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| **POLICE AND PRISONS CIVIL RIGHTS UNION** **POPCRU SUBMISSION****SAPS RURAL SAFETY STRATEGY**A Submission prepared by the Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union1 Marie Road, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 2000Tel: 011 242 4600; Fax: 086 625 3054; Email: gs@popcru.org.za**14 November 2018**  |

**1. Background**

The SAPS implemented its Rural Safety Strategy between the period 2011 and 2014 in an effort to address the ongoing violent crimes perpetrated against rural communities, as well as the high levels of stock theft. The strategy aims at addressing rural safety as part and parcel of an integrated and holistic day to day crime prevention approach, based on the principles of Sector Policing which addresses the needs of the entire rural community, including the farming community. It further aims to promote effective and dedicated participation, partnership and involvement of internal and external stakeholders in an integrated, joint and coordinated manner[[1]](#footnote-1).

We therefore believe that today’s sitting is pivotal in deliberating and understanding the challenges and possible proposals to the achievement of the rural safety. Based on this background, POPCRU would like to elaborate further on the following facts that hinder effective implementation of the strategy:

**1.1 Lack of adequate resources in Police Stations**

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 Our members are continuously terrorised and killed by cold-blooded criminals due to the long standing impasse of inadequate human and physical resources as they work under unsafe and understaffed conditions; others in dilapidated buildings.

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. For an example, what you find when walk into a police station in Sandton you can’t find it what you walk into a police station Matlerekeng village in Limpopo. It is on this premise that we have witnessed cases such as Engcobo where criminals stormed in a poorly resourced police station and brutally killed police officers and stole firearms. POPCRU condemns similar cases of this nature and further reiterate that they must be prevented at all costs.

Understaffed police stations generally find it difficult to 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.

* 1. **Insufficient Police Stations in Rural Areas**

It becomes practically impossible for a local police station to deliver on the objectives of the RSS when the distance between itself and communities or villages it serving is far apart. And unfortunately this is the realistic situation in most rural areas wherein one police station is miraculously expected to serve with excellence more than 20 villages which are far apart from each other. Community members in rural areas are as a result expected to walk a very long distance to reach to the police stations to report crime which is not the case with urban communities.

We submit that more police stations must be built in rural areas to reverse the serving pattern of the apartheid system wherein services were provided only to a specific group of people. Rural community is equally important like anyone else living in urban areas of South Africa and must be sufficiently serviced. Their safety should be equally prioritised.

**1.3** **Community Police Forums**

The relationship between the police and the community has collapsed and it needs to be urgently restored. Community Policing Forums which would serve as a link between the community and police officers and further to facilitate community involvement and participation are unfortunately currently dysfunctional. This collapsed relationship perpetuates serious mistrust between the community and police officers which result in police officers being perceived as enemies and subsequently attacked by community members.

We therefore submit that these forums be resuscitated such that they can serve a vehicle that will help in combating crime and building a bridge between community and police officers in communities.

**2. Recommendations**

Despite the beautiful RSS and persistent challenges highlighted above POPCRU submit that the following recommendations must be seriously considered:

* Better infrastructure must be developed to make police stations accessible to communities they serve. This includes construction of more police stations.
* Deployment of enough trained police officers, detectives and establishment of stock theft units dedicated to visible rural policing.
* Introduce a viable medium of communication to address the impediment of the distance and lack of infrastructure. Technology and social media should be explored for this purpose.
* The establishment of sector policing and livestock theft units which will be allocated to the different villages and farms within the jurisdiction of individual police stations. These sectors must be well coordinated and supported by well-resourced and highly motivated Community Police Forums (CPFs) and police revisits to assist precisely with both operational and administrative duties.

**3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, POPCRU acknowledges challenges encountered during the implementation of the NRSS between 2011 and 2014. We argue that there is a need to channel sufficient resources, especially in police stations where they struggle to counter and eliminate any form of threats that persistently continue to put rural safety and farming activities at risk. We are of the firm view that the provision of enough resources and proper coordination will definitely result into successful implementation of the strategy. The decision must be considered taking into cognisant how rural economy, in particular agriculture, contributes to broader economic growth, employment rate and food security.

We want to seize this opportunity to commend all stakeholders who endeavour to ensure that rural safety is realised in our rural communities. POPCRU further seeks to applaud men and women in blue who always ensure that despite difficult working conditions, rural communities, in pursuance of the Chapter 12 of the National Development Plan (NDP) which is to build safer community, are safe and secured

We further urge that based on the success and challenges of the RSS, the new improved strategy must be developed, out of extensively consultative process, to eliminate identified challenges and piggy back on the registered success to establish a stable and secure rural environment. However what is a concern to us is the amount of time taken since the lapse of the previous strategy to conduct a review process. Social upliftment, rural development, education, accountability by all government departments, and active community involvement, are all essential for success.

1. Rural Safety Strategy,2011-2014, SAPS [↑](#footnote-ref-1)