

CHAPTER 5

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR SECTOR POLICING IN SOUTH AFRICA

It is evident from the SAPS' draft national instruction that sector policing in South Africa in the early 21st century will look very different to sector policing in London in the dying days of the 20th. The South African version aims to give effect to a similar philosophy of community policing and to bring police and people closer together. And it sets out to do this by dividing policing areas into smaller, more manageable, units and mobilising other institutions and individuals to join with the police in identifying and resolving local crime problems.

Although apparently similar to the London model, the SAPS framework is both more modest, and more ambitious in its aims than the London version. It is more modest in that it does not contemplate a wholesale restructuring of the police organisation: no more than one or two police personnel (either members or reservists) are to be redeployed on to sectors. This redeployment will affect the line management of crime prevention activity in the SAPS, but should have only an "occasional" impact on the work of the other specialised functions of the organisation.¹¹⁵ But the South African sector policing approach is also ambitious. Instead of trying to improve the quality and accountability of the service delivered to the public by making more effective use of existing police resources, it seeks to do so by engaging with and mobilising hitherto untapped resources *outside* the organisation—primarily through the mobilisation of police reservists (volunteers) and participants in the Sector Crime Forums.

Despite the significant differences between the South African model of sector policing and that tried in Holloway, there remain some useful pointers from the London experience, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. The following are just some of the more obvious questions for sector policing in South Africa that are prompted by reflecting on the Holloway case study:

- How can sector boundaries be drawn in a way that balances the requirements of organisational and administrative efficiency, representivity and the need to foster closer links between the police, other key roleplayers and the public at local level?

- Under what conditions will sector crime forums be able to act both as a broadly representative forum for the expression of public concerns about crime and a mechanism for co-ordinating the response to those concerns across a range of agencies?
- How can the police provide information about local crime and safety problems to sector crime forums in a comprehensive yet comprehensible and useable form? How can agreement be reached on the priority crime and safety problems in a given area instead of relying on the police's definition of the 'real' problems?
- What can be done to influence the internal organisational culture of the SAPS positively towards sector policing? How can SAPS reward structures and measures of performance be adjusted to reflect the goals of sector policing, and to valuing collaborative problem-solving work at least as highly as more traditional short term and arrest-focussed approaches to policing?
- How can supervision, discipline and accountability be maintained when police officials are delegated to work more independently at sector level? How can control be maintained when the sector policing model rests on such a high degree of reservist (volunteer) participation?

How these questions and others like them are answered in practice will determine whether sector policing will work under South African conditions. But nothing will be more critical to its success than the ability of sector managers to construct, maintain and develop mutual trust and practical working relationships between the police, other roleplayers and the public.

According to the draft national instruction, members or reservists selected to act as sector managers should possess a formidable range of skills: creativity, communication, presentation and marketing skills, problem-solving abilities, planning and facilitation skills, and the capacity to team manage in a multi-cultural environment.¹¹⁶ To find many people with such a wide array of skills in any organisation would be a tall order. To find hundreds of them in and around a relatively poorly-paid police organisation, which has high levels of functional illiteracy and was run until comparatively recently on military lines in a culture that valued obedience and compliance over initiative and innovation, may be wildly over-optimistic.

International evidence suggests that few police personnel at any level—even those from organisations without the *skop, skiet en donder* tradition of the

SAPS behind them—easily adjust to the demands of collaborative problem solving.¹¹⁷ The sector inspectors at Holloway certainly found the process of setting up and co-ordinating the HSCP a uniquely stressful one for which their police training and many years of experience had left them ill-prepared. Even if finding *enough* people to act as (and assist) sector managers may be relatively easy, finding the *right* people is likely to prove considerably more difficult, particularly given the important role to be played by reservists in the South African sector policing model.

Importing sector policing to South Africa

In addition to the challenges facing the SAPS in implementing sector policing, a number of important questions are also implied in this monograph about importing ideas from the UK and US to South Africa, and their subsequent indigenisation.

As discussed above, the concept of sector policing was imported from the UK and US to South Africa in the 1990s. This was justified as part of the ongoing modernisation and internationalisation of the SAPS, and its re-entry into the international market of police ideas, with references to ‘team policing’ as used in the US in the 1970’s, ‘unit beat’ systems from the US and UK, ‘problem-oriented policing’ (which had been quite thoroughly adopted in the SAPS approach to community policing) and even the Japanese ‘koban’, cited in SAPS documents which describe the origins of sector policing. However, team policing and unit beat systems were long dead, and even sector policing in London was in its last stages in the late 1990s, just when the SAPS was beginning to develop the concept for use in South Africa. The obvious question is why the SAPS and South African policymakers would choose to import an idea which had failed or fizzled out in its countries of origin?

