

A Decade of Crime Prevention in South Africa: From a national strategy to a local challenge

by

Gareth Newham



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Gareth Newham is a former Project Manager in the [Criminal Justice Programme](#) at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

Introduction

Launched in May of 1996, the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) was billed as a holistic national strategy for reducing crime in South Africa. It emerged from the deliberations and research of a multi-disciplinary team of experts from the state and civil society who were tasked with forging a long term strategy to focus the state's attention on addressing the root causes of crime in the country. This was premised on the understanding that to effectively reduce crime, an approach that included, but went beyond, the criminal justice system was required. Drawing on international experience the NCPS propagated a strategy that advocated a 'developmental' approach to the prevention of crime. This required that crime be seen as a broader 'social' challenge rather than purely a security one. Consequently, 'crime prevention' in its true sense meant addressing the socio-economic and environmental factors that gave rise to crime rather than only enforcing the law after it had occurred. However, by the year 2000 the overall vision of the NCPS had dissipated as the state responded to the pressure from a crime embattled populace by declaring 'war on crime'. This resulted in governments' primary focus and resources being directed to the institutions of the criminal justice system and the term 'crime prevention; has become synonymous with policing.

The objective of this paper is to refocus attention on the original vision and meaning of the term 'crime prevention' as set out in the National Crime Prevention Strategy. The first part therefore distinguishes between what has been termed the 'law-enforcement' approach and the 'crime prevention' approach in the international arena. Thereafter, a brief overview of the NCPS and the process of its implementation are presented. This section also reflects on how the original vision of crime prevention in the NCPS was taken up in subsequent government policies and how the original vision is still valid in South Africa today. The third section demonstrates how crime prevention as a tool for enhancing public safety has continued at the local level and some of the current challenges that are being faced and lessons learned to date.

The author of this paper works in the Criminal Justice Programme at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR). The CSVR is a non-profit, public interest organisation that was established in 1989. Committed to deepening democracy and the culture of Human Rights, CSVR undertakes innovative policy research and community based interventions in the fields of transitional justice, reconciliation, criminal justice transformation, youth and gender violence prevention, victim empowerment and

sustainable peace building. CSVR staff were part of the multi-disciplinary team that drafted the NCPS and contributed to later government reviews of the implementation of the strategy.

Law-enforcement and Crime Prevention

During the 1970s the traditional law-enforcement approach to addressing crime problems was increasingly under fire for its ineffectiveness. Throughout the developed world crime rates were increasingly causing general public alarm. The common state response was to increase spending on the institutions of criminal justice. Large numbers of additional police officials were hired and law-enforcement training improved. Initiatives were undertaken to streamline court processes and more prisons were built. However, none of these initiatives managed to stem the growing rise in crime. As Donziger (1996, p. 198) quite forcefully argues:

For the past twenty years, criminal justice practices have been so profoundly ill-conceived that they have been bound to fail. As the failures have accumulated, the justice system has responded by adding more of the same policies. Prison and jail populations in this nation [the United States] have tripled since 1980, and law enforcement expenditures have quadrupled, but polls show that most Americans do not feel safe. Legislatures lengthen sentences and add more mandatory minimum penalties. More police are hired, more prisons built. Still, we do not feel safe. In response, policy-makers continue to expand the same criminal justice apparatus: more enforcement, longer sentences, more prisons. If this 'get tough' strategy worked, the results would be apparent by now. They are not.

From the 1970s analysts around the world had already started to more carefully consider the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the law-enforcement approach to combating crime. It was quickly realised that the law-enforcement approach was reactive and failed to address the root causes of crime. Criminal justice systems could only react once a crime had been committed. It was assumed that having a police force would be a deterrent to criminals as they would fear the sanctions they could face once caught. However, comparative research demonstrated that even the best resourced and professional criminal justice systems failed to solve most crimes or apprehend most criminal perpetrators. For instance, Bayley (1994, p. 27) reveals that on average, Canada could only solve 45% of its reported crime, Britain 35%, Australia 30% and the USA 22%.

