

CHAPTER 3

SECTOR POLICING POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The origins of sector policing in South Africa

When one of the authors did some preliminary research on sector policing in South Africa in 2000, he was unable to establish how the SAPS first came across the British model, as none of the police officials he interviewed were familiar with the guidance notes issued by the London Metropolitan Police. One version of the origin of the sector policing concept in South Africa is that it was picked up by a senior SAP officer who attended a conference of US police agencies in 1993 or 1994 (possibly even prior to the creation of the SAPS). Another version has it that a senior SAP officer was attending a training course in Britain in 1994 where he had the opportunity to examine sector policing practices (and documents) in London.

In either version, there is explicit acknowledgement that the idea of sector policing was imported from abroad, probably at about the time the democratic transition took place; and undoubtedly as a result of a donor-funded trip abroad. This would explain how there came to be a passing reference to sector policing in the government's 1996 National Crime Prevention Strategy. In the NCPS, sector policing was cited as a possible tactic for reducing the then-prevalent problem of inter-group conflict—mainly the political violence in KwaZulu-Natal.

The 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security contains the first reference in an official policy document to the concept of sector policing:

Sector policing entails the division of areas into smaller managerial sectors and the assignment of police officers to these areas on a full time basis. These police officers regularly patrol their own sector and are able to identify problems and seek appropriate solutions. Sector policing encourages constant contact with members of local communities. Sector policing should be:

- pro-actively, vigorously and fairly conducted;

- based on clear instructions from police commanders to patrol officers;
- planned on the basis of crime analysis;
- focused on specific problems within any area;
- implemented on the basis of specific time frames;
- developed in collaboration with municipal police services and other relevant roleplayers.⁵⁰

The drafting of this document was co-ordinated by a policy team in the Secretariat for Safety and Security. Extensive interactions took place between the team and international experts and police agencies in key donor countries such as the UK and USA throughout 1997 and early 1998 as the White Paper took shape. It is likely that this collaborative drafting process provided further opportunity for policy transfer of the sector policing concept to South Africa.

The first official guidelines on implementing sector policing appear to have been issued in 1998 as part of the effort to develop sector policing in certain parts of Johannesburg under the auspices of the SAPS' 'Project Johannesburg'. This original SAPS version of sector policing policy emphasised the crime preventive and community partnership aspects of the approach. The 1998 guideline document referred to three sources of ideas on sector policing: British, American, and the 1998 South African White Paper on Safety and Security, and defined sector policing as:

...a method of policing in smaller manageable geographical areas within a police precinct, which involves all roleplayers in identifying particular policing needs in each sector and in addressing the root causes of crime, as well as enabling and contributing factors, in order to ensure effective crime prevention.⁵¹

In its gestation phase in South Africa, between 1998 and 2003, the notion of sector policing was interpreted and used to suit a variety of different policy purposes, much as the term 'community policing' had been during the preceding decade.

In Johannesburg, the first phase required drafting a working document on the concept of sector policing—the first version of the guidelines. These original guidelines emphasised the following features of sector policing:

- [Sector policing's] main aim is the rendering of police services as close as possible to the community.

- It should result in closer and more regular contact between sector police personnel and the community in the sector.
- It should result in pro-active or pre-emptive problem-solving and crime prevention.
- It should ensure effective crime prevention.⁵²

The beginnings of sector policing as part of Programme Johannesburg involved a number of workshops with police managers from the Johannesburg area during March and April 1998. Thereafter, each police station in the area was required to divide their jurisdiction into sectors, and to 'activate' one sector as a pilot project for the station. The intention was that once sector policing in the activated sector had reached a certain standard, other sectors would be activated. However, Programme Johannesburg was terminated and the implementation of the sector policing project did not proceed according to plan. The Secretariat's 1999 evaluation of Programme Johannesburg found that:

