary Report which we hope to launch at the Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Vienna, 10-17 April 2000).

In order to implement the second phase and, consequently, widen the scope of the project, we need more funds. We hope that Governments and Member States will support this effort.