TOWARDS A PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY POLICING FORUMS: THE CASE OF TLOKWE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

In any democratic dispensation, public participation is a widespread concern and highly topical to guide a discourse on openness, transparency and inclusiveness in governance. The South African Constitution (Section 215) and the South African Police Service Act 68 of 1995 (Section 19 to 21) stipulate that the notion of public participation in the South African Police Service (SAPS) are embedded in an approach focusing on community policing. This type of policing is generally more community centred and aim to encourage the active involvement of community members in the affairs of the police. The principle mechanism established for this purpose is community policing forums in all municipal areas in the country. The purpose of this article is to report on findings of an empirical investigation conducted in police stations within the Tlokwe Local Municipality. The aim of the survey was to assess the challenges for public participation within community policing forums. Based on these findings, a framework is proposed that outlines a public participation strategy for community policing forums in order to facilitate and improve the involvement of community members.

Keywords: *Community policing forums; public participation; community policing; participation strategy; democracy; the South African Police Service; Tlokwe Local Municipality*

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of a democratic dispensation in 1994, the Public Service in South Africa experienced dramatic systemic changes and transformation. As such, changes in the roles, responsibilities and operations of public service institutions were inevitable. The South African Police Service (SAPS) was no exception in this regard.

In response to democratic transformation, Section 201 of the interim Constitution of South Africa (1993) and Section 19 to 21 of the SAPS Act (68 of 1995) mandate SAPS to adopt community policing as an approach and system of policing within South Africa. The interim Constitution of South Africa (1993) further points out that, despite community involvement in policing matters, SAPS remains the key role-player to maintain safety and security in the country. Community policing can be regarded as a management strategy that promotes the 'joint responsibility' of citizens and the police for community safety, through working partnerships and interpersonal contact (Van Rooyen, 1994: 20; Peak & Glensor, 1996: 72).

To give practical impetus to the philosophy informing community policing it is necessary to create mechanisms for the police and the community to work together in a partnership that will help them solve complex social and crime-related problems. For this purpose, community policing forums (CPFs) have been established – based on the premise that effective policing is only achievable through adequate public participation. The SAPS Act 68 of 1995 (Section 7) in this regard proclaims that CPFs should be utilised as "vehicles" to facilitate public engagement. However, for this participation to be sustained, a clear and comprehensive strategy should be implemented to ensure that CPFs are able to adapt and cater for challenges it might encounter. In light of the above-mentioned context, the purpose of this article is threefold:

1. Conceptualise public participation and contextualise the role and responsibilities of community policing forums to engage civil society in policing matters.

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2. Report on findings of an empirical investigation conducted at Tlokwe Local Municipality to uncover challenges associated with public involvement.

3. Propose principles and elements of a public participation strategy for CPFs.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: A THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

Roberts (2003: 9) explains that the concept of public participation has a long lineage and social science practitioners generally believe that its principles originated in the Greek city-states ("polis") through the expressions in the Ecclesia of Athens. This Ecclesia comprised an assembly open to all free male citizens aged 18 and above. The purpose of this assembly was to debate, seek consensus and make democratic decisions on behalf of all community members. These Greek males were elected and mandated to screen socio-political agendas, which included rulings on the "constitutionality" of proposed measures. Such rulings implied that these ordinary men were actively participating in the governing and the ruling of Athens city state (cf. Camay & Gordon, 2004: 9).

The word public participation is a clear combination of two concepts ("public" and "participation"). According to Camay and Gordon (2004: 10), "public" refers to those individuals who live within a polity and are governed by a constitution and the police. Within this polity, individuals have to fulfil certain obligations in order to make the polity habitable. An example of such an obligation was to participate in the effective functioning of the polity. Birch (1993: 80), in turn, regards 'participation' as an activity of taking part with other members of society in certain social processes to achieve a common purpose. In the context of local government, Birch (1993: 80) defines public participation on the most fundamental level as participating in the process of local affairs. Tshabalala (2007: 10) regards participation in the local sphere as a way that authorities 'glean' opinions, perceptions, and information about local conditions, needs, desires and attitudes. Cloete (1993: 5) and Van der Waldt (2007: 25) furthermore view public participation as an indispensable prerequisite for local democracy seeing that it fosters an open, transparent and accountable process through which communities can exchange views and influence local decision-making.

