



# Evaluating Community Safety Forums<sup>1</sup>

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The Community Safety Forum (CSF) project was launched in the Western Cape in October 1998 under supervision of UMAC and with financial support from the British Department for International Development (see chapter 5). The goal of the project was to establish a vehicle for facilitating the implementation of multi-agency crime prevention initiatives at local level. At its initiation, the project had two objectives:

- To establish CSFs as a means of facilitating the active participation of primary stakeholders in the planning and implementation of multi-agency crime prevention projects in selected pilot areas.
- Through this, to enhance a co-ordinated response to specified priority crimes by departments of the criminal justice system and other agencies in the pilot areas.

These objectives correlate directly with government policy guiding the delivery of safety and security services (see chapter 2), especially the provisions that advocate 'integrated' or 'co-ordinated multi-agency' approaches. Since the project's inception in late 1998, CSFs have been established and are functioning in eight localities in the Western Cape, namely George, Robertson, Khayelitsha, Wynberg, Mitchell's Plein, Elsiesrivier, Nyanga and Atlantis.

In March 2001, UMAC contracted the ISS and a research organisation, insideout, to conduct an evaluation of the CSF project in the Western Cape. For UMAC, the purpose of this evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the CSFs. The evaluation was therefore intended to provide a descriptive analysis of how the CSF project was implemented in the selected areas, an identification of promising and inhibiting practices, and an analysis of the effectiveness, sustainability and replicability of the CSF project.

This chapter is based on results of the field research conducted in April and May 2001. The research consisted of:

- A review of project documentation.
- Interviews with two representatives of the CSF Provincial Steering Committee.
- Interviews with five UMAC CSF practitioners.

- Interviews with 33 CSF practitioners at four of the eight CSF pilot sites, selected on the basis of their geographic location and progress in the CSF project. These sites were: George, Robertson, Khayelitsha and Tygerberg.

The interview data collected from the four evaluation sites was collated and presented in the form of four detailed case studies.

## Implementation of the CSF project

In practice, the establishment of the CSF structures had generally followed a seven-step process:

1. Networking to introduce the CSF concept among primary stakeholders.
2. Establishing the CSF structure, usually signified by the nomination of an executive committee.
3. An official launch of the CSF.
4. A series of introductory workshops (usually held monthly) to introduce participants to one another, clarify the purpose of the CSF, resolve organisational competition and potential role conflict, and to brainstorm crime and safety issues.
5. A series of planning meetings to formulate safety plans to address priority issues.
6. Allocation of activities and responsibilities to participants to begin implementation of the safety plan.
7. Initiation of projects to address issues identified in the safety plan.

In broad terms, these steps correlated with the four-stage 'evolutionary' process that UMAC's CSF practitioners aimed to follow in developing the CSFs:

- Stage 1: regular meetings between primary stakeholders.
- Stage 2: improved understanding between primary stakeholders of one another's particular roles, responsibilities and functions as they share information at their regular meetings.
- Stage 3: improved co-operation between the stakeholders and other role-players who are drawn into the CSF to share in co-operative planning to react to priority issues.
- Stage 4: initiation and implementation of projects aimed at addressing priority issues.

UMAC facilitation had succeeded particularly well in terms of the first four steps of the seven step process outlined above—that is, with regard to Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the 'evolutionary' process. In the four areas targeted for the evaluation, the initial networking, role-clarification and problem-solving, which was initiated in late

1998 and which led to the establishment and launch of the CSFs, took place within three to four months.

This is a significant achievement in view of the range of stakeholders initially targeted for participation: the three agencies of the criminal justice system (the South African Police Service, Department of Correctional Services and Department of Justice and Constitutional Development), the Department of Welfare, local government and representatives of the community police forums. This is because, despite a range of government policies directing these agencies to co-operate, interaction at the operational level is often limited. Further, at all four sites, UMAC facilitation at the CSFs had ensured that these stakeholders and other local and provincial role-players had the opportunity to interact regularly: the CSFs in each area met at least monthly.

However, the very real challenges facing multi-agency co-operation at local level were indicated by the length of time it took the CSFs to develop their respective safety plans. This process appeared to be extremely time consuming, ranging from 12 months in one case to 28 months in another. Indeed, the George CSF that was launched in April 1999 had not yet developed a safety plan. Nevertheless, in the case of Robertson, safety plans had been developed and approved in September 1999, and were ready for implementation. In the case of Tygerberg and Khayelitsha plans were ready for implementation in September and October 2000 respectively.

