

MEDIA RELEASE

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NPA study supports new partnership method to prevent crime

The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) today launched a new partnership-building activity aimed at preventing crime problems. This development is a culmination of the announcement of the introduction of the concept of community prosecutions early in 2007. The objective of this initiative is to identify and build strategic partnerships with other branches of government, the community and civil society to jointly address the underlying causes of public insecurity, and therefore alleviate pressure on the courts.

The evaluation results revealed that community prosecutions contributed to reducing crime problems in eight out of the nine provincial sites during piloting between May 2007 and October 2008. The detailed data is most convincing for national implementation because many improvements could be recorded in the high crime sectors of some of the worst crime hotspots in the country.

In urban areas where community irritants such as the sale of drugs, unregulated taverns and other illegal establishments were identified to be the underlying problems to crime, these were successfully addressed by community partnership structures jointly focusing on improving the quality of life of the community members.

Crime prevention activities at the eight sites varied in accordance with already existing partnerships to solve local problems. . The SAPS proved to be one of the key partners. The key success factor in the work of the community prosecutors was determined by the extent to which they either drove these partnerships or participated on crime prevention bodies. This led to a large variety of activities such as selective prosecutions and fast-tracking cases; educating the public about the law, in order to improve reporting levels, service delivery or co-operation levels.

Of the nine pilot sites across the country, the following was collectively identified

- Seven target sites experienced a *visible* reduction in crime problems based on before and after site observations by the evaluator that included photographs and a baseline study.
- Upwards of 90% of the partners participating in research activities at eight pilot sites associated the project with improved safety programmes in round-tables discussions, interviews and on questionnaires.
- Statistics for targeted crime problems dropped in four sites—Siyahlala, Mamelodi, Ngangelizwe, and Windsor-- between the time of the May 2006 baseline study and the evaluation and this was attributed by informants (in focus group discussions, questionnaires and interviews) to CMP-led partnership activities.
- Questionnaires and testimony in round-table discussions with partners and interviews with community members indicated much greater feelings of safety owing to the project at six of eight sites (Siyahlala, Mdantsane, Bohlokong, Windsor, Point, Kudumane). This included two that were not statistically safer and left out two that were safer based on statistics alone (feelings do not necessarily match statistics).
- Only one site showed no improvements (Phuthanang in Galeshewe outside Kimberley) but this owed to changes in personnel that delayed piloting activities.

While evidence of general improvements in safety owing to various partnership activities was significant enough for the evaluator to recommend this model for crime prevention, this also came with certain provisos:

- The evaluator cautioned that owing to the small size of some pilot sites, crime was sometimes displaced from one sector to the next (e.g., drug related activities in Windsor)

- Success is dependent on the outcomes of negotiations between SAPS and the NPA about how to work together and enlist other partners
- Owing to both problems of displacement and since each crime type can have a different distribution across policing sectors the evaluator recommended a strategic focus on specific crime problems according to their distribution across one or more policing areas
- Monitoring and evaluation needs to continue since a minimum of six years was the requirement elsewhere in the world to direct activities toward maximum impact.

The independent evaluator recommended that the targeted areas should be SAPS priority zones, which can include more than one station. This would enhance the working partnerships between the NPA and SAPS, at local and national levels to address nationally-defined priority areas. According to the findings, the best office location for these NPA specialists would be next to a community court at a police station - to distinguish the role, fast-track cases and to allow the prosecutor to make rapid progress owing to the accessibility of critical partners.

Adv Shamila Batohi, Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) for KZN and community prosecutions project owner said, "One of the NPA's delivery objectives outlined in Strategy 2020 is to contribute to crime prevention and community justice. The successes from the study are encouraging enough for us to continue exploring the concept and finding ways to develop the capacity of community prosecutors in the NPA, without losing focus on the core mandate of traditional prosecution.

The South African society is under siege because of massive crime, and therefore more creative ways of using community partnerships in dealing with the problem cannot be ignored. The NPA is in the process of carefully considering the findings of the evaluation and will embark on a process to plan the implementation of the concept in larger areas, taking into account the impact on the organisation."