



HAVE often been asked whether it is possible to reduce levels of crime in South Africa when many of the promises made in the form of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) have not yet materialised. The Ministry of Safety and Security is of the view that there is an important relationship between stability and development. For a reasonable level of safety, the success of the RDP is necessary.

When we examine the challenges facing the new South African Police Service (SAPS), therefore, we shall have to do so in the context of this programme, which quite clearly seeks to ameliorate the conditions in which our people find themselves.

One of their legitimate expectations was that, in the immediate aftermath of the non-racial democratic elections, all conflicts – in particular, political violence – would disappear from the face of the country. Although we have seen reductions in levels of violence, we should not assume that violent crime will disappear. In fact, levels of interpersonal violence may increase because of anxieties and apprehensions which are attendant problems of processes of transition.

The interim Constitution puts forward the vision of community policing, a notion that is not new in the South African vocabulary. But many previous efforts to improve police-

community relations have fallen victim to the view of police officials that such efforts were mere window-dressing.

It is clear to us, therefore, that community policing involves more fundamental transformation of the police organisation than was envisaged previously. The police service must be organised in such a way that police officials at all levels can define priorities which are attuned to the needs and sentiments of the community.

This implies a consultative approach to police work, an approach which sees a police-community partnership as an essential ingredient for effective crime prevention. As I see it, there are two basic obstacles which stand in the way of realising such an approach.

The first is that the current structure and culture of police organisation does not facilitate a consultative process of police work. Decision-making powers in the police force are so centralised that police officials on the ground are not empowered to exercise their professional discretion. This culture is so deep-rooted that the new approach is viewed as a loss of authority.

The second problem is the historical lack of police training and skills in such important areas as conflict resolution, problem solving and communication. The oppressive political dispensation of the past, to which police work was functional, did not have to expose police officials to these universal, non-enforcement functions of policing.



Police in South Africa are beginning to operate under a new ethos but in a context

fraught with difficulty. Minister of Safety and Security SYDNEY MUFAMADI sketched the way ahead in a recent speech to the Independent Mediation Service of South Africa.

Partnership is path

This legacy will be with us for some time to come. It would be naive, therefore, to expect the police to immediately become accustomed to playing a conflict-solving role when history has made them one of the parties in conflict.

Another potential source of conflict is the increasing awareness of personal and fundamental rights among the public. To some police officers, this constitutes a challenge to authority and they feel compelled to respond by exerting more authority, at times through the use of force.

The interim Constitution is the supreme law of the land. We are in government to uphold the law. The Constitution says, among other things, that workers have a right to strike as part of the collective bargaining process.

Recently truck drivers decided to exercise this right by blockading highways because that is their workplace. A snap debate was introduced in parliament on the issue.

After the debate I asked the Commissioner of the SAPS to send the police to the highways: Transport Minister Mac Maharaj and Labour Minister Tito Mboweni were going there to negotiate with truck drivers and their employers, and I considered it important for the police to be there as observers.

It is now a matter of record that the conflict was resolved because both the employers and the union agreed on the formation of an industrial council. Negotiations would continue within that framework.

I have yet to receive a report from the police officers commanding the units deployed on the highway, but from that report I will assess the extent to which they learnt from the negotiations facilitated by the two ministers.

However, there are times when members of the public exercise their rights in a manner which does not suggest sufficient appreciation of the rights of others.

These cases include situations in which striking workers believe, quite erroneously, that their right to picket entitles them to use force to prevent others from doing business with the companies they work for. This explains why neutral third party intervention will remain necessary for some time to come.

The role to be played by service organisations cannot be confined to mediations, given the picture I have just painted. It will have to be extended in a big way to include education and training. And I see the major stakeholders in matters of safety and security, namely the police and the broader community itself, as the prospective students.

The following story illustrates this point. An activist told me he was trying to set up a community-police forum in White City, Soweto. He complained that the station commander was not co-operating with him in this regard: he was being reactionary. In fact, said the activist, the station commander was undermining the RDP because he disagreed with the activist's suggestions.

This points to the important role to be played by service organisations in encouraging a more nuanced, sophisticated and profound interpretation of some of the important things that are being

page 22

Police, community at odds in Harare

By Sobantu Xayiya

THE call for greater co-operation between police and communities is clouded by the mist of the past. Many communities are still haunted by experiences of harsh police treatment and as a result remain sceptical of working relations between them and law enforcement agencies. Attempts to draw them into contributing towards the process of reconstruction are therefore often unsuccessful.

Harare, a site-and-service squatter settlement on the fringes of Khayelitsha in Cape Town, is one of many communities struggling with this legacy in relation to co-operation with the police. For most of its residents, the line between past and present police services is blurred, if not non-existent.

Residents have been locked in a bitter struggle with the authorities over a police station built for the area in 1992. The squatters demanded that the structure be converted into a hospital, which they identified as a facility more urgently required in the area. According to some, residents were never consulted, or informed, about plans to build the police station in 1992.

After a series of confrontations, the authorities responded by starting to build a hospital - opposite the police station. The hospital is nearing completion but the police station is still not functioning, as residents remain implacably opposed to its presence. The police station is deserted. The only people there are two police guards.

Most of the people I spoke to see the police station as a potential threat to their survival. "Should it start functioning, we stand to lose greatly," is the view of one resident, a man who makes a living by smuggling dagga. He says unemployment and inadequate skills are the reasons for his illegal line of work.

But it is not only the police station that is disturbing many Harare residents. It is the whole idea of community policing. They are far better informed than the police about who is involved in illegal businesses. But the shared need to make a living somehow, in the context of massive unemployment, is behind their unwillingness to respond positively to the call for greater co-operation with the police.