Cloete (1993: 4), Van der Waldt (2010: 13) and Motale (2012: 14) reiterate that democracy is the rule of, by and for the people. Similarly, Van Hanen (1990: 8), Bekker (1996: 11) and Young (2000: 67) view democracy as a political system that provides regular constitutional opportunities to change current governing officials. Democracy also delivers a social mechanism that permits the largest possible section of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. In other words, democracy is a process where all citizens have an opportunity, and even a duty, to take part in public affairs. As such democracy will ensure that the interests of every individual in the society are expressed, irrespective of the person's class or social standing, (Roberts & Edwards, 1991: 82). In this context, public participation can be regarded as the instrument or vehicle of a democratic process through which people can play an active role in the development and co-ordination of services that will affect their lives (Van Hanen, 1990: 8; Bekker, 1996: 12).

Based on the conceptual clarification of democracy and public participation above, it is imperative to design certain strategies to facilitate public participation in the context of community policing. Such a participation strategy should be based on the mandate of a particular institution (i.e. a CPF).

FRAMING COMMUNITY POLICING

Radelet and Carter (1994: 53) assert that community policing is a First World invention. This method originated in the United States through the experimental work and interactive research beginning with the Neighbourhood Foot Patrol (NFP) experiment in Flint, Michigan; the Citizen-Oriented Police Experiment (COPE) in Baltimore, Maryland and the Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) in Newport News, Virginia. Although community policing is regarded as a First World additive, it is proposed as a new policing style in South Africa to address crime, fear of crime, neighbourhood deterioration and issues on the overall quality of

life. The acceptance of this policy is neither an easy task nor can it be based on a short-term approach.

Since the advent of community policing in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) in the late 1970s, the concept has been subjected to a multitude of definitions (Stevens & Yach, 1995: 23). A community can be regarded as a set of people who live in a region with fixed boundaries, unite in similarities in the way of life, execute their beliefs and practices in a common way, and have self-awareness (Cloete, 1993: 29-30). Nchona (1994: 23) adds to this definition by describing a community as a group of people who stays in a specific area or location and utilises common organisational machinery such as a municipality. The notion of 'policing', in turn, also has various perspectives and definitions. The word 'police' is derived from French meaning "good order" and "administration of civil society" (Waddington, 1993: 1). As a function, Mishra (2011: 2) regards policing simply as the "role performed by law enforcement agencies". The question arises whether the policing function is restricted merely to agencies that enforce the law. Morrison (2011: 144) answers by pointing out that the victims of crime (i.e. community members) need to convey relevant information to law enforcement agencies which would help them investigate cases and arrest the perpetrators. In this way, community members play an indirect, albeit equally important, role in law enforcement. This reciprocal relationship between the community and law enforcement agencies (i.e. SAPS) in the policing process led to the notion of community policing (Ncholo et al, 1994: 67).

Adams (1994: 894) regards community policing as "… a shift from a military inspired approach to fight crime, to one that relies on forming partnerships with constituents". Stipak (1994: 115) elaborates by describing such policing as a management strategy that promotes the "joint responsibility" of citizens and the police for community safety, through working partnerships and interpersonal contact. Van Rooyen (1994: 20) as well as Peak and Glensor (1996: 72) make a unique contribution to the debate by describing this type of policing as a "philosophy". This theoretic construct is based on a partnership between the community and the police to find creative solutions for contemporary community problems, crime and other related matters. It is important to note that SAPS policies generally adopted this approach by explaining community policing as a philosophy that guides police management style and operational strategies. The construct also emphasises the establishment of police-community partnerships and a problem-solving approach responsive to the needs of the community (Reyneke, 1997: 12).

Community policing as a certain philosophy or approach, requires adequate public input through consultation and participation mechanisms to operationalise SAPS's constitutional mandate. In this respect Reyneke (1997: 12) points to fact that this philosophy guides the management style and operational strategies of the SAPS by emphasising the building community-police partnerships and seeking of problem-solving approaches satisfying the needs of the community. Community policing is, therefore, based on the premise that the police and community must work in a co-ordinated and co-operative fashion. This will enable them to identify, prioritise and solve contemporary problems related to crime, fear of crime and physical order.

