

CHAPTER 2

LOCAL CRIME PREVENTION IN CONTEXT

What is crime prevention?

Crime prevention is a complex concept that often means different things to different professionals and practitioners. The definition of crime prevention hinges around our understanding of crime and its causes. Crime is a social and legal concept that refers to a number of anti-social behaviours, that may be planned or unplanned and that occur in different circumstances. However the way we currently understand, analyse and respond to crime is strongly influenced by the legal description of the concept rather than its social aspects. This explains the general tendency to focus on the criminal justice system, with its emphasis on arrests and punishment, as a solution to crime. The spread and persistence of crime should however encourage a rethink of such strategies. There is a need to balance both the legal and social aspects of crime and offending.

Various crime and offending studies show that crime is not caused by any one event, but rather results from a combination of many factors that interact in complex ways.⁴ Demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors are associated with high crime areas. Poverty and income inequality have also been linked to high crime rates. Although these social conditions are strongly correlated with crime levels, research indicates that individuals subjected to identical social and economic conditions will not all abstain from, or engage in, criminal behaviour. Even in conditions where overall rates of offending are high, the decision to engage in crime remains an individual choice.⁵

Socio-economic, cultural and demographic variables provide the broad context that influences criminality. The links between programmes dealing with these underlying social factors and crime prevention, are however, not well understood. Hence the current thinking on crime prevention focuses more on the practical management of risk and minimisation of specific crimes.⁶ The management of specific crimes depends on three sets of characteristics: those of the offender, those of victim, and those of the environment where the crime is committed. The environment includes the

physical location, as well as the people and activities in an area that might deter or encourage the offender in his or her actions.⁷

Crime prevention programmes can target either the broad underlying factors or the specific circumstances of the crime. For instance, a well planned urban development programme should reduce the number of people leaving in informal settlements, provide parents with a better environment for the care of their children, and easier access to key services such as health, education and policing. All these improvements should assist in preventing crime. A properly managed education and schooling system can also contribute to crime prevention by teaching children to value and accept society's social norms, and also by keeping learners stimulated and occupied and thus out of trouble. Programmes aimed at the effective development and management of the urban environment, better schooling, and family support are key for preventing crime.

Together with criminal justice officials such as police and prosecutors, it becomes clear that crime prevention will involve a range of activities that are the responsibility of various service providers, both in government and civil society. In line with the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security, crime prevention could be defined as "all activities that reduce, deter or prevent the occurrence of specific crimes"⁸ or improve the socio-economic conditions that facilitate the occurrence of crime.

Provisions in the policy and legislation

The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) and the White paper on Safety and Security laid the foundation for local level crime prevention initiatives. The NCPS broadly provided that local governments should play a leading role in crime prevention in their areas of jurisdiction. It set out that local government, in collaboration with local partners, should:

- set priorities for crime prevention within their jurisdiction;
- promote, coordinate and oversee departmental and agency involvement in effective crime prevention for their locality;
- acquire the necessary skills to engage with crime prevention issues and develop the required capacity to drive prevention projects;
- obtain the support of major local role players in committing themselves to crime prevention;
- meet the management, monitoring and assessment requirements of their chosen strategies, programmes and implementation methodology;

- facilitate reporting and coordination in respect of provincial NCPS structures and processes;
- continuously review and enhance strategies, programmes and activities;
- set up a coordinating committee which could comprise of senior representatives from structures of the local authority, area and station SAPS offices, local community police forum and/or area boards, local branches of government departments responsible for welfare, education, housing, health, and justice, and appropriate non-governmental bodies.⁹

The White Paper on Safety and Security stimulated city-level interventions by allocating responsibility for bylaw enforcement as well as the coordination and initiation of crime prevention projects to local government. The White Paper covered a range of activities relevant to municipalities, including social crime prevention, bylaw enforcement and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). These developments were reinforced by the passing of the South African Police Service Amendment Act No 39 of 1998. The Act amended the South African Police Service Act of 1995 to allow local government to establish municipal police services in their areas. Whether local governments go this route or not will however depend on whether they have the substantial resources and capacity, as determined by the legislation, to develop and sustain their own police service.¹⁰

The White Paper on Local Government encourages municipalities to form partnerships with other government departments and civil society organisations that can assist in carrying out crime prevention programmes. Moreover the Local Government Transition Act of 1993 compels municipalities to develop negotiated Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) – which typically include projects relating to crime and safety – for their areas of authority.

The Department of Land Affairs' Development Facilitation Act 67 of 1995 requires municipalities to prepare land development objectives (LDOs) each year. LDOs are drawn up through a process of extensive public participation and provide local government with a clear idea of its constituency's most important development priorities. The process of defining the LDOs and developing the IDPs has been designed to ensure that people who are affected by these plans have a say in their development. In towns where these plans have been approved, it is apparent that crime is a major concern for residents.¹¹

A major task for municipalities is to understand their local crime problems and how particular programmes can reduce crime. More importantly, the challenge

is to integrate the required activities within the Integrated Development Plans.

What can municipalities do?

The White Paper on Safety and Security outlined three areas of intervention for municipalities:

- crime prevention through social development;
- crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED);
- law enforcement, including bylaws.

Crime prevention through social development or social crime prevention focuses on the social, economic and cultural factors that contribute to criminality. This approach tackles individual, family and community risk factors that lead to crime and victimisation.¹² For many of these programmes and projects, municipalities will need to work jointly with the Departments of Education and Social Development, as well as non-governmental organisations. Some of the key risk factors that can be tackled through social crime prevention are:

- inadequate living conditions including overcrowding;
- factors that affect the family such as poverty, poor parenting, and alcohol abuse;
- individual personality and behavioural factors such as aggression, lack of social skills, critical reasoning and problem solving skills;
- school related factors such as the optimal functioning of schools, school drop-out, and poor school performance;
- peer association such as association with friends who are involved in crime;
- creating employment opportunities by providing skills training; and
- programmes and projects directed at children and youth at risk of being offenders.

Crime prevention through environmental design is a form of situational crime prevention. In this case crime is reduced through appropriate planning, design and management of the physical environment.¹³ It can include:

- reducing the amount of vacant land or open spaces in an area;
- ensuring that public spaces such as residential streets and public parks are well lit and maintained;
- developing safe pedestrian routes and trading centres;
- designing safe public transport nodes;
- improving surveillance systems in crime 'hot spot' areas; and

- applying crime prevention principles when designing new towns and residential areas.

Criminal law enforcement is the prerogative of the criminal justice system departments namely the SAPS, and the Departments of Justice and Correctional Services. Nevertheless, municipalities ought to collaborate with the criminal justice system as far as law enforcement in their areas of jurisdiction is concerned. In the case of bylaws, local government is the primary agency responsible for their enforcement, and where municipal police exist, for preventing crime in general. Bylaw enforcement presents municipalities with their clearest and most direct tool for engaging in crime prevention, because bylaws regulate how the city is used, and the social patterns and behaviour of those who use it. Although most bylaws do not appear to be directly related to acts of crime, they can be used to change those aspects of the environment that facilitate crime. Some municipal law enforcement activities include:

- working with the SAPS and National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) in identifying crime hot spots and coming up with joint projects on how to police them;
- enforcing traffic laws and assisting the SAPS with joint roadblock operations;
- enforcing bylaws such as those relating to health and safety, land and housing, in line with specific crime prevention goals in specific parts of the city;
- using zoning regulations to control where and when certain activities take place, such as the sale of alcohol; and
- participating in forums aimed at improving local safety, such as community policing forums and sector policing forums.