Economic and Social Council

Commission on Narcotic Drugs

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Vienna, 14–18 March 2022
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*
**Follow-up to the implementation at the national,
regional and international levels of all
commitments, as reflected in the Ministerial
Declaration of 2019, to address and counter the
world drug problem**

Statement submitted by Slum Child Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* E/CN.7/2022/1.
** Issued without formal editing.

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Outcome Document: Africa Conference on Drugs and Crime, a Civil Society Perspective on Promoting Evidence-based Interventions to Foster African Development

Background

The *Conference* took place on 21-23 February 2022 in a hybrid format. It was attended by 100 participants and organized by Slum Child Foundation Kenya, with the support from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the NGO Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, and the Vienna NGO Committee on Drugs.

The conference aimed at creating avenues for dialogue and action to address drug and crime challenges in Africa and opportunities for civil society to support governments in responding to them through international instruments, including the implementation of the UNODC Strategic Vision for Africa. The discussions focused on the areas of crime prevention and drug use among youth as well as organized crime, cybercrime, and illicit trafficking.[1]

This outcome document summarizes the discussions of the conference, including proposed actions to contribute more effectively to addressing drugs and crime challenges in Africa.

1. The nexus between drugs & crime

Drug markets and criminal activities constitute profitable avenues for organized criminal groups, affecting young people especially from marginalized communities who are often unaware of the legal consequences of their involvement.

Thus, appropriate responses are urgently required whereby civil society, academia, and the private sector can play a key role.

The lack of sufficient and reliable data on the drug-crime nexus remains a major challenge. Therefore, a key component to developing effective responses is filling this data gap, especially by clarifying the existing intra-,and inter-regional connections.

Increased digitalization undoubtedly contributes to increasing development possibilities for the continent but simultaneously entails potential dangers and challenges. Thus, in addition to the possibility of accessing the Darknet, it must be considered that social media, Clearnet platforms as well as messenger services constitute potential tools for facilitating illicit trafficking as well as a channel for cybercriminals to reach their victims.

However, social media can also be part of the solution, as it could be mobilized by CSOs for sensibilization and preventative activities.

2. Existing instruments to address regional challenges

Recent international instruments such as the 2019 Ministerial Declaration, the Kyoto Declaration, and various resolutions of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime identify cross-cutting challenges that include issues such as crime and drug use prevention, organized crime, and the misuse of information technology.

At the regional level, the 2014 African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal data Protection (*Malabo Convention*) establishes a legal framework on cybersecurity and personal data protection. Moreover, with the scope to facilitate the implementation of the Convention, the African Union together with the Internet Society (ISOC) developed the *Personal Data Protection Guidelines for Africa, acting as* blueprint for an evolving process of developing policy, operational guidance, and best practice, as new circumstances and requirements emerge.

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[1] More information at: https://vngoc.org/africa-conference-on-drugs-and-crime/.

Crime and drug use prevention among youth

Crime and drug use can have detrimental effects on young people. UNODC's World Drug Report 2021 thereby reveals that young people account for the largest percentage of drug users in the world – with a substantial increase especially in developing countries since 2000.

To this end, the UNODC Strategy 2021-2025 highlights commitments towards more effective youth empowerment and capacity building.[2] In addition, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNODC developed the 'International Standards on Drug Use Prevention', providing an evidence-based framework of interventions that have proven to be effective when it comes to preventing both drug use and crime among youth.

The contributions made at the conference provided viewpoints enhancing the understanding of the tools currently being used locally. All initiatives showed a strong need to involve governments and the need for support, such as through treatment and rehabilitation programs, education, and greater collaboration with civil society.

Programs are increasingly designed to develop young people's self-esteem, build their capacity, and provide mental health support, and involve communities, schools, and law enforcement agencies, with due consideration to gender issues. Also, in response to the high numbers of young people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system,[3] experts discussed alternatives to incarceration. One of the noteworthy examples of government-civil society collaboration includes a program carried out together with the National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the Kenyan Ministry of Education whereby children are accompanied throughout the year and socially engaged to provide concrete perspectives to their future within the community.

