



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION REPORT ON CRIME STATISTICS

**held at the
Institute for Security Studies Seminar Room, Pretoria on 24 August 2007**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mission of the OSF-SA

The OSF-SA is committed to promoting the values, institutions and practices of an open, non-racial and non-sexist, democratic civil society. It will work for a vigorous and autonomous civil society in which the rule of law and divergent opinions are respected. Within the context of these objectives, the Criminal Justice Initiative (CJI), a programme at the OSF-SA, supports innovative projects relating to the transformation and accountability of the criminal justice system (CJS).

1.2 Rationale for the Roundtable Discussion

Crime statistics provide important information at a number of levels. At a policy level they provide a measure against which to assess criminal justice strategies. On an operational level they provide critical information for decision making on the resourcing of the criminal justice system. They also provide civil society with a measure to track performance and hold the responsible departments accountable.

Because of their political utility to so many role players they are hotly contested. The release of the 2006/07 crime statistics has, as in past years generated significant debate. In addition to the concerns around the crime increases and ongoing lobby for the release of the statistics on a more regular basis, questions are increasingly being asked about the how the statistics are compiled, analysed and reported upon.

The strategy of the CJI in this sector is to enhance accountability in the institutions of the criminal justice system in South Africa by building on the transformation and structural reforms underway since the 1994 transition. Credible information about crime, in the public domain, is essential to improved accountability and oversight. Without access to credible and reliable data about crime levels, it is impossible - either at the national or the neighbourhood level - to assess whether policy-makers and practitioners are in fact responding appropriately to crime problems.

The CJI roundtable allowed experts and practitioners the opportunity to debate the compilation, analysis and reporting on crime statistics of the country's crime statistics.

1.3 Welcome and Introductions

Sean Tait, Director of the Criminal Justice Initiative, a programme at the OSF-SA welcomed all participants, provided some background information and outlined the objectives of the roundtable. He noted that Gillian Gifford of the Star and Jonny Steinberg an author and researcher in the field had been billed to speak but were unfortunately unavailable.

1.4 Acknowledgements

The OSF-SA would like to thank the participants, presenters for their contributions and the ISS for the use of their facilities.

1.5 Participants

1	Lisa Vetten	Tshwaranang
2	Bilkis Omar	ISS
3	Pieter Du Rand	DOJCD
4	Michael Ndlovane	DOJCD
5	Boyane Tshehla	ISS
6	Johan Burger	ISS
7	Takadzani Rambuda	CJCP
8	Kerwin Lebone	SAIRR
9	Charl De Beer	Provincial Legislature Northern Cape
10	Pritima Osman	OIJ
11	Louise Ehlers	OSF-SA
12	Deon Oosthuizen	DoCS Western Cape
13	Michael O'Donovan	HL Analytics
14	Cyril Adonis	ICD
15	Bhekithemba Simelane	DoCS Western Cape
16	Ndrabi Mahkangu	ICD
17	Amanda Dissel	CSVR
18	Chris De Kock	CIAC SAPS
19	Sean Tait	OSF-SA

2. PRESENTATIONS:

2.1 The Operational and Strategic Use of Crime Statistics - Dr Chris De Kock, head of the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) of the South African Police Service (SAPS),

Dr De Kock made a presentation on the operational and strategic use of crime statistics in crime combating from the perspective of the Department of Safety and Security.

2.1.1 Utility at Station Level

The system utilised by CIAC in generating the crime statistics, the case analysis system (CAS), is centralised, but requires cases to be registered at local level.

Utility at station level was a key recommendation by the 1998 Orkin Commission of Enquiry (comprised of local and international experts from both government and civil society) into crime statistics¹The elements of such improved utility include a more user friendly interface as well as the introduction of a geographical information system (GIS) facility that allows particular crimes to be mapped to geographic locations.

In meeting these requirements, the system was designed to generate reports for each station against crime categories and would include geographical location, victim details and a description of the crime.