The ‘policy transfer’ of the idea of sector policing appears to have been voluntary. In other words it was not imposed by a government agency or multilateral donor, and was not the result of advocacy from outside the police. Rather, it was the result of an individual police officer’s efforts to import and popularise the idea. There has clearly been some internal lobbying and debate within the SAPS about the sector policing policy—evidenced both by the lengthy delays in the finalisation of the policy, and in the many ways that sector policing has been cited and interpreted by politicians and police leaders.

The absence of civil society actors in formulating sector policing policy is relatively unusual in South Africa and may frustrate efforts to gain the support of non-government stakeholders once the policy starts to be fully implemented. Experience of introducing community policing in South Africa showed that the NGO sector and local branches of political parties played an enormous role in popularising and supporting the policy, even in the face of resistance from within the police.

The degree of policy transfer is high—the South African policy is virtually copied from the British (rather than, say, using the British policy merely as inspiration for the local version).

The relevant literature suggests a range of possible constraints on policy transfer: the complexity of the policy, previous policies, structural or institutional constraints, and constraints on feasibility.¹¹⁸ There are also possible ideological, cultural, technological, economic and language constraints. In the case of sector policing, one of the constraints likely to impact on the transfer of the policy would be the nature of the police institution in South Africa, and its previous policies. The fact that it is still in the process of transforming from its repressive, militarised past mitigates against de-centralised approaches to policing which rely on high levels of individual skill and integrity, as would be expected in the sectors. Equally, the sheer size and physical distribution of the SAPS makes the notion of a sector in the Northern Cape something dramatically different to that envisaged in London, for instance.

Another theme examined by scholars of policy transfer is how it can lead to failure. They suggest three possible routes to failure:

- un-informed transfer of policy;
- incomplete transfer;
- inappropriate transfer.¹¹⁹

In the case of sector policing in South Africa, it remains to be seen whether the policy will succeed or fail, and whether or not the fact that it was an imported concept is a contributory factor. Underlying that, of course, is the question of how to measure the success of policing.

One of the interesting differences between the SAPS sector policing policy and that used elsewhere is the extent to which it has been associated with 'tough policing' and seen as a possible extension of the kinds of high-density saturation policing operations associated with Operation Crackdown. This

association, though it might horrify the community policing purists, might—in the South African context—be a greater guarantor of the policy’s survival. However, the mere fact that a policy survives is no guarantee that it will be implemented or that it will have an impact. The particular objectives of the sector policing policy need to be clarified, and indicators developed to measure progress.

Adaptability of the sector policing concept: determinant of success or failure?

As discussed earlier, during the five-year process of policy development around sector policing in South Africa, the concept has been used in support of widely differing policy agendas, such as:

- crime prevention and problem-solving;
- community policing, improved police-community relations, and community partnerships;
- Operation Crackdown;
- improved intelligence gathering in the community;¹²⁰
- increased police visibility—saturation policing or targeted police patrols—in the hope that more visible policing will lead to reduced crime (a perennial pre-election favourite for politicians of all persuasions, particularly when the absence of reliable official crime data may generate feelings of insecurity, and of mistrust towards the police and government).

In addition to serving a wide variety of policy imperatives, sector policing is now also far more integrated with other policy initiatives in the SAPS, most notably the new Reserve Police policy and the approach to rural safety. This is an attempt to rationalise policies, ensure internal coherence within the SAPS and minimise confusion. It also facilitates resource allocation for sector policing efforts in future.

The vagueness of the sector policing concept—and the fact that it has been cited in support of both the ‘soft’ crime prevention agenda, and the ‘tough’ crackdown agenda within the SAPS—may be the reason why the concept has

survived and finally graduated into national police policy. However, the fact that sector policing has been cited in support of diverse policing tactics suggests that the concept may be less than clear. Perversely, a lack of clarity can be an advantage, because if a policy concept is 'all things to all people' it is likely to be adopted by a broader range of policymakers and supported more widely in society. However, the woolliness of the concept would make its implementation and impact hard to measure—leaving it open to claims of failure as well as success.