

## Chapter 10 Recommendations

The object of the rural protection plan is to encourage all roleplayers in rural safety to work together in a co-ordinated manner, and engage in joint planning, action and monitoring to combat crime in the country's rural areas. The statistics on farm and smallholding attacks indicate that the rate of increase in the number of attacks (and the murders associated with the attacks) has diminished since the plan came into operation.

From the research conducted so far it appears that the plan's success varies from one area to the next. Generally, the police and the SANDF (as well as the police reservist structures and the commandos) co-operate and assist each other. However, civilian participation – especially among farm workers – is inadequate. Organised agriculture needs to encourage farmers and their workers to participate in the rural protection plan. The security forces are too thin on the ground in the country's rural areas to prevent farm and smallholding attacks in any meaningful way. Civilian participation is consequently crucial if the plan is to succeed.

The state's most glaring weakness is in its intelligence and detection capabilities. Too few farm and smallholding attacks are prevented because the security forces rarely obtain advance warning of such attacks. Moreover, once the perpetrators of an attack have disappeared the detective service frequently lacks the resources and capacity to arrest the culprits.

### **Publicity campaigns**

The research team came across a high level of ignorance among farmers and smallholders (the latter, in particular) concerning their potential role in making their homes and community safer against criminal attack. Many of the people interviewed had not heard, or did not know of the rural protection plan. Many (especially among smallholders) did not know that they could become home and hearth protection commando members, whereby they would be primarily responsible for their own farm and smallholding and those of their immediate neighbours only.

It appears that many people do not take heed of the existing publicity campaigns of the police and the commandos. It might be appropriate to revisit the way such schemes are marketed to the public. Emphasis will have to be placed on those aspects of these schemes which show the public what they can gain by joining the police's reservists or the commandos.

It is also apparent that there is little contact between neighbours even among smallholding residents. It appeared that many smallholders left the city to develop a more individualistic lifestyle uninhibited by neighbourly interference. As a result, many smallholders are not motivated to get to know their neighbours, or indeed to get involved in community structures in their neighbourhoods. The police encourages smallholders to get to know their neighbours and to join community police forums and similar structures which would assist the police in its crime prevention functions. A new approach might be required which emphasises the benefit of greater public involvement for the participating smallholders and farmers.

## **Resources**

The security forces in the areas researched – the SAPS, and the SANDF and its commando structures – are working under severe resource constraints. While it would be unrealistic to expect additional funding for the hiring of more personnel or major capital expenditures, relatively minor spending could make a substantial difference to the security forces' effectiveness. For example, newer radios for the Pretoria East Commando (with a link to the police's radio frequency) would substantially improve the co-ordination between the SAPS and the local commando in an emergency. Some of these costs could be covered through private sector assistance.

Given the resource constraints of the security forces, it might be prudent to conduct focused and regular high intensity operations in certain areas which are linked to farm and smallholding attacks. While it is a labour intensive process to raid and close down shebeens and illegally operating taverns, such an approach could be beneficial if many of the farm and smallholding attacks are planned in shebeens and taverns.

## **Improved intelligence and detective work**

Circumstantial evidence suggests that some of the farm and smallholding attacks – especially those which involve the theft of motor vehicles, expensive household items and firearms – are committed by criminals who are part of larger organised crime structures. To combat this kind of criminality effectively, sufficient intelligence needs to be gathered on such groups to allow the state to arrest the crime kingpins involved and prosecute them successfully.

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Generally, the ability of the police and the commandos to gather advance intelligence before an attack on a farm or smallholding is limited. Greater effort is required to develop better intelligence gathering capabilities, especially in the squatter and informal settlements from where a high proportion of the culprits are allegedly emanating. One member of a commando remarked that they would be able to gather much better intelligence if they had even a small budget from which they could pay R50 or R100 to people who supply them with useful information. This might warrant further consideration and investigation.

Most farm and smallholding attackers are not apprehended at the scene of the crime. As a result, the police's detective service is greatly relied upon to investigate attacks which can lead to arrests and eventual successful prosecutions. As has been alluded to, much dissatisfaction was expressed by a number of the victims about the level of service provided by the detective service. If the functioning of the detective service is improved, more people might participate in the rural protection plan as they would think that their participation could make a real difference. Detectives need to be given the resources, and they need to be motivated to pay due attention to the more serious attacks on farms and smallholdings.