Further research started to explore the reasons why crime occurred in the first place. It had been assumed that criminals were morally deviant individuals who committed criminal acts as a result of not being able to adhere to societal norms and values. However, research into this question revealed that most people who engage in various forms of criminal conduct do not necessarily differ in any measurable manner from law abiding individuals (see for instance Travis and Weisberse, 1997 as cited in [Palmary, 2002](#)). Rather, when looking at crime rates and patterns generally, crime was more clearly linked to a combination of powerful social, economic and demographic forces and dynamics. For instance large-scale, longitudinal research in a number of developed countries have clearly demonstrated that, "youth who are exposed to any of all of the following conditions are more likely to commit delinquent acts than those who are not (Waller and Sansfacon, 2000, p. 5):

- Relative poverty and inadequate housing;
- Inconsistent or insufficient parental or guardian guidance;
- Limited social and cognitive abilities;
- Exclusion from school;
- Family violence;
- Few opportunities for employment and economic exclusion;
- A culture of violence.

Moreover, developments in what has been termed 'environmental criminology' have revealed that crime and victimisation are clearly influenced by 'place based or spatial factors' (Bottoms and Wiles, 2002, p. 621). That environmental factors has a direct influence on patterns of offending has been taken up and popularised by James Q. Wilson and George Kellings (1982) 'broken window' theory which demonstrated that certain signs of disorder (broken windows, housing abandonment, litter and graffiti) will encourage criminality in communities.

The strong link between socio-economic and environmental and crime led to a new approach towards understanding and addressing the problem. The core idea behind what was termed to be the 'crime prevention' approach was that through intervening in the particular causal factors that lead to a criminal incident occurring, crime and all its negative consequences can be prevented. It was obvious that many of the above factors could not be addressed by only the police or other CJS institutions. Other government departments (i.e. education, health, and welfare, city planning, etc), as well organisations in civil society had a critical role to play in crime reduction. In order to guide the types of programmes that could be used for crime prevention, a typology that distinguished between primary, secondary and tertiary approaches to crime prevention was initially developed by Brantingham and Faust (1976).

Primary crime prevention focuses on a range of environmental factors that can lead to crime occurring. Pease, 2002, p. 954 cites two volumes of separate and successful case studies in which crime has been reduced (Clark, 1992 and 1997). Examples of such initiatives include simple target hardening (i.e. the use of steering locks to prevent car theft) to environmental design (street lighting and housing design that can reduce crime by up to 30%) and urban renewal.

Secondary crime prevention focuses on groups of people who are at risk of offending or becoming victims of crime. As examples, Pease (2002, p. 957), highlights four types of programmes with proven results in criminality reduction including: parent education (in the context of home visiting), parent management training, child skills training and pre- school intellectual enrichment. Such intervention programmes targeting young children belonging to high risk groups have shown to reduce incidence of criminality (as measured by arrest rates) by as much as 50% later on in life.

Tertiary crime prevention focuses on those who have already committed crime or have embarked on criminal career with the intention of intervening so as to prevent further incidents. Given the dynamics impacting on individuals of such programmes (they are typically in prison) these programmes have had more moderate successes than the initiatives undertaken as part of primary and secondary approaches.

An even simpler way of understanding crime prevention is offered by what is referred to as the 'problem analysis triangle' (Pease, 2002, p. 950). This theory essentially states that all crimes require victims, offenders and locations. Intervening in any of these three elements can prevent the crime from otherwise occurring. This model is often used by practitioners to analyse the various components of particular crime problems so as to identify possible crime prevention interventions.

A further argument as to why crime prevention programmes are desirable is that it also makes good financial sense. A number of studies have demonstrated that funds spent on 'crime prevention' interventions can significantly reduce the costs that would otherwise be incurred through the use of criminal justice systems to respond to crimes that otherwise would not have occurred. For example, cost benefit analysis on programmes aimed at "encouraging the social development of children, youth and families reduce delinquent behaviour with returns ranging from US\$1.06 to US\$7.16 for every US\$1 spent (Sansfacon and Welsh, 1999).

