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THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN CRIME PREVENTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Occasional Paper No 33 - August 1998

INTRODUCTION

Countering high levels of criminality in South Africa has become a central focus of government policy. Crime increased dramatically in the country from the mid-1980s, peaking in 1996, then stabilising at high levels. Increasingly, a key component of the government's policy focus on crime control is on preventive actions, aiming to undercut the causes and costs of lawlessness.

In this context, crime prevention measures refer to those activities that are intended to reduce or prevent the occurrence of specific types of crime (or the fear thereof). This can be done either by altering the environment in which they occur, or by intervening more broadly to change the social or other conditions, which are thought to have causal significance with regard to crimes. Reducing crime also requires that much greater effort is directed towards providing support and advice for those who have already been victimised. This would not only assist the process of police investigations, but should also seek to ensure that re-victimisation does not occur.

Preventing crime demands a process of analysis to determine the cause of specific types of criminal actions (and their costs for particular groups of victims), as well as the co-ordination of the resources and skills of a range of role-players to develop and implement appropriate interventions. These requirements mean that crime prevention programmes are most likely to be effective if developed in the localities where the problem occurs, rather than at national level. It requires a targeted approach that focuses various activities towards a single crime problem. Specifically, it also suggests that local players - and in particular local government - have a key role to play.

This paper aims to provide a broad overview of the emerging policy framework in relation to local government crime prevention, as well as the reasons for this approach. In addition, some attempt is made to outline areas where intervention can occur at focal government level. Finally, some of the constraints and dangers of local government involvement in crime prevention are explored.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

The involvement of local government in crime prevention programmes in South Africa is a relatively recent development. A number of key documents and initiatives in some metropolitan areas suggest that local government will increasingly play a key role in this regard.

The National Crime Prevention Strategy

The NCPS (May 1996) argues for a closer integration and transformation of the criminal justice system as a prerequisite to fight crime adequately. The NCPS represents a major step forward in the debate on criminality in South Africa, placing the concentration on preventive - as opposed to reactive - measures to counter crime. The NCPS has thus brought a new focus on the prevention - of victimisation and of offending, as well as on co-ordinated, long term

strategies that involve a range of participants beyond the traditional criminal justice system. The NCPS sketches a specific role for local government: to co-ordinate and promote interagency crime prevention work within local boundaries. While suggesting that local government is a key role-player, the NCPS does not spell out specific options for local government involvement in crime prevention in any detail.

Draft White Paper on Safety and Security

The draft White Paper (May 1998) proposes explicitly that local government should be responsible for the implementation and co-ordination of social crime prevention programmes within its areas of jurisdiction. Thus it is argued: "*Local government, the level of government which is closest to the citizenry, is uniquely placed to actively participate in social crime prevention initiatives and to redirect the provision of services to facilitate crime prevention.*" Specifically, the draft White Paper suggests that local government should work with community police forums and play a part in:

- initiating, implementing and maintaining social crime prevention interventions, in line with broad national and provincial guidelines;
- developing interventions aimed at preventing victimisation and deterring offenders;
- leading and co-ordinating crime prevention strategies and interventions;
- re-orienting municipal services to facilitate crime prevention; and
- ensuring that development projects take account of crime prevention principles.

White Paper on Local Government

The White Paper (1998) directs local government to promote integrated spatial and socio-economic development that is socially just and equitable. This requires that crime prevention considerations should be integrated with other aspects of local development, including local economic development. The White Paper also encourages local government to enter into partnerships with community-based organisations and non-government organisations, especially where these agencies have expertise that is traditionally lacking within local government - such as crime prevention.

Proposed legislation on municipal police services

Legislation currently before Parliament makes provision for the establishment of police services by local government. Provision is made for such services to have three functions:

- policing of municipal by-laws;
- traffic law enforcement; and,
- crime prevention, specifically through the provision of visible policing.

Municipal police services will not be empowered to investigate crime and it is proposed that they are paid for by municipalities themselves, without direct financial support from national government.

Safer City programmes

A number of metropolitan councils have initiated (or are in the process of doing so) Safer City programmes. Broadly, these aim to prioritise, co-ordinate and implement crime prevention at local government level. Safer City strategies have been adopted or are being developed in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria. Durban has also gone some way in developing crime prevention interventions. While it is too early to assess the impact of such strategies, some early lessons (considered in more detail below) can be drawn.

Despite the emerging policy focus on issues of crime prevention and its application at local level as outlined above, there has been little debate about the detailed reasons why and how local government should become involved.