A major challenge faced by many service organizations is the lack of funding from governments. While dialogue with governments is essential to better address service gaps, engagement of affected populations in a holistic manner has proven effective. Therefore, strong partnerships between CSOs and governments are key.

Organized Crime & Cybercrime

The need for the global community to collectively address crime in its various forms as an obstacle to development forms part of the UN 2030 Agenda. The Conference addressed the issues through the lenses of key existing instruments to combat these crimes.

Among promising practices, ENACT which is a joint initiative by INTERPOL and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime supported by the European Union aims to combat the spread of organized crime in Africa. The project intends to aid police services in countering organized crime by improving investigative procedures, information exchanges, capacity building, and report preparation.

In identifying the main challenges posed by organized crime, cybercrime and illicit trafficking, the Conference noted that the whole continent has suffered from Covid-19 and its socio-economic impacts. With the pandemic, organized criminal groups adapted quickly by moving many activities into cyberspace and taking advantage of the vulnerability of migrants. The second main challenge raised is the insufficiency and inefficiency of information sharing mechanisms between law enforcement agencies and the medical sector. The necessity for greater collaboration and communication between national and international bodies, as well as different agencies and civil society was also highlighted.

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[2] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/strategy/full-strategy.html.

[3] According to the World Drug Report 2017, prevalence of drug use disorders is much higher among incarcerated people than in the general population and women are disproportionally affected.

Further challenges include:

- Judicial system and legislative limitations: legislative flaws and delays in applying laws discourage victims from turning to the courts, provide fertile ground for criminals and entail associated and prohibitive costs.

- Shortage in professionals: the bodies responsible for regulating and combating crimes are under-resourced and criminologists capable of supporting the work are lacking.

- Isolated areas: the capacity building offered is often confined to cities as reaching rural regions to better communicate with and protect victims and vulnerable populations is often made more difficult by the variety of languages spoken.

- Lack of transparency: shortage of qualified journalists and bold media outlets who can expose organized crimes, due to the prominent occurrence of corruption in Africa.

3. The way forward

Building on good practices and existing national, regional, and international networks, the conference made the following recommendations:

1. Further expand partnerships and encourage the establishment of informal and formal networks of NGOs at regional and national level, creating trust mechanisms by understanding common objectives and creating codes of conduct that enhance the ability to build sustainable relationships. This includes, for example, establishing a guideline of minimum standards to be followed in terms of partnerships. The formation and expansion of partnerships should encompass civil society organizations including media, governments, international organizations, community groups as well as affected populations to guarantee integrated, effective, and efficient service delivery.

2. Increase sharing of knowledge and documentation in recognition of the structural differences of the different regions of Africa as well as the sharing of achievements and failures between governmental and NGOs is an important step in deepening partnerships and improving the impact of the work done.

3. Strengthen and improve organizational systems that allow different stakeholders to be part of important decision-making processes to ensure networking capacity and to benefit from resource allocation.

4. Provide effective mentorship and capacity building programs, both among civil society organizations themselves and with governments and international organizations such as UNODC. Existing national, regional, and international tools to share knowledge with diverse groups of organizations need to be better leveraged.[4]

5. Increase youth engagement in the implementation of joint commitments on drugs and crime. Open information forums organized by and for youth can contribute to training and education.

6. Reduce delays in applying laws which discourages many victims from turning to courts and provide support for legal costs which are often unaffordable for most of the African population.

7. Uproot corruption in law enforcement agencies and among prominent people, including by increasing qualified journalists and bold media outlets who can expose organized crimes

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[4] This includes inter alia increasing judicial system and legislative capacity to adequately respond to crimes, increasing criminologists and resources for institutions, increasing capacity building to areas outside capital cities.