



Lessons from practice

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The previous chapters have outlined a range of approaches to crime prevention in South Africa. The lessons from these projects are discussed below in three sections: the first deals with policy related challenges, and the second with the challenges of making multi-agency strategies work: those of consultation, partnerships and co-ordination. The third section covers the challenge of matching the right solution to the crime problem, including the role of research and evaluation in the crime prevention process.

Policy related challenges: would local be better?

The success of any policy is measured by how it is implemented and its effect. Given this, the implementation of crime prevention policy in South Africa has had an inauspicious start. The White Paper on Safety and Security, approved by Cabinet and launched with some fanfare in 1998, has not been implemented in any systematic way—in fact, many of its provisions have simply been ignored. Also, with the exception of a victim empowerment programme, implementation of the 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy has focused on criminal justice and policing projects as opposed to prevention projects aimed at impacting on the causes of crime. Importantly also, few NCPS initiatives have been implemented at local level—an important determinant of success for any prevention strategy.

The points above highlight a wide disjuncture between policy and practice, a disjuncture that is attributable to the general failure of policy to take into account the actual requirements for its implementation.

The gap between the policy and the requirements for its implementation has been compounded by the adoption of policy models from the developed West, with little, if any, assessment of the feasibility of these models in the South African context. Considering that policy and legislation to support crime prevention are fairly new even in the developed world, it is not surprising that the results have been less than satisfactory in South Africa. For example, although the British Home Office's

Crime Prevention Unit was established in 1983, the Crime and Disorder Act that legislates local level engagement with crime prevention was only passed in 1998. Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy was finalised in 1994, and in the United States, legislation providing federal support for crime prevention programmes and research was passed in 1984.¹ South Africa's crime prevention policy has drawn extensively from these models.

However, these models are based on systems that are strong in the West but weak in South Africa, where they exist at all. For instance, policy directing local-level crime prevention in the developed countries is premised on direct local accountability, that is, on the assumption that elected officials oversee government functions to ensure that these respond to and meet the needs of the electorate. Despite the political rhetoric, South Africa's proportional representation system of voting and tiered structure of government, with its complicated and diverse spread of particular and concurrent responsibilities, means there is little public access to decision making and little direct accountability.

This is compounded by the fact that elected local officials have no formal oversight of the national police service, whose priorities are filtered up through the organisation and ultimately decided at national level in Pretoria. This means that those directly affected by crime in a particular area have little influence over the decisions that are made by their local government or local police about how to address the issues.

Also, South Africa's National Crime Prevention Strategy and White Paper on Safety and Security provide for an integrated, multi-agency approach to crime prevention as is practised in developed countries. However, government budgeting and reporting processes make this difficult in practice. Although there has been an attempt at joint prioritisation by the criminal justice 'cluster', budgets are still determined by individual departments and allocated to specific line functions within these departments. These line functions and their whole departments report individually on activities and expenditure. Thus, while crime prevention policy advocates an integrated approach, the way in which government operates inhibits implementation of joint activities.

The challenge of 'joined-up government' is no doubt something that governments engaged in crime prevention strategies throughout the world must overcome. However, in South Africa the challenge is more acute: many of the departments concerned struggle to deliver on their most basic responsibilities, let alone co-ordinate priorities, budgets and activities involving other departments.

The lesson here may be that crime prevention strategies should focus initially on strengthening basic service delivery in the government departments that are central to crime prevention. These, importantly, include the departments responsible for social welfare, health and education, as well as the police, courts and prisons. Once a satisfactory level of service from these departments has been achieved, attention could shift towards the co-ordination of inter-departmental activities.

Another important difference between crime prevention practice in developed countries and in South Africa is that in developed countries, where national policy directs local crime prevention, national government has taken an active and consistent role in supporting local initiatives. This support has taken the form of policy guidance, technical assistance, and financial support. Using a comparative study of successful community safety interventions, mostly in the developed world, the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime in Montreal recommends that achieving sustainable crime prevention requires a "responsibility centre", to:

- Provide leadership located at the highest level of government.
- Develop an implementation strategy.
- Ensure that the policies of other departments contribute to the strategy.
- Stimulate partnerships (often through providing seed funding) so that key actors work together.²

In South Africa, where skills and resources are in short supply, and crime prevention is new, support of this kind is vital. This is especially true when service delivery in some areas of government is weak. A national crime prevention centre in South Africa could lobby for improved delivery and provide advice on the allocation of funds to crime prevention projects. Such a centre could also encourage and support delivery on the ground by providing financial incentives in the form of seed funding, technical assistance in submitting applications for funding, as well as training, advice on what works, and research and evaluation.

