

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2003 SAPS National Commissioner Jackie Selebi issued a Draft National Instruction on sector policing. This monograph examines how sector policing has been interpreted and implemented on the West Rand. Sectors in the three station precincts are studied – Randfontein, Roodepoort and Kagiso.

Sector policing – international and domestic context

Sector policing emerged in the early 1970s as one among a host of experiments to address a crisis in American policing. Police leaders and scholars had gone right back to basics and asked what it is that the police do to reduce crime. The endeavour to answer this question has produced a host of policing innovations in the last 30 years. These innovations can be divided into four categories: 1) hotspot or targeted patrolling, 2) controlling risk factors, 3) problem-oriented policing (POP), and 4) community policing (COP).

Sector policing is an eclectic composite. It includes COP and POP as its core, definitional components, but it usually includes targeted patrolling and risk factor identification as well.

COP is a form of policing that mobilises civilians into crime prevention projects. It has been successful when trained on specific problems.

POP borrows from the philosophy of public health interventions and applies it to policing. It ‘vaccinates’ an area against micro-crime patterns by identifying and managing their causes.

The form sector policing takes is shaped in no small part by the host policing culture that receives it. In recent years, South African policing has been characterised by a strong, active national centre, and uneven policing on the ground. The SAPS has come increasingly to rely on high density, high visibility paramilitary policing operations – precisely the sort of policing that a force with a strong centre and weak personnel can execute with accomplishment. Sector policing has been billed as a project to transcend these limitations – to restore grassroots policing.

Sector policing on the West Rand

The West Rand's interpretation of the Draft National Instruction has been ambitious and far-reaching. Station precincts' centralised capacities have been stripped and distributed into sub-precinct sectors. Either the decentralised organisation polices by solving sector-based problems, or policing simply does not work at all.

To the extent that police organisation and culture have successfully adapted to sector policing, three crucial factors are responsible:

- A large proportion of sector personnel are recently-recruited police officers. Sector policing is their first and only experience of policing. There are no old ways to be unlearned.
- Veteran middle-ranking police officers' first experience of sector policing has come in the form of a dramatic increase in resources and infrastructure, and a vastly improved managerial support system.
- Area management has grasped the concept of sector policing with enthusiasm, rather than having it thrust upon them.

The most rudimentary elements of sector policing have undoubtedly been implemented successfully. This is evidenced in:

- the accomplishment with which ordinary members have abandoned random patrolling for targeted patrolling and the identification of risk factors;
- the degree to which officers attempt to dissolve the blurred outlines of hotspots and transform them into specific crime patterns rooted in specific problems;
- the range of environmental, physical and social features ordinary members identify as crime-inducing, and their capacity to enter into partnerships with other state agencies and civilians.

Despite these successes, the study did identify several recurring problems:

- Some Sector Crime Forums (SCFs) are working poorly. In some cases, this is because the sector is too socially diverse. In other instances, the SCF is used to express and to deepen civilians' alienation from the SAPS.
- In regard to the policing of some institutions – illegal shebeens in particular – police culture is proving unable to absorb the philosophy of problem-oriented policing. (This problem is not ubiquitous, but it is fairly widespread.)
- As the same officers begin to patrol the same places, so the relationship between police and offenders becomes increasingly personalised. In some

(by no means all) instances, a process of mutual escalation ensues. Police resources are dragged into the management of a spiralling conflict.

- There is still work to be done in regard to intimate, sensitive encounters between officers and civilians – the policing of domestic violence complaints in particular. The nuances of police conduct can be crime-inducing or crime-alleviating. Research is required in this regard.