

***COMMUNITY POLICING IN A HIGH CRIME
TRANSITIONAL STATE: THE CASE OF SOUTH
AFRICA SINCE DEMOCRATISATION IN 1994***

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Introduction

- **With the 1994 democratic changes the legacy of repressive, authoritarian and militarised policing there was an obvious need to transform the old SAP to a new policing style**
- **The previously underpoliced (in pure policing terms) communities needed to be better policed with regard to service delivery and the allocation of resources**
- **With a more democratic and human rights oriented form of policing**

Result (theoretically) = implementation of community policing

Policing legacies & obstacles to CP

By mid-1990s policing in SA characterised by legacy of mistrust and hatred for police; non-reporting of crime; covert support for criminals (gangster heroes); and excessively high levels of crime

Under-policing in townships

- **purely reactive; “fire-engine” type merely responded to crime**
- **quick “in-and-out” approach**
- **1994 any patrolling or forms of “visible” policing had all but ceased**

Structural defects in SAPS

- **militaristic-type of training they received;**
- **top-heavy management structures staffed largely by white officers;**
- **public perceptions of being used by previous (pre-1994) regime largely for political repression and the forceful suppression of township protest actions;**
- **lack of legitimacy;**
- **traditionally highly centralised, para-military and authoritarian;**

Defects....

- **poorly equipped for crime control and prevention in the newly democratic South Africa;**
- **no systems of police accountability and oversight present;**
- **a poorly developed (historically disadvantaged) criminal detection capability;**
- **mirrored in the area of crime intelligence;**
- **amalgamation of eleven different policing agencies**

Policy framework

Interim Constitution 1993:

- **concept of Community Police Forums (CPFs) inserted**
- **intended to exert civilian oversight over the police at various levels**
- **in particular the local police station level**
- **monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by the police**
- **as well as advise the police on local policing priorities**

Developing a policy framework

1994 Green Paper on Safety and Security: outlined principles such as community policing, democratic control, and accountability

SAPS Act No.68 of 1995: provided for accountable, impartial, transparent, community-oriented and cost-effective police service

-a civilian ministerial secretariat, community police forums (CPF's) and an independent complaints directorate (ICD)

Policy framework...

- **NCPS**: motivated for a change from the previous exclusive focus on law enforcement to now include “crime prevention” (i.e. away from a narrow “crime control” focus) focused more on the role of the police in operationalising these needs in fighting crime than on operational aspects of Community Policing

Policy framework...

The White Paper (1998):

- **emphasis on improved service delivery by means of a partnership between the police and communities**
- **Interventions: social crime prevention & problem-oriented partnership strategies**
- **view of serving community better with more effective management of both direct and indirect victims and witnesses of crime**
- **emphasises role and involvement of other new role-players outside of the SAPS within a framework of social crime prevention programmes**

Implementing community policing

- ***The Community Policing policy framework and guidelines (CPPFG), released in April 1997, was intended to serve as guidelines for implementing this official policing style in South Africa***
- **largely an adaption of traditional Western European and American principles, inter alia the emphasis on establishing police-community partnerships within a problem-solving approach responsive to the needs of the community**

Broad concepts accepted...

- i) service orientation (community being the client and SAPS the service provider);**
- ii) partnerships (co-operative effort to facilitate a process of problem-solving);**
- iii) problem solving (joint identification and analysis of the actual and potential causes of crime within communities);**
- iv) empowerment (creation of sense of joint responsibility – joint capacity for addressing crime and service delivery);**
- v) accountability (mechanisms for making police answerable for addressing needs and concerns of communities)**

Policy guidelines....

- **all police members were tasked “to develop new skills through training which incorporates problem solving, networking, mediation, facilitation, conflict resolution and community involvement”**
- **CP document also focused on est. of Community Police Forums (CPF's)**
- **1998, a comprehensive programme launched within the SAPS to train all members in the philosophy, values and principles of community policing**

Views on CP....

- **A survey of police officers in Gauteng Province revealed that the introduction of community policing simply meant to them that the community should help them in fighting crime**
- **Most communities viewed the new form of (community) policing as an opportunity to change the balance of power in their communities and make the police accountable to community needs and structures (inter alia via the new CPFs)**
- **Accordingly, especially in the poorer and largely black communities (townships) community policing “was about the control of the police – and much less about preventing crime”**

Dysfunctional CP....

after the initial burst of enthusiasm, as it became apparent the no real improvement in policing per se let alone in the full implementation of community policing was occurring, communities in black townships fell back into ‘old ways’ of either vigilantism or apathy with the CPFs becoming either non-active, dysfunctional or merely a police-controlled ‘talk-shop’

CP SAPS-style

- **with the implementation of CPFs (as the foundation of the new community policing) there very quickly arose disputes between forum members and local police station members, particularly over the operational independence of the SAPS themselves;**
- **clashes erupted over CPF community crime priorities and the official SAPS priorities – which were set at national level**
- **National SAPS priorities of responding to murder, armed robbery and other violent crime did not accommodate CPF/community priorities such as dealing with rape, domestic violence and child molestation**

Abandonment of CP...

- **in little more than five years the new community policing style largely became abandoned (or at best simply ignored or disregarded in terms of operational planning) in all but name throughout the SAPS**
- **this “abandonment” (with SAPS personnel strongly believing it to be “too soft” for the tough crime conditions in South African townships) was also due in part to a number of inherent constraints**
- **at CP inception personnel of SAPS were still largely undertrained and underskilled**

Conclusion

Community policing in South Africa, as originally intended as an alternative policing model to assist the police to prevent crime in communities soon came to be subsumed into other forms of policing

Although not initially apparent, while still paying lipservice to a community-oriented approach (using all the appropriate terminology), the SAPS, as early as the launch of the Community Safety Plan in 1995, had already demonstrated – if one carefully read between the lines and observed the special operations launched as part of this plan – “their intention to revert to more traditional methods to combat crime”

Conclusion...

all pretence to community policing was in fact abandoned with the more formal Policing Priorities and Objectives (otherwise known as the Police Plan) of 1996/97 and the implementation of Operation Sword and Shield with its “return to basics” policing approach

Conclusion...

So, in essence, Community Policing per se, faded into the background, and other forms of policing (such as visible and sector policing) were pushed forward by the SAPS, ostensibly in support of Community Policing, but all more designed to improve the SAPS operational effectiveness in fighting crime rather than dealing directly with community sensitivities and needs to be policed in a more considerate, sympathetic, compassionate and sensitive manner

Conclusion...

- **while the policy framework makes provision for its wider implementation through such initiatives as social crime prevention, CPFs and supported by the activities of Visible and Sector Policing, it has only been accepted as a wider philosophical guideline without real community implementation and participation in its envisaged form**
- **since its official acceptance in 1994 it has only become accepted through other, largely police operational structures with the communities having limited say in the evolvment of an adapted South African model**

Thank you !

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