

Gang Rule and other Factors Affecting Social Cohesion and Collective Violence in Mamelodi

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

This report presents findings of research conducted by the African Centre for Migration and Society (ACMS) in April and October 2022 in Mamelodi East (Wards 15 and 18), in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Gauteng Province. Conducted as part of -and for- the Kagisano programme¹, this research builds on -and updates- an original study conducted in the same area in 2017. The 2017 study resulted in a [Mamelodi Case Study Report](#) (hereinafter referred to as the 'original report'). As an update of the original research, the current report should be read together with the above-mentioned detailed original report.

Like the original study, this research aims to identify obstacles to -and opportunities for social cohesion to inform interventions to address collective or group-based violence and foster social cohesion in 16 selected sites and the country. Social cohesion generally refers to the ability of different population groups and people to peacefully live together differently (Freedom House 2017). Updating the original research was important to assess whether there may have been significant changes in the empirical reality in the targeted, highly mobile and fluid communities, and by doing so, ensure that new interventions are not based on outdated data and information. Further, the new research envisaged to collect additional baseline qualitative and quantitative data. This baseline data is not available in the original reports but is required for the new, planned community-based programmes.

This report has three key sections. The first section briefly discusses the research methods and data sources. The second section provides a summary of the detailed presentation and analysis of the research findings. Lastly, the third and concluding section reflects on the implications of the research findings for the promotion of social cohesion and prevention of collective violence.

1.2 METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Findings discussed in this report are informed by three main data sources: i) desktop research or review of literature on relevant research themes, ii) qualitative interviews with key informants and general observations, and iii) community-based and targeted quantitative surveys.

¹ Kagisano is a program aimed at building social cohesion and preventing collective violence in selected communities and schools across South Africa.

In-depth face-to-face interviews and general observations were carried out in the area by a team of four researchers in April 2022. The team conducted a total of fourteen in-depth face-to-face individual interviews with purposively sampled key informants. Targeted key informants for this research were leaders or members of organisations and institutions living, working in, or familiar with the community. These include amongst others: faith-based organisations, women organisations, youth organisations, civic and political organisations, sports and cultural groups, business fora or associations, stokvels and self-help organisations, labour unions, advocacy groups, school and student bodies, migrant organisations, international NGOs, the police, CPF, ward council, street communities, etc.

The research targeted key informants for two reasons: (i) to get a sense of their own experience living and/working in the community, and (ii) to ask them about the community experience i.e., to draw on their situated knowledge, perspective, and professional experience to reflect and share information on community's lived experiences about specific research themes (see interview guide in Annex II).

In addition to qualitative interviews, the research used community-based and targeted surveys to collect quantitative data (see Overview of survey results in Annex I). While digital, the surveys were administered by enumerators either in person or telephonically in October 2022. In Mamelodi the surveys recorded answers from a total of 212 participants.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research identifies the following main challenges that have direct or indirect implications for social cohesion and collective violence in Mamelodi:

- **Group conflict and tensions:** Like other townships in the country, Mamelodi is a highly diverse society, hosting different population groups from within or outside the country. This research finds that, while these different population groups are able to 'co-exist', their interactions and relationships are often characterised by ethnic conflicts and tensions between locals and foreign nationals. Mamelodi is an ethnically diverse community. According to respondents, ethnic groups often engage in fights and violence, particularly to control the hostels and protect and expand their criminal activities. The tensions between locals and foreign nationals are a result of the competition for scarce resources and opportunities as well as the locals' conviction that foreign nationals are an unnecessary and

illegitimate burden to local public services. Group conflicts and tensions are symptoms of social cohesion fault lines.

- ***Socio-economic challenges:*** Mamelodi battles with growing levels of unemployment, poverty, crime, various forms of violence, and poor service resulting in shortages of basic services such as housing, electricity, water and sanitation, and policing amongst others. As elsewhere, social-economic challenges and hardships are a direct obstacle to social cohesion in Mamelodi as they undermine interactions between groups and between residents and institutions of authority and leadership. This often leads to collective violence in the form of violent service delivery protests and attacks on foreign nationals.
- ***Gang authority and informalisation of community leadership:*** Mamelodi has a diverse leadership base, both formal and informal. This research establishes that, due to lack of trust in formal institutions of authority (e.g., the police) and community leadership (e.g., ward councillors), informal leadership structures particularly civic organisations, such as SANCO and Mamelodi Concerned Residents, command more respect and recognition in the community because they help address residents' concerns more than formal or constitutionally sanctioned structures. That said, this research further finds that gangs and, particularly the Boko Haram gangs, are the de facto authority and rulers of the space owing to their influence in politics, the economy, and social relations. As one community leader succinctly puts it, the gang " ...owns the air that we breathe now in Mamelodi".

The lack of trust in formal institutions of authority and leadership means that there are no trusted, effective formal conflict resolution mechanisms in Mamelodi East. This explains why residents turn to informal leaders and violent gangs for help, and also why they often take matters into their own hands and, , use mob justice to resolve crime-related conflicts. It is therefore a direct driver of collective violence.

