

“The Politics of Crime Prevention and Partnerships – Mobilising the Community with Honourable Intent”

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Preamble

“ I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities” (President Nelson Mandela, 1964).

“ In a civilised society, error must be expressed as freely as truth, else how else shall be distinguish one from the other? Liberty must be defended in flawed cases. Justice must be dispensed to those who seem least likely to merit it. The rights of the shabbiest persons must be those most strongly defended. We must never forget that tyranny begins by a deliberate diminishment of dignity. The political prisoner is stripped before the interrogators. The function of the torturer is not only to hurt but to debase. The function of the propagandist is to create scapegoats by caricature..... I have come to the conclusion that institutional power distances men and women from their own humanity. They forget that men and women are the subjects and objects of salvation, not institutions. The institutions may survive; people have only their precarious “now”. It is in the “now” that we are saved or damned. To legislate or adjudicate upon future consequences is one road to the terrible indifference of tyranny”. (Morris West, 1997, p. 102/3)

In addressing the Objectives for this Conference and placing my background in Partnership development in the context of the African experience, I am obliged to declare some preliminary observations and bias:

1. I come from a developed world which has systematically expropriated the wealth and resources of the world fundamentally to the exclusion of the majority of world citizens;
2. In my opinion, crime prevention should be measured in terms of its capacity as an outcome from processes that work towards equity and fairness (that is, social justice) – and that these principles are the real objective;
3. That crime prevention must **not** be a means to a political end;
4. That discussion on crime prevention in the African situation is superfluous in the midst of social and economic disparity resultant from long-term exploitation;
5. That unless you totally engage affected citizens in the Partnership process as primary Stakeholders (and owners of the process) we are all wasting our time;
6. The issues of greatest significance to these Stakeholders revolve about survival in the face of desperation – and are not governed by some set of middle-class ideals.

Introduction

There is no trick in mobilising local communities to embrace reasoned crime prevention and social justice initiatives. For the vast majority of citizens the opportunity to engage in processes – with an honourable intent – towards safer, sustainable communities is compelling and desirable. Whether citizen’s perceptions are based upon real or imagined fears; whether the community is

affluent or impoverished; the simple desire by citizens to live a peaceful existence provides a powerful incentive for participation.

The trick, my friends, is recognising and neutralising the slight of hand that seeks to transform and subvert the genuine and legitimate goodwill of ordinary citizens – those insidious political and/or personal agendas that cripple honourable intentions.

The purpose of this paper is threefold; firstly to discuss some of the structural barriers to whole-of-government approaches to crime prevention, secondly to provide evidence of the communities support for crime prevention in the face of traditional ‘law and order’ responses by government, and thirdly to discuss some of the issues that need to be acknowledged if meaningful and sustained community participation in crime prevention is to be achieved. This paper was not written to provide answers, but rather to ask questions, and challenge the reasons why crime prevention has been elevated to a level of significance above social justice. It could be argued that a concentration upon crime per se and the endorsement of police-centred crime prevention validates a form of social control in the context of inequitable social and economic relations. The presentation of this proposition should serve as a warning – that crime prevention is a *consequence* of strategic processes that enshrine the principles of equity and fairness for all citizens in terms of access to affordable housing, health, education and so forth.

Past and present history for the African continent appears to mitigate against the application of the raft of social programs in health, education, and employment that are absolutely imperative to crime reduction and harm minimisation. Past history, in terms of predatory exploitation of resources of this Continent, is beyond remedy. Present history, in terms of debt repayment is not. The transfer of funds currently acquitted to the maintenance of the National debt to initiatives in housing, employment, urban renewal, health and education will make a defining difference to the future of the African Nations. With a clever and lateral approach to “economic rationalism” everybody would win; the Continent in terms of social equalisation and the banks in terms of the long-terms benefits from a productively engaged and prosperous set of communities with revitalized industry and investment. Some would say that this is a fanciful proposition but I am convinced that a carefully constructed business plan will give teeth to this proposal.

