

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN?

Sector policing and community policing forums

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In its efforts to address crime the South African Police Service is increasingly focused on the implementation of sector policing. This is a strategy that calls for a more focused approach to policing at the local level, and includes the establishment of sector policing forums. Indeed, sector policing could be seen as a way of enhancing community policing. One of the key challenges is to ensure that these new police-community based structures do not experience the same shortcomings as community policing forums. This article will describe sector policing and consider some of the challenges to its effective implementation.

Sector policing is a UK based policing model that can be traced back to the previous decade, and was initially known as 'neighbourhood policing'.¹ Sector policing adopts a far more decentralised approach to policing, as it is a strategy intended to address root causes of crime at specific geographical locations, in partnership with particular communities. Thus, sector policing can be seen as an approach that seeks to tailor-make policing responses to suit specific local needs.

Although sector policing has only recently become more of a feature, the idea behind this strategy was mentioned as early as 1994 in the Minister of Safety and Security Draft Policy Document, where then Minister Sidney Mufamadi referred to "community police officers with an intimate knowledge of a particular area and its problems as a main operational unit of a 'lean and efficient' police organisation." Although very similar in principle, the term 'sector policing' was not at that stage used to describe this approach to problem-solving policing.²

In 1996 sector policing was briefly mentioned in the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) as an operational strategy to addressing violence associated with inter-group conflict in Kwazulu-Natal. In this case, the term sector policing was not specifically defined, but rather used to describe the deployment of police officers to specifically affected areas.

The term sector policing again made an appearance in the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security where it was defined as "the division of areas into smaller managerial sectors and assignment of police officers to these areas on a full time basis. These police officers regularly patrol their own sectors and are able to identify problems and seek appropriate solutions. Sector policing encourages constant contact with members of the local communities."

The White Paper further states that sector policing should be:

- Proactively, vigorously and fairly conducted;
- Based on clear instructions from the police commanders to patrol officers;

- Planned on the basis of crime analysis;
- Focused on a specific problem within an area;
- Implemented on the basis of specific time frames; and
- Developed in collaboration with the municipal police and other relevant stakeholders.

According to the White Paper the idea behind the implementation of sector policing is to maximise effective police visibility and enhance accountability at local level. More recently, in a SAPS planning information document for 2003/2004, sector policing is identified as a service delivery indicator for visible policing, with the aim of being established at the 145 priority stations by 2005. Some headway has been made in this regard with the Johannesburg policing area already having been divided into 111 policing sectors.

Implementation of sector policing

According to the report of the Johannesburg CPF Area Board workshop on sector policing, the implementation of sector policing comprises four phases. The idea behind breaking down the implementation of sector policing into clearly defined phases is to enable the stations to monitor their progress as to how far they are in terms of implementing the policy.

Phase one entails each station deciding on how many sectors it will have within its precinct. The number of sectors will be determined by the capacity of the station, crime 'hot spots', and the size and diversity of the precinct.

In phase two the station needs to compile a profile for each sector. This entails the identification of the following:

- Root causes of crime within that area;
- Factors inhibiting effective crime prevention;
- Means of eliminating those factors;
- Key role players within that area; and also
- Partnerships with community based organisations or NGOs.

Then, in phase three, the station commissioner needs to appoint a sector manager for each sector. These sector managers have to be members of the SAPS with the following responsibilities:

- Getting to know the sector
- Establishing sector forums
- Organising meetings and other events in the sector
- Liaising with all the relevant community stakeholders
- Initiating crime prevention strategies based on the profile and the dynamics of the sector
- Reporting to the station commissioner.

The sector managers will be accountable to the station commissioner, whose responsibility it will be to monitor all sectors falling under his or her station.

Phase four entails the establishment of a sector policing forum (SPF), which will be a consultative forum at which all relevant stakeholders of a particular sector will be represented. For this forum, a secretary and a chairperson need to be appointed by the participants. The activities of SPFs include the following:

- Monthly meetings
- Identification of crime prevention strategies
- Co-ordination and implementation of sector policing activities.

The phased approach is useful in providing a structured way in which to implement and monitor sector policing. Nevertheless, some flexibility could be exercised in relation to the order of the activities in each phase. For instance, appointing a sector manager, which is seen as happening in phase three, could occur before profiling the sector, which supposedly happens in phase two. Given that the manager is responsible for managing the sector, it would make sense that s/he is part of the profiling process.

If successful, sector policing can be seen as resulting in a number of benefits, including:

- Improving the identification of hot crime spots and the root causes of crime at a local level;
- Better use of policing resources according to the needs of a particular sector;
- Improving visible policing;
- Allowing for enhanced manageability, given that the precincts will be divided into smaller areas;
- More effective and efficient police response to

- community complaints and emergencies;
- Better cooperation between the police and communities at local level to address specific crime problems.