This new approach does not mean that criminal justice systems do not have a role to play in crime reduction. Indeed, there is much that the police can do to tackle dangerous criminals and criminal groups that ordinary citizens can not do. Moreover, effective problem orientated policing can contribute to building stronger communities that can become increasingly resistant to criminals and their activities. Courts are needed to ensure that those who do commit crime are sanctioned within the framework of the law and prisons can ensure that society is protected against those who pose a serious danger. While criminal justice systems are necessary however, they are not sufficient to deal with the underlying factors that contribute to crime in any given society.

The National Crime Prevention Strategy and its Implementation

The NCPS was South Africa's first attempt to take lessons from the emerging body of international work on crime prevention and apply them to our particular context. In recognising that crime was the result of a multitude of factors, it went beyond only looking at the role that the criminal justice system had to play to deal with the challenge. In this way the NCPS introduced a new paradigm for the state and the way in which it had to function to address crime. The key components of this paradigm were as follows (See [Rauch, 2002](#)):

- Government cannot deal with crime on its own. The institutions of government on all three tiers (national, provincial and local) must work together and with civil society to reduce crime.
- Law enforcement and criminal justice responses alone are inadequate or addressing crime.
- The criminal justice system cannot operate effectively unless there is better coordination between the departments that constitute the system, and integration of their activities.
- Crimes are different and must be 'dis-aggregated' if effective prevention strategies are to be designed and implemented.
- Prevention efforts need to be focused on victims and potential victims, and not merely on perpetrators, as is the case with traditional systems of criminal justice.
- Prevention efforts need to take cognisance of the fear of crime, as well as of actual

crime patterns.

In order to focus government activities a framework called the "four pillars approach" was developed. According to the NCPS, "Each pillar represents a particular arena of attack against the factors which create or facilitate criminal activity." (1996, p. 51). The 'four pillars' consisted of:

1. Re-engineering the criminal justice system to ensure certain and rapid deterrence;
2. Reducing crime through environmental design to limit opportunities and maximise constraints on crime when planning new developments and upgrading infrastructure;
3. Community values and education to ensure community awareness and involvement in crime prevention;
4. Trans-national crime to ensure regional cooperation and stability and to address cross-border crime.

Within each pillar, the NCPS highlighted a number of 'national programmes' with which a range of government departments and other role-players would engage. In all there were to be 17 such programmes of which nine fell within the first pillar, four in the second pillar, two each in the third and fourth pillars.

In the discussion of the national programmes presented within each pillar the NCPS identified the following seven priority crimes that needed to be addressed:

1. Crimes involving firearms
2. Organised crime
3. White collar crime
4. Violence against women and children
5. Violence associated with inter-group conflict
6. Vehicle theft and hi-jacking
7. Corruption in government

While the NCPS was hailed as a progressive document and opened the government to some of the latest international thinking on the role of the state in preventing crime there were a number of key challenges to its implementation. [Rauch \(2002\)](#) highlights a these challenges as follows:

- The NCPS was based on an important assumption that the cross-cutting national programmes it proposed would spontaneously lead to inter-departmental cooperation. However, the financial and performance incentives in government acted against integration and cooperation. Moreover, the project management skills and information systems to support this approach were not available.
- The NCPS did not allocate dedicated government funding towards its implementation but rather encouraged departments to rationalise and allocate existing resources to the national programmes.
- The intersection between the four pillars and the seven priority crimes was not well articulated. This resulted in an over focus on the pillars with the result that structures and processes were isolated from the content of the crimes that were

meant to be dealt with.

Some of these challenges looked to be overcome with the allocation of R174 million from the RDP fund and the appointment of a senior advisor to the Minister to coordinate the NCPS from the National Secretariat for Safety and Security. Moreover, Business Against Crime (BAC) was established around that time and brought much needed capacity to the pillar on re-engineering the criminal justice system (CJS). Given that the CJS was floundering under the heavy demands placed on it while it was undergoing a dramatic transformation, this pillar was an obvious priority. The consequence however, was that a vast majority of the funding allocated to the NCPS was spent on strengthening the infrastructure of the CJS at the expense of the other three crime prevention pillars. While the important roles of provincial and local governments were highlighted in the NCPS, the guidelines were broad and the capacity of these tiers of government was inadequate given their relative newness.