Because the safety plans allocate responsibilities and deliverables to guide implementation of crime reduction activities, the completion of this task in all areas except George was an important achievement for the CSF project.

However, the case study data showed a disjuncture between the development of the safety plans and the implementation of actual crime reduction initiatives. While three of the four CSFs evaluated had developed safety plans, it appeared that these plans, with the exception of Khayelitsha, had resulted in limited, if any, project activity. This correlated with the views of the UMAC CSF practitioners, all of whom noted that the four CSFs had reached Stage 2 of the "evolutionary" process (improved understanding between the primary stakeholders), and that only one CSF, in George, had reached Stage 3.

This meant that the CSF project's key achievement at the time of the evaluation was that it provided an opportunity for improving interaction, communication, co-operation and joint planning between the primary stakeholders and other role-players in the safety and security field at local level. In particular, the CSFs had succeeded in providing a structured opportunity for:

- Developing a better understanding of crime prevention among role-players within and outside the local and provincial spheres of government.
- Government departments to receive input from civil society organisations which might otherwise not have had such an opportunity.
- Developing a better understanding among government and civil-society role-players about the links between their roles and activities.
- Developing agreement among these role-players on priority issues.
- Developing a co-ordinated response to these priority issues.

This was confirmed by the views of those representing the various organisations participating in the CSFs. Most participants were positive about the impact of the CSFs because they provided:

- A forum for improved information sharing (about crime, existing projects, the needs of the community and government priorities).
- A better understanding of roles, responsibilities and activities of representative departments, and particularly those of the three departments of the criminal justice system.
- A network of contacts which could operate within and outside the CSF for ad hoc problem-solving.
- An appreciation of the need to work together to deal with common problems.

A few respondents were uncertain about the CSFs' impact, saying that it was too soon to tell. Several believed the CSFs had had little or no impact. They explained that the forums had resulted in too many meetings without concrete results, the formulation of plans which were "too idealistic", or that participation in the CSFs had not resulted in new activities or projects.

Those who were critical of the CSFs believed that the forums' purpose was to initiate new projects in addition to, or supportive of, existing activity. These respondents were not aware that the CSFs aimed, at least initially, to facilitate project development rather than start new projects.

## **Challenges facing the CSF project**

### ***Clarity of purpose***

As indicated above, the CSF project was initiated with two clear goals:

- To establish CSFs as a means of facilitating the active participation of primary stakeholders in the planning and implementation of multi-agency crime prevention projects in selected pilot areas.
- Through this, to enhance a co-ordinated response to specified priority crimes by departments of the criminal justice system and other agencies in the pilot areas.

CSF practitioners and participants in the four areas under review were aware of these two goals. However, equal, if not greater emphasis was placed on other goals beyond the stated brief of the project. For instance, respondents identified the following as the objectives of the CSFs:

- Community empowerment: the CSFs are to include so-called community representatives to ensure input on safety issues, to improve the accessibility of the participant state departments and to raise community awareness of the services available from participant organisations. Here 'community' was used synonymously with the community police forum indicating that the UMAC practitioners believed that "CPF members represent the community".<sup>2</sup>
- Strengthening and supporting the police, especially by enhancing communication between the police and the community.
- Enabling closer co-operation between government departments through information sharing and shared decision making.
- Facilitating integrated local planning through ensuring input from a range of relevant stakeholders at local level.
- Providing of a safer environment through the co-operation of a range of government and non-government organisations.
- Facilitating the implementation of Urban Renewal Strategies in the targeted pilot areas.

The first two objectives identified by CSF practitioners and participants, while laudable, fall outside the objectives of the project. The last objective, also beyond the scope of the CSF project, is properly the responsibility of provincial and local government in co-operation with other government departments.

This difference in understanding of the project purpose, and the disjuncture between this understanding and what the CSFs actually achieved—namely creating a forum for information sharing—help to explain two of the key criticisms levelled at the CSFs by those who participate in them: that the CSFs did not enable concrete outcomes and did not ensure consistent attendance from those with sufficient decision making authority. These criticisms point to important views about the assumptions underlying the establishment of the CSFs.

### ***Assumptions of the CSF project***

Participation in the CSF is intended to result in concrete activity, in the form of multi-agency programmes to reduce crime. An important assumption of the CSF methodology is therefore that:

- Regular meetings to share information will lead to a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the various role-players.
- This will lead to a better understanding of the interdependence of these roles

and responsibilities.

- This will, in turn, lead to greater co-operation in the delivery of services.
- Ultimately, all these activities will lead to the active initiation of multi-agency crime reduction initiatives.