Based on the discussion above, Sebola (2014: 303-304) stresses that the following principles should be considered the cornerstone of community policing:

- Improve the delivery of policing-services to the community;

- Strengthen the relationship between the community and the police;

- Promote joint problem identification and problem solving;

- Ensure consultation and proper communication between the police and its clients; and

- Establish police accountability and transparency.

This brief orientation of the principles of community policing illustrates the fact that SAPS members need to work with the community and have a constitutional mandate to gather with the citizens and engage them in police activities. Furthermore, SAPS have the

responsibility and obligation to establish CPFs in order to co-ordinate partnerships with the community (cf. SAPS Act 68 of 1995, Section 7).

Community Policing Forums
SAPS have structured and institutionalised consultation between the community and itself by establishing community policing forums (CPFs) in terms of Section 7, Chapter 19(1)(2) of the SAPS Act 68 of 1995. According to Morrison (2001: 51) a CPF can be regarded as a group of people from the police and different sectors, including interest groups in the community that meets to discuss problems emerging from their communities. CPF members are representatives of the community who have been either elected democratically, or appointed. In terms of the SAPS Act, each police station must have a CPF in order to facilitate public participation. Chapter 19(1)(2) of the SAPS Act describes the following objectives of CPFs:

- Promote co-operation between the SAPS and the community to fulfil the community's needs regarding policing.

- Improve transparency in the SAPS and its accountability to the community.

- Focus on joint problem identification and problem-solving by both the SAPS and the community.

Morrison (2001: 51) further argues that CPFs can promote accountability of SAPS toward local communities by monitoring and evaluating how effective the policing services are rendered. Although CPFs do not have executive powers, they can advise, serve and act as monitoring mechanisms within the community.

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997, makes provision for *Batho-Pele* ("people first") principles. In line with these principles the functions of a CPF in relation to adequate public participation include:

- Partnership: CPFs should facilitate co-operative and consultative processes.

- Problem-solving: CPFs and SAPS have the responsibility of joint identification and analysis of the causes of crime and conflict, and of developing innovative measures to address these issues.

- Empowerment: CPFs should create ownership and nurture a culture of responsibility for crime prevention and develop adequate capacity to deal with cases of crime.

CPFs: The case of Tlokwe Local Municipality
A challenge has emerged since establishing CPFs in the Tlokwe Local Municipality (TLM). Public participation is characterised by a perceived lack of commitment and willingness on the part of the community members to participate in the CPFs' operations. This situation has caused the key stakeholder, the local community, to drift away. As a result, public participation in the CPFs has declined significantly leading to "selective companionship" (cf. Mishra, 2011: 2). Bekink (2006: 286-287) confirms this trend and proposes a way to improve public participation: organisations such as CPFs need to develop some crucial capacities and strategies to facilitate and involvement by community members. Such a development of capacities will require the CPFs to:

- Become more strategically oriented, in other words they should be open and flexible to the new and unforeseen demands;

- Maximise integrated capacity, both inside and outside the institution; and

- Become more community-oriented.

In compliance with the SAPS Act (68/1995), all three police stations in TLM have established CPFs in its area of jurisdiction, namely Ikageng, Potchefstroom and Buffelshoek.

A preliminary investigation revealed that all of these CPFs experience the following two main challenges:

- Inadequate public participation: Potchefstroom and Buffelshoek CPFs only have White membership, whilst the CPF in Ikageng only has African members. This is despite the fact that all three areas comprise diverse racial groups. As a result, public participation in the CPF has tended to become selective and unrepresentative.

- Youth representation: In terms of Statistics South Africa (2011), the youth are the majority grouping in the area. Their participation in public structures, such as CPFs, is thus vital. However, no CPF has indicated that they have any young (<18 years) members.