A review of the NCPS at the end of 1997 highlighted a number of lessons with regards to the involvement and coordination of the different tiers of government relating to preventing crime. [Rauch \(2002\)](#) further argues that two important conceptual links were made at this stage namely, "the need to link enforcement and prevention, and the need to link immediate or short term actions against crime with the longer term approaches envisaged in the original NCPS."

These lessons were taken up in the drafting of the White Paper on Safety and Security which was to guide government's approach to crime from 1998 to 2004. The White Paper (1998), presented the following broad definition of crime prevention which was "all activities which reduce, deter or prevent the occurrence of specific crimes firstly, by altering the environment in which they occur, secondly by changing the conditions which are thought to cause them, and thirdly by providing a strong deterrent in the form of an effective criminal justice system."

At a national level, the White Paper called for the establishment of a National Crime Prevention Centre to provide a central point at which research and learning around crime prevention initiatives could be housed. It was envisaged that this structure would provide support to the provincial and local tiers of government as they undertook crime prevention initiatives. In particular the White Paper more clearly defined the roles of provincial and local governments in crime prevention.

With regards to the provincial administrations, it was advocated that this level of government:

- Initiate and coordinate social crime prevention programmes
- Mobilise resources for social crime prevention
- Co-ordinate a range of provincial functions and role-players to achieve effective crime prevention
- Evaluate and support local governments in crime prevention partnerships
- Establish public and private partnerships to support crime prevention.

Local government was expected to play a greater role by playing the following functions:

- Initiate, coordinate and participate in targeted social crime prevention;
- Work with the local police to set joint local safety priorities and possible areas for local government intervention;
- Align municipal resources and objectives with a crime prevention framework to ensure that developmental projects take account of crime prevention;
- Effective enforcement of municipal by-laws;
- Assist victims of crime through the provision of information regarding available support services in the municipal area.

By the end of 1998 crime was becoming an increasing concern for most South Africans and the pressure on the government to be seen to be taking control of the situation was intensifying. [Rauch \(2002\)](#) highlights that as a result, "the implementation of the 1998-2000 period focused almost entirely on law enforcement and the infrastructural design on an integrated criminal justice system." Part of the reason for this lay with the second general election of 1999. The new ministers in the criminal justice departments were keen to differentiate themselves from their predecessors so as to infuse a new sense of hope amongst a crime weary population. This was reflected through various speeches that emphasised what was supposed to reflect a new tough 'war on crime' agenda. For example:

We are ready, more than ever before, not just to send a message to the criminals out there about our intentions, but more importantly to make them feel that *die tyd vir speletjies is nou verby* [the time for games is now over]. We are now poised to rise with power and vigour proportional to the enormity and vastness of the aim to be achieved. (Minister of Safety and Security, Steve Tshwete, Parliamentary media briefing, Cape Town, 28 June 1999).

The consequence of this was that elements of the NCPS and the White Paper which were perceived as 'soft developmental approaches to crime' were, "either entirely ignored or adapted to fit the tough enforcement agenda" ([Rauch, 2002](#)). An example of this was that the civilian led National Secretariat of Safety and Security was substantially disempowered. Rather than being strengthened so as to play a more meaningful role in providing support to developmental crime prevention projects at the lower tiers of government as proposed by the 1998 White Paper, its staff were shifted into the South African Police Service's Social Crime Prevention Unit at national level. In essence this marked the end of the NCPS as a holistic government framework in which 'crime prevention' in its true sense had any meaningful standing in government policy.