Community policing forums and sector policing forums

As with any new policy initiative, there are bound to be challenges during the initial stages of implementation. With sector policing, a key challenge involves clarifying how the sector policing forums (SPFs) differ from community policing forums (CPF). Part of the reason for the confusion is that at the outset there appears to be little to distinguish the two structures.

Indeed, the following five core elements that underpin CPFs could easily be extended to SPFs:³

- Service orientation: the provision of a professional policing service, responsive to community needs and accountable for addressing these needs.
- Partnership: the facilitation of a co-operative, consultative process of problem solving.
- Problem solving: the joint identification and analysis of the causes of crime and conflict and the development of innovative measures to address these.
- Empowerment: the creation of joint responsibility and capacity for addressing crime.
- Accountability: the creation of a culture of accountability for addressing the needs and concerns of communities.

Given the similarities between CPFs and SPFs, how these two structures differ in practice is a frequently raised question. The answer can be found in the following statement made at a Johannesburg CPF Area Board workshop on sector policing in 2003: "Sector policing is not intended to replace the community policing forum, [but rather to] to maximise effective visible policing and to enhance accountability and transparency on the part of the police. Sector policing is intended to work in collaboration with CPFs. If problems cannot be addressed at the sector police forum, they should be channelled to the CPF, which would act as a facilitator."

It is expected that the CPFs and SPFs will work together if necessary with SPF chairpersons attending CPF meetings to share information about the activities and concerns of their particular sector. Some key differences between CPFs and SPFs include:

- CPFs represent large areas consisting of different communities, making it an unsuitable forum for police to develop specific crime prevention strategies with particular community representatives.
- All too often, communities or groups that could play a crucial role in tackling certain crime problems are not represented in CPFs. However, due to the smaller size of a police sector, specific groups or individuals could be targeted to participate in particular activities that could have a direct impact on the area where they live.
- CPFs often cover areas that are too large and diverse for any one police representative to have the kind of detailed knowledge of a particular location that would be expected from a sector manager.

Despite these differences it is apparent that both structures are expected to complement each other in enhancing the SAPS policy of community policing.

Challenges to the effective implementation of sector policing

Apart from initial confusion as to how SPFs differ from CPFs, the Johannesburg Area Board workshop raised a number of other challenges relating to the implementation of sector policing and the establishment of SPFs.

- A lack of common understanding as to what exactly sector policing entails.
- A shortage of sector managers who are adequately trained for managing a sector and mobilising relevant stakeholders.
- Inadequate resources (such as vehicles and cell phones), for sector managers to function efficiently and effectively.
- Ensuring accountability is one of the potential challenges of sector policing, especially in bigger stations. Station commissioners are likely to find it difficult to adequately monitor all

- sectors, given their heavy workloads.
- Some SPFs are experiencing similar problems to CPFs in trying to mobilise members of the community to volunteer of their time to attend meetings and get involved in activities.

International research has highlighted other substantial challenges to implementing the sector policing approach. One study revealed how tensions often occur between the demands of performance indicators established by a typically centralised command structure, and the particular needs that emerge from a decentralised sector.³ For example, performance indicators will typically prioritise reactive policing activities, such as numbers of arrests, while neglecting sector policing activities such as proactive foot patrols around certain locations at certain times to prevent particular crimes from occurring. As a result of having to comply with established organisational performance standards, police officers involved in pro-active policing activities emerging from the needs of a particular sector were quick to revert to policing activities against which their performance would be formally measured. The study also found that even though sector policing was intended to be a consistent policing approach, this was not the case in practice as different sectors would typically prioritise different problems and respond in different ways.⁴

Conclusion

Although the police have only recently started to implement sector policing, this model has many challenges to overcome before it can be considered to be working consistently and effectively. In particular, clear guidelines need to be established to explain the role and purpose of the SPFs and to ensure that sector policing is practised consistently. To this end it would also be a good idea if 'good practices' could be identified and disseminated amongst sector managers to ensure that sector policing achieves its aims more broadly. Performance indicators will also have to be developed and incorporated into the formal performance management system to ensure that innovative sector policing initiatives are not abandoned. Importantly, sector managers are going to need support from their stations if they are going

to build solid working relationships with people in the communities. Hopefully the smaller size of the police sectors will go some way in enabling the SPFs to overcome some of the challenges faced by their earlier cousins, the CPFs.

Endnotes

- 1 See Dixon, B. (2000). *The Globalisation of Democratic Policing: Sector Policing and Zero Tolerance in the New South Africa*. Institute of Criminology, University of Cape Town.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Department of Safety and Security, *Community Policing Policy Framework and Guidelines*, 1997, pp 2-3.
- 4 J Scott, 1998. *Performance Culture: The return of Reactive Policing*. *Policing & Society*. 8(3): pp 269-289.
- 5 Ibid.