

Global effects of gangsterism and policing

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In our country, just as in many other parts of dwellings across the world, gangsterism has since time-immemorial been a common occurrence at varying levels. In current times, its growing emergence has largely been attributed to poverty, inequality and unemployment. As a country, we are beginning to realise heightened altercations like no other time since our democratic breakthrough twenty-five years ago, and this has even spread to our schools where there is a huge concentration of our young people.

Gangsterism is a gross human rights violation, and a global phenomenon inclusive of the formation of groups with the aim of committing violence and crime, and to defend themselves physically against violence of other groups. It is an anti-social behaviour that emerges from within communities themselves, with drugs usually being their main currency, therefore becoming foot soldiers of a much more sophisticated underworld economy, engaging in serious and violent crime, money laundering, human trafficking, drugs peddling and arms smuggling, all at varying scales.

However, gangsterism differs in terms of its magnitudes and focus areas, whereas you can identify its three aspects as being along those whose crimes and actions are not planned, those well-organised with gang members having gone through ritual rites which separate them from non-members and corporate gangs which are highly structured criminal conspiracies that are usually organised to sell drugs.

Its spread into schools can be seen as a community problem in South Africa since schools are part of the community. In our case, this has resulted in learners often challenging and dismissing legitimate authority in this evolution of an urban identity determined along racial and economic lines.

The main challenge within schools is that during these gangsterism fights, both learners and educators are terrified of being caught in crossfire, not only at school as some of these altercations are further perpetrated on their way back home. At most, some opt not to go to school until calm has been restored, therefore becoming a serious impediment to learning and teaching.

Quite often, in environments suffering socially and economically, gang members (mostly youth) are provided a sense of belonging and protection against other gangs, and often where the prospects of gainful employment are low, gangs provide illegal means of earning a living such as trafficking in narcotics or stolen property, extortion and assault. They are very diverse and different, and sometimes become targets of choice for some ideological and extreme beliefs, which influence and motivate them. South Africa has had to review travel laws at some point due to many youngsters being recruited into terrorist groups through the internet, demonstrating the sophisticated nature within which different gangs operate in recent times.

Unfortunately, innocent people can get caught in the crosshairs, so all those who live in the community where a gang is present are in greater danger as a result of the effect of the gang on their society.

It is common that gangs have become a permanent feature of urban landscape around the world, and with communities striving to do anything possible to prevent gang crimes, to make life safer and to create foundations that will be able to protect them, in the modern world cooperation and communication on the topic of gangs is quite important. Without the cooperation of the community and police it will be very difficult to protect the families and to live in safety.

Most notably, the process of globalisation has in some cases led to convergences in lifestyles and behaviours in distant communities. These marked lines of stratification in which social, cultural and spatial mobility is a central theme. The process of socio-spatial segregation and inequality have adhered in the development of spaces of advanced marginality in urban settings across the globe have seemingly proved to be breeding grounds.

Due to globalisation, gangs can no longer start and stop with local conditions but today must also be rooted in a global context. Studying gangs is important because of unprecedented world urbanization, the retreat of the state under the pressure of neoliberal policies, the strengthening of cultural resistance identities, including fundamentalist religion, nationalism, and hip-hop culture, the valorisation of some urban spaces and marginalization of others, and the institutionalization of gangs in some cities across the world.

Community policing becomes a necessity as it is based on the assumption that an effective fight against crime and antisocial behaviour requires close cooperation between the Police and members of the community.

We are of the view that it is both a philosophy and an organisational strategy that allows police and community residents to work closely together in new ways to solve the problems of crime, fear of crime, physical and social disorders, and neighbourhood decay that has engulfed our communities. This involves increasing the number of pedestrians Police officers (and other similar services), they should be the members of the communities in which they work. Building mutual trust and faith in the rule of law continues in through the establishment of direct contacts with the people-police should be open to citizens by showing patience, understanding and willingness to help, even if you entrusted to the problems have no direct connection with the violation of the law. Conceptually, the police officer has to be more a sort of “friend” than a civil servant and representative government. You can then count on the active participation of community members in efforts to combat crime.

Their main goal should be to bring community resources together to solve problems, decrease fear of crime, to listen to and address citizen concerns, to increase public confidence in the Police Department, to impact specific crime problems, and educate the public about its Police Department.