From 2000 the government has focused most of its energy and resources on strengthening the criminal justice system and enhancing law enforcement. In particular, the SAPS drove the government's approach to crime reduction. In March of 2000, the SAPS's high profile National Crime Combating Strategy was adopted. The 2001 budget review reflected substantial increases in spending to support the following CJS priorities ([Rauch, 2002](#)):

1. Improving the remuneration and growing the numbers of officials in all three criminal justice departments (police, justice and prisons);
2. Investing in technology, resources and infrastructure in the CJS;
3. Expanding prison accommodation.

This trend has continued over the past four years and will continue into the near future. The

SAPS is expected to grow to the size of 156 000 personnel by 2007. More courts are being built and prosecutors hired. The new 'war on crime' approach has seen the SAPS making over a million arrests a year and large numbers of illegal firearms being taken off the streets. General public opinion about the government's performance in relation to crime and the CJS has shown a marked improvement since 2002. Some high profile crime categories have started to show substantial decreases (i.e. murder, hijacking, cash in transit heists), while most crime categories have stabilised (i.e. they have increased or decreased less than 5% on previous years levels). Legislation was introduced in 1997 to increase the length of sentences handed down for specified serious offences. In response to the burdening prison population, the Department of Correctional Services has embarked on a prison building programme, but this is not sufficient to cope with the pressure of overcrowded prisons.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of these successes in the long term is still in question and some problems are far from resolved. Even though many categories of crime have stabilised, this is still at an unacceptably high level and victimisation surveys reveal that South Africans feel more fearful now than they did in 1998 ([Burton et al, 2003](#)). Certain categories such as aggravated robbery have continued to increase. Our prisons are over 80% overcrowded to the extent that the conditions are not conducive for any form of rehabilitation. Yet most prisoners will be released the foreseeable future, alienated, unable to find employment and having strengthened their social ties with other criminals. Indeed, many of the root causes of crime in South Africa continue to exist (e.g. dramatic inequality, high levels of unemployment and poverty, unstable families, high rates of alcohol abuse, inadequate education, cultures of interpersonal and group violence, etc). At the present time there is no updated, cohesive national framework for preventing crime and most of our social service departments (i.e. education, health, welfare, public works, etc) do not develop policy or spend resources in accordance with any clearly identified crime prevention programmes.

It is not too surprising that the NCPS became primarily focused on the law-enforcement components at the expense of crime prevention programmes in the true sense of the definition. Many crime prevention programmes are long term in nature and results may only be seen after a number of years (particularly those focusing on early childhood development). The rising crime rate had placed increasing pressure on the government to be seen to be doing something that showed results in the short term. Indeed, the public generally expects that the departments that should be doing something about crime reside in the criminal justice system. During the time that the NCPS was calling for a focus on integration and coordination across departments, these very departments were struggling to define and deliver on their core mandates within the new democratic government system.

While much of the impetus of the NCPS may now have been generally lost at national government level, it has not signalled the end of crime prevention at this tier. It has been argued that a continued focus of various national departments to deliver on their core functions could have a positive impact on crime if they succeed ([Frank, 2003](#)). Examples include the Department of Education's policy of ensuring access to schooling for all, the Department of Social Development's policy of extending and improving the quality of early childhood development services, and moves by national government to cut the employment rate. The government's 'Moral Regeneration' initiative may also provide opportunity for the revival of a coherent national approach to long-term crime prevention education-type activities.

South Africa and Crime Prevention at Local Level

While the demise of the NCPS has been perceived as the loss of a coherent crime prevention approach at a national level, the move toward an increased focus of crime prevention at a local level has been a notable trend. ([Palmary 2002](#)) highlights that this is in line with what has been the overall international trend for the following reasons:

- The large-scale failure on the part of national governments to successfully prevent crime or reduce the fear of crime.
- An increased recognition on the side of government officials of the importance of understanding the dynamics of the particular geographical location in which interventions are planned.
- The multi-disciplinary approach needed for successful crime prevention initiatives requires the cooperation of non-governmental and other civil society groups which in many cases are locally rather than nationally based.