- The various internal workshops held in the SAPS in Johannesburg had failed to generate a sense of ownership of the notion of sector policing among the police leadership in the city.
- In some areas, sector policing was seen as synonymous with crime prevention, and particularly with special crime prevention 'operations' (of the cordon and search and roadblock variety). This was in part due to a lack of resources for sector policing, and the reliance on sector policing staff on the local crime prevention divisions for resources and support (especially transport).
- The links between sector policing and community policing (and the CPFs in particular) were unclear in the minds of staff at many of the implementing police stations.
- There was contestation over roles and responsibilities of the SAPS officials involved in sector policing, especially the Sector Managers. Sector Managers were envisaged as full time staff who would be dedicated to 'organisation and mobilisation' envisaged in sector policing, rather than 'physical policing'; but, in reality, played dual or triple roles and, of course, worked shift hours.
- Failure to allocate (promised) dedicated resources was a major stumbling block to the effective implementation of sector policing.⁵³

By mid-2000, the sector policing project in Johannesburg was running at only 21 police stations. There were indications that sector policing had been more readily adopted in (traditionally white) middle-class suburban areas in the north of the city.⁵⁴ However, despite the problems in Johannesburg, the idea of sector policing began to be tried elsewhere in the country. In June 2001, the new Minister of Safety and Security, Charles Nqakula, announced his vision for the future of sector policing:

I want to get quickly to the point where we must introduce effective policing in clearly demarcated sectors. The police who will be displayed in the new crime sectors will be highly visible, highly mobile and pro-active. Those who will be deployed in this manner will be carefully chosen and appropriately resourced. Sector policing, which will pick up on the successes of Operation Crackdown, is also intended to establish close partnerships between the police and communities in order to address crime through a series of multi-disciplinary initiatives.⁵⁵

A few months later, the SAPS announced a plan to implement sector policing in over 100 police station areas. The National Commissioner claimed in his report for the 2001/2 period, that “one of the aims of sector policing is to improve our response time when crimes are in progress”.⁵⁶ Later in the same report, he described “the establishment of partnerships between appointed sector managers and sector communities to strengthen community police forum (CPF) structures” as a “key objective” of the sector policing methodology.⁵⁷

However, despite repeated public statements about the introduction of sector policing, the SAPS policy documents on the approach were taking a long time to finalise. This was perhaps because of internal debate and contestation over the meanings ascribed to sector policing: as will be discussed below, the concept was cited in a variety of different ways by politicians and police leaders throughout its five-year development phase.

By late 2002, plans for implementing sector policing had again been amended, and implementation was being targeted at 50 priority stations (high-crime areas) and 14 presidential stations (areas identified in the government’s rural development and urban renewal strategies, which are the poorest and least-developed areas of the country). This re-selection of sites was in line with the SAPS’ 2002-2005 Strategic Plan, which saw a new emphasis on prioritisation of the high-crime areas and of certain crime problems (such as violent crime and firearm crime).

The five-year plan was broken down into phases: an initial two-year period which would focus on containing the most serious crimes and the worst hit areas (the 2000-2003 'stabilisation phase'), followed by a normalisation approach once the high levels of crime had been somewhat stabilised, and also in areas where the problem of crime was not as severe (the 2003-2005 'normalisation phase'). However, implementation of sector policing continues in some of the other station areas where it had already taken root prior to the 2002 strategic approach.

By late 2003, the Sector Policing Guidelines had been rewritten a couple of times and emerged in final draft form as a 'Draft National Instruction', to be issued by the National Commissioner in terms of the SAPS Act.

The Final Draft National Instruction

The final draft of the 2003 National Instruction on Sector Policing is a 20 page document,⁵⁸ and an integrated and abbreviated version of earlier draft National Instructions and the various guideline documents. The current SAPS documents lay out a step-by-step approach to implementing sector policing:

- Demarcate the geographic sectors within the local police station area in discussion with the local SAPS management, the CPF chairperson and the Head of Reservists. The main criterion for deciding on sector size and boundaries should be manageability of the sectors for the envisaged sector managers.
- Appoint a sector manager and at least one assistant manager (Deputy) for each sector, and recruit reservists to engage in sector policing tasks for which the local SAPS does not have capacity. The managers are envisaged to be SAPS members with excellent community work skills, and the assistant managers would be reservists or members of the local CPF.
- Compile a 'sector profile' to include details of prominent people and important groups in the sector area, population and other demographics, and crime trends in the sector area. This will assist the manager and assistant/s to familiarise themselves with the sector area, and with planning and prioritisation.
- Establish and sustain a 'Sector Crime Forum' (SCF), which can link to the CPF.