Based on the above-mentioned challenge it is argued that the police stations within TLM in the North-West province need to design a comprehensive participation strategy that encourages the entire community to partake actively in CPF programmes. Peak and Glensor (1996: 7) argue that without adequate public participation in the CPFs, the abiding principle of inclusiveness and involvement is unlikely to be achieved in the future. In this way CPFs' sustainability could be compromised severely in the future. Peak and Glensor (1996: 7) further assert that a strategy for public participation in community policing would operationalise the community-based philosophy of SAPS. A public participation strategy that is developed for CPFs as such, will need to recognise that policing is not something done *to* people but rather something that is done *with* people (Department of Police, 2013: 23). In this regard Priscoli (2004: 206) elaborates on public participation as "a means to adapt and to make democracy work better and to 'reinvent civic cultures'". Such "reinvention" implies that a strategy for public participation needs to be designed for CPFs to stimulate a civic culture of engagement. Jagwanath (1994: 164) as well as Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1994: 2) confirm that community policing can be regarded as a strategy that promotes a new partnership between the people and the police.

Strategy clarified

Pettinger (2009: 9) points out that no organisation can exist in isolation. As a result, organisations should adjust proactively to environmental dynamics, stay vibrant, do things differently, and work more efficient. This implies that organisations need to develop a specific strategy to keep abreast of trends and events in the environment. Van der Waldt and Knipe (1998: 40) and Schutte (2003: 11) define a strategy as a process in which an organisation makes use of certain policies, procedures and resources in order to operationalise its objectives. Similarly, Baker (2007: 17) and Hunger and Wheelen (2014: 17) describe a strategy as a comprehensive plan outlining how the organisation will achieve its mission and objectives.

According to Mills et al. (2002: 7-20) and Pettinger (2009: 10-14), an effective strategy should clarify the details concerning purpose, priorities, conduct and behaviour by determining how the organisation will conduct itself when pursuing its goals. Strategy in essence is about having processes in place to make organisations more efficient, effective and productive in achieving its goals (Goldman & Nieuwenhuizen, 2006: 21). Similarly, organisations such as CPFs need a strategy that helps them adhere to their main mandate, namely adequate public participation. In developing such a strategy, CPFs should draw on aspects of the environment within which they function.

Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux (1994: 25), Van der Waldt and Knipe (2002: 15-26) as well as Goldman and Nieuwenhuizen (2006: 29-37) explain that when formulating strategy, an organisation needs to incorporate the following key elements and steps:

- audit: diagnosis or assessment of the current status of the organisation, typically by means of SWOT-analysis;

- needs assessment: determining the relevant organisational and stakeholders' needs;

- values: the organisation's belief and basis for action;

- vision: the 'ideal' future state of the organisation;

- mission: the organisation's purpose and the execution;

- general goals: broad performance targets essential to achieve the organisation's mission;

- strategic alternatives: alternative courses of action for reaching the general goals;

- operating alternatives: optional courses to reach the respective general goals;

- operating objectives: specific and concrete targets (operations and procedures) to execute the selected strategies for each goal;

- implementation: execution of the strategy by means of an operational plan; and

- monitoring: continuous evaluation to measure progress against planned performance and actual results.

Taking these elements into consideration, CPFs should design its public participation strategy. The strategy should provide for the following aspects: audits and assessments of community needs, the legitimacy of the strategy, and obtaining stakeholder buy-in, the reciprocal exchange of information, an implementation plan, and monitoring mechanisms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
In view of the contextual background above, the empirical investigation followed a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were used as instruments to collect data. The interviews had the following aims:

- Obtain the opinions and perceptions of the relevant stakeholders such as SAPS, CPFs, and community members, respectively, on the perceived challenges associated with public participation in CPFs in TLM.

- Ascertain relevant stakeholders' opinions and perceptions of a suitable strategy for public participation in CPFs within TLM.

- Based on the identified shortcomings, propose a framework to provide a strategy for CPFs' public participation.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants from SAPS, CPF members, and ordinary community members in the Tlokwe Local Municipality (TLM), as case study. As stated, TLM consists of three police stations, namely Ikageng, Potchefstroom and Buffelshoek. The sampled participants from these three stations (i.e. target population) comprised the following:

- the station commanders directly responsible for effective management of CPFs in TLM (unit of analysis 1);

- community police officials serving as a link between the police and the community (unit of analysis 2);

- ordinary police officials with different ranks ranging from Constable (lowest) to Captains (highest) (unit of analysis 3);

- executive members of the CPFs (unit of analysis 4); and

- ordinary community members not directly involved in CPF activities (unit of analysis 5).

