

Smart collaboration needed to tackle big government issues like crime

Johannesburg – 24 October 2013: Private-public sector collaboration, underpinned by smart technologies, stand to significantly reduce South Africa's crime levels, says IBM South Africa. Speaking from GovTech 2013, IBM South Africa Sales Lead Hamilton Ratshefola noted that the most recent crime statistics, while showing some gains in the fight against crime, were still cause for concern.

"What is needed to deal a real blow to crime is a coordinated programme of collaboration, involving the public and private sector, as well as citizens, enabled by the innovative use of advanced technology," he says.

Ratshefola, explaining that IBM has moved beyond its roots as a technology company, to become a high-tech consulting house and solution enabler, says IBM's global Smarter Cities initiative has illustrated the advantages of collaboration and the use of advanced technologies in enhancing public safety around the world.

New York, for example, is now the safest large city in the United States, thanks in part to collaboration and innovative use of sophisticated storage, analytics and search tools. IBM worked with the New York Police Department to create a data warehouse that could bring together information buried in filing cabinets, on index cards and in handwritten notes. Now, more than 120 million New York City criminal complaints, 31 million national crime records and 33 billion public records are available in an integrated database that allows officials to make connections across multiple databases in minutes, and relay critical information to police officers at a scene immediately.

In Colombia, the government's Financial Information Analysis Unit worked with IBM to develop a tool to systematically gather information across different agencies, and analyse it to identify potentially related crimes. The system now links 16 government entities into a single, united front to fight organised crime.

Closer to home, IBM recently collaborated with the University of Fort Hare in East London, on a city public safety project that simply invites members of the public to phone a special report line with complaints regarding public safety issues such as potholes, exposed wires, crimes and suspicious activities. The calls are transcribed and run through analytics tools, which allows for trends to be identified and appropriate action to be taken.

"There are scores of examples where collaboration and the innovative use of technology have substantially improved the authorities' fight against crime. We believe that wherever there is a system of operation – in society, government or business – technological innovation has the power to improve it," says Ratshefola.

Ratshefola supports comments made by the Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa during the release of the crime statistics, on the need to reorganise, streamline and in some areas, redefine responsibilities in the South Africa Police Service, as well as on the need for qualitative analysis of the primary factors driving violent crime, in order to advance a deeper understanding of these issues.

"Through cloud-based, integrated data systems and advanced search and analytics, it becomes possible to delve into problem areas, track trends, visualise the crime situation and even predict future crime hot spots," says Ratshefola.

"Through shared information and advanced analytics, it also becomes easier to trace and prosecute offenders and better manage public safety resources. The innovative application of technologies can also streamline and support the work of the Criminal Justice System, Correctional Services and forensic services," he says.

Ratshefola says in South Africa, it is evident that many of the crime prevention successes were built on collaboration with stakeholders, improved access to information, and better technologies. He notes that the SAPS strategic partnerships with the banking sector (SABRIC), business (Business against Crime), CrimeLine and LeadSA; as well as shared intelligence with the banking industry, were credited with contributing to decreases in

certain crime areas. These successes can be extended, he believes, through increased accessibility to shared data and the greater use of advanced analytics, to support proactive, rather than reactive, crime prevention.