Through the growth of Partnerships as a prime focus of Crime Prevention at a community level we in the developed world (as a sector) have opened the door and invited the community inside our little house. Explanations will be demanded from the community if they find that while we have invited them in, they are not allowed to sit on the best furniture or use the good silver. It is not adequate to enable the community to express crime prevention and community safety needs and then ask their support for initiatives they did not ask for or express a need for. To do so on the basis that ‘the community doesn’t always know what is good for them’ is patronising and dangerous. Patronising because it implies that the community is not open to information about alternative actions and dangerous because to invite someone to your house and then insult them (their lack of knowledge) will surely invoke a stronger reaction against you than never having invited them at all. The expression of need at someone else’s request generally brings an expectation that action (to address that need) will result. The community is now increasingly being asked to participate in the crime prevention debate via the expression of needs and the onus is now clearly on government and the ‘experts’ to provide action.

Community Participation in Crime Prevention: Structural Barriers to Whole-of-Government Response

As suggested, the first section of this Paper will seek to articulate those matters that are believed to be impediments to partnership development. This list is by no means complete, but it does nonetheless point to those matters which evolving partnerships should be aware of in order that they can differentiate between that which is relevant and that which is not as they open the door

to their houses and invite the community in. These issues are based upon experiences in the developed world. It is my view, however, that there will be points of convergence for the developing world given the inherent nature of humans. Many people suggest that partnerships are difficult to manage. Whilst ACRO would not disagree with this view, we would strenuously argue that these difficulties can be effectively managed by recognising, acknowledging and responding to them.

In the first instance, it is important to acknowledge that the personality of partnership members or workers can interfere with the creation and sustainability of partnerships. The more problematic impediments as they relate to personality may manifest in issues such as 'empire building' (creating the 'industry' and ensuring its growth), fear of failure (opting for non-human based services simply because they appear to work – or at the least provide conspicuousness), reliance upon the 'comfort zone' (dependence upon the parameters of specific academic qualifications or life experiences rather than exploring beyond that which is immediately understood), moral bias (which can create prohibitions in such areas as sexuality, human relationship and so forth) and career orientation (using the work within the partnership for a purpose beyond its scope – be it political, social or work oriented).

ACRO would suggest that there have been several other significant macroscopic impediments to the development of a coordinated approach by governments (and players of significance within the Corporate, Community and Media sectors) in the past that takes into account the nexus between criminal and social justice. The principle of these are:

The compartmentalisation of responsibilities both within levels of governments and across levels of government.

The historical development of State government structures has created discrete departments (e.g. Police, Health, Education) each of which have developed strategic approaches to what they perceive to be their area of responsibility. The sharing of a common view across these departments on a range of social issues is virtually non-existent and interdepartmental committee structures have failed, in the author's view, to deal with the co-ordination of resources both human and financial to deal with issues that are clearly of common concern.

Furthermore there is a suspicion of each level of government, each against the other - which has tended to mitigate against cooperative venturing in the area of social justice. This is an extremely difficult impediment particularly given the interdependence of these levels (specifically between State and Local governments). In more recent times the public perception of Local Government as a change agent rather than as a government of water, rates and sewerage, has been noted (ACRO, 1994; 1997). The effect of this changing perception is a public expectation that Local Government can deal with crime, health and education issues (to name a few). The debate about "responsibility" about such matters in the context of this perception has exacerbated friction between levels of government. Local Governments increasingly are moving towards the creation of Community Services Departments, replicating in part structures at other levels.

Any reasonable partnership structure should provide the necessary interface to significantly interfere with, and ultimately eliminate, cross-department and cross-government differences by:

- C assigning crime prevention and community safety as the core business of all levels of governments (including across departments) and the community, thereby extending "tunnel vision" to "lateral vision" which recognises the correlation between the work of each;
- C Educating the general public to the view that crime prevention and community safety are the "responsibility" of all citizens and that by dealing with issues such as participation in

education, racial intolerance, family dysfunction and other such matters influence criminogenic behaviour and that governments of themselves (or specific Departments such as Police) cannot reduce criminal behaviour.

