



Africa Criminal Justice Reform  
 Organisation pour la Réforme de la Justice Pénale en Afrique  
 Organização para a Reforma da Justiça Criminal em África

## SECTOR POLICING

### THE SAPS' SEMINAL STRATEGY

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## Introduction

In October 2018 the South African Police Service (SAPS) announced a new Community Policing Strategy and Community in Blue Policing Concept.<sup>1</sup> At its launch, National Commissioner Khehla Sitole said the strategy would 'make history by changing the way we do policing'.<sup>2</sup>

However, the strategy retains the SAPS sector policing model - a holistic, promising approach to community policing which has never been fully implemented.

If successfully implemented, sector policing could significantly shift the way police approach their work and so help to make communities safer. This Fact Sheet reviews the key tenets of sector policing as presented in the SAPS' Sector Policing Operational Guidelines.

## Overview

Sector policing is a decentralised, geographical, problem-oriented and community-focused approach to policing. Simply put, it requires that every station precinct be divided into two or more sectors and that each sector be assigned a sector commander to coordinate and drive sector activities.

Sector policing was developed in the late nineties based on the neighbourhood policing model of the United Kingdom. It was first piloted in South Africa in 1998 and rolled out more broadly in 2002/2003.<sup>3</sup> Central to its vision was the joint

identification of challenges by police and community members, and the coordination of responses to them.

In its early years, police interpreted sector policing as requiring the equal deployment of resources in every sector, and so a means through which to motivate for more station resources.<sup>4</sup> As a result, many stations failed to implement sector policing and it developed a poor reputation. The system was reviewed and revised in 2011/2012, leading to the development of a new National Instruction, and to the strategy being revised to better fit low-resource rural stations.

In 2015 the SAPS published a Sector Policing Operational Guide, presenting a clear, in-depth overview of the sector police philosophy and how it should be implemented.

## SAPS Sector Policing Aims

The Sector Policing Operational Guide states that 'sector policing must become the way of policing' and that all role players must be held accountable for implementation and maintenance.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1 Figure 1 Sector policing aims



Sector policing has numerous aims. Among the most important are enabling police to identify and address the causes of crime and community concern in each sector, to mobilise actors to address them, to improve community trust and confidence in police, and to improve resource efficiency.<sup>6</sup> More broadly, it aims to prevent crime, encourage visible and accessible policing by familiar police officials, improve police reaction times and investigations, establish informer networks, enhance partnerships and accountability between the community and the SAPS, and improve the flow of information.

Sector policing is intended to be data- and community-led, with resources deployed in accordance with crime pattern and threat analysis, intelligence reports and station crime combatting forum (SCCF) taskings.<sup>7</sup> This is important. Sector policing is not about the equal provision of policing to all communities but rather the focused policing of the most important problems. For example, if one sector generates significantly more risk and crime than other sectors, commanders can shift resources to that sector to tackle related problems, even if it means not having a permanent police presence in all sectors at all times.

SCCF's are expected to monitor and evaluate the impact of SAPS operations and institute corrective alternative measures or specialised interventions where necessary.<sup>8</sup> This can be assisted by registering intervention plans and measuring progress against intended outcomes.

### Sector Commanders, Forums and Profiles

Sector commanders are the heart of sector policing. Without their leadership (or without their being capacitated), sector policing will fail. The Operational Guide describes them as 'a new type of police official', 'a community problem solver', and an official who 'is seen as a friend who can help'.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, they are 'a referral specialist, the community's ombudsman who links people to the [services they need]'. They are expected to compel 'reluctant bureaucracies [elsewhere in government] to do the jobs they are supposed to do in order to address crime and create a safe and secure environment'.<sup>10</sup> This approach, in which police serve as the lever-pullers of broader municipal and national government, is key to evidence-based, problem-oriented policing and should be earnestly pursued.<sup>11</sup>

Sector commanders should be familiar with the root causes and crime generators in their sector, crime patterns and threats, hotspots, modus operandi, wanted suspects, recently released parolees, and the relevant crime-prevention tools and techniques available to address them.<sup>12</sup>

They should communicate this information to partners in the sector (e.g. community structures, government, private sector) and together identify priority needs, and coordinate and initiate projects to address them.<sup>13</sup> Much of this communication should take place at sector forum meetings.<sup>14</sup> Once identified, they should ascertain what combination of primary interventions (e.g. poverty alleviation, environmental design), secondary interventions (e.g. targeting youth at risk) or tertiary interventions (e.g. focused deterrence) would be most suitable to address them, and initiate plans to do so.<sup>15</sup> Sector commanders are expected to drive these projects.

### Sector Profiles

Sector commanders must also establish, and at least every four months update, a sector profile (or file). Sector profiles contain key information about the sector, its members, challenges and activities. The profile must be developed in consultation with the sector community and station crime intelligence officer. In addition to a range of formal policies and documents (e.g. National Instruction 3/2013, sector map) it must include an overview of the sector's infrastructure and population, recent crime trends, as well as the sector forum's code of conduct, constitution, meeting minutes, and record of activities.<sup>16</sup> Ideally, it should assist commanders to track community satisfaction with police, something the SAPS has long-identified as central to its work but which it has not seriously measured at the station or sector level.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to traditional, random patrols, the Operational Guide notes that 'the most important' aspect of sector patrols is that they be intentional.<sup>18</sup> This, it notes, is because sector commanders can't tackle all problems in their area equally.

