

## Executive summary

In the three years between January 1997 and December 1999, some 361 people were murdered in more than 2 000 attacks on farms and smallholdings in South Africa. Most of the attacks and murders occurred in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal.

At the request of the former president, Nelson Mandela, a rural protection plan was put into operation late in 1997. The objective of the plan is to encourage all roleplayers concerned with 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.

In late 1999, a research project was undertaken to evaluate the rural protection plan's effectiveness, and to develop a better understanding of the nature of crime on farms and smallholdings. The research was conducted in selected parts of the three provinces worst affected by attacks on farms and smallholdings.

It was found that the rural protection plan's effectiveness to combat attacks on farms and smallholdings varied from area to area. In the country's rural areas, where farms are far removed from the nearest police station or army base, the plan's success depends primarily on strong civilian participation.

In the event of a farm attack, it is normally only the victim's neighbours who can respond rapidly enough to apprehend the culprits. By the time the security forces arrive at the scene of a farm attack, the culprits have usually fled.

Given that the police and the army do not have a rapid response capability in the country's rural areas, it is crucial that farmers and smallholders themselves – through the organised structure of the South African National Defence Force's commando system or the police's reservist system – take greater responsibility for their, and their community's safety.

The police's primary contribution in combating farm and smallholding attacks is in its detective and intelligence functions. In some areas, the detective service functions well and many farm and smallholding attackers have been apprehended and convicted by the courts. There are, however, other areas where the police is performing poorly in this regard. This is frequently the case where the perpetrators of farm and smallholding attacks operate from outside of the area where the attack takes place, and local detectives have to co-operate with their colleagues in other parts of the country. Interregional co-operation in the detective service needs to be improved.

An important weakness of the rural protection plan is that the police – and the security forces generally – have weak intelligence gathering capabilities. This is especially so in rural informal settlements and squatter camps from where farm and smallholding attacks are often planned, and to where many culprits flee after an attack. The security forces need to improve their intelligence gathering capabilities to be in a stronger position to pre-empt attacks on farms and smallholdings.

The rural protection plan is a good mechanism to drive and co-ordinate safety initiatives for the country's farms and smallholdings. There are, however, aspects of the plan which can be improved. Moreover, while the plan provides a sound framework for rural safety, the individual components of the plan must be adapted to local needs and capacities. Crucially, the plan needs to be accepted by local communities. Without their ongoing participation in the plan, its effectiveness is limited.