- C Insisting upon performance by all levels of government in problem solving locally identified issues and resourcing options across relevant levels of governments and departments.

A lack of cross-discipline / cross-government management protocols to recognise and respond to shared issues of concern.

Because each government department interprets government policy in the context of its particular strategic area of "responsibility" and each department operates differing management strategies to meet the objectives of their departments, the proposition of cross-discipline / cross-government cooperative approaches is problematic. The "tunnel vision" of departmental approaches (and therefore, the rationale for not responding to issues that could arguably be included in their portfolio of responsibility) is often justified on the basis of differing management protocols (linked to departmental outcomes as opposed to government outcomes [which are, more often than not, not defined]).

A sensible approach to partnership development should see the development of standardised management protocols between and across, government departments and levels. This set of protocols should be negotiated and based upon a mutually agreed-shared vision.

Divergent information collection and sharing methodologies.

As a result of the development of differing methods of information collection and sharing between different government departments (if and when it occurs) and across levels of government (and within the community in general) it is difficult to integrate information, and stimulate holistic debate on community safety and crime prevention issues.

An effective partnership model should allow a more realistic flow of information across and between government agencies in the resolution of crime prevention and community safety issues. It has been the author's experience that high-leveled and structured Partnerships allow the informal flow of information (ACRO, 1994, 1997). However, this process needs to be formalised.

Lack of Process to identify and promote "successes"

There are numerous successes at a local level of crime prevention and community safety initiatives that go unnoticed - and which are rarely replicated as a consequence. Many of these undertakings have value-added to the communities in which they have been auspiced.

A key ingredient to partnership strategies should be the promotion of successes consequent from the work of the Partnerships. This publication should be facilitated to affected groups and not just to the 'converted'. At the end of the day it will be the good will of citizens that will ensure the continuity of effective partnerships, not the good intentions of crime prevention 'specialists'. Furthermore, the development of a strategy to share information about successes should utilise WorldWideWeb technology as well as the traditional mediums of Reports, Newsletters and other such devices to ensure replication.

Media campaigns, which promote fear about crime and disproportionate negative reporting

The Media tends to adopt an ethos of exaggeration about crime matters that tends to feed to a hysterical reaction by the public. The usually uniformed debate generated within the media, which at times inappropriately appears to target specific interest groups (particularly young people), inadvertently or otherwise, influences public perceptions about crime and those interest groups (ACRO, 1994, 1995).

The authors recognise that the media operate as a business that markets products in much the same manner as any other corporation. Crime is a marketable product for a range of psychological and sociological reasons and ACRO has created a successful strategic approach in its dealings with the media that creates marketability for stories that others would have difficulty promoting. The adoption of this method (i.e. Marketing crime prevention in a positive manner), as a matter of routine, should be of the highest priority to partnerships.

Lack of Practitioner Organisations with a specific and holistic Crime Prevention and Community Safety mandate.

As crime prevention and community safety become the core business of government, business and the community, the coordination of the work of existing and emergent practitioner organisations becomes critical. Firstly it is essential that the niche market that currently epitomises the work in the field be replaced by a holistic set of strategies the implementation of which will greatly assist in the long-term implementation of Programs that have social justice outputs. Secondly, it is equally important that a consensual approach be adopted that is inclusive of the largest number of citizens possible in order to diffuse the effect of personal, 'professional' (those who don't trust the public view and consider theirs as the most appropriate approach) and/or esoteric agendas as well as ensure ownership of any processes from within the community. Finally, this coordination must recognise the constituency in a way that completely dismembers the concept of our work contributing to an 'industry'. What we collectively do is meant to be in the interest of our communities - not to aggrandize the process, but rather to celebrate the outcomes that benefit us all.

The authors agree that whole-of-government, whole-of-Council, whole-of-community responses will achieve desired outputs in crime prevention and community safety. However we would also argue that perhaps the current orientation for partnership development is disproportionately loaded against the citizenry – upon whom is vested the longer-term responsibility for social justice responsiveness.