- ***Collective violence:*** collective or group violence in all its different manifestations is a common feature of everyday life in Mamelodi. The most common types of collective violence in Mamelodi East include political violence, gang violence, taxi violence, violent service delivery protests, xenophobic violence, and ethnic violence. As elsewhere, collective violence is simultaneously a cause and effect of social cohesion fault lines. It is not only a result of social cohesion frailties, but it also further exacerbates group tensions and undermines peaceful coexistence.

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS

Population groups and their interactions

Mamelodi is a diverse community home to people from different parts of the country and beyond the borders of South Africa. Detailed sociodemographic characteristics from the 2011 Census is available in the original report. As respondents noted, while different groups are able to 'co-exist', their interactions and relationships are often characterised by ethnic conflicts and tensions between locals and outsiders.

Ethnic conflicts

Mamelodi is an ethnically diverse community. According to respondents, ethnic conflicts and tensions are especially common among the Pedis and Zulu as they often engage in direct confrontational fights and violence over the control of the hostels. . Indicating that hostels are sites of criminal activities such as the selling of drugs and hideout spaces for criminals, respondents believed that ethnic conflict and violence at Mamelodi Hostel are an attempt by the criminals from different ethnic groups to protect and expand their criminal empires.²

Respondents further revealed that ethnic tensions in Mamelodi exist even beyond the hostels. According to a SANCO representative, South Africa missed an opportunity to unite people of different ethnic groups when it attained independence in 1994. The post-apartheid government inherited a system that was characterised by divide and rule and never made any meaningful developments to promote social cohesion and enable people of different ethnic groups to co-exist peacefully. He said:

You know what? This thing of co-existence with different ethnic groups or tribes doesn't work. I will be lying to say there is a very good relationship between different ethnic groups. This thing didn't start today or yesterday, it started back in 1994, because we never dealt with this thing of integration, so these things (of intolerance) are escalating.... it just needs someone to spark fire, it is because we have failed to deal with this issue for the past 28 years.³

The participant went on to suggest an urgent need for proper structures and programs that specifically teach, especially the young people, how to be tolerant and co-exist peacefully with one another.

Tensions between locals and outsiders

² Interview, Mamelodi resident, 08 April 2022

³ Interview, SANCO representative, 07 April 2022

While noting that some of the immigrants, especially from the SADC region, have blended well with Mamelodi's culture, including mastering one of the popular local languages (S'Pitori⁴), respondents indicated that there are tensions between locals and foreign nationals. Many locals feel uncomfortable living with strangers, as one community leader stated:

Well, what I have observed over the years is that people are not settled, they are not comfortable living with people they don't know, strangers, you know. I will be honest with you, there is this level of intolerance amongst one another hence you will hardly see a person that lives in Mamelodi socialising with a foreigner from Zimbabwe, I am just giving an example. It is very rare; you will hardly see a person who grew up here sitting and having a conversation with a foreigner. So, they just live with one another, but there is this tension and this pretending as if we are one, but we are not, that's what we've observed as SANCO.⁵

According to respondents, these tensions are a result of the competition for scarce resources and opportunities, as well as the locals' conviction that foreign nationals are an unnecessary burden to local public services. One respondent, for example, said:

...the system itself has failed our people to an extent that we can't tolerate each other. The issue of economy, our people are now saying these people are taking our jobs, our spaza shops are now owned by people from outside the country. We do not benefit, we do not work with them, we just consume, we give them our money in return we get nothing. Then there is this issue of services because we are too many, they are using our clinics and hospitals; we don't have access to our facilities like we used to previously. There is also this issue of crime, most of the time I see them on TV, they are pastors and scamming our people, and all those things that also contribute to the tension⁶

Summing up the nature of group interactions in Mamelodi East, one respondent stated:

I would say it's still a work in progress. Most of the areas in Mamelodi are still very tribal. There are still areas known as Zulu-speaking areas and areas where Tsonga-speaking people belong to. There is still a drift and visible tension in different tribes' interactions. The community is still hostile to foreign nationals.

Tensions and conflicts between different groups are a symptom of social cohesion fault lines, and, as discussed in the following sections, they often lead to different types of collective violence.

Livelihood and socio-economic challenges

According to respondents, the main socio-economic challenges Mamelodi East residents face include high rates of unemployment, poverty, crime, poor service delivery resulting in shortages of basic services such as

⁴ An ever-changing street lingo popular amongst young people in Pretoria

⁵ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

⁶ Ibid

housing, electricity, water and sanitation, and policing amongst others. The following provides a brief description of these challenges.

Unemployment

Available official statistics indicate that the unemployment rate in Mamelodi was 36% in 2021 (Stats SA 2011), already above the 2022 provincial and national rates of 32,7% and 33,9% respectively (Stats SA 2022).⁷ Participants opined that the unemployment rate in Mamelodi is higher than the above official statistics, particularly given the effects of COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. The pandemic-related lockdown resulted in significant job losses in both formal and informal sectors. According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey of 2020, Covid-19 contributed to an increase of unemployed people from 6.5 million in the third quarter of 2020 to 7.2 million in the fourth quarter of the same year (cited in SASSA 2021). Under normal circumstances, Mamelodi East residents' main livelihood sources are formal employment in the local manufacturing and construction industries, and informal businesses and trade.