WHY THE FOCUS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

The focus on cities and towns as the key to crime prevention is directly in line with international developments in the area of crime prevention. Since the vast majority of (recorded) criminal activities take place within cities, towns and urban areas in general, this focus is a logical one. Urban local government is often well placed to implement (or at least co-ordinate) initiatives to counter and prevent criminality. Greater co-ordination between different local government departmental functions is a critical success factor in achieving and

sustaining urban safety and security.

There are real incentives for municipal authorities to ensure a safe locality: revenues are increased through, among other factors, the provision of a safe environment, actively encouraging investment by business. Also, there is an important political dimension (although this in itself carries some dangers, as will be shown below): many local politicians are under increasing public pressure to be seen to be acting against crime. Developing and implementing local crime prevention policy will ensure that ward councillors respond to the needs of their constituents.

In many cases, a city or town government constitutes the lowest level where planning can take the needs of local communities and their particular crime problems into account, thus providing a potentially effective link between locally elected officials, municipal departments and the national police service.

As it is, only a few types of crime can be combated at national level. An analysis of crime statistics from across the country suggests that the key to local crime prevention is the recognition that crime varies from locality to locality. As a consequence, different priorities and strategies and different approaches are needed in different areas to prevent crime. The failure to establish local crime prevention initiatives in response to the needs of diverse local communities across the country will have serious consequences in the long term for the success of the NCPS.

It is also essential that crime prevention initiatives at local government level begin sooner rather than later. Experience elsewhere suggests that there is much to be gained from 'learning by doing' - an incremental approach to the implementation of crime prevention strategies rather than one which attempts to ensure a high level of co-ordination across the country. Indeed, while crime prevention strategies are only in their early stages in South Africa, much has already been learned (some of these lessons are outlined below).

At the same time, these developments in South Africa have the potential to feed in (and learn from) an emerging global debate on urban safety. Over the past decade, there has been a growing trend across the world towards concentrating the bulk of crime prevention effort and its control not nationally, or even provincially, but at the level of the city or town. The last five years has seen a proliferation of forums in which cities share experiences of optimal approaches to urban safety and security.

These debates have been characterised by broad participation from a variety of role-players in city government, of which the policing authorities - whether locally or nationally organised - are but one of the players. The key to most successful crime prevention strategies elsewhere has been that city or local government bodies have played a leading (if not the leading) role.

Thus, municipal crime prevention councils in France (where there is a centralised police force, as in South Africa) reduced crime by 15 per cent in some areas through joint planning between housing, social services, schools and police departments. In the United Kingdom, where a national Safer Cities programme has been operating for some time now, initiatives where police, social workers and city government work together to analyse the causes of residential burglary in poverty stricken housing estates, break-ins were reduced by 50 per cent in the first year, and over four years the reduction amounted to 75 per cent.

The two examples outlined above, however, represent one of the problems of the Safer City debate - that it has largely been confined to developed countries. This is beginning to change with a focus on crime prevention initiatives among some Latin American cities and towns. Early conclusions suggest that the nature of crime prevention initiatives in cities and towns of the developing world (though there are of course some parallels) may be fundamentally different from their counterparts in the developed world.

Primarily, the debate on urban crime prevention in the developing world cannot be separated from broader issues of improving urban governance and management. In fact, this may be an advantage. Firstly, it may mean a closer integration of crime prevention imperatives within the

context of more general city planning and management strategies. Secondly, as in the case of South Africa, a focus on crime prevention comes at the same time as new development initiatives come on stream, making it easier to integrate crime prevention principles into development planning.

In sum, the lessons for South Africa are as follows:

- Crime varies from locality to locality and requires different solutions to reduce it. While national government can provide frameworks for encouraging and supporting crime prevention, implementation by its nature must take place at local level.
- Representative local government is often in the best position to determine what crime prevention priorities should be in any area.
- Essential to the long term success of local crime prevention, is the development of a culture of innovation and experimentation.
- The debate on crime prevention in developing countries cannot be separated from that on urban governance and management.

Despite both an emerging policy consensus and justification for local government to play a larger role in crime prevention initiatives, much work still remains to be done to determine exactly how this can be achieved. Some possible options are considered below.

MAKING A CRIME PREVENTION A REALITY AT LOCAL LEVEL

Local government involvement in crime prevention can take a variety of forms. These can be broadly summarised into nine categories which span a spectrum of functions internal and external to municipal government. These areas do not exclude each other (indeed, there is a considerable degree of cross-over between them) and maximum impact will be achieved by a concentration in all areas. The areas have thus been ordered, as far as possible, ranging from those that require the least financial commitment to those that require the most.

