

# INTRODUCTION

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South Africa's criminal justice system is not performing optimally. In 2000 almost 2.6 million crimes were recorded by the police (up from 2 million in 1994). Of these the prosecution service took on 270,000 cases (the remainder being unsolved or withdrawn), with slightly more than 210,000 ending in a conviction of the perpetrators. That is, only 8% of recorded crimes resulted in a conviction. For some serious crimes the number of convictions as a proportion of recorded cases was even lower.

The slow investigation and prosecution of cases is creating unmanageable numbers of awaiting trial prisoners. In December 2001 the country's prisons had an approved occupancy level of 105,000, but were holding 175,000 inmates – more than a third of whom were awaiting trial.

These dismal figures are of more than just academic interest. How well South Africa's criminal justice system functions is important for several reasons. If perpetrators are apprehended and convicted timeously and effectively, certain crimes can be reduced. A functional system helps to deter some potential offenders from committing a crime. An effective and efficient justice system inspires confidence among victims and witnesses and encourages them to participate in the criminal justice process, thereby leading to the arrest and conviction of offenders. Finally, criminal justice successes – especially if well publicised – are essential for boosting public confidence in the government's ability to reduce crime and make people feel safer.

In 1996 Business Against Crime (BAC) investigated blockages in the criminal justice system. The investigation recommended that many blockages needed to be addressed across all criminal justice departments. This resulted in the Integrated Justice System (IJS) initiative.

The IJS requires people with specific technical skills, knowledge of the criminal justice system, and the ability to plan in a practical and achievable manner – in essence, people who can assist with project implementation. Yet these are often the very skills that are in short supply within government

departments. Skills needed by the IJS government departments are project and programme management skills, and related business skills (i.e. skills which bring a sound fiscal and financial approach to a project, and the skill to develop clear objectives which are measurable and output-orientated).

This monograph is about one IJS project, the Port Elizabeth Court Centre Project, in which the private sector and the state have worked together in a symbiotic relationship. The Port Elizabeth Court Centre has become a beacon of hope for South Africa's poorly performing criminal justice system. Within three years, using the best practices from a diversity of subsidiary projects, the Port Elizabeth Court Centre has significantly improved the performance of one of the busiest magistrate's courts in the country.