Using ICT to Fight Crime - A Case of Africa

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ABSTRACT

The scale of crime represents a considerable challenge to law enforcement agencies in Africa. With so much of our everyday communication and commercial activity now taking place via the Internet, the threat from crime is increasing, targeting citizens, businesses and governments at a rapidly growing rate in Africa. Criminals in Africa have gone high tech in their activities. They use the ICT to break into peoples bank accounts, withdraw money from peoples account and track movement of people and rob them. The aim of the study was to assess the ICT tools available to law enforcement institution to fighting crime in Africa. The study revealed the police in developed countries have developed ICT methods of crime detection and combat. Legislation has also been updated to allow the police to gather evidence on criminal activity carried out via the internet but Africa is yet to take advantage of ICT in fighting crime. ICT tools such as CCTV technology, tracking technology, social media and mobile phone are efficient in fighting crime. These are now everyday technology. Information is the key word in crime detection and this information must be accurate and easily available. ICT has a huge role to play in this. For Africa to succeed in the fight against crime it needs a comprehensive adoption of ICT.

Keywords: ICT, crime, Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global nature of the Internet has allowed criminals to commit almost any illegal activity anywhere in the world, making it essential for all countries to adapt their domestic offline controls to cover crimes carried out in cyberspace. The use of the Internet by terrorists, particularly for recruitment and the incitement of radicalization, poses a serious threat to national and international security [1].

More and more criminals are exploiting the speed, convenience and anonymity that modern technologies offer in order to commit a diverse range of criminal activities. These include attacks against computer data and systems, identity theft, the distribution of child sexual abuse images, internet auction fraud, the penetration of online financial services [1].

In the past, crime has been committed by individuals or small groups of individuals in Africa. However, Africa is now seeing an emerging trend with traditional organized crime syndicates and criminally minded technology professionals working together and pooling their resources and expertise, taking crime to a high tech level.

The control and regulation of cross-border activities are essential for ensuring peace and stability and for the promoting pertinent political and socio-economic activities needed for integrating African countries. The movement of persons and goods is inevitable in undertaking these cross-border activities. Studies conducted have shown that between 4 and 5 million ECOWAS citizens ply the highways and frontiers of the community’s territory every month [2].

The porous borders of Africa, however, continue to engender cross-border crime and instability, owing to the lack of an appropriate mechanism for monitoring movements and illegal activities across these borders. Cross-border crime activities undermine good governance and security in Africa [3].

The aim of the study was to assess the ICT tools available to law enforcement institution to fighting crime in Africa. The study revealed that, Africa is yet to take advantage of this everyday technology such as CCTV technology, tracking technology, social media and mobile phone. The criminals have gone high tech, and the solution is a coordinated approach in using ICT to fight crime.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper interrogated and reviewed the efforts being made by African countries in using ICT to fight crime.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world of the twenty-first century, economic and political barriers are being lowered and technological advancements in communications and commerce are on the increase, affirming that ours is indeed a globalised world. The globalization phenomenon is increasingly producing immense opportunities for students, researchers, tourists, and business people, and at the same time fuelling economic growth and development. However, among those taking advantage of opening up societies and borders are criminals who engage in the human trafficking and drug trade, arms smuggling, fraud, counterfeiting, and other financial crimes, and increasingly in computer crimes [4]. This presents a grave predicament so much that today, it is estimated that international crime is a $1 trillion business [5].
The uses of technology within the police forces in England have greatly increased the way in which the police serve and protect the population for the better. The aims of the Police force in England has been and will always be to both solve crime and to try to prevent it from happening. The way in which the police go about investigating crimes has been revolutionized by the improving technology that has become available to the police. The police use ICT to aid in monitoring road traffic, where officers can watch traffic images live and direct them on the ground to incidents by use of CCTV. The Metropolitan Police in London is one of the largest CCTV schemes. It monitors the M25 and all the routes in and out of London including the main roads in central London [6].

Western Australia Police have reduced crime through the use of predictive analytics and GPS maps which show crime hotspots in the state. By using business intelligence (BI) it has been able to build up a picture of crimes committed over the past five years. The police have combined data from other government agencies to identify areas of social disadvantage. Bus routes and CCTV data have also been overlaid on to the maps [7].

The Police in Australia have also used data to assign patrols to hotspot areas in a bid to increase response times when a crime occurs. The police analyze social media using text mining. Crime analysts used to spend two hours every day looking at the previous day’s reports. Today there’s a code which skims all of the data from the previous night so it now takes 30 seconds. In addition, the Police now sends messages via Twitter or Facebook to people who have organized large parties telling them that the party is been monitored [7].

In almost all the developed countries, there is a central database that has details of all citizens and has links to other databases such as the car registration database held at the Drivers Vehicle Licensing Agency and to another powerful computer running the Automated Fingerprint Identification system. This integrated system helps in tracking down and controlling crime.