It is exactly this kind of support that was advocated in the White Paper in its provisions on the establishment of a National Crime Prevention Strategy Centre. As indicated above, this has not been done and responsibility for crime prevention has been spread so broadly that it is difficult to pin down. Indeed, it often appears that it is the small social crime prevention unit in the police that drives most government crime prevention initiatives. This has severely limited national support for crime prevention in the country.

Given that the concept of crime prevention is difficult to understand and that the policy does not adequately take into account the requirements for implementation in the country, the lack of meaningful political support for crime prevention is not

surprising. This is, no doubt, why politicians are inclined to back tough law enforcement approaches over longer-term preventive ones. Hard and fast policing operations are able to show quick results, while preventative initiatives can take years.

This is why good prevention practice requires programmes with both long- and short-term components. To sustain political and public support, short-term demonstration projects should be carried out alongside the longer-term programmes. For example, a project aimed at reducing sexual assault in a particular locality could include:

- Short-term public awareness campaigns.
- High-profile policing operations focused on the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act.
- Police screening procedures to ensure that men with a history of domestic violence are not issued with firearm licences.
- Restriction of the illegal sale of alcohol.
- A medium-term skills development programme targeted at unemployed men.
- Longer-term gender-sensitivity interventions among primary school children.

The need for balancing long- and short-term programmes reinforces the notion upon which the NCPS was based: that crime prevention policies need to integrate policing, justice and developmental prevention projects. The need for integration is particularly pressing in South Africa where levels of crime—and especially violent crime—are high. As has been shown throughout this book, the police are the first to engage with any crime prevention initiatives, and often take the lead in their implementation. It follows that crime prevention practice should acknowledge the important contribution of the police.

However, exactly what crime prevention means for the police is unclear. The move internationally from reactive policing towards more community-oriented methods, like community policing and sector policing, represents attempts by the police themselves to define and engage with their role in prevention—with mixed results. In South Africa, despite policy and legislation on community policing, practical crime prevention for the police still largely amounts to roadblocks and high-density search and seizure operations.³

The fact that the ability of the police to prevent crime is limited, that crime prevention is unclear in operational terms, and that policing goals tend to be short-term, raises the question of whether crime prevention policy and programmes should be led by the police, as has often been the case in South Africa. Apart from adding to the burden of the police, this has allowed other departments, such as those responsible for social welfare, education and health, to disengage from their

responsibilities. It has also meant that the concept of 'safety and security', which implies an active role for players other than the police, has been downplayed. For instance, in areas with high levels of youth offending, prevention projects—such as youth diversion, after-school care for children at risk, and home visits for new mothers—are the responsibility of the departments of social development and education. Unless these departments deliver on their line functions and drive projects such as these, there is little that the police can do to reduce offending behaviour.

Perhaps the core issue is that despite the provisions of the NCPS and the White Paper on Safety and Security, public safety is still commonly viewed as a security issue to be dealt with by the criminal justice system and particularly the police. The concepts of 'safety' and 'crime prevention' need to be reconceptualised as 'social health' issues. This would allow the crime prevention burden to be shared across a range of role-players in government and civil society. It would also create political space for the longer-term interventions that, ultimately, are most important in ensuring the prevention of criminal behaviour.

This is of course what the NCPS set out to do in 1996. However, the responsibility for co-ordinating the NCPS was then located in the department responsible for policing. This meant that implementation of the NCPS was subject to police priorities and the short-term political prerogative to show results in the 'war against crime'. It was not surprising, therefore, that implementation of the NCPS focused mainly on improvements to the criminal justice system to the detriment of its other provisions. So to reduce the pressure for quick fixes, the lead responsibility for crime prevention should not lie with the police. It would be far more appropriate for this responsibility to be the core focus of the departments of the social cluster, that is, the departments of social development, health, and education. The engagement of these departments as lead agencies for crime prevention would, no doubt, assist a wider understanding of crime as a 'social health' issue rather than solely a security issue.