A representative sample of the target population in all three police stations was selected by means of sampling fraction. Champion (1993: 113) explains a sampling fraction as 1/10 of the sample size (i.e. *n*). However, all three station commanders and community police officials were interviewed, which represent 100% of the target population. A total sample of 55 participants from the above-mentioned variations of the population was selected. The response rate achieved for the interviews was 87%. Data analysis was done by

means of the *Tesch* eight-step process for qualitative analysis. The content of the interview schedule was divided into four main sections:

- Section A: Dealt with station commanders of the three respective police stations as the head of the management within TLM. The section posed 13 questions, of which three focused on biographical profile for purposes of analysis.

- Section B: Contained 14 questions and the target group comprised members of the current CPF structures.

- Section C: Focused on ordinary police officials who were not actually part of the management as well as those police members whose primary duties involved community policing. Fourteen questions were formulated for this section.

- Section D: Targeted ordinary members of the community; 10 questions were formulated dealing with this topic.

The biographical profile of station commanders indicated that their average length of service in the SAPS was 25,63 years. The average length of service in their position as station commander turned out to be 3,5 years. These statistics reflect that the participants have more than adequate experience in the field of community policing and issues of community participation in the affairs of policing, to make a meaningful contribution to this study. The station commanders, furthermore, on average lived in the area for 27 years. They thus have extensive knowledge about community policing and the functioning of CPFs in the area.

CPF members' biographical profile revealed that their average length of staying in TLM was 26 years. Participants' age ranged between 20 years and 70 years with an average of 46,2 years. The level of education was found to be a school leaving certificate. As such, these participants possessed adequate knowledge about CPFs and functioning as such in their areas of jurisdiction.

From the biographical profile of CPO's and junior police officials, it became clear that the average period participants served as members of SAPS was 20,5 years. The average stay of a participant in TLM was 19,6 years. Different categories of police officials participated in the study, carrying the ranks of Captain, Warrant Officers, Sergeants and Constables. As such, these participants had sufficient knowledge about community policing and CPF matters in their respective categories.

Regarding community members (unit of analysis 5), the interview schedule provided for ten open-ended questions. Of these questions, four determined the biographical details of participants whilst the other six focused on the perceived challenges that public participation in CPFs pose, as seen from ordinary community members' point of view. The purpose of interviewing this group of participants was to determine possible contradictions between their perceptions and those of the other three groups. In terms of their biographical profile, the average term for these participants residing in TLM was 19,85 years. Both males (69%) and females (31%) participated in the study with the age average of 46 years. Participants of this group had matric and post-matric qualifications. As such, this group generally had sufficient knowledge for a meaningful contributing to the study.

Adhering to ethical considerations in research as outlined by Babbie and Mouton (2001: 57) and Paten (2004: 25), the researchers addressed the following aspects:

- *Informed consent:* During the sampling process, participants have been informed of their voluntary participation and detailed clarity of the project has been provided;
- *Anonymity assured:* The participants' responses have been kept confidential throughout the research and storage of the data.

- *Potential harm to respondents:* In this survey, participants have not been exposed to harmful situations or circumstances where they could have been compromised.

- *Permission for the research:* Written permission was obtained from those in authority (SAPS).

- *Requirements followed:* The guidelines for such surveys, as outlined in Chapter 3 of the SAPS National Instruction 1/2006, have been complied with.

Throughout the research process, important decisions on the design have been documented diligently and the North-West University's Ethical Clearance procedures have been followed meticulously.

An interview schedule was piloted (pre-tested) and used during semi-structured interviews. These interviews covered four main dimensions:

- general challenges associated with public participation in the respective CPFs;

- initiatives of public participation impacting negatively on policing in the area;

- the prevalence of a conducive and feasible environment to facilitate public participation; and

- the availability and content of a comprehensive and documented strategy for public participation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
Due to the limited scope of this article, only the most prominent results obtained from the empirical investigation are highlighted briefly below.