Jamaica is taking full advantage of the offerings of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in combating crime across the island. A number of crime control and prevention initiatives have been implemented with the use of modern technology. Among these is the recent upgrading of the Jamaica Constabulary Force’s (JCF) Automated Palm and Fingerprint Identification System (APFIS) at a cost of $260 million. In addition, the Blackberry (smart phone) law enforcement database has been installed on some 550 handsets of traffic and operational personnel across the island and the smart phone application has been used to check the authenticity of drivers’ licenses and motor vehicle documents. The analogue police radio system has been converted to a digital system with enhanced capabilities at a cost of $240 million [8].

The Italian Government is also using a new Business and Location Intelligence system to fight crime. Aiming at enhancing the enforcement actions taken to combat crime in the entire Italian territory, the Department of Public Security of the Italian Ministry of the Interior adopted an advanced business intelligence system based on Oracle Business Intelligence to produce detailed analysis of criminal events evaluating all the aspects of each crime (victim, author, geography, time, type). The solution has been developed within the SIGR project (Integrated System for the Georeferencing of Crimes) with the support of I consulting, Oracle’s Platinum Partner, which has in-depth expertise in the field of Business and Location Intelligence. Today the new system allows the Department of Public Safety to be quickly updated on the progress of cases and the Italian situation related to crimes [9].

In the U.S.A, more and more police departments are utilizing GPS technology as a part of their crime-prevention and crime-fighting strategies. With its ability to accurately locate individuals and vehicles, this technology is providing a range of new law enforcement solutions. GPS-based law enforcement technologies can be used in the following ways: emergence response, patrol management, individual and vehicle tracking and gunshot detection [10].

3.1 Attempts by Africa

In January, 2013, the Ghanaian government hosted the three-day West Africa Cyber security Workshop, facilitated by the US Department of State. The workshop was attended by around 80 participants from eleven countries, as well as representatives from the European Union, the African Union Commission and the Economic Community of West African States. The delegates discussed the successes and challenges of fighting cybercrime. Strategies to achieve this objective include the collaboration with regional and international agencies as well as a regular review of laws relating to ICT were also discussed [11]. Information security awareness is crucial for combating crime. In Africa, there is a significant lack of security awareness among the citizenry. Poor security awareness means that investments to fight crimes are minimal, leaving businesses across Africa vulnerable to all forms of crimes or online attacks. The African continent is in dire need of strong ICT security systems and awareness training [11].

4. TOOLS TO USE

From an ICT perspective ICT tools in fighting crime, is simple and has been implemented many times over in other developed countries, but Africa changing the processes as well as the mindset to use technology in such activities is the way forward. Most crimes are not caught by things so out of the norm, most potential attackers and thieves are fended off or caught by everyday technology used by everyday people. Africa can adopt these commonplace items that have become excellent detectives.
4.1 CCTV Technology
African countries should install Closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras on public highways and in shopping malls and arcades. CCTV cameras can constantly monitor what people do. CCTV is also used by the police to monitor road traffic. The police services in Africa adopt what their counterparts in developed countries use CCTV for, such as surveillance of target premises and locations where police have intelligence that crime is likely to occur. These types of CCTV operations are used to remotely monitor premises without having to have police officers engaged in long term operational surveillance. It can be used in emergency response, patrol management, individual and vehicle tracking and gunshot detection.

4.2 Tracking Technology
In the past, GPS devices were large, unwieldy and expensive. As a result, few law enforcement agencies have access to them. Today, GPS devices can be produced in small packages that can be easily concealed in a suspect's vehicle. Armed with these GPS devices, law enforcement agents can track suspects and use their locations as potential evidence. In addition, cell phones constantly communicate with cell towers, and detailed logs can reveal where particular individuals were located during particular periods of time. This information can be subpoenaed and used as evidence against alleged criminals. Thanks to this technology, more criminals are behind bars where they cannot commit further crimes in many developed countries [12].

4.3 Social Media
The law enforcement agencies in Africa can use the social media. It is a great way to distribute information, and news of crime can quickly spread across these networks. By sharing a surveillance camera image on social media, law enforcement agents may be able to get tips as to the identity of the perpetrator. Social media can also be a great place to share tips for avoiding dangerous areas and tips for keeping safe against crime.

4.4 Mobile Phones
Modern systems can be accessed through smart phones and other mobile devices, which allows homeowners to get instant alerts about potential property crimes. Another advantage of modern systems is that they can automatically alert law enforcement agents. Because of this, homeowners may not need to call the cops after a robbery has transpired; police officers may be able to respond while the crime is in progress

5. CONCLUSION
The fight against crime in Africa requires a cohesive and coordinated approach supported by strong ICT security system. In addition the security agencies require support in the form of strong legal framework, strong base of cyber security experts with expertise in system administration, network administration, penetration testing, security audit, forensic investigation, information security and software development to deal with the future challenges of both conventional and cybercrime. Today the battle against crime continues, and law enforcement agents have more tools at their disposal than ever before. African countries need to acquire and use them to fight. To meet the demands of investigation as well as prosecution, the research recommends the use of these every technology (CCTV technology, tracking technology, social media and mobile phone) which are not tools expensive to purchase, install and operate.

Crime today is borderless in nature and this makes criminal investigations more complicated for law enforcement authorities. To effectively tackle crime, African leaders need to learn from the steps taking by most developed countries in using ICT combat crime.

REFERENCES