Other lessons have been learnt in the past few years about implementing multi-agency crime prevention projects that could improve the delivery of these initiatives. These lessons relate to how the concepts of consultation, partnership and co-ordination, which are key to multi-agency approaches, have been interpreted in practice.

Consultation, partnerships and co-ordination: from process to action?

As indicated in this book, common to all approaches of crime prevention is the agreement that collaborative, multi-agency partnerships are most effective. Generally, implementation of these approaches follows a similar process:

- Stakeholders in a particular area are consulted about the nature of the crime problem, and what might be done about it.
- A further analysis of crime in the particular area is conducted, often through an analysis of police statistics or a victim survey.
- Those driving the process form a partnership with various role-players—often a diverse range of interest groups—to act on an agreed-upon set of crime problems.
- An agency is nominated to co-ordinate the activities of the various role-players, to align these activities and sustain the initiative.

Despite this being a generally accepted method, few of the projects outlined in this book have managed to move the process into actual project implementation. What is it that has inhibited practical implementation of multi-agency crime prevention initiatives?

Most obviously, practical crime prevention activity has been impeded because the process leading up to project implementation has often been seen as an end in itself. In other words, the key elements of the process, such as consultation, partnership and co-ordination, have often been emphasised to the point that they become the sole 'activities' of a crime prevention initiative.

Such emphasis on the process is most apparent with respect to the need for consultation on the crime problem and what can be done to address it. Rather than being seen as one step in a larger process designed to provide information on key stakeholder needs and available capacity, consultation is often confused with participation and thus becomes an ongoing activity aimed at acquiring input and consensus from as many stakeholders as possible. In these situations, consensus on actual priorities is difficult to achieve. Instead, agreement is often sought on everything—a host of crime problems and a long and over-ambitious wish-list of things to do to address them, rather than one or two strategic priorities to focus on. This delays the process, often frustrates those involved and sometimes results in the withdrawal of those who are central to the actual delivery of the crime prevention initiative. Once important role-players withdraw, the potential to develop action-oriented partnerships is limited. So the partnership that emerges from such processes also focuses on engaging other participants, and wide-ranging partnership takes precedence over focused delivery.

Thus partnership, too, becomes confused with constant participation.

Commonly understood, partnership means an affiliation of actors who each contribute something specific, be it skills or resources, towards the achievement of a common goal. However, in South African practice it is common to see 'partnerships' formed during a consultation process, before it is clear what it is that each partner is meant to contribute. This often translates into an emphasis on continuing participation over effectiveness, that is, ensuring that all the partners always attend meetings and provide input, rather than on who the most appropriate partner may be at a particular time, what is required from that partner and when. So what comes to matter more than anything is that all partners attend all planning meetings and workshops, no matter that nothing specific may be expected from them.

The emphasis on participation also means that there is often little assessment of the capacity of the partners. This results in unequal partnerships dominated by those with high levels of capacity and resources. In such cases, the partnership that develops becomes one in which some of the partners are increasingly silent. In worst-case scenarios this failure to assess capacity results in partnerships between the equally dysfunctional in which the partners are unable, actually, to deliver anything other than their participation, which amounts to regular attendance at meetings and workshops.

In short, then, crime prevention partnerships are meant to be strategic alliances, founded and developed on the value each partner adds towards meeting the overall purpose of the programme or project. However, the point that partnerships may be flexible, requiring different input and activities at different times and that partners can therefore change, often appears to have been lost.

In practice, the emphasis on broad participation from a wide range of partners also blurs the distinction between co-ordination and process facilitation. This is because co-ordination implies a mandated authority to direct particular activity at particular times, an authority that in practice is seldom unpacked or openly agreed to. The lack of authority to direct and guide activities has been particularly problematic in government crime prevention initiatives, like the NCPS at national level and various Safer City projects referred to in this book which have resulted in the creation of new structures meant to 'co-ordinate' activities of other government departments and those of non-governmental partners. In these instances, senior managers have been appointed, staff recruited and offices set up and equipped, only for it to be discovered that the co-ordination responsibility of the structure has not been agreed to and its reporting lines lack appropriate authority. So, like its mandate, the operational responsibilities of the new structure become ever more vague.