Community Participation in Crime Prevention: The Voice of the Community

It seems that at a global level, policymakers have recognised that crime prevention initiatives need to look beyond the criminal justice system. In Australia, the results of an examination of the association between socio-economic disadvantage and crime led ACRO to conclude that crime prevention should be the concern of social and economic policy development just as it is the concern of the police (Devery, 1991). The 1990's has seen a growing movement toward the development of crime prevention strategies based on community initiatives that have in turn been based on community identified local needs (The John Howard Society of Alberta, 1995).

In late 1997, over 8000 Queenslanders (residents of the State of Queensland in Australia) living in regions across the state took advantage of an opportunity to voice their opinions about crime and crime prevention (Whelan & Begg, 1998). The aims of the research were clear; to provide a forum for the expression of community needs regarding community based crime prevention (Whelan & Begg, 1998). The results of the research must be seen as encouraging to all practitioners and (hopefully) policy development officers who have long realised the need for

widespread community involvement if crime prevention is to be an effective tool in creating safer communities.

The research was conducted via a mail survey and asked over forty (40) questions regarding respondents attitudes, experiences and needs regarding specific crime and crime prevention issues. Importantly, the survey did not ask questions regarding the criminal justice system but as stated earlier was clearly focused on community participation in crime prevention. Selected findings will be discussed within the paper based on their relevance to the papers subject of concentration. Parties with further interest in the research findings should contact the researchers, ACRO, the Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation Incorporated, or view the material at <http://www.acro.com.au> under “Partnerships”, “Publications” or “ Research”.

Respondents were asked if *The Community (with Police/Government support) can be an effective force in preventing crime*. Respondents answered resoundingly in the affirmative, 84.1% (7077) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the community could be an effective crime prevention participant. In contrast to this strong acceptance of the role the community could play in crime prevention, was the community perception of the ability of the Police to be effective as the sole agent of crime prevention. When asked if the *Police are doing a good job tackling crime in the Community*, 41.5% (3503) agreed or strongly agreed that they were. It would seem that there is a strong recognition within the community that crime prevention (to be successful) cannot be the sole responsibility of the police and further that the community can be an effective partner in crime prevention.

In anticipation of strong community interest in the issue (community participation in crime prevention) and in an effort to provide individuals with a clear invitation to become actively involved, the researchers made an important addition to the research. Each package mailed out by the researchers contained a ‘Participation Form’. The form enabled respondents to not only voice their opinions (through survey answers) but to become active participants in crime prevention in their community. The Participation Form enabled respondents to either indicate a desire for ‘being informed about crime prevention in their community’ or ‘getting involved in crime prevention in their community’ thus creating a mandate for community participation beyond determining need. The determination of community need is well practiced across a wide range of issues (hence complaints that the community is ‘surveyed out’) but the follow-on response to that identified need is often seen to be lacking by community members. By including options for ongoing involvement (through information or activity) the researchers hoped to achieve two aims. Firstly, to provide those bodies mandated to implement community based crime prevention with a base of community support that can be consolidated and built upon, but also to ensure that some responsibility was invoked among those mandated bodies to recognise community participation as something more than simply determining need.

Respondents were further asked if *Effective community programs that tackle crime issues would benefit my (their) suburb*. 76.6% (6446) of respondents felt that programs that tackled crime issues would be a positive addition to their suburb. Respondents were also asked if *Crime prevention programs should target the underlying causes of crime (unemployment, poverty, isolation, etc)*. 83.6% (7249) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that crime prevention programs should target the underlying social causes of crime, thus demonstrating support for the knowledge held within the crime prevention field that crime prevention will be most successful when it is concerned not only with short term solutions and strategies but when concentrated effort is focused on long term strategies that tackle the many risk factors associated with crime.