Internal prevention

While much of the focus of the crime prevention debate has been on the kind of external support local government can provide, there has been little focus on how crime can be prevented within local government institutions themselves. This should be a priority area. Adequate internal management systems and procedures are central to the undermining of opportunities for offending. The benefits for local government of such an approach are obvious: efficient operation and delivery of services without internal loss. Indeed, the internal prevention of crime and fraud is central to good management. Internal issues of good management and crime prevention, however, are all too often (unnecessarily) separated from the more general task of crime prevention at local level.

Improving police accountability

Given that local councillors are elected representatives of the communities that they serve, they have a useful role to play in improving the accountability of policing at local level. While local government is constitutionally not in a position to interfere in police operations, councillors are in a strong position to influence policing priorities, given their elected status. This could be done in a number of ways depending on the particular needs or capacity in any area, for example:

- regular attendance by local elected representatives on community police forums;
- establishment of a joint crime prevention forum between local government officials and the South African Police Service; and
- joint setting of crime prevention priorities between local government and the police and jointly agreed upon strategies to ensure their implementation.

Aligning resources and objectives within a crime prevention framework

Crime and crime prevention should be seen as central to the planning and functions of all municipal department line functions. This should place crime prevention and safety issues on the agendas of, among others, the planning, transport, parks and recreation departments at relatively limited cost to local government. Thus, parks and recreation departments should ensure that municipal property under their control is administered in such a way as to ensure the maximum benefits for crime prevention. For example, the positioning or lighting of parks and sports fields to ensure greater safety for citizens must be considered as key strands of ordinary departmental functions. Currently, however, the potential crime prevention functions of different departments within municipalities have not been recognised or clearly defined.

Ensuring development projects take account of crime prevention principles

The lack of crime prevention principles in current development projects initiated by local government is a cause of concern. Initially, design interventions in these areas may amount to little more than assessing the linkages between urban layout, the positioning of police stations, schools, parks and government services, and the connection between increases and decreases in criminality. While the formulation of crime prevention principles for development projects is currently under way at national government level, there is much to be gained from local co-operation on the issue between planners, architects, community representatives and the police.

Co-ordination of crime prevention

It has already been argued that local government has a key role to play in co-ordinating crime prevention interventions. Even if local government itself is only in a position to make a small financial investment in crime prevention interventions (see below), a useful role can be played to bring together different role-players in the field. This has three broad dimensions:

- initiating local crime prevention forums to ensure some degree of co-ordination (and the avoidance of duplication) between various local players and the police;
- ensuring that principles of best practice from projects and cities elsewhere are made available to local practitioners;
- assisting community crime projects to raise funding by formally expressing support and, where appropriate, making joint approaches to potential funders; and
- providing in-kind support - such as the use of municipal facilities - to crime prevention projects and ensuring that there is equitable access in this regard.

Effective by-law enforcement

By-laws regulate issues as diverse as parking, squatting, health standards in restaurants, hawking, noise and the issuing of licences for the sale of alcohol. Successful by-law enforcement is thus critical in making cities and towns cleaner and safer. The breakdown in enforcement of certain by-laws, such as those relating to street trading, littering and alcohol licencing, particularly in inner city areas, contributes to high levels of crimes like mugging and theft. Victim survey evidence from South Africa's major cities has also found that such conditions increase the fear of crime among the majority of residents.

Effective traffic law enforcement

Traffic policing was made a municipal responsibility in the 1930s when the then South African Police felt that traffic policing was beyond its resources. Since then, local government has invested heavily in this function. Effective traffic policing has important implications for crime prevention. Traffic police officers, by the nature of their work, often have a visible presence in many cities and towns and so implicitly perform a crime prevention function. More specifically, however, the effective regulation of traffic, in a similar way to the enforcement of by-laws, ensures well-managed and regulated cities and towns, thus ensuring environments less conducive to crime. The effective enforcement of traffic laws - given that driving a motor vehicle is the most regulated activity that a fair proportion of citizens engage in - also serves to undercut the culture of impunity prevalent in the country.