Rather, they should identify the most harmful, then develop interventions to target specific problems, places, persons or times, formulated according to the following:<sup>19</sup>

- Identify and study the problem
  - E.g. What is the cause? What is the offender and victim profile? What impact does this problem have on the community? What is the geography of the problem?
- Identifying possible responses and formulate an intervention plan.
  - What do we want to achieve? How will we deal with the problem? Who will be involved? When will it be done?
  - The aim and objectives should be clearly defined and understandable to all stakeholders. It should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and given a realistic timeframe.
- Implement the intervention.
- Evaluate and adjust the intervention.
  - Evaluate impact of intervention on problem, how has it changed?
  - Hold regular meetings to evaluate progress and provide feedback to role players and community.
  - What additional action is needed? Who must take it? By when?
  - Learn lessons for future interventions.
  - Communicate results to community, media and others.

Throughout, the guide recommends generating and utilising accurate, timely information to guide and assess action.<sup>20</sup> This approach is well supported by the evidence-based policing and violence prevention literature.<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 1 Initiating, Developing and Implementing Crime-Prevention<sup>22</sup>**



## Is sector policing adequately conceived and is it being implemented?

The SAPS has an excellent vision for sector policing. However, some concerns remain.

According to the SAPS, 99.66% of stations identified to implement sector policing in 2017/18 did so.<sup>23</sup> While this appears promising, the manner in which the SAPS evaluates the implementation of sector policing reveals very little about whether it is functional. All that is required to please auditors is that the police station area must be divided into at least two sectors; a permanent member must be appointed as a sector commander to manage and coordinate activities in the sectors; a sector profile must be compiled for each sector by the appointed sector commander; operational members and physical resources must be deployed in accordance with the information analysis in the sectors to enhance service delivery, based on the available resources; and a sector forum(s) must be established unless existing community structures exist to facilitate community interaction and participation.<sup>24</sup> All this can be achieved without the substance of sector policing – collaborative problem solving through partnerships, manifesting.

Another concern relating to the Operational Guidelines is that, on the one hand, officials are instructed to identify and tackle

– using ‘initiatives’ and ‘programmes’ – the causes of crime and community concern. On the other, they are instructed to ‘render policing services’, including patrols, complaints and crime prevention activities.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the ‘standard deployment of resources’ guidance for sector policing is very basic. In effect, it is a basic deployment of patrollers based on crime intelligence and analysis of the preceding 24 hours.<sup>26</sup> While such analysis is important, true problem-oriented policing takes a much longer-term view. As such, it would be better if deployment emphasised the importance of sector profiles and intervention plans (theories of change), rather than daily crime pattern analysis.

Depending on their station, many sector commanders likely have impossible tasks. Not only are they expected to carry out the numerous functions outlined in this sheet, but they are expected to carry out regular policing activities, too. While this may not be impossible everywhere, effective sector policing in busy, heterogeneous urban precincts requires dozens of hours of meetings, consultation, administration and planning each month. To be effective in this role, sector managers should, as much as possible be relieved of duties not directly associated with the core business of sector policing (i.e. networking with stakeholders, drawing up and implementing intervention plans). Their work should be at the core of everything the SAPS does.

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<sup>1</sup> SAPS (2018a) Media Statement issued by the National Media Centre Corporate Communication and Liaison South African Police Service, 20 October. Available at: <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/selnewsdetails.php?nid=17810>

<sup>2</sup> SAPS (2018)

<sup>3</sup> SAPS (2015) *Sector Policing Operational Guide*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> SAPS (2015) *Sector Policing Operational Guide*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 12-13.

<sup>6</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 23, 40, 51-52, 75

<sup>7</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 17-18, 27, 39

<sup>8</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 73

<sup>9</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 51

<sup>10</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 51, 71-72

<sup>11</sup> Sparrow, M (2016) *Handcuffed: What holds policing back, and the key to reform*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press; Moore, M.H. & Braga, A. (2003) *The 'Bottom Line of Policing': What Citizens Should Value (and Measure!) in Police Performance*. Police Executive Research Forum; Plant, J.B. & Scott, M.S. (2009) *Effective Policing and Crime Prevention: A Problem-Oriented Guide for Mayors, City Managers, and County Executives*. Centre for Problem Oriented Policing, U.S. Department of Justice.

<sup>12</sup> SAPS (2015), p.71.

<sup>13</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 61-63.

<sup>14</sup> SAPS (2015), p.22, 35.

<sup>15</sup> SAPS (2015), p.78-84.

<sup>16</sup> SAPS (2015), p.36.

<sup>17</sup> SAPS (2015), p.56, Faull, A. (2016) 'Measured governance? Policing and performance management in South Africa' *Public Administration and Development* No 36, pp.157–168.

<sup>18</sup> SAPS (2015), p.80.

<sup>19</sup> SAPS (2015), p.81-91.

<sup>20</sup> SAPS (2015), p.84

<sup>21</sup> Abt, T. & Winship, C. (2016) *What works in reducing community violence: a meta-review and field study for the northern triangle*.

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/USAID-2016-What-Works-in-Reducing-Community-Violence-Final-Report.pdf>

Accessed 6 August 2018; Sherman, L.W. (2013) 'The Rise of Evidence-Based Policing: Targeting, Testing, and Tracking' *Crime and Justice*, 32(1), pp. 377–451.

<sup>22</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 65 (Note: the third and fourth blocks have been switched from the original as it makes sense to plan before implementation).

<sup>23</sup> SAPS (2018b) *Annual Report 2017/18*, p. 14, 90.

<sup>24</sup> SAPS (2018b), p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> SAPS (2015), p. 37.