It is interesting to note that city level crime prevention initiatives were underway at about the time the NCPS was being launched. During 1996 the United Nations Urban Management Programme in partnership with the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) mobilised support for a South African Safer Cities Programme which subsequently took place in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Over the past few years these programmes have changed shape and form as has local government more generally. Indeed, a number of cities have developed City Safety Strategies (sometimes more than once), that include developmental approaches to crime reduction.

Over this time period there has been ongoing interest in the role of local government in crime prevention. This focus was given particular emphasis with the adoption of the 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security. This policy document not only stipulated the role and function of local government in crime prevention, but went even further to provide specific strategic areas for consideration including:

- Designing out crime;
- Education;
- Promoting local cohesion;
- Supporting youth, families and groups at risk;
- Breaking cycles of violence;
- Promoting individual responsibility;
- Socio-economic interventions to undercut causes of crime.

At the time, [Shaw \(1998\)](#), who was highly supportive of the need for local governments to play a leading role in crime prevention, warned of common dangers and constraints that could be confronted:

- Funding – it is too often funded by foreign donors and is therefore considered an 'add on' which weakens responsibility and accountability. Moreover, because crime prevention initiatives cross many departments specific budget allocations are not provided and it lacks coordination and support.
- Skills, experience and resource capacity for crime prevention initiatives are

generally lacking.

- Political support – either it is inadequate at the required level or necessary long term interventions are overlooked in favour of short-term deliverables for reasons of political expediency.
- Experimentation – political pressure for too much to be delivered too soon does not allow for the necessary experience and skills to be developed that are acquired through experimentation.
- Policing solutions – with the establishment of Metropolitan or Municipal Police Departments (MPDs), all crime prevention initiatives may become the responsibility of these agencies so that law-enforcement approaches are favoured rather than developmental and social approaches.

During 2002, a review conducted in four cities (Johannesburg, Tshwane, Cape Town and Durban) looked at how the strategies proposed in the White Paper were implemented by local government ([Palmary, 2002](#)). This revealed that the warnings highlighted earlier were appropriate. In the local governments reviewed the most progress had been made in crime prevention through environmental design. For instance closed circuit television (CCTV) has been extensively implemented, visible policing through the use of MPDs and private security has been increased, urban renewal and City Improvement Districts (CIDs) have been established and there has been an increase in the regulation of hawking and informal trade.

Nevertheless, it was also noted that crime prevention projects aimed at addressing deeply entrenched social inequalities such as poverty or factors contributing to youth crime such as family instability or enhancing social skills, were not yet being effectively implemented by South African cities. More recent research by the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has highlighted that despite crime ranking amongst the top three priorities of every Integrated Development Plan in the country, "the ability to incorporate crime prevention plans into the local development agenda is limited." ([Landman & Lieberman, 2005](#)). A further challenge highlighted by [Pelser \(2002\)](#) is that local governments still need to strengthen their ability to deliver in relation to their core services before they are able to effectively deliver on integrated, multi-agency projects.

Apart from local government, there have been a various research institutions and non-governmental organisations that have undertaken a range of crime prevention projects with various local governments and communities. While there is limited information on these projects, a number of publications are instructive (See Griggs, 2003 and 2005; and [Pelser, 2002](#))

Out of the most recent literature and research on local level crime prevention in South Africa, the following three crucial ongoing challenges are apparent and expanded on below:

1. Research and planning of new initiatives
2. Rigorous evaluation of crime prevention initiatives
3. Establishing effective multi-agency partnerships

Research and planning of new initiatives. As was highlighted earlier, social crime prevention programmes can be complex and require specialised skills. It is important therefore for role-players who are interested in supporting or initiating local level crime

prevention initiatives to keep up to date with international experiences and developments in this regards. According to [Frank \(2003\)](#), in South Africa, "very few crime prevention initiatives are able to articulate the set of theoretical and process assumptions that motivate and rationalise the interventions that are undertaken in the field, and these interventions are seldom informed by local and international research." For instance, the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (<http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org>) has collected over 3000 reports and publications about such initiatives around the world that could prove insightful for conceptualising South African interventions. Recently there has been growing attention paid to the role that the private sector can play in crime prevention and examples of public and private sector partnerships in this regards (the 5th Annual International Colloquium being held during 27 & 28 October 2005 in Chile will be focusing on this topic.)