Assisting victims of crime

In recent years, criminal justice agencies responsible for crime prevention have shifted their focus from arresting and convicting criminals, to include the provision of better treatment and services for victims of crime. A crucial component of this is providing victims with information about the impact of crime, the services that are available to them and their potential benefits, as well as details of the process and kind of support they should expect from the criminal justice system. In this way, both the practical and emotional addressing of the needs of victims, enables them to cope better with their victimisation and to regain faith in the criminal justice system's ability to protect them. While survey evidence suggests that the majority of victims turn to the police for assistance, they are unaware of the services that are available beyond those offered by law enforcement agencies. By serving as a source of information,

local government could play a vital role as the link between service providers and the police. Providing adequate levels of information to victims of crime could involve:

- producing a directory of services available to victims of crime;
- distributing pamphlets in police stations, clinics, hospitals and churches which aim both at preventing further victimisation and describing the process that should be followed by the authorities and by victims once a case is reported. By detailing this information and providing it to victims, local government also plays a role in improving local level police accountability; and
- promoting community-based support to victims of crime by drawing on existing support structures - both formal and informal - through encouraging the establishment of networks of support by local churches and community groups.

Initiating targeted crime prevention programmes

Local government is well placed - providing the required funding is available (see below) - to design and implement programmes targeted at specific crime problems. Such prevention programmes can either be financially supported by local government itself or through business, donor or national government funding. The most viable crime prevention strategies are those that aim at a particular crime (or particular group of crimes) and aim to put in place a focused programme of preventive measures. It is essential that any initiatives taken, can be measured to determine their benefits. It may also be wise (particularly given political pressures) to ensure that programmes selected for implementation are a mix of both long and short term interventions. Any crime prevention project should set clearly defined aims and objectives from the start, set clear measures for the success of the project and review its success. Thus, the implementation of crime prevention projects can be divided into the following stages:

- *Defining the problem:* This consists of a process of data collection, consultation with role-players, analysis and review of policy and practice used elsewhere.
- *Selecting the appropriate intervention:* The process in this stage entails prioritising problems, the development of appropriate policy options, an appraisal of these possible approaches and the preparation of an operational plan.
- *Implementation:* Ensuring the successful implementation of the project requires the necessary resources and project management skills, as well as the ability to monitor progress accurately.
- *Assessment:* Once the project has run for a sufficient period of time its impact should be evaluated and its success reviewed

The above argument has outlined in broad terms the various areas of interventions where local government can engage more fully in crime prevention. Some progress has indeed been made in this regard. Safer City programmes (see above) are being initiated in a number of metropolitan areas, with Johannesburg having arguably made the most progress in this regard. Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria are following suit. It is important to note that there is a (healthy) distinction between how each of the programmes has been initiated and implemented in the various cities. This suggests that programmes are being tailored to suit the requirements of various municipal structures and capacities. Some early lessons from these programmes are considered below.

DANGERS AND CONSTRAINTS

The development of local government crime prevention in South Africa has not been unproblematic. In their short history, Safer City and other local government crime prevention programmes have exposed a number of problems and potential dangers. While these may vary from city to city, some common themes have emerged. These are broadly discussed below.

Funding

The way local crime prevention is funded, is critical not only for the actual implementation of programmes, but more importantly, for shaping the role which local government plays as the co-ordinator of initiatives to prevent crime. The following has occurred:

- Crime prevention (both in South Africa and elsewhere) is often considered an 'add-on' when funding for these initiatives is drawn from outside the local government

budget through foreign donors. This limits accountability for delivery, weakening local government's responsibility towards crime prevention.

- There is also the danger that crime prevention - precisely because it crosses over so many local government line departments - is in danger of not receiving specific allocations of financial support from local government itself. Departments are simply told to take account of crime prevention without receiving the necessary support.
- Crime prevention is seen as an unfunded mandate in that safety and security is a national government function. This ignores both the fact that safety is a key 'quality of life' issue where local government can contribute, and that many functions of local government are involved more broadly with issues of governance, and thus also of crime prevention.

Capacity

Closely related to the problems associated with funding, are those that relate to the capacity of local government. The pressure for service delivery and development on new (and often weak) local government structures is immense. But development projects (notwithstanding some of the funding problems outlined above) are in fact in a position to take account of crime prevention requirements without necessarily increasing the resources that are allocated to them. Thus, addressing crime prevention need not necessarily be seen as an additional or heavy burden. The consolidation of local government structures presents a window of opportunity for integrating crime prevention into the line functions of municipal departments. This will ensure better service delivery to citizens on the ground.

Political support

The issue of political support for crime prevention is potentially a two-edged sword. On the one hand, a great deal of political leadership is required in order to ensure that crime prevention is prioritised. Where political support is missing, crime prevention initiatives are often undercut. On the other hand, politicians, under a great deal of public pressure, are tempted to raise expectations about what local level crime prevention can achieve in the short term. Programmes with too many objectives, which are poorly funded at the same time, are likely to become overloaded, achieving little actual prevention.