General challenges for public participation in the CPFs
Participants underlined the significant challenges associated with public participation in CPFs of TLM. The most prominent challenges highlighted per participation group are outlined below.

Station commanders:
- lack of understanding of what community policing entails;
- re-orientation of police culture, ethos and level of openness;
- citizens having a negative perception of the police; and
- junior police members not committed fully to the philosophy of community policing.

CPF members:
- poor service delivered by the police;
- jack of trust for and from the police;
- inadequate resources; and
- cultural, social and economic conditions.

CPOs and junior police officials:
- lack of trust from the community towards the police;
- apathy and a disinterest on the part of the public to participate;
- mala fides of those who participate, to satisfy either personal or political aspirations;
- lack of financial as well as physical resources for the CPF;
- the need to remunerate CPF members in order to encourage participation; and
- citizens lacking knowledge of what community policing entails.

Ordinary community members:
- unemployment (i.e. lack of economic means hampers people's ability to participate);
- insufficient empowerment of the community;
- poor service delivery by the police for the public;
- members associated with the CPF victimised by other members of the community;
- people participating in CPF structures for personal (i.e. political) gain and self-interests; and
- majority of the community disinterested in government activities in general.

The main finding standing out from these inputs is a significant communication and participation gap between the police and the community. As a result, the functioning of the

CPFs is compromised severely and neither the community, nor the police benefit from the possible advantages of public participation.

Public participation initiatives impacting negatively on policing
When asked about possible negative effects, participants differed according to stratus (i.e. unit of analysis). The police on the one hand, believe that certain initiatives of public participation have a negative effect on the work of the police, whilst community and CPF members believe the opposite. Some of the negative effects that police members pointed out was the tendency that community members generally "overstep their mandates" when they become involved in the CPFs. These members want to control the police for their own personal gain, and they often leak sensitive police-related information to outsiders. An interesting response from the police was that community members tend to overload a particular police official with work due to their confidence and trust in this individual. In contrast to these views, community members and CPF executives did not perceive real negative effects seeing that they considered themselves the "eyes and ears" of the police.

The responses of the participants correlate to the main challenges of public participation in the CPFs as highlighted above. As a result, SAPS as the custodian of safety and security in TLM, has not been able to bridge the divide between themselves and the community. Furthermore, the police generally have not been able to live up to the philosophy underlying community policing. These challenges and shortcomings could be attributed to a general lack of understanding regarding community policing and the potential advantages that public participation holds.

Need for an environment conducive to public participation
Questions about the suitability of the environment were included in the interview schedule. This was done to determine possible correlations between the challenges of public participation and the prevalent climate's negative impact on police work. The aim then was to establish whether the negative impact could be attributed to the absence of a clear strategy for public participation within CPFs of TLM. Based on the responses, it is evident that the perceived absence of such a strategy significantly could be linked to the majority of challenges identified above.

All the participants mentioned encouraging signs that a climate and environment conducive to participation are in in process. The main reason for such a response was a general opinion that there are adequate legislation and regulations to guide and facilitate this process. Participants specifically alluded to the National Development Plan (Vision 2030) and the SAPS Act in this regard. Furthermore, even though they pointed out significant challenges regarding public participation in the CPFs, participants still believe that SAPS do support community members and generally encourage community engagement.

Availability of a comprehensive and documented strategy
The majority of the participants (98%) confirmed the absence of a comprehensive and documented public participation strategy for the CPFs in TLM. However, they indicated that each police station uses its own initiatives to foster public participation within their respective communities. This is done under the guidance of police management and according to statutory guidelines. The remaining 2% of the participants stated that although they were not sure whether such a strategy exists, they firmly believe that it was a necessity.