For example, there is the man who says he survives by stealing cars and selling them. Like most self-confessed thieves, he sees himself as a Robin Hood. He does not steal from township residents, whom he regards as poor like himself: his "business" operations are conducted outside the townships. Naturally, he cannot imagine co-operating with police.

Nor can the taxi driver whose vehicle is not roadworthy. Plagued by traffic fines, he is opposed to co-operation with the police on the grounds that it would "complicate" his life.

Harare is no different from any other squatter settlement in the Peninsula. Most residents come from the Eastern Cape (recorded as the region hardest hit by unemployment) in search of jobs. Unable to find employment, they seek alternative ways of making a living.

Harare residents make it clear that they believe in democracy. But, to most of them, the idea that the police are a vital component of democracy is inconceivable at this stage. The bottom line is survival. ■

to peace

ALICE COETZEE explains how a community-policing initiative is bringing hope to an area where poverty and mistrust are rife.

Small peace blooms in Bekkersdal

Row upon row of corrugated-iron shacks, bleak and encircled by dust, lead you into Bekkersdal, a small, treeless West Rand township outside Krugersdorp. Outwardly, it's a stark picture of hopelessness, yet this little place was the first township in 1990 to unite supporters of the ANC, Inkatha Freedom Party and Azapo into a working relationship aimed at building the community.

The accord was shattered in the run-up to the April elections, with Internal Stability Unit (ISU) intervention fanning the flames. But a fragile peace has returned in the wake of the formation of a peace committee led by local leaders. The restoration of peace is all the more remarkable in the new context of mushrooming informal settlements around Bekkersdal, with new communities with their own needs and leaders asserting themselves.

The Bekkersdal community is now on the brink of officially launching its own community-police forum, but police and community representatives have different views on how it will work. For the police, the forum will give the community a role in solving crime. For the community, the forum has a much broader purpose: to change the nature of policing in their township.

A champion of the process is Lieutenant-Colonel Louis Cole, unit commander for community liaison on the West Rand. In his view, the community has been more open to dialogue with the police, including the ISU, since the elections. "Through the forum we hope the community will feel free to report crime and to bring problems with the police to the police," he says. Aware of long-standing community mistrust of the police, Cole hopes trust will be built once there is a "solid mechanism in place".

Chairperson of the Bekkersdal Development Campaign Committee Vusi Dhlamini agrees. "The most important thing is to build trust and communication between the police and the community. Since the fighting, there have been no-go areas and the amount of crime is increasing. We hope the forum will be able to stop this. The police attitudes are changing."

Azapo activist Violet Mogone is not so sure. "I don't see any difference between the past and the present police," she says. An opponent of the forum, she believes the community should do its own policing. "By including the police, the community will be divided because people will be encouraged to inform on one another," she says.

Mistrust of the police and the need to deal with it through the forum appears to be high on the community's agenda. This is expressed through fear of police dominance of the forum and anger over what is perceived as continuing police harassment, in contradiction of the forum's objective of building relations between the community and police.

"The police from Krugersdorp work here and when they ask you to show the policeman who beat you up yesterday, you cannot tell the difference between the white policemen. They hide their name tags," says Simpeo Mpothsana, of the Bekkersdal ANC

marshalling structure.

The apartheid legacy of the police and attitudes instilled during their training is what worries James Ngoko of the ANC. He says that if the forum's aims of uniting, educating and building a positive relationship between police and community are to be achieved, police should be recruited only from the community: "If we can work with the local police and not the police from Krugersdorp, we will be able to solve problems with the police because we can go to the house of the police officer and raise the matter with him."

Nellie Mathikge of the Concerned Women of Bekkersdal agrees, calling for the upgrading of Bekkersdal's single satellite police station into a full station. She thinks it should be operational 24 hours a day and should have adequate resources, including transport, so that police can respond to emergency calls.

Both she and Azapo's Mogone are particularly keen to see the appointment of women police officers who can deal sensitively with women who have been raped and abused.

Bekkersdal station commander Lucas van Tellegen supports the call for a full police station. "We have 28 policemen working in four shifts to serve 150 000 people. It is very difficult for us to do our job."

Says Warrant-Officer Tefo Mpete of the police community relations department: "We've come a long way. At first it was gloves off and we boxed each other. Then, as the process went on, we wrestled; and now we are helping one another. There are still problems but some of the police who could not accept the changes are beginning to understand the realities. Community policing is two-sided. We must each do our part." ■

Alice Coetzee is based at Idasa's Pretoria office.

Partnership is path

◆ from page 21

put forward, among these the RDP.

These principles should not be treated as slogans. If this practice continues, then we will not be able to consummate the process of democratising our country.

After this address, Mufamadi was asked a number of questions.

Police-community forums are almost impossible in certain areas, such as KwaZulu and Bophuthatswana. How can this be addressed?

We are now building a national police service

which will be organised at two levels – national and provincial. Standards will be set at national level and these must be observed, irrespective of whether one is in KwaZulu/Natal or the PWV. These reform initiatives, internal to the police, will ultimately make police-community partnerships possible throughout the country.

Now and then one will see manifestations of resistance. In such cases it will be necessary to encourage, persuade and sometimes even punish officials who behave in a way which is inimical to sound police-community rela-

tions. In KwaZulu/Natal some investigation is already in progress with regard to making community policing possible.

Has a fresh, systematic look been taken at the claims against your department which you inherited from the previous government?

We are looking at those claims because some of them present a moral dilemma. How can the new SAPS fight a claim made by the widow of Matthew Goniwe? It would not be justifiable. I think some of these cases will end up with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where it will become possible to talk about reparations for victims. But if we were to settle all these claims at the amounts that are being demanded, the RDP would suffer. ■