### **Farm and smallholding employees**

Given the evidence – albeit it circumstantial in places – that employees of farmers and smallholders frequently abet the actions of attackers, greater care needs to be exercised by farmers and smallholders in screening applicants for employment. The security forces need to advise farmers and smallholders that new employees should ideally be sought through official channels such as employment agencies or the department of labour. Moreover, farmers and smallholders need to be made aware of the fact that it is illegal to employ foreigners without a valid work permit.

Greater effort also needs to be made to involve employees on farms and smallholdings in security structures. It is crucial, if the rural protection plan is to succeed, that people who work and often live on farms and smallholdings become SAPS reservists or join the commando structures.

### **Devolution of responsibility**

Many smallholders (and some farmers) have the attitude that the state is responsible to provide for their security 24 hours a day. Given the state's limited resources, this is clearly not possible. Even with more resources and personnel, it would be impossible for the security forces to patrol all smallholding and farming areas in the

country. Smallholders and farmers need to be made aware that they must take some of the responsibility to provide for their own security and safety.<sup>1</sup>

The rural protection plan's success often stems from a few committed individuals. The success of most structures – such as GOCOCs, residents' associations, or even neighbourhood or farm watches – can frequently be attributed to a few motivated and committed individuals. The implication is that even the best structures cannot succeed in their aim if they are not driven by at least a small number of people who have the commitment to make them work.

### **Local solutions to local problems**

The rural protection plan is a viable framework around which rural safety initiatives should be undertaken. From the research conducted in three separate areas, it is apparent that the rural protection plan can be made to work – and reduce attacks on farms and smallholdings – provided it is adapted to local conditions and needs. The rural protection plan needs to be flexible enough to accommodate local security needs. Dialogue between local, provincial and national roleplayers on the rural protection plan needs to be fostered. This will bring about a greater sharing of information to assist operational planners at national level to accommodate local conditions in their strategic plan for the country as a whole.

### **Definition of smallholding attacks**

The official definition of a smallholding attack used by the security forces reads as follows: "Acts aimed against the *person* of residents on smallholdings, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm." For statistical purposes, only the following crimes are recorded as a smallholding attack (provided they fall into the above definition): murder, attempted murder, rape, assault with the intent to commit grievous bodily harm, robbery and armed robbery, vehicle hijacking, malicious damage to property (if the damage caused exceeds R10 000), and arson.

The definition is problematic as all violent crimes are arguably directed against the person of the victim. As a result, criminality which would generally be treated as normal (albeit serious) is given a different status as constituting attacks on smallholdings and/or smallholders. Thus, while a housebreaking coupled with a robbery in the urbanised part of the Wierdabrug police district is simply that, if it occurs five kilometres away on a smallholding it is statistically registered as a smallholding attack.

The research team did not come across any evidence, in its analysis of statistics on smallholding attacks during the one-year period after October 1998, which

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indicated that smallholders in the Wierdabrug area were victimised because they lived on smallholdings or were smallholders. Obviously, many smallholders – especially those living in isolated and outlying areas – are particularly vulnerable to criminal victimisation. However, vulnerability should not be confused with criminals’ motives. Criminals – motivated by greed – might rob a smallholder rather than a flat resident because of the former’s vulnerability, and not because of his or her being a resident of a smallholding. Vulnerability to criminal victimisation is not unique to smallholders. Other groups of people such as the aged, women and children who live, for example, in Wierdabrug, are also more vulnerable to criminal attack than other members of society.

By singling out serious crime committed on smallholdings and calling it attacks against smallholdings, the impression is given that there is considerably more serious and violent crime on smallholdings than in the country’s cities and towns. This partly erroneous perception may in itself fuel the fear of crime among smallholding residents. Moreover, by combining smallholding and farm attack figures, it is difficult for the public (including smallholders and farmers) to gain an accurate impression of changing levels of rural crime and safety. It would be beneficial if the incidence of farm and smallholding attacks were counted separately.

## Note

- 1 That this can be effective, was shown by a group of smallholders (in the Timsrand area of Wierdabrug) where the community came together to fight crime. Most of the smallholders in the area meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern. The smallholders also got together and persuaded the town council to erect street lights in their area. The smallholders pay for maintenance and electricity to make this service possible. Through their own initiative, the smallholders have also developed a good and ongoing relationship with the residents of a small squatter settlement in their area. Smallholding attacks in the Timsrand area have decreased dramatically since the smallholder community became more involved in taking responsibility for their own security.