The problems associated with an undefined co-ordination role are however not limited to government. Several projects outlined in this book involve non-governmental organisations that have attempted to co-ordinate multi-agency crime prevention initiatives. These organisations have all struggled to do this because they have no mandate to direct or guide the activities of government departments or other NGO partners. In such initiatives, implementation of projects intended to reduce crime has choked on the differing perspectives of the partners, competition between the partners, different decision making and working procedures amongst the partners, and lack of accountability to the co-ordinating agency.

At other times, these NGO initiatives have not considered that real decision making power regarding priorities and allocation of resources may be dispersed over various points in the national, provincial and local spheres of government and may therefore, actually take place at a level unknown or inaccessible to the co-ordinating agency. Lacking integration within the already approved (and budgeted for) activities of the government partners, projects planned by the co-ordinating agency have often been seen by key partners as 'add-ons' to their primary responsibilities. So delivery of these projects has seldom moved beyond the planning stage.

Thus much of what is called or assumed to be 'co-ordination' is actually an attempt at process facilitation. Process facilitation means assisting the progress of a particular activity or intervention. Unlike co-ordination, process facilitation may not require a mandate from a recognised authority. Rather, facilitation may take the form of enabling a range of potential partners to see more clearly and agree upon their contribution to a crime prevention project. Once agreement has been reached, however, co-ordinating or managing the implementation of the project can only be undertaken by a partner that has a recognised decision making mandate.

As indicated above, confusion around the practical meaning of consultation, partnership and co-ordination can be attributed to the formation of alliances before it is clear what is actually required from participants. What is needed is a more careful analysis of:

- The objectives of the crime prevention initiative—what it is, exactly, that the project intends to achieve.
- Who is required to assist implementation and why these specific actors.
- What exactly is expected from each of these actors.
- Their capacity to fulfil this role.
- When in the life-cycle of the project they are to participate.

The challenges discussed in this section suggest that in the practice of multi-agency crime prevention, the policy and guidelines have been applied too dogmatically.

This has meant an emphasis on getting the process of engaging a range of agencies right, rather than on the point of the process—the implementation of projects that prevent or reduce crime. It is also possible that local practitioners have continued to look to process over outcome because of a lack of confidence in the likely success of crime prevention projects in South Africa. This no doubt stems from the lack of research and evaluation on what works and what does not in South Africa.

Matching the right solution to the crime problem: the need for evaluation

Despite six years of crime prevention policy and practice in South Africa, there has been little evaluation of either.⁴ This is primarily because the value or importance of evaluation has not been widely acknowledged. The lack of emphasis on evaluation is probably associated with the political emphasis on service delivery, often at the expense of considering or testing what is most likely to succeed in particular circumstances. Further, much crime prevention activity in South Africa has been funded by a range of donors, who function under similar pressure for delivery. When such donor-funded initiatives include evaluations, these are conducted more for internal reporting purposes rather than to deepen and share understanding of good crime prevention practice. The results of these evaluations are therefore seldom published, and institutional learning rarely extends beyond the donor agency and the individual project concerned.

The lack of evaluation contributes to the application of generalised approaches to specific problems—such as public awareness campaigns to reduce child rape or building football fields to reduce gangsterism amongst the youth. These broad approaches are chosen because the assumptions about the risk factors associated with, in this case, sex offending and gangsterism have not been tested, and because the effectiveness of existing projects has not been evaluated. Given the dearth of project evaluations and the lack of shared learning from those that have been evaluated, it is no surprise that practitioners are readily drawn to intuitive solutions rather than those informed by local conditions.

As has been pointed out in this book, evaluations can be time consuming and expensive, which disinclines practitioners to conduct them. This reinforces the need for a national crime prevention centre discussed earlier in this chapter. The centre could dedicate capacity, time and resources to ongoing evaluation and the dissemination of learning, and thereby increase the confidence with which policy makers and practitioners could approach multi-agency crime prevention programmes.