The reports generated by the system are intended to help local stations in their day to day operational and crime prevention planning. Particularly they:

- Assist with planning of daily operation
- Provide information for social crime prevention purposes
- Promote oversight and accountability
- Allow for displacements to be identified and tracked
- Support intelligence and detective functions

2.1.2 Policy and Resourcing Utility

At a second level the system has a resourcing and policy utility. The information is fed into the CIAC where it is compiled and analysed for various purposes ranging from organisational planning to governmental policy making.

2.1.3 Moratorium on Crime Statistics

From July 2000 to May 2001, a moratorium was placed on crime statistics while certain distortions were rectified, crime categories defined and definition manuals provided to stations and the safe guards to maintain the data integrity of the system improved.

2.1.4 Compilation of Statistics and Challenges

Daily statistics from the CAS system are 'frozen' on the 28th of each month to constitute the crime figure for that month. The integrity of the statistics is maintained both at local station level where they are tracked and at CIAC level where they are routinely checked and anomalies identified and addressed. Overall a 5% margin of error is allowed which is well within international standards which allows anything between 5 - 10%.

Among the challenges now is how to extract optimum utility from the information generated, the ability and availability of analysts particularly at local police stations and the defining crime categories.

2.1.5 Release of Crime Statistics

In conclusion De Kock he said that the crime statistics are primarily a SAPS tool. The decision to make statistics available is a political decision and at various times in

¹ The Orkin Commission was instated to review the SAPS system of collecting crime statistics. Its results were never made public

South African history these were made available at monthly, quarterly, bi annually and on an annual basis as is currently the case.

2.2 Challenges with Crime Statistics - Boyane Tshehla head of the Crime and Justice Programme at the Institute for Security Studies,

Mr Tshehla addressed some of the general shortcomings of crime statistics. While he was convinced of the integrity of the system to record what it was designed to do, the fact of the matter is that people remain suspicious of crime statistics. This is related in his opinion to five issues.

2.2.1 Under Reporting

Firstly, Tshehla noted that many crimes go unreported and that this can mislead both public and law enforcement agencies in terms of understanding the prevalence of certain crimes. According to some analysts under reporting could be as much as 50% if taken as an average between murder which has a very high rate of reporting and ordinary robbery which often had a very low rate of reporting.

In this regard it is important to supplement crime statistics with data from victim surveys. The Ministry for Safety and Security should give serious consideration to undertaking regular victim surveys and not be reliant on civil society organisations who depend on donor funding to undertake this task.

2.2.2 Perverse Incentives

Secondly crime statistics are vulnerable to manipulation. The current evaluation system of the SAPS which uses crime rates as an indicator may create perverse incentives and encourage non-reporting.

2.2.3 Release of Crime Statistics

Thirdly he questioned the usefulness of crime statistics based on their delayed release. In his opinion a regular monthly release of statistics could be far more beneficial for crime fighting and prevention than an annual release.

2.2.4 Offending in South Africa

Further, the fact that crime statistics record untested allegations that a crime occurred rather than crimes for which a conviction has been achieved, means that they do not present an accurate picture of offending in South Africa.

2.2.5 Capacity

Finally the capacity, training and integrity of police officers who record and analyse the information plays a significant role in the quality of information and analysis produced.

3. Discussion

3.1 Utility of the current crime statistics for measuring criminal justice performance

Several participants questioned the utility of the current crime statistics in being able to measure the performance of not only the police but the criminal justice system in addressing crime in South Africa. Information from the courts and correctional services is required to complete the picture. However the difficulty in comparing statistics across departments was raised. For example conviction records from the Department of Justice reflect the case heard and not the separate counts which may be present in one case and are the basis for calculating crime statistics.

Department of Justice representatives present at the meeting outlined developments within the Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster to improve statistics across the Criminal Justice System. One such initiative is the development of an integrated justice system. In addition, the Department of Justice is undertaking its own investigation into the production of statistics for the Department. Unfortunately until the system has been established much inter departmental exchange of information will continue to be influenced by human and relational issues.

Representatives from the Independent Complaints Directorate related how improved relationships between them and SAPS has facilitated a process where ICD statistics could be reconciled with SAPS statistics before being finalised

There was general consensus that better integration of statistics across the system is desirable.