- The ongoing management of the sector would require the sector manager to participate in daily meetings of the station concerned with crime combating, and to liaise regularly with other components of the SAPS, as well as to share information and build partnerships with a wide variety of stakeholders and to initiate crime prevention/safety-promotion projects.⁵⁹

The internal educational material on sector policing which is being distributed to members of the SAPS emphasises its links to community policing, crime prevention, partnerships, and the ongoing modernisation and transformation of police work in South Africa.⁶⁰ The aim of these linkages may be to avoid confusing police members on the ground who are ultimately responsible for implementing new policies. The references in the Final Draft National Instruction to community policing, democratisation and the post-1994 policy documents perhaps also aim to generate—among police officials—a reassuring sense of progress and continuity. Internally in the SAPS at least, the sector policing policy (as contained in the Final Draft National Instruction) is strongly aligned with:

- Crime prevention: “sector policing is a method of policing used...to bring about effective crime prevention.”⁶¹
- Community involvement: “sector policing provides an ideal opportunity for community involvement in their local safety and security”⁶² and “provides a mechanism for more and better community participation”.⁶³
- Community policing: sector policing is a “practical manifestation of community policing”.⁶⁴
- Improved service delivery: sector policing “allows for [police] service delivery to take place even closer to communities”.⁶⁵
- Modernisation and acceptance in the globalising world: “sector policing is a step towards the development of a modern, democratic policing style for the present century”.⁶⁶

This is an interesting contrast with how sector policing has been presented to the South African public at various points earlier in the policy development process (see previous section). It reflects the fundamental dynamic in the police policy environment: an uncomfortable coexistence of a ‘social’ approach to crime prevention alongside a tougher ‘war on crime’.⁶⁷

Specific features of sector policing in South Africa

Two aspects of the South African sector policing policy are distinctive. First, it has recently been linked far more closely with the new SAPS policy on reservists. The SA Reserve Police Service is now governed by regulations issued in terms of the SAPS Act and a National Instruction issued by the National Commissioner of the SAPS.⁶⁸ The National Instruction makes special provision for a new category of police reservist (basically a member of the public who does voluntary duty to assist the police) known as ‘Category D Reservists’ who work in sector policing, both rural and urban. These reservists:

- “shall perform functions in operational facets of policing related to sector policing at station level”—as opposed to other reservists who perform administrative, non-operational or specialised duties,⁶⁹
- “may only perform duties in areas specified by the commander”—ie. the sector area;⁷⁰
- “must be utilised for sector policing.”⁷¹

One of the imperatives for the revision of the reservist policy is that former military volunteer units (known as Commandos) are being dismantled and commando members are expected to join the SAPS reservist system instead. The commando system has been dogged by controversy and the tightness of the SAPS regulations and instructions concerning reservists is intended to ensure that similar difficulties do not arise for the Reserve Police Service. According to the new policy, reservists will, inter alia, be accommodated in:

- the SAPS’ National Intervention and Crime Combating Units—which have the responsibility to support provinces with the security of big events, disaster management and to stabilise high crime and violent situations;
- the SAPS’ Area Crime Combating Units—which will engage in rural protection activities, act as a rapid response capacity for serious crime, and participate in crime combating operations such as cordon and search and saturation policing;
- the sector policing teams at each police station.⁷²

If significant numbers of former commando members are absorbed into sector policing work, there may be some interesting and unforeseen impacts on the development of the new policing methodology.

Another important feature of sector policing policy in South Africa is the need for the policy to cater for a variety of diverse areas. In particular, the implementation of sector policing in some parts of rural South Africa is likely to generate interesting challenges and results. Rural safety has been a police priority in recent years, with escalating levels of violent crimes being recorded in some areas. One of the reasons given for the lengthy delay in finalising the sector policing policy document is that it had to be amended to take into account key lessons learned through piloting earlier versions of the policy in rural areas.⁷³