In summary, the empirical investigation verified the level of congruence and discrepancies between the theoretical orientation (i.e. democratic principles, public participation, statutory requirements, and the mandate of CPFs) on the one hand, and the status of CPFs in TLM on the other. The study did indeed reveal significant disparities between theoretical and statutory best practice and actual practice in the context of the case study. From the responses it is clear that a public participation strategy for the CPFs should be designed to deal with the challenges identified within TLM. Such a strategy could ensure that the CPF adapt to changing circumstances and able to cater for possible further challenges. Furthermore, such a strategy will enable both the police and the community to

form a sustainable partnership, reduce the communication and trust gaps between them, and ultimately benefit society by helping to reduce crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS: ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A CPF'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

Based on a robust literature survey, the theoretical exposition, and the empirical investigation, this section makes recommendations about the inclusion of core elements in a public participation strategy for CPFs.

Recommendation 1: Design of a public participation strategy

The first recommendation is that the elements and steps for a strategy design, as highlighted above, should be included and followed systematically. In this regard Van der Waldt and Knipe (2002: 4), for example, explain that a strategy is a suitable plan or method to achieve the aims of an organisation (i.e. CPF), regardless of the changes that it might face. In other words, a strategy is a process whereby certain policies, strategies and resources are used to achieve the main objectives of the institution, irrespective of the circumstances.

The first step is for the CPF to get clarity on its mandate to inform key stakeholders (SAPS, CPF members, community members, media, TLM, etc.) of the CPF's goals and to highlight its benefits. Since the core mandate of the CPF is to co-operate with the police, it is imperative that CPF members be knowledgeable about applicable authorised actions in this regard. This will ensure that CPF members do not overstep certain boundaries and prevent them from interfering with police work. Furthermore, as CPF members gain insight into the significance of their contributions, they may be resourceful in suggesting ways to project a more positive policing image. Such an action will help eliminate the negative perceptions towards the police and will enlighten citizens about the benefits of community policing.

Another benefit of a clear mandate may be that it will make police officials more aware of relevant legislation, regulations and guidelines determining their co-operation with ordinary citizens. The SAPS Act 68 of 1995 and the NDP can be of great assistance in this regard. In this way, service delivery (i.e. policing) can improve, which results in a more positive image of SAPS (cf. Bryson 1995: 42).

A further step towards designing a participation strategy is for the CPF to conduct a thorough environmental scanning. Environmental scanning refers to a process where a comprehensive assessment or audit is made of the CPF's current status in general and its position on public participation in particular. CPFs within TLM need to identify their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and solve strategic issues of public participation.

During environmental scanning, both internal and external analyses should be conducted. The internal analysis should focus on assessing internal CPF processes and practices such as its structures, management style, resources, strengths, and weaknesses. External scanning should focus the analysis on the political, technological, economic, social, and legal environments. These contexts need to be analysed continually to identify potential threats and opportunities. This assessment phase could ensure that SAPS and CPF members understand the needs, aspirations and general profile of the community. This may also help stakeholders understand the underlying reasons why people seem unwilling to participate in CPF activities.

The fourth step in the proposed framework is the design of a vision and mission statement. The particular CPFs' overall strategic direction (i.e. desired end state) and the socio-political reason for the CPFs existence should be clarified. It is important that the CPFs take their unique contexts into consideration. Since circumstances differ in the three police stations, a 'one-size-fits-all approach' is inappropriate. The mission statement should reflect on manners in which the CPFs intend to encourage and sustain public participation and what their core responsibilities are in this regard. Input for the formulation of the vision and mission statements should be obtained from the community and other stakeholders to facilitate commitment and buy-in in the process (cf. Ehlerz & Lazenby, 2004: 120).

The design of the strategic plan should follow the vision and mission statements. In the formulation phase, the 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why' and 'how' dimensions may serve as guidelines. Answers to these questions will clarify which elements should be included in the strategy for public participation. This process of strategy formulation could help the CPFs to draw up plans that will address challenges such as citizens' general lack of interest to participate, as well as the issue of inadequate resources.

After formulating the strategy for public participation, it needs to be implemented. Strategy implementation is a process whereby strategic plans are turned into a series of actions or operational plans. This is to ensure that the strategy is executed in such a way that its stated objectives are achieved. A critical element in the implementation process is continuous monitoring, control and evaluation of the strategy. The purpose of such interventions is to verify whether the objectives and intended outcomes are realised. The participation strategy for the CPFs should thus provide for regular inspections, reporting arrangements, and other control mechanisms to assess whether the strategy is implemented successfully. If these interventions indicate that the strategy does not yield the desired results, the strategy should be amended or abandoned.

