

CHAPTER 6

KAGISO (SECTOR 4)

Kagiso is a West Rand township with a population of 190,000 people. The station precinct extends beyond the boundaries of the township itself and covers a population of 230,000. Included in the precinct's jurisdiction is the industrial district of Chamdor, which is home to more than 100 factories, a large mine workers' hostel and three informal settlements. To the southeast of Kagiso are the settlements of Rietvallei and Azaadville, which also fall within the Kagiso police precinct.

The station area is divided into five sectors. The first three were formed in April 2003, the fourth in August and the fifth in December of the same year. As in all West Rand police precincts, sectors were launched sequentially in line with incremental increases in personnel and infrastructure. In the months preceding the launch of the first three sectors, the station had a staff complement of 134. At time of writing, October 2004, it stands at more than 200. As in Roodepoort, 18 months ago the entire precinct was policed by two patrol vans and a single response vehicle. Today, each of the five sectors has its own dedicated patrol and response vehicle.

Sector demarcation is determined partly by social geography. Chamdor and its three informal settlements, for instance, comprise one sector. Rietvallei and Azaadville comprise another. In Kagiso proper, though, council ward boundaries are the primary determinant of sector boundaries. Ward councillors have intensive and formalised relationships with their constituents, and ward meetings are an established institution in Kagiso. They thus form natural units for SCFs. On average, each SCF has about six wards within its boundaries. The SCF consists mainly of ward representatives, and the wards themselves operate as *de facto* sub-SCF structures. In other words, there is an efficient, pre-existing civic infrastructure which community policing has tapped. The result is that the SCF problems experienced in Toekomsrus and in Roodepoort's Sector 6 – under-representation in Roodepoort Sector 6, a constituency seemingly immune to mobilisation into crime prevention partnerships in Toekomsrus – do not exist in Kagiso. Sector policing inherited a community well practiced in conversing with state

agencies at grassroots level. As we shall see below, the result is that sector managers have a range of problem-solving capacities at their disposal not available in the other two sectors studied.

Kagiso Sector 4

Kagiso's Sector 4 is a large, densely populated section of Kagiso proper comprising six council wards and a population of at least 50,000. Kagiso Avenue, the township's longest thoroughfare, forms the sector's eastern boundary. Its southern boundary is Randfontein Road, a regional artery that runs across the width of the West Rand. A large swathe of mine property lies to the sector's north, and a stretch of empty veld to its west.

Despite its population density, the social composition, and thus the crime patterns, of Sector 4 are fairly diverse. Father Gerald and Riverside are relatively affluent districts. Most residents are employed and thus vacate the township during the daylight hours of the week, leaving their appliance-filled homes vulnerable to burglary. Batswana, Extension Eight and Extension Six are far poorer, and carry the burden of high unemployment levels and high volumes of liquor consumption. Contact crimes, ranging from street robberies to a steady stream of domestic violence complaints, are high.

Targeted patrols

Kagiso's Sector 4 was undoubtedly the most impressively policed of the West Rand policing sectors studied. There are several reasons for this, some regarding the nature of the sector's social geography and crime patterns, others regarding the eagerness with which police officers have taken to problem-solving, and to the more intimate relationship with civilians that sector policing has brought in its wake.

The first indication of the sector's level of competence is the character of its patrol patterns. The sector has entirely eliminated random patrolling. It is no exaggeration to say that each minute of every shift during the periods in which the patrol was not responding to a complaint was spent in carefully delineated hotspots, the tasks and activities of each member goal-oriented and planned. For instance, the most common crime committed on weekday mornings is residential burglary in the districts of Father Gerald and Riverview. Every week, the sector manager requests an updated burglary-plotting map from the SAPS' Crime Information and Analysis Centre, and marks the addresses, streets and blocks most prone to repeat victimisation. Morning patrols concentrate on

these identified hotspots, and they are policed aggressively. Idling cars are pulled over and searched. Pedestrians carrying bags are stopped and searched. Houses with inadequate security are noted and the sector manager allots a time in her diary to visit the owner. The addresses of houses that appear to be vacant are noted. Neighbours are questioned about whether anyone lives there. If the house has been repossessed by a bank, the bank is contacted and encouraged either to sell the property or to employ a security guard. Occasionally, the officers leave their vehicle and conduct foot patrols on vacant pieces of veld in the vicinity of hotspots. In the hotspots themselves, the officers open each municipal dustbin on the street to see whether it is being used as a temporary repository for stolen goods. The patrol repeats these procedures two or three times a morning.