Respondents were provided with eleven (11) program concepts (10 explicitly stated and 1 other) for ‘desired introduction’ in their suburb. As stated earlier, the criminal justice system (and its role in crime prevention) was not the focus of the research and as such only one policing option was provided. The program options were heavily loaded with ‘crime prevention through social

development' concepts as it is accepted by the researchers that these options are likely to be most successful in preventing crime on a long term basis. Respondents were able to choose as many concepts as they felt would be of benefit to their suburb. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who selected each option according to their age. Options are listed in the table as they are listed in the survey form. While there were obvious differences between age categories in their selection of 'crime prevention programs for (desired) introduction in their suburb, the most popularly selected program concepts tended to be (in no particular order) safety checks for older neighbours, after school activities for youth, school based crime prevention programs, facilities such as lighting, paths, etc, and foot/bike patrols by police.

Table 1 Programs selected for 'desired introduction' in respondents' own suburb by age.

Program Option	Age Category Indicated by Respondents in Years					
	12-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +
After school activities for youth (12-18 years)	48.2%	52.1%	54.6%	49.6%	47.8%	38.3%
Safety checks for older neighbours	49.7%	47.1%	53.5%	57.0%	57.0%	49.7%
Support services for families	26.8%	25.6%	30.6%	24.9%	21.6%	18.3%
Support networks for those living alone	30%	34.3%	40.6%	45.5%	48.7%	44.3%
Programs for increased communication between neighbours	37.4%	34.8%	33.2%	36.1%	34.7%	24.7%
Neighbourhood graffiti clean-ups	23.2%	25.5%	27.4%	30.2%	28.3%	21.5%
Foot/bike patrols by Police	44.4%	49.6%	53.6%	52.0%	53.7%	47.1%
Facility for Community development programs	16.2%	21.9%	23.1%	21.8%	19.6%	13.6%
School based crime prevention programs	42.9%	56.1%	60.4%	53.9%	50.5%	36.5%
Facilities such as lighting, paths, etc.	74.7%	63.3%	56.2%	53.2%	46.2%	35.2%
Other (specify)	9.4%	9.4%	8.4%	7.6%	6.9%	4.9%

Table 1 shows that 'crime prevention' needs differ across age categories. Respondents aged between 12-24 years most strongly supported lighting, paths etc, followed by safety checks for older neighbours (altruistic concern?), after school activities for youth, and foot/bike patrols by police. Respondents aged between 25-34 years most strongly supported lighting, paths etc, school based crime prevention programs, after school activities for youth, and foot/bike patrols by police. Respondents aged between 35-44 years most strongly supported school based crime prevention programs, lighting, paths etc, after school activities for youth, foot/bike patrols by police and safety checks for older neighbours. Respondents aged between 45-54 years most strongly supported safety checks for older neighbours, school based crime prevention programs, lighting, paths etc, and foot/bike patrols by police. Respondents aged between 55-64 years most strongly supported safety checks for older neighbours, foot/bike patrols by police, school based crime prevention programs, support networks for those living alone, and after school activities for youth. Respondents aged over 65 years most strongly supported safety checks for older neighbours, foot/bike patrols by police, and support networks for those living alone.

In the conclusion of the discussion of this recent research conducted by ACRO, several points bear reinforcement. The community has clearly indicated that they perceive a real and necessary role for the community in crime prevention. Approximately one in five survey respondents actively indicated (through the completion of participation forms) a desire for greater involvement in community based crime prevention. The community does have (and can articulate) crime prevention needs that go beyond the traditional criminal justice responses of more policing and more severe sentencing. Determining community need is important, however, perhaps more important is the recognition of the community as the major partner in crime prevention.

Community Participation in Crime Prevention: Translating the Community Voice into Action

To provide the community with a voice should be a primary function of any body that seeks to facilitate change in any community. Where that voice is weak and tenuous, then provide support for the strengthening of that voice. Where that voice is stuttering and unsure, then provide the information that will enable that voice to become fluent and forceful. Where that voice is strident but lacking the power of information to be most effective, then provide the knowledge that will assist that voice to ask for what will work. It is the author's belief that the transformation of Crime Prevention into 'core business of government' cannot occur until such time as agencies and individuals within the Crime Prevention sector accept that their 'core business' is providing support, information and knowledge to the community, so that their voice can demand such a transformation. The 'experts' within crime prevention have quality knowledge about what is effective in preventing crime. Certainly that knowledge is constantly evolving and there are key areas of weakness that need to be addressed, but enough has been done (crime prevention practice) at an international level to have a strong basis for decisive action to take place.

