WHY CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CRIME STUDIES ARE LONG OVERDUE IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN AFRICAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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Abstract

The efficacy of the educational system of a society may be gauged by how well the system meets the needs of that society. One of the most readily discernible societal needs in most parts of Africa today is to contain sprawling crime and disorder. This paper makes a compelling contribution to discussions about the type of educational reform that will be relevant for managing the crime problem as a requisite preparation for the goals of twenty-first-century development in Africa. I present the argument that in order for developing nations to position themselves for the demands of the twenty-first century and beyond, they will need to introduce modern scholarship on crime and its corollaries, and revitalize existing criminal justice programs in higher education.

Keywords: **Criminal justice, Curriculum, Higher Education, Kenya**

Background

Crime is the single most ubiquitous social perversion across history. People die in the hands of others on a daily basis, and the amount of property that is lost to the underworld on any given day cannot be estimated. In many parts of the world, people cannot go about their daily routines without constantly worrying about their safety, the safety of their loved ones, and of their property. In many African cities, the police have demonstrated a genuine inability to abate the raging tides of daylight crime. Crime undermines the rule of law and general democracy, and a weak democracy undermines efforts to realize economic growth (Barkan, 2003). The educational needs of any society must reflect the human needs of that society. As modernization brings about changes in

societal needs, the rationale for updating educational needs occasionally for the purpose of responding to changing societal needs becomes more pronounced. Unfortunately, while the underworld reaches out for the latest technology for achieving criminal objectives and thus steadily holds down society's efforts to realize meaningful development, law enforcement personnel have not kept abreast of such technologies. Their inability to respond decisively to distress calls has left many citizens with only one option—namely, to take the law into their own hands and lynch crime suspects at the slightest distress call.

It is clear that the need to address emergent societal problems affecting the educational reform agenda is now crucial. For a long time, the Kenyan economy has been predicated on agriculture and tourism (Bates, 1989; Haugerud, 1989; Heald, 1999; Manyara & Jones, 2007). During that time, the educational agenda has oscillated between, on one hand, elevating the quality and expanding the quantity of agricultural produce, and on the other, improving the attractiveness of the country as a tourist destination. This, of course, is after holding constant most of the other key human services that have already been implemented. As a result, we have witnessed impressive growth spurts in agriculture- and tourism-supporting curriculums in institutions of higher learning, including the establishment of departments of agriculture, agricultural economics, horticulture, land economics, agricultural engineering, agricultural education, and veterinary medicine. The creation of state-of-the-art agricultural-based research institutes and major advances in animal health in addition to other key agrarian reforms have also evolved. On the tourism frontier, unprecedented growth in such academic disciplines as range management, hotel and tourism management, forestry, and environmental sciences has occurred.

Times and circumstances have changed, but educational needs have not kept abreast of such changes. In the years around independence, crime was an almost entirely foreign concept in

most rural communities and a relatively unknown phenomenon in urban centers. Those who were involved in random criminal acts would easily be contained with relatively minimal resources. Today, rural life hardly attracts, if the current urbanization is any indication. In most parts of Africa, however, the urban population influx has been compounded by millions of refugees who are fleeing civil war and famine (Handelman, 2000). City life is becoming the end rather than the means of eking out a living for most people. The result is the unprecedented growth of urban population with all its documented consequences, the main one of which is an upsurge of crime (Situ & Liu, 1996; Koczberski, Curry, & Connell, 2001). Many recent studies have yielded a strong positive correlation between crime and urbanization (Ergun & Yirmibeşoğlu, 2007; Hoppe, 2008). With this background, it is clear that in order to attain meaningful and sustainable development, the training inadequacies in the field of crime management must be addressed.