The need for experimentation

International experience of crime prevention suggests the need for programmes to gain experience through an incremental process of experimentation or 'learning by doing'. This is often not the case in a highly charged political environment where there is the tendency to rely on crime prevention programmes to do too much too soon. This is a particularly important point to emphasise, given that all crime prevention initiatives in the country are in a fledgling stage in their development.

Policing solutions

With the imminent passing of legislation making it possible for local government to establish municipal police services, there is some danger that policing interventions will be seen as the only effective solutions to crime. While municipal police services - particularly if they provide a visible police presence in areas frequented by all South Africans - will have some impact on crime and the fear of it, it is important to emphasise that this will be only a partial solution. Local government has a particular responsibility to initiate crime prevention programmes which undercut some of the social causes of crime and which would not ordinarily fall within the ambit of the South African Police Service.

CONCLUSION

Debate is increasingly beginning to focus on how national level crime prevention initiatives can be made a reality on the ground in South Africa. This has shifted the focus to ways in which institutions of local government could fulfil a role in this regard. Thus, a number of key policy documents have drawn attention to the need for local government involvement to ensure the effective implementation of crime prevention initiatives. These include government's national cross-departmental framework for reducing crime in the longer term - the National Crime Prevention Strategy - as well as shorter term departmental white papers.

This applies particularly to the draft White Paper on Safety and Security (1998-2003) which is explicit on the need for local government involvement in crime prevention.

The requirement for local government involvement in crime prevention has a number of reasons. Primarily, much of the ordinary daily activities of local government involve issues of local level management and governance. Thus, many crime functions are inherent to the ordinary operations of local government. Crime also varies from area to area across the country, as do the causal factors for offending. These factors imply that different strategies and approaches may need to prioritise different problems in different areas. In turn, both a local implementing agency as well as a mechanism in which the needs of particular communities can be determined, are required. Representative local government fulfils both these functions.

While the focus on local government involvement in crime prevention is increasingly accepted as necessary, the debate - with the exception of some cities in Latin America - has largely been confined to the developed world. In the developing world, the debate (now gaining some momentum) is assuming a different focus: crime prevention is being seen as inherent to issues of urban governance and management. Thus, for example, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements has placed the issue of safety on top of its agenda in its interventions in the developing world - the theme for this year's World Habitat Day is 'Safer Cities'.

While such interventions are changing the preconceived notions of the role of local government in relation to safety in the developing world, much more work is required on the detail of this involvement. In South Africa, it is suggested, there is a spectrum of activities in which local government has a role in preventing crime. Indeed, many of these are already key municipal functions. In broad terms, these are as follows:

- The focus should fall on the prevention of crime internally in local government institutions.
- Elected officials at local level have an important role in improving police accountability.
- Ordinary local government functions should take crime prevention considerations into account.
- Development projects at local levels should be designed with crime prevention principles in mind.
- Local government, given its relative institutional stability, has an important role in co-ordinating crime prevention initiatives in any area.
- The effective enforcement of by-laws (currently performed by local government) will go some way in reducing some crimes and the fear thereof.
- Traffic law enforcement (again, currently conducted by local government) is in itself an important crime prevention function when effectively performed.
- Local government could have an important role to play in assisting victims of crime by acting as a conduit between the police and service agencies tasked with this function.
- Where adequate resources are available, local governments could become key partners in reducing levels of crime in their areas by initiating sustainable and targeted crime prevention programmes. This is beginning in a number of cities.

The short experience of local government involvement in crime prevention in South Africa, however, has already suggested some potential problems. Primarily, these point to the need for an adequate political commitment from local government, as well as an understanding that crime prevention requires appropriate levels of financial support. While donor funding is available, it has the potential to reduce local accountability, with crime prevention seen as an 'add-on' to other local government functions. It is also critical, given the fledgling nature of crime prevention initiatives in South Africa, for space to be made available for best practice - appropriate to South African conditions - to be developed. This can only be achieved through a degree of experimentation, often difficult when the issue of crime is politically highly charged and immediate successes are seen as imperative.

The issue of crime will remain a key issue for government over the next decade. There are no easy solutions. However, the need to ensure that the national vision for crime prevention becomes a reality on the ground where citizens experience victimisation and fear is critical. Local government has to be a key partner in this regard.