This assumption is similar to that underpinning much of the government policy directing integrated governance and multi-agency responses to particular issues. However, underlying these approaches is a clear decision making process. The problem for the CSF approach was that the link between information sharing and understanding the roles of various stakeholders on the one hand, and actual decision making on the other, was not clear. This is hardly surprising, given that decision making powers in government departments may be dispersed over various points in the three spheres of government (national, provincial and local). As such, decisions may be made at a level inaccessible to participants in the CSF structures.

Further, the individual or organisation that co-ordinates multi-agency projects must be in a position to direct particular activities at particular times. This in turn requires a mandate and recognised authority (and one that rarely exists at local level in criminal justice matters). Neither the CSF structures nor the UMAC facilitators had the mandate or authority to co-ordinate multi-agency activity, particularly that of government departments. Nor did CSFs have the authority to ensure that the various stakeholders account for their activities. As such, the CSF structures could arguably only function as forums for information sharing.

The expectation that participation in the CSFs would necessarily result in crime reduction activities and actual CSF projects was therefore misplaced.

This was most evident in the George CSF, where a range of focused problem-solving activities had been initiated under the chairmanship of the local police station commissioner—an authoritative figure. These activities had already been agreed to by the participating government departments, and the CSF appeared to function mainly to iron out implementation problems as they arose. This was achieved in the absence of a safety plan, which is significant when one considers that the CSF practitioners believed the George CSF was the only one of the four to have progressed as far as Stage 3.

Given the misplaced assumption that information sharing will necessarily lead to action, it was not surprising that some CSF participants became discouraged and that participation was inconsistent. Having said that, the CSF process could lead to decision making that results in inter-agency activity if the following steps were adopted:

- Facilitation of an initial networking phase aimed primarily at identifying current activities, priorities and concerns of relevant stakeholders.
- Problem identification and planning to address particular issues aimed at developing priorities and formulating a draft plan of action to address these priorities.
- Focused lobbying of appropriate stakeholders aimed at clarifying roles and responsibilities, ensuring support and acquiring meaningful input to the development of actionable interventions.
- A short process to finalise the approved interventions in a business plan that specifies deliverables, time frames, budgets and responsibilities.
- Implementation of a dedicated system of reporting to the political and administrative heads of department at provincial level.

Active lobbying or advocacy targeted at relevant government stakeholders would be required. This could be undertaken by a CSF member, the UMAC facilitator, or more appropriately, the primary stakeholder relevant to resolving a particular problem. This would allow the CSFs to tap into appropriate decision making authorities, rather than to simply assume such authority. This could, however, change the UMAC approach from one of establishing CSF structures for co-operative information sharing, to that of active strategy development.

### ***Structure vs strategy***

At the time of evaluation the focus of the project had been on establishing the CSF structures and ensuring that they were seen as valuable and legitimate by stakeholders. This was understandable, as policy was relatively new and those involved were still grappling with their roles. Given this focus, it was no surprise that there were real differences of opinion as to what exactly the CSFs were meant to achieve and how they would achieve it. These differences were largely attributable to the assumption that enhanced information sharing leads, necessarily, to co-operative and co-ordinated activity.

The limitations of this approach are most apparent when considering the safety plans formulated by the CSFs. Most striking was the ambitious nature of the plans.

In Robertson, the CSF identified eight deliverables, five of which required infrastructural development and therefore a substantial injection of finance and other resources. Further, objectives that focused on the protection and development of the youth in the area were apparently decided in the absence of representatives of the Education Department, the Department of Health and Welfare or its local social services counterpart, local youth structures, churches and recreational facilities.<sup>3</sup> It was not surprising therefore that the study found that "members feel that

there is little progress in implementing the plan, and attribute this failure to a lack of resources".

The Tygerberg Safety Plan, completed in September 2000, referred to six objectives. One of these, "job creation", was so broad as to be meaningless and was certainly beyond the scope of the CSF. Three of the other objectives, to support the safe schools project, the establishment of a health forum to improve accessibility to health services and the development of park and recreational facilities, were agreed to in the absence of representation from the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Public Works or its local government counterpart.<sup>4</sup> Again, the lack of clarity from the participants regarding what activities had actually resulted from this safety plan was to be expected.

In Khayelitsha, the CSF had taken on a long-term Urban Renewal Strategy as its primary deliverable—one it shared with the provincial Department of Community Safety. While the Khayelitsha Safety Plan was even more ambitious than the other two under review, it was apparent that there were projects under way in the area. It was not, however, clear whether these projects were directly related to proposals in the safety plan or whether, given the provincial government focus on the area, they would have been initiated with or without the CSF's support.