The Quintessence of the Problem

In many African cities, crime has become a vibrant industry and a favorite, albeit macabre, topic of conversation (Seekings, 2003). On a typical day in Nairobi, marauding gangs face off with police officers in the streets. Mugging has become so widespread that it has entered the daily lexicon. Drug syndicates have made inroads into all population groups, and regarding homes, burglary and house-breaking define the greatest source of fear for the average citizen. Homicide has become so common that it sometimes does not make headline news. Even the corporate world is not any safer. Bribery, fraud, extortion, embezzlement and mega-corruption schemes have become the main way of doing business. At the same time, public opinion polls record low levels of public confidence in the capacity of the justice system to curb crime (Seekings, 2003).

This daunting reality affects all members of society in many ways. First, we are affected as victims, perpetrators, witnesses, family members of victims or perpetrators, friends of victims or perpetrators, accomplices, and so forth. But more pertinently, crime instills fear that leads to lifestyle modifications that inhibit the rapid attainment of life-success goals. For example, instead of investing available resources in income-generating activities, most people would first fortify their houses to cushion them against burglary. Instead of working a few extra hours, most people would leave work early to get home before dusk, when muggers begin their day. Instead of operating all day, most traders would close their shops early to keep away looters. Fear of crime also leads potential victims to wall themselves off from the rest of society and thus from each other, resulting in the decline of the public's sense of community and neighborliness, as the buildup of social capital among citizens also declines (Barkan, 2003). Yet economic development correlates strongly with social development, which is more easily realized when citizens are able and encouraged to interact freely (Handelman, 2000). If unchecked, this situation steadily stymies efforts to realize meaningful development.

In order to prepare for twenty-first-century development goals such as Kenya's Vision 2030, developing countries must consider crime and delinquency prevention and the eradication of social disorder. They must take a bold step in rethinking the current systematic absence of crime and justice-related curriculums in the mainstream institutions of higher learning. At the present time, the closest approximation of studies of crime and justice in most African institutions of higher learning, outside of the legal domain, is criminology and juvenile delinquency, which, though important in paving the theoretical underpinnings to crime and delinquency causation, lack the necessary breadth to equip modern arts-oriented students with the capacity to understand and deal with the surging crime problem. The society continues to relegate all crime-control responsibilities

to the formal, traditional law enforcement machinery that was built upon the principle of reactive response to crime. The law enforcement officer is still equated to a crime fighter whose primary role is to pursue criminals and arrest them or to use any amount of force available to subdue them if they resist or challenge the officer's authority.

To facilitate the preparation of the requisite groundwork for the foundation of sustainable development, it is time to augment reactive responses to crime with a sound crime-management agenda that answers to the needs of the people proactively—that is, before the crime occurs in the first place. This calls for training of less combative but more service-oriented crime managers at all levels of the justice system. By making such training available, society will be confronting effectively the problem of crime and disorder. More directly, such a move would contribute to long-term development goals by ensuring community stability, which would be realized when employment opportunities are opened up.

The Way Forward

In one of his many research papers, my doctoral professor and friend, Dr. Thomas J. Durant, avidly argues that crime is a public-health problem, and that to eradicate disease and bolster public health, efforts to eradicate crime must be considered (Durant, 1996). According to Durant, the parameters that define crime as a public-health problem are mental, emotional, physical, and social consequences such as injury, mental trauma, fear, death, social discontent or unrest, and the economic costs that the victims of crime and their families have to bear. From this perspective, the incidence of crime brings both health and economic costs to society, and this means, by implication, that crime, health and development are not mutually exclusive.

The transition to true democracy, which is a prelude to sustainable development, often produces an increase in serious crime in many societies (Stone, 2003). In readiness for the twenty-first-century developmental goals, it is incumbent upon universities that authoritative academic disciplines are provided that will prepare interested and qualified students not only to understand passively various types and causes of crime, juvenile delinquency, and social disorder, but also to pursue actively careers in the fast-growing criminal justice field that includes, *inter alia,* crime prevention, community policing, law enforcement, evidence analysis, adult probation administration, forensic science, prisons supervision, juvenile justice management, drug control initiatives, and crime-victim care. That academic discipline is criminal justice, which, in Western academic arrangements, is typically a lone department or a major component of a set of related disciplines that are administratively grouped together where there may be resource limitations.