Another example of a weekday morning crime: the sector manager is aware of three discrete spots in her sector used by vehicle thieves to deposit cars stolen from the CBD and suburbs of Krugersdorp. She is aware that stolen cars are never deposited there for longer than a couple of hours; the thieves leave the cars for a while in the event that they are fitted with trackers, and then come back to retrieve them. She is also aware that of the stolen cars found at these three points in the last year, more than 90% are Volkswagen Golfs and Polos. So, the three points are patrolled every couple of hours. All Golfs and Polos spotted in the sector have their licence plates radioed to the control room to check whether they are stolen. The sector's informer network is asked why only two models of stolen vehicles are brought into the sector. Are these vehicles feeding a single market? Are they stripped somewhere inside the sector or taken elsewhere?

A third morning activity: SCF members have informed the sector manager that a house in Sector 4 is being used as a brothel and drug retail centre. The house is visited in the mid-morning, while its occupants are still asleep. It is searched for drugs and firearms, two teenaged girls are asked for the names and addresses of their parents. The sector manager makes a note to check out the title deed and contact the owner.

A new crime trend had recently been identified in Sector 4 – a spate of armed house robberies, conducted between seven and ten in the evenings, around Extension Eight. The *modus operandi* in each case is much the same. The perpetrators enter the sector on foot, hold the home owner up at gunpoint at his or her front door, load the victim's car with household appliances, and make off in the direction of Kagiso Avenue. As with house burglary, the sector

manager requests a crime map from the Crime Information and Analysis Centre, and tries to identify hotspots. She then identifies routes between the hotspots and Kagiso Avenue, and patrols the requisite areas between 7 and 10 in the evenings. Groups of young men entering Sector 4 on foot are stopped and searched for firearms. Vehicles leaving the sector are stopped and searched for firearms and stolen goods.

Late at night and in the early hours of the morning, especially on weekends, the biggest crime problems on the sector's streets are assault, robbery and armed robbery. The policing strategy here is simple and blunt – it is about taking guns and drunken people off the streets. The blocks around shebeens are patrolled intensively. Pedestrians are stopped indiscriminately and searched for guns. (On a Friday night, for instance, the patrol searches up to 20 pedestrians in the space of an hour). Anybody on the streets who is demonstrably drunk is arrested and spends the night in the station's police cells.

Each problem shebeen in the sector is profiled and each is policed differently according to its character. For instance, the shebeen in the area most closely associated with gun-related crimes was watched and profiled. The sector manager noted that most patrons come from outside the sector and arrive in cars, not on foot. The manager believes that raiding the shebeen is not the most effective way of dealing with the problem; a raid will merely disrupt trade for a few days after which business will return to normal. Instead, she targets patrons, rather than the shebeen owners, in an attempt to make their visit to the shebeen as unpleasant and dangerous as possible. The traffic department has been contacted and has agreed to conduct a one-person operation outside the shebeen every weekend evening over a three-week period. The driver of every car leaving the shebeen will be stopped, forced to undergo a breathalyser test, and his car searched. Inside the shebeen itself, every patron will be searched for firearms and every inebriated patron arrested. The idea is to scare away the shebeen's clientele, particularly those who carry firearms.

From targeted patrols to problem-solving

While the targeted patrols described above are performed with admirable efficiency, they are seldom performed with enthusiasm, for two reasons. First, they are repetitive, routine and boring. Second, while they do net results, they nonetheless constitute a blunt and labour-intensive method of policing crimes. The Sector 4 patrol officers are acutely aware that there is a world of

difference between the broad-brushstroke activity of identifying and patrolling geographic hotspots, and the far more nuanced and difficult endeavour of identifying the situational causes of micro crime patterns. The sector manager thus constantly attempts to dissolve her hotspots into smaller patterns, each attached to a situational cause. She is sometimes successful, sometimes not. In regard to residential burglary in Father Gerald, for instance, the sector has been unable to get beyond the routine task of identifying repeat victims. But in other instances, the sector has managed to transcend the mere mapping of hotspots, identified simple problems and executed simple solutions. Here are two examples.

In mid-2004, a street on the western boundary of Sector 4 experienced a spate of house burglaries. Sector patrol officers interviewed every home owner on the street, all those who used the street during the day, and the sector's informers. They discovered that a single group was responsible for the spate of burglaries. Two men would spend several hours of each day concealed behind a wall at the end of the street and watch to see when residents left their houses. They would make a cell phone call, would be joined half an hour or so later by a red bakkie, break into an empty house and load the bakkie with stolen goods. Ownership of the bakkie was traced to a resident of Swanneville, a settlement adjacent to Sector 4. The owner was found and questioned. The residents of the street were called to a meeting, informed of the group's *modus operandi* and formed into a street watch. Every time a resident planned to leave her house empty for longer than a couple of hours, she would contact the street watch and her house would be scouted intermittently. The street watch was also instructed to phone sector officers on their dedicated cell phone whenever strangers were seen lingering in the vicinity of the street. Since these measures were taken, house burglaries on the street have ceased.