The ambitiousness of these safety plans (which mitigates against a local response), as well as the lack of agreement by primary stakeholders on some projects, inhibited the development of actionable plans. For instance, the safety plans for Robertson and Tygerberg included a range of activities, but lacked performance indicators, responsibilities, time frames and budgets. The lengthy Khayelitsha Safety Plan, which painted objectives in broad brush, displayed similar limitations.

Finally, where activities had actually been initiated, the link between these activities and the safety plan was often tenuous. As such, the plans are unlikely to inform coordinated departmental activity or inspire additional role-players, which could limit the CSF's ability to achieve their intended purpose. Rather than being viewed as an end-result, the safety plans should be seen as a first step that should be taken up with relevant stakeholders for input, refinement and integration within their planning and budgeting processes. The more detailed and specific the plans become, the more clarity there will be about the roles and responsibilities of particular role-players—what they are expected to do, how they are meant to do it, and when they are to do it.

This means that the safety plans should be amended to become detailed business plans which could be negotiated with and hopefully approved by the relevant

stakeholders. Such an approach is likely to affect the CSFs positively in two ways.

Firstly, by providing an approved 'to-do list' and allocating specific responsibilities it is likely that the CSF meetings will take on greater structure and consistency. Only those involved in particular activities would be expected to attend to provide feedback at particular times. Secondly, more detailed plans are likely to alleviate the seemingly constant political and institutional turf issues, particularly those associated with participation of the CPFs.<sup>5</sup>

In short, the development of a coherent and approved strategy to address key problems is likely to alleviate many of the internal issues associated with the functioning of the CSFs. Adopting such an approach would however require UMAC to examine its facilitation role.

### ***Facilitation or process management?***

If the CSFs are to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of crime prevention, a change of approach is required. Where UMAC facilitation has been strong on convincing a range of role-players of the need for an integrated approach to safety and security, interaction at the CSFs has had a limited impact on demonstrating the benefits of such an approach to these stakeholders.

Thus, having spent considerable time and energy on bringing stakeholders together in the CSFs, it is not certain that UMAC facilitation at the CSFs was able to provide appropriate direction to these stakeholders. The danger is that in the absence of meaningful activity (which is dependent on clearly articulated and allocated responsibilities), participation declines or becomes sporadic, morale among those who continue to participate lowers and the CSF participants become caught up in internal process issues.

Therefore, if the CSF process is to grow and be replicated elsewhere, UMAC, as the implementing agent, needs to consider a strategic switch from facilitating information sharing to actual process management. The implications for UMAC should not be underestimated. At the very least, such a switch will need a significant project management capacity as well as an experienced lobbying or advocacy capacity with a focus on government stakeholders. Both are likely to impact on UMAC's current staff profile and therefore have budgeting and funding implications. Nevertheless, the research indicated that there is some room for enhancing UMAC's administrative and facilitation capacity under the current arrangement.<sup>6</sup> The key choice lies in what shape these improvements take.

## **Recommendations**

Given the challenges outlined above, UMAC should consider revisiting its approach to the CSFs. The recommendations below advocate a more interventionist role.

### ***The purpose of the project***

If the purpose of establishing the CSFs is to enable a multi-agency approach to crime reduction at the local level, rather than the broader objectives identified by many of the participants, a more strategic approach is required. This should aim at moving the CSFs from a means of sharing information to a more active role in problem-solving and project development. This would entail considering an appropriate process to direct the functioning of the CSFs, especially with regard to the development of actionable safety plans.

### ***An appropriate decision making methodology***

Related to the point above is the need to review the facilitation methodology currently in use at the CSFs. Rather than attempting to seek consensus from all participants, (which often results in a wish-list of broad interventions), UMAC facilitation should aim to acquire authoritative decisions on priorities and the allocation of resources. This means that the safety plans must be more specific and include measurable indicators, responsibilities, time frames and budgets. This process is unlikely to be appropriate at only the local level.

UMAC facilitation should view the information sharing phase as a first step in a process leading to appropriate authorisation for activities. This means that a critical part of the initial design of the safety plans must be identifying decision making processes in the departments or organisations most affected by the envisaged interventions, followed by a dedicated process to tap into these processes.

### ***Building the appropriate capacity***

If the first two recommendations are accepted, UMAC would need to consider its ability to engage with its amended role. At the very least, UMAC would be required to enhance its project management capacity and to build an advocacy or lobbying capacity targeted at government.