

CHAPTER 2

POLICY CONTEXT

The South African government's 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) linked the then-burgeoning crime problem most strongly with the process of political transition that the country underwent in the early 1990s. In its analysis of the crime problem, the NCPS pointed out that the transition from authoritarian to democratic government had had significant implications for social cohesion and values:

The period of negotiated transition [is one]... in which there appears to be a vacuum of legitimate social authority. When added to the extensive destruction of the family, the school and even the workplace as vehicles of social cohesion during the preceding era, the cumulative experience of many South Africans has been of a society without any cohesive fabric or legitimate sources of authority.⁵

The process of consensus-building during the negotiation phase – and even subsequent to the April 1994 election – was considerably less efficient and rather slow... in the building of legitimate, consensus-based vehicles of social authority, social norms and socialisation processes.⁶

The NCPS recognised some of the complexity of the problem of norms and values:

The transition to democracy has understandably served to emphasise new freedoms in South African society,in the absence of adequately engaging with residual cultures of violence and intolerance, and frequently failing to anticipate the expectations or sense of entitlement associated with these new-found freedoms. ...The necessary culture-change is a slow and gradual process and demands a targeted focus on the development of the norms and values needed to underpin any orderly democratic society.⁷

In its strategy to tackle crime, the NCPS consisted of four 'pillars' – each one a particular arena of attack against the factors which create or facilitate

criminal activity'. One of these 'pillars' focused on 'Public Values and Education', with the intention of tackling 'the prevailing moral climate within communities, the attitudes towards crime, and the tolerance towards crime'.⁸

The aims of the NCPS in respect of public values and education were to:

- provide citizens with a working understanding of the criminal justice system, to enable them to participate fully in the workings of the system;
- provide information which underpins the development of strong community values and social pressure against criminality or 'grey' activities which support criminality (such as the buying of stolen goods);
- promote the use of non-violent means of conflict resolution, hence reducing victimisation;
- promote awareness of gender issues and the empowerment of groups most prone to victimisation; and
- promote awareness of the steps that individuals can take to reduce the risk of victimisation and hence enhance the level of civic action directed at crime prevention.⁹

In the practical programmes it proposed for implementation in the sphere of public values and education, the NCPS proposed a comprehensive Public Education Programme, to focus, *inter alia*, on the 'creation of strong community values and low tolerance for criminal behaviour'.¹⁰ It was suggested that the Department of Safety and Security should lead this programme. In practice, this broad national programme never materialised, although many of its key messages (crime awareness, community mobilisation into local crime reduction initiatives, etc.) were contained in subsequent publicity campaigns by the various national criminal justice departments and by provincial governments.

The second programme suggested in the NCPS was a School Education Programme, which would enable some kind of education in 'values' to be delivered through the national curriculum:

The most important social process which determines whether individuals will be law-abiding is a stable family environment and childhood socialisation around values and norms. While it is rather difficult for the state to impact meaningfully on family dynamics and parenting, the formal schooling process provides an opportunity for the creation of responsible and empowered citizenship at an early age.¹¹

The NCPS proposed the development of new curricula to provide scholars with awareness, knowledge and skills that would enable them to 'play responsible roles as citizens in the prevention of crime'.¹² It mandated the National Department of Education to lead this programme. Again, the programme was never implemented in the form envisaged in the NCPS; but the Department of Education, with its provincial counterparts, has been involved in numerous efforts aimed at similar goals, most notably the 'Values in Education' initiative, which could cumulatively be seen to have matched the original intentions of the NCPS.

The failure to implement the public values and education programmes as envisaged in the NCPS may have been a result of the absence of dedicated funds for NCPS activities at the time of its launch, and the difficulty of re-prioritising departmental funds within the government's medium-term expenditure framework; as well as difficulties of co-ordinating the kind of inter-departmental effort envisaged in the NCPS.¹³ However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to conclude that, in part, the intentions of the original NCPS *have* been acted upon by various government departments. There have been a variety of public education and social marketing initiatives related to crime prevention and criminal justice. These have ranged from 'Know your Rights' campaigns led by the South African Human Rights Commission, to the production of media advertisements which discourage citizens from purchasing pirated software and video products. Extensive public education work has been done by government and NGOs on issues related to sexual violence, often related to the broader campaign around HIV/AIDS. Government has spent significant resources on publicising new sexual offences legislation and the specialised courts that have been established to deal with these offences; and politicians and officials are vocal in condemning gender-based violence, especially against girls.

One problem with all these initiatives has been a lack of co-ordination, particularly in respect of messaging. Different government departments and different spheres of government (from local municipal councillors to national ministers) often communicate different—and even competing—messages about crime, prevention and criminal justice. This situation may have been different if the NCPS had been more vigorously implemented at the time of its inception.

The other problem with these various initiatives (all of which *may* have impacted on public values, ethics and morality) is that their impact is

extremely difficult to measure. Some of the government-funded public education campaigns related to HIV/AIDS have been evaluated, but the impact of campaigns related to crime prevention and the strengthening of resilience and ethics has not been assessed. It is therefore impossible to judge whether these educational campaigns and social marketing ventures do, in fact, impact on community values and on delinquent or criminal behaviour in South Africa.