

Transnational crime groups versus public institutions

There is a connection between organised crime, systemic corruption, and globalisation.

Transnational criminal organisations (TCOs) are highly proficient, dynamic, mobile and have an entrepreneurial flair that enables them to operate across borders with minor inconvenience. TCOs are transnational organisations par excellence.

Some perceived the Cali syndicate as the most successful transnational criminal organisation in the world. Cali, a cocaine-based Latin American syndicate, expanded its product range to include heroin, which has a much higher profit margin, opening additional markets in Western Europe through Spain and Portugal, an indication of its innovativeness and entrepreneurial flair (Williams).

TCOs have many advantages over public sector institutions, such as being very flexible and "fluid" network structures rather than having fixed bureaucratic structures; excellent intelligence and technology as opposed to uncoordinated intelligence and inadequate technology; not democratically accountable for their actions compared to increased global and local expectations of accountability; centrally coordinated syndicates rather than multiple departments that are semi-autonomous; and one objective of maximising profit as opposed to multiple objectives, constituencies and agendas (Williams, Buscaglia & Ratliff). The "fluid" network structures of TCOs enable "webs of influence", which are far more effective than any formal public institutional structure in allowing criminals to exploit

opportunities. Such networks are loose and temporary arrangements that can expand and contract very fast.

THE VALUE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING

The key to understanding TCOs is the "network" concept. All networks have social value, i.e. networks in the labour market to get employment are as important as applicants' competencies, and neighbourhood networks, e.g. Neighbourhoodwatches and Farmer Associations, can provide security and other social benefits of cooperation (Putnam).

Criminal networks are at the same time "pervasive and intangible, ubiquitous and invisible, everywhere and nowhere" (Williams). Such networks cut through divisions of specialisation, rank, ethnicity, culture and wealth. These networks of social organisation enable illegal markets to be more efficient, reducing transaction costs and increasing opportunities for both buyers and sellers, upstream and downstream (e.g. drug trafficking). The (secret) network structure of TCOs enables them to neutralise law enforcement initiatives, and to be sensitive to threats and opportunities (Williams). The success of local criminal organisations and TCOs lies in their social organisation, networks or webs of highly flexible and cross-cutting relations that can maximise opportunities and reduce risks. Social networks enable participants (including criminals) to achieve goals they could never achieve without such networks. Networks of social organisation create social capital. All



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Qaeda is an excellent example of an organisation with a high level of social capital (Putnam).

Based on our knowledge of TCOs, one alternative to crime in Namibia is to develop social networks between citizens so that observations, information, and awareness are synchronised in partnership with the City and National Police Forces. It is for us as citizens to get involved and get our hands dirty (but not to take the law in our own hands) if we want to address crime and corruption.

Socio-economic challenges such as poverty, the urban land issue and unemployment can benefit from social networks. Effectively, one way is to create open forums of debate on social media such as Facebook and Twitter to engage and learn from each other in order to find common solutions for national challenges.

• References

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