3.2 Crime categories

There is a great deal of confusion regarding the definition and understanding of crime categories. There are enormous discrepancies in terms of what is understood under particular crime definitions, the relationship between SAPS definitions and the schedule of crime defined in the Criminal Procedure Act.

It was also noted that crime statistics with the exception of murder included actual and attempted crimes.

Some crimes such as Domestic Violence are not captured in the current statistics. A request was made to SAPS to give consideration to making this data available.

3.3 Capacity of Researchers and Analysts

Capacity limitations were cited as an impediment to making full use of the statistics generated. De Kock explained that queries on the crime statistics are often time consuming to answer and may require that the CIAC officers programme a run through the entire data base to generate responses. Further that most capacity at the CIAC is utilised in the production of the statistics rather than subsequent analysis and research. This problem is compounded at station level. It was noted that most stations are now on the CAS system with those which still do not have access continuing on a manual system. The meeting discussed collaboration between SAPS and civil society partners to support research efforts as a way of addressing capacity limitations.

3.4 Access to Crime Statistics

It was noted that the primary utility of the crime statistics was to identify incidents of crime, plan interventions and to monitor performance. In each area access to the data is vital and it was the view of most participants that the release of crime statistics needs re thinking. The meeting took note of the logistical difficulties involved in releasing statistics against the operational utility of the data. It was noted that the decision is a political one over which the SAPS themselves have little control.

3.5 Reporting on Crime Statistics

The meeting noted its disappointment that the media was not present. Often the controversy regarding in crime statistics is generated by how it is reported by the media to the general public.

3.6 Error and Manipulation

It was noted that while a margin of error was provided for, the SAPS viewed any deliberate manipulation in serious light. If such incidents are uncovered the person or persons concerned could be charged with fraud or defeating the ends of justice. It was however noted that the perverse incentive not to record crime so as to improve station ratings does exist and could be a strong motivator not to record crimes. Addressing this issue requires consideration.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion it was noted that the opportunity for users of crime statistics to come together and discuss areas of common concern was useful and welcomed. The importance of criminal justice system wide information was reiterated and participants indicated their willingness to interact with the Department of Justice in the design and development of their information system. Issues of capacity in research and analysis were acknowledged along with the potential that exists for civil society and criminal justice agencies to improve capacity through greater cooperation.

5. Appendix

5.1 Input by Jonny Steinberg²

The release of crime statistics ought to be rethought; one of the purposes ought to be to empower citizens to 1) understand better the distribution of crime across the space and time of their own lives, and thus, hopefully, be freed from persistent and amorphous fear, 2) take action to reduce crime and 3) put pressure on non-criminal justice state agencies to reduce crime.

Every police station in South Africa generates a simple collection of up-to-date crime-pattern maps and should make them publicly available. A website could be launched where anyone can download any crime map he or she wants. Printouts of maps should be placed on the walls of the local supermarket, published in knock-

² Jonny Steinberg was not able to be at the meeting but his input has been included for information purposes.

and-drops, displayed at community centres, and shared with residents associations and businesses.

This measure will make communities feel safer, make policing easier, and reduce crime for three reasons:

- The most destructive characteristic of crime is fear. The greater part of that fear arises from the fact that crime is an amorphous presence. In reality, crime is always highly concentrated; it clusters around specific places, times and people. Seeing the distribution of crime is empowering: fear is now channelled into particular moments, particular events, particular tasks; you begin to feel a greater sense of ownership of the spaces in which you live your life.
- When business and residents associations get useful information about crime patterns they quickly discover that the solutions to particular problems often have little to do with policing.
- When shared with the public, crime maps form the basis for a systematic and transparent way to describe crime. This makes for the formulation of far better crime policy. Too often, police are forced to shape policy on the back foot, in response to media coverage of a sensational crime of the moment. If we have a common and stable understanding of crime patterns, police are under less pressure to respond irrationally to public sentiment. They can use shared, publicly available information to defend keeping their heads down and maintaining consistent policy.