Evaluation of crime prevention initiatives. A number of analysts have lamented the lack of rigorous evaluation of crime prevention initiatives in South Africa ([Dixon, 2002](#); [Frank, 2003](#); [Palmary, 2002](#); [Pelser, 2002](#)). They highlight that unless evaluations are undertaken on such projects it is impossible to know the extent to which they achieved their objectives or actually contributed to a reduction in crime. Furthermore, evaluations are necessary so that learning can take place to enhance the success of crime prevention interventions in other settings. While this has started to be rectified to some degree amongst civil society interventions (as the above publications reflect), it is still a significant challenge facing government driven programmes.

Establishing Effective Multi-Agency Partnerships. Given the complex factors that facilitate criminal activity, it has long been recognised that successful crime prevention interventions require multi-agency partnerships. However, this is also often the reason for the failure of such initiatives as partnerships are not necessarily built properly and can be difficult to sustain. [Pelser \(2002\)](#) states that implementations of crime prevention initiatives generally follow the same approach:

- Stakeholders in a particular area are consulted about the nature of the crime problem and ideas sought on what can be done about it;
- Further analysis of the crime situation is undertaken through victim surveys or police statistics;
- The agency driving the intervention forms a partnership with various role-players to act on an agreed-upon set of crime problems;
- An agency is nominated to coordinate and sustain the activities of the various role-players.

After analysing various crime prevention partnerships in South Africa [Pelser \(2002\)](#) posits that the most common fault is that the process of establishing a multi-agency partnership (i.e. consultation, coordination) often becomes an end in itself and therefore the primary activity of a crime prevention initiative. Often consultation and consensus is sought with as wide a range of stakeholders as possible resulting in long lists of issues to address being generated rather than one or two strategic priorities upon which to focus. Moreover, an over emphasis on participation can also result on partnerships being formed during the consultation phase before an adequate assessment of the ability of the role-player to contribute to the project has been taken. The consequence of this often leads to many meetings and workshops with too many stake-holders resulting in no real delivery on project objectives.

Pelser (2002) states that, "crime prevention partnerships are meant to be strategic alliances, founded and developed on the value each partner adds towards meeting the overall purpose of the programme or project." He argues that many of the challenges experienced in establishing effective partnerships can be overcome if greater consideration is given to the following:

- The exact objectives of the crime prevention initiative;
- Understanding who is required to assist with implementation and why;
- The specific value or resource that each role-player is expected to contribute;
- Their capacity to meet this expectation;
- When in the life cycle of the project each role-player is expected to participate.

Conclusion

Although the original vision of crime prevention as set out in the NCPS has largely dissipated in response to strengthening the criminal justice system, local level crime prevention initiatives continue. While the future of crime prevention as a government policy approach in South Africa is uncertain, the need to find new and innovative ways to reduce crime at local level remains.

International experience is instructive as it reveals that in most developed countries, it took years of research and experience before crime prevention became official government policy. While work on crime prevention had already taken shape during the mid-1970s, it was only in 1984 that legislation providing federal support for crime prevention programmes and research was passed in the United States of America. Canada's National Crime Prevention Strategy was only finalised in 1994 and in Britain, the Crime and Disorder Act that provides a legislative framework for local governments engagement was only passed in 1998 ([Pelser, 2002](#)).

While much can be learned from experiences internationally, successful crime prevention relies on a keen understanding of what is possible at a local level. South African local governments have started to realise their responsibilities with regards to enhancing public safety. There is also a growing recognition that local police agencies can only play a limited role in this regard and that other approaches need to be adopted. Much has been learned about local level crime prevention in South Africa over the past decade. What is now needed is a broader recognition throughout society of the potential benefits of developmental crime prevention. Closer relationships need to be forged between local government, civil society and the private sector to take the lessons so far learned and establish the type of successful crime prevention interventions that some other countries have enjoyed. Our future depends on it.

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