Recommendation 2: Specific operational considerations
Based on the empirical investigation, the following recommendations are made as operational considerations:

i.   *Training and development*:
     From the responses of the station commanders and other police officials it became clear that not all members fully supported community policing. As such, police officials need to be re-trained in community policing to help them understand that this strategy implies both a philosophy and an operational policy of the SAPS. Moreover, community policing should be emphasised in orientation programmes of new recruits. CPF members should also be inducted and trained continuously to ensure meaningful participation. On-going training of CPF members could also empower more citizens in the art and practices of community policing.

ii. *Leadership focus*:
     Station commanders and other senior police officials are the custodians of effective community policing. Their ability to lead and guide this process effectively is paramount. Therefore, it is imperative that these commanders ensure that all stakeholders are guided and influenced positively to understand and accept community policing as a philosophy and a policing strategy of SAPS.

iii. *Physical and financial resourcing*:
     The findings revealed that members of the police and citizens believe that insufficient physical resources and financial remuneration for CPF members decreased levels of participation. As such it is recommended that CPF members should be offered some form or remuneration or stipend, especially to assist with transport costs to meetings, stationary and telephone costs. Furthermore, CPF as a structure should be equipped and resourced adequately so that police members do not perceive the functioning of the CPFs as a burden.

Recommendation 3: Probing public participation in CPFs
As indicated previously, the findings of this research are based on a public participation strategy for CPFs within the three selected police stations in TLM. Thus there is a need for further empirical investigations on CPFs' successes and failures regarding public participation in other municipalities. It stands to reason that circumstances in other local, district and metropolitan municipalities may differ. The challenges associated with public participation may thus be unique and depend on the following variables: police areas (called "clusters"), the nature of the relationship between the community and the police, the demographic and crime-related matters, as well as the availability of resources. Comparative analyses targeting these areas could reveal certain challenges, but also point out possible best

practices. This may also outline further steps to help improve public participation within CPFs.

The sampling strategy employed in this investigation did limit the results to an extent, since most of the CPF members are volunteers and were not readily available. The method of purposive sampling selected for this study could not ensure that the sample would offer adequate representatives with the same characteristics of the larger population under investigation. In this regard, the data collected from the sample might have influenced the reliability and validity of the research investigation. A further limitation, which additional surveys should address, is the relatively low literacy levels of some of the community members, including those partaking in the CPF. Although the interview schedule was piloted and refined, the input from some participants clearly reflect that they do not fully comprehend the significance of public participation, community policing, and the general requirements of successful crime prevention in their community.

CONCLUSION

As a basic tenet of democracy and as a primary principle of community policing, public participation is crucial for a successful operation. South Africa has established a comprehensive statutory and regulatory framework to guide civil society's participation in local government affairs, and especially the actions taken by SAPS to combat crime. The Constitution of South Africa, (1996), the SAPS Act 68 of 1995, and the National Development Plan: Vision 2030 in particular, provide for the need to facilitate closer co-operation and partnerships between the police and the community.

To give practical impetus to the philosophy underlying community policing it is necessary to create mechanisms in which police and the community can co-operate in a partnership to help solve complex social and crime-related problems. For this purpose, community policing forums (CPFs) have been established, based on the premise that public participation is essential for effective policing. To realise the statutory obligations of SAPS and to operationalise the mandate of CPFs, the development of a strategy for public participation could make a significant difference. Furthermore, such a strategy could empower both the community and the police.

This article conceptualised public participation and contextualised the role and responsibilities of CPFs to engage civil society in policing matters. The article also made a significant contribution by reporting on findings of an empirical investigation conducted at Tlokwe Local Municipality. This helped to uncover challenges for public engagement, and identified principles and elements to include in a public participation strategy for CPFs.

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, once said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is a progress and working together is a success" (Ford & Crowther, 1922: 72). In this regard, the formulation of a public participation strategy for CPFs should ensure that the community and the police harmonise and sustain their relationship. In this way the important stakeholders on local government level can co-operate to create a safer and more secure South Africa.

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