Integrating criminal justice into higher learning curriculums would ensure the capacity-building necessary to meet the challenges that come with various developmental goals. In the developed West, the discipline of criminal justice has come to define the core of many schools of arts and social sciences. To complete a university degree in criminal justice, students typically take several core courses in addition to such common courses as computer literacy, data analysis, and report writing, as well as basic mathematics. The array of criminal justice courses is too wide for a complete listing in this paper, but common courses include, among others, introduction to the criminal justice system, fundamentals of criminal law, prison issues, policing systems and practices, criminal investigation, law enforcement, community policing, courts and the criminal procedure, white-collar crime, victimology, understanding homicide, forensic science, sexual offenders, terrorism, juvenile justice, law in society, legal aspects of corrections, child abuse and

neglect, drug abuse, ethics in criminal justice, organized crime, correctional counseling, community corrections, data collection and management, domestic violence, and global security.

Upon the completion of a degree in criminal justice, qualified citizens would be able to manage and operate effectively the entire system of administration of justice from law enforcement through the judiciary to corrections. Students graduating with a degree in criminal justice administration would be able to secure many different types of jobs. At the level of law enforcement, the graduates could work not only as police officers, which is certainly an area of need, but also as detectives or undercover operatives, emergency-call dispatchers, crime-scene investigators and technicians, police dog handlers, police training instructors, domestic-relations specialists, traffic analysts, narcotics officers, industrial security officers, private loss-prevention managers, suspect-booking personnel, and so forth. At the courts level, job openings for the graduates would include court clerks, court recorders, bailiffs, intelligence analysts, witness managers, forensic scientists, court administrators, and private investigators, among others. In the corrections subsector, criminal justice graduates would be able to work as wardens, corrections officers, prisoner advocates, probation officers, correctional counselors, juvenile probation officers, and mediators. Outside of the criminal justice system, graduates could work as trainers in diverse areas, including as college and university instructors, upon gaining further education in their respective specialties.

Policy Implications

According to available research, crime is more effectively controlled when democratic practices are built into crime control strategies and the public is treated with dignity and respect by criminal

justice agencies (Bayley, 2003; Mbuba, 2008). Therefore, staffing the entire criminal justice system with well-prepared and adequately trained personnel is critical, as this will produce several important implications for sustained development, both in the twenty-first century and beyond.

First, higher efficiency levels in crime prevention and in the processing of criminal suspects will be recorded, and the corollary reduction of the fear of crime among citizens will free up for profitable investments the resources that were previously used for barricading homes against criminal activity. Such is the case in many Western countries where perimeter walls around houses have been eliminated, except for privacy and low fences for restraining small pets. Second, the resultant efficiency in the criminal justice system will elevate public confidence in the legal administration of justice and, consequently, diminish the need for vigilante and other extortionist self-help crime-prevention groups whose main method of punishing crime suspects is lynching, irrespective of crime type.

Third, the increased public support for the rule of law will heighten personal responsibility and thereby tame street disorder, collective behavior, and mass waywardness that provide cover to individuals with premeditated criminal intent. Finally, increased job opportunities will form the fundamental basis for development and, at the same time, change the conditions that generate crime in the first place. These are ultimately the pillars upon which stand the prerequisites to sustainable development.

Conclusion

Educational reform is inevitable in the changing world in which we live. Because a superior educational system is the one that best meets the most pressing needs of society (see Bacchus, 2008), the desired educational reforms in Africa will be complete only upon encompassing the

society's priority issues, including criminal behavior, juvenile delinquency, and social disorder. Introducing comprehensive studies of criminal justice administration would help assuage the culture of public mistrust toward the police, law enforcement, and other agencies that deal with processing offenders. Such trust is necessary in order to realize the gains of effective crime management, including the stability of society and eventual sustainable development. It is against this background that I suggest the establishment and development of crime-related curriculums that are packaged into criminal justice programs in institutions of higher learning.

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