In another example, the sector identified a pedestrian passageway on which people were repeatedly robbed. Sector patrol officers surmised that the perpetrators were among three groups that regularly held dice games in the streets around the passageway. They periodically broke up groups of gamblers and arrested them on petty offences, but they knew that this was more of a cat-and-mouse game than a lasting solution. They believed that the best course of action would be to link specific gamblers to specific crimes. They profiled four or five gamblers, collected all the dockets of robberies committed in the passageway and re-interviewed all complainants. Through this process, charges were laid against four of the people they had profiled and all were convicted.

These examples of problem-solving are neither complex nor demand a great deal of intellectual labour. They are the product, more than anything else, of perseverance and hard work. In the context of a one-year-old policing sector, though, they are impressive. Points on the sector map previously marked in red as hotspots, to be patrolled repetitively and aggressively, have been replaced by the identification of specific problems with specific causes. The more a sector can substitute problem-solving for targeted patrolling, the better its work.

The sector's capacity to identify and solve problems is greatly assisted by the fact that its SCF is well attended, active, and voluble. More often than not, the SCF is adept at identifying environmental and situation causes of crimes to be attended to by state agencies other than the police. For instance, the SCF identified the fact that the maintenance of street lights in the sector was poor. The municipality's infrastructure department was invited to attend the following SCF meeting. A cell phone number was distributed to all residents in the sector to report street lights out of order. The municipality undertook to respond to every complaint within a week.

SCF members argued persistently during the course of 2004 that the recurring problem of rapes and robberies in alleyways and pedestrian paths would be best resolved by environmental design rather than police patrols. The SCF drew up draft plans for the creation of small, enclosed municipal parks in the areas around alleyways, thus closing off crime-prone thoroughfares. The municipality was slow to respond to the plans. The problem was taken to SAPS Area office, which undertook to enter into negotiations with Mogale City.

The SCF has also undertaken to keep a register of unoccupied houses in the sector and to earmark those that have been vandalised for immediate attention. The register is delivered to the appropriate ward councillor, who is responsible for tracking and contacting the relevant title deed holders.

Qualitative changes in the nature of complaints and routine police activities

One of the most significant changes to have occurred as a result of the introduction of sector policing is perhaps best observed during downtime – quiet times when violent and predatory crime complaints are few and sector police are conducting routine patrols. Take, for instance, a one-hour period early on a Wednesday morning. At 7:30am, a call comes over the radio that

a group of boys is vandalising a public phone on Kagiso Avenue. An old man is threatening to shoot them. The patrol van arrives on the scene two or three minutes later. In the event, no vandalism is taking place – just an ugly altercation. The youngsters are herded into the back of the van and driven to their primary school. The patrol officers phone their parents from the principal's office to tell them what their kids have been up to instead of going to school.

At 8:15, the patrol gets a call on its sector cell phone from the principal at a local high school. The patrol is at his office six or seven minutes later. He says there is a sweets vendor operating from a caravan on the public road behind the school whom he suspects is selling drugs to his students. The patrol officers stroll across the school grounds, walk around the back of the caravan, and take the vendor by surprise. They search him, the caravan and his merchandise and find no drugs. They get him to sign a written undertaking to move his caravan into his front yard, several blocks away, within 48 hours.

Half an hour later, the patrol comes across a teenaged boy crossing the road with a large prefab wall strung across his shoulders. They stop him, ask where he got the sheet, make him accompany them to the site where he found it. Their concern is not merely that he stole it, but that there might be a vacant property in their sector which they are not aware of.

Kagiso police may have received these kinds of complaints before the introduction of sector policing. But with a single response vehicle covering the entire township, it is unlikely that they had the time or the inclination to respond to them. In other words, the better the police service gets, and the closer to their clients police officers become, the more they will be called upon to police quality of life complaints, emerging crises, micro conflicts, and risk factors identified by civilians.

Kagiso Sector 4 patrol officers took to this sort of work both with enthusiasm and with a great deal of emotion. Officers were quick to sense that their formal policing tools were too blunt to deal adequately with complex interpersonal problems; they became lay-counsellors, instructors on civil law, financial advisors, and, at times, disciplinarians. In other words, they defined their role as police officers broadly, rather than narrowly. Their conduct reflected their belief that crime reduction and law enforcement are just the beginning, rather than the whole of their vocation. They viewed complaints as problems to be solved, whether or not the complaint involved the commission of a crime.

Whether this sort of work leads to a reduction in crime, or just a style of policing too invasive of privacy, is a point that has been debated since the inception of criminology and is unlikely ever to be resolved. But there can be little doubt that it is new in a context like Kagiso. In the history of South African township policing, the simplest, most rudimentary function of police work has never been adequately present: the guaranteed presence of a force vested with the authority to provide solutions to emerging crises – all and any crises. As simple and mundane as this function is, it is also more or less new in townships like Kagiso. Its contribution to wellbeing can never be adequately measured, but its existence is surely invaluable.