A change in its police service to the public is how the police can identify what is truly high-quality service and how it subsequently provided to the public. In the past, police always respond only to specific problems, and do so quite peculiar way and did not pay almost no attention to the proactive approach. For this, the work of the police today is truly effective, and there is the need to: take seriously

the needs of the public, take into account the needs of police actions and programs, which are then focused on the public. It is in this sense that the police are becoming more receptive to public needs and can also better understand how their work has an impact on society.

Earlier this year, POPCRU argued in the South African parliament that the introduction of an anti-gangsterism strategy put forth by the National Intelligence Coordinating Committee (NICOC), based on four pillars, Human Development, Social Partnership, Spatial Design and Criminal Justice Process, should not only focus on police officers' role, but that of communities as well since the fight against any form of criminal activities affects us all.

The union argued for the need to have a dedicated team that would fight gangsterism in all of South Africa's nine provinces, which should be made up of officers with specialised training in ensuring they become more proactive instead of reacting to eventualities. Most importantly was that this establishment should be done in accordance with existing legislative frameworks.

The union further argued for strong social partnerships which would include amongst others, the establishment of the community safety forums and community police forums with restored relations as such had previously collapsed.

These forums must be resuscitated such that they can serve as vehicle that will help in combating crime and building a bridge between community and police officers

in communities, and must equally be vetted such that criminals do not harbour themselves within these structures to advance their own inimical activities

The required resources needed to deal with this problem are still unevenly allocated within police stations in communities, which is often worsened by the lack of proper spatial design and population dynamics in some of the areas.

POPCRU has, on numerous occasions, raised a grave concern on the fact that the South African Police Service's human and physical resource allocation has been, and continues to be, a deep-seated challenge with severe adverse effects to both the police officers and the community at large.

Majority of the police stations, more especially in townships and rural areas, do not have basic equipment such as well-functional CCTV cameras, bullet proof windows and burglar doors while members do not have adequate protective gear. This effectively renders these police stations and police officers on the ground susceptible to incursion by heavily armed gangsters.

This unfortunately leaves many of our members unnecessary perishing at the hands of these heartless criminals.

Another hindrance to the effective and efficient fighting of gangsterism and other forms of crime is understaffed police stations. It is practically impossible for understaffed police station to service and respond to the crime scene because the stations cannot be left unattended. Most police stations find themselves with only one police vehicle and

two police officers to service their widely scattered jurisdictions. This kind of situation affects and prolong the turnaround time for police officers to report on crime scenes or reported complains.

The union also reflected that the disintegration of this strategy to other tiers of government reflects a dismal failure to come up with implementable strategy that can be used to combat gang related crimes and other form of crimes. The union is of the firm view that any crime preventing and fighting strategy should locate SAPS at the centre of implementation and operationalisation.

There must be a value chain within the Criminal Justice Cluster departments wherein a synergy will be built in terms of crime prevention and combating.

For this to be realised, the Criminal Justice Cluster departments stop working in silos but begin to synergise their efforts and resources to develop one comprehensive crime prevention and fighting strategy to deal with all form of crimes including gangsterim. With this submission we envisage that our correctional centres, in a situation where arrest and conviction were secured, are able to rehabilitate prisoners and eliminate reoffending.

Any strategy should provide tangible and concrete solutions to deal with the scourge of gangsterism and other form of crimes. Its disintegrated and incoherent approach on implementation and coordination is a recipe for failure.

POPCRU calls upon all community structures mandated to fight gangsterism to closely work and synergise their

work with that of police such that they make impact in fighting this scourge in our communities.

All in all, it can be said that there are many issues that disturb the society and there is a considerable influence from the gangs. The effects of gangs in the community and the effects of community policing take place in the society, but there have to be taken more proper measures to ensure safety and living in comfort for the people. As a fact, the best way is to eliminate the groups of people who harm the society. Consequently, there has to be tighter cooperation between the community and police, there has to be developed the new of communication, etc. There have to be present the newest technologies that will allow police to take proper actions and to know everything in advance. Nowadays, the importance of the national security has become one of the main issues, as different circumstances lead people to committing different crimes, either in groups or individually. This problem has to be revised at the state level and its importance does not have to be underestimated under any circumstances.