There is little question that Crime Prevention has grown as a sector of activity for both government and non-government bodies in recent decades to the degree that this area of activity is now becoming referred to as an 'industry'. The consideration of Crime Prevention as an industry may be problematic, given that most industry seeks to perpetuate activity indefinitely. After all this is the nature of business, to strengthen and expand. If a definition of Crime Prevention is accepted as 'any act that prevents crime' then it is an anathema to consider a body that seeks to prevent crime as a component of a 'Crime Prevention Industry', a schema that suggests perpetuation and growth. A more effective crime prevention sector might consider that its primary role is to further the expert knowledge available regarding crime prevention and to consistently and effectively pass that information on to the wider community, enabling the community to enter the debate on an equal footing. A well-educated community (in terms of effective crime prevention) is likely to be the most potent method of ensuring that crime prevention goes beyond traditional punitive responses to crime and effects worthwhile positive change in the community.

It is the authors' assertion that a primary function of crime prevention needs to become community education. When we discuss community education in this paper, we refer not only to community education regarding the issues but community education about what is effective in combating these issues. The media continue to be the major source of information about crime for the wider community. For too long we have asked the media to do our job for us and at times bewailed its failure to take completely on board our (crime prevention sector) arguments regarding the reporting of crime and the alternatives to traditional punitive responses to crime. There are some wonderful examples, both locally and internationally, of the media's willing involvement in positive crime prevention and community safety, but it is also true that a continuing difficulty is the culture of 'if it bleeds it leads'. Research has certainly supported this notion. Serious violent crime (while a small percentage within crime statistics) consistently dominates 'crime reporting' in a variety of media sources and has contributed to distorted images of crime.

(Federal Justice Office, 1992; John Howard Society of Alberta, 1995). It is not the intention here to take up the argument of the media's role in perceptions of crime and fear levels but merely to suggest that the 'experts' in the crime prevention sector could be more proactive in ensuring that community education regarding crime and crime prevention is effectively achieved. It is true that the media has an important role in information provision in contemporary society. It is also recognised that the media has contributed positively at times to the crime and crime prevention debate, but it is further suggested that the crime prevention sector has not been as active as it could have been in ensuring an effective level of 'good' information is provided to the community.

Conclusion

As stated in the preamble, this paper was not written to provide answers but rather to acknowledge some key issues (in ACRO's opinion) that need to be addressed if effective community participation in crime prevention is to be achieved. These are only some of the issues. They are issues, however, which the authors believe if not adequately addressed will delay the development of an effective response to crime, currently and in future decades. The focus of crime prevention on an international level is clearly centred on community partnerships and it is the authors' assertion that it is now a key responsibility of the crime prevention sector to ensure that the community does not become the subordinate partner (to governments and experts in the field) but becomes the dominant partner it deserves and needs to be, for crime prevention to be effectively achieved. The very real barriers to whole-of-government approaches to social issues as described in the paper also need to be planned for and strategies developed to address their occurrence. Partnership Model development needs to take into account and dynamically address the barriers to whole-of-government approaches and the crime prevention sector needs to listen to the community and effectively educate the community (without relying solely on media cooperation) to enable a whole-of-community approach to be truly evident and effective.

I would like to lend from President Nelson Mandela who wrote some 36 years ago: "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities". Should crime prevention as a concept be the tool by which we as a society (either within the developed world or in the developing world) crystallize the social dilemma that social and economic disparity reaps upon us all, then so be it. But should we use a moment in history to exploit an already deeply repressed citizenry without direct and substantial net benefits to that citizenry, then we deserve to be damned in history. The disenchantment by constituencies with governments that don't take their concerns seriously (which from this writer's experience and ACRO studies are rooted in realistic approaches – social justice approaches – will be measured at polling boxes. Citizens are not generally stupid; they are just treated as if they are. As suggested, there is no trick to mobilisation. But do not give undertakings unless you are serious about delivery and honourable in your intent.

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