

# INTRODUCTION

---

In December 2003, the South African Police Service (SAPS) National Commissioner issued a Draft National Instruction on sector policing. At first glance, the changes to grassroots policing envisaged by the Instruction are organisationally modest. Several sector policing initiatives implemented in various parts of the world in the last three decades contemplated a wholesale restructuring of the police organisation; many foundered on the notorious difficulties that attend to ambitious institutional reform.

In contrast, the Draft National Instruction envisages only that one or two personnel be redeployed from patrol and response work to do community liaison and problem-solving work in geographically demarcated sectors.<sup>1</sup> The organisational expectations implicit in the National Instruction are thus prudent and cautious.

Yet, if the SAPS is cautious about what it expects to change institutionally, what, precisely, does it expect to change in regard to the ethos and goals of policing?

Here, the Draft National Instruction is abstract and imprecise, leaving much to the interpretation of those who will implement it. This is hardly surprising. The concept of sector policing is notoriously slippery; it has, over its short history, been animated by a host of different goals and ideas, some of which are mutually contradictory. Even within the SAPS itself, the concept is subject to a great deal of definitional indecision. Some emphasise its capacity to reduce crime through the formation of partnerships with civilian bodies; others say it will assist in the accurate demarcation of hotspots to be saturated with visible police. These are very different goals.

This monograph reports the findings of a study of sector policing in three station jurisdictions on Johannesburg's West Rand. The study has two primary aims: 1) To understand what sector policing has come to mean in practice on the West Rand, and 2) to distil best practice from the West Rand which can be learnt across the country.

Before moving to the West Rand study, there are two prior ports of call. The first is the short but eventful international history of sector policing. The second is the relevant South African context into which sector policing is being received.