In Mamelodi, job losses led many people to rely on other means to survive, including government grants and food handouts from religious institutions and other Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs). One participant stated: "...we saw an increase in the number of people who were requesting food handouts during lockdown. Many people lost their jobs and were struggling to make ends meet. We tried to reach out to as many people as we could. The demand for food was very high."⁸

Respondents further note that the decline in employment during the pandemic resulted in an increase in the number of grant applications, particularly the R350 relief grants at Mamelodi SASSA offices, as was the case countrywide (SASSA 2021). A government representative from SASSA explained: "Since the pandemic started, we have seen an increase in the number of young people who are applying for the R350 relief grant. As you are aware, many people lost their sources of income because of the pandemic."⁹

Poor service delivery

According to respondents, poor service delivery in Mamelodi results in shortages of basic services such as housing, electricity, water and sanitation, and policing, amongst others. Respondents cited housing and related services as main service delivery concerns. The demand for houses exceeds supply to the extent that many people cannot access decent, formal houses. The resulting effects have been the proliferation of informal settlements and backyard accommodation.

⁷ Stats SA, 2022. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=73290

⁸ Interview, I Care Representative, 07 April 2022

⁹ Interview, SASSA representative, 07 April 2022

Housing-related challenges include inadequate supply of water and sanitation, electricity, and inaccessible roads, especially in the informal settlements (Moloisane 2018). Other service delivery challenges respondents identified include the lack of adequate and sufficient public infrastructures and institutions, such as schools and clinics, to service Mamelodi's rapidly growing population.

Mamelodi East residents blame poor service delivery on politics, corruption, and incompetence of office bearers. The executive mayor of the City of Tshwane is from the Democratic Alliance, while the councillors for the 14 wards in Mamelodi are from the ANC. According to some respondents, this scenario presents huge challenges of service delivery as the political players often sabotage each other. One respondent had this to say: "On the ground, the people are crying, we need to help them, but the person who is in charge is from the DA. They are going to complain to you, they will say, how can I bring services to you when you didn't vote for me? I bring services to those who are voting for me."¹⁰

Further, participants noted that incompetent municipal officials are also contributing immensely to the challenges of service delivery. One informal leader charged:

If you can go to the municipality office, our offices, there are long lines there. Everyone there is hopeless...worse, they are people in those offices who are incompetent. I mean, how can you help someone with a service-related problem when you cannot do a basic thing like using a computer? The people who should be helping us need training first. You wonder how they got into those municipal offices.¹¹

Service delivery shortages make Mamelodi East residents unhappy. Asked about their level of satisfaction with service provision in their community, one participant said: "We are not happy. Our people are not happy. These people [authorities] take us for granted."¹² Indeed, our survey reveals that 65% of surveyed Mamelodi East residents (N=111) feel that there is no improvement and service delivery is getting worse; while 74% do not bother engaging the local structures to address service delivery concerns (see overview of survey results in Annex I). As discussed later in this report, this unhappiness is often expressed in violent service delivery protests.

Crime and lack of adequate policing

Mamelodi is one of country's and Gauteng's townships with high crime rates. Indeed, according to crime offenses recorded by the Mamelodi East police station, Mamelodi East is ranked among the top 30 nationally

¹⁰ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

¹¹ Conversation, Mamelodi resident, 06 April 2022

¹² Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

for many crime offences including robberies, contact related crime, rape and sexual offenses, carjacking, etc.¹³

Table I below provides Mamelodi East's official crime statistics with emphasis on Q2 (April-June) of 2022.

Respondents shared their opinions on some of the main and concerning criminal activities in the area. These include drug peddling, carjacking, extortion, and gender-based violence.

Drug peddling

According to participants, most of the criminal activities related to drugs happen at the hostels. One participant had this to say:

Throughout the country, we all know that hostels are dangerous, and a lot of criminal activities happen there. Here in Mamelodi, they are the ones that are providing drugs to the community. It is a major drug hub. Everyone in Mamelodi knows that drugs are sold at the hostels; the hostels are the territory for drugs. We even proposed to the Minister of Human Settlements to say, listen, why don't you destroy this hostel [Mamelodi Hostel] because now it is destroying our community.¹⁴

According to respondents, some crimes committed by the 'nyaope boys', such as muggings and housebreakings, are often driven by the desire to 'get a fix', which may cost up to R400 (eNCA 2014). In 2014, SAnews reported that 80% of households in Mamelodi East have a family member hooked on nyaope (SAnews 2014).

¹³ Stas SA, 2022. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=73290

¹⁴ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

Mamelodi East crime statistics Q2 2018-2022¹⁵

CRIME CATEGORY	April to June 2018	April to June 2019	April to June 2020	April to June 2021	April to June 2022	Count Diff	% Change
CONTACT CRIMES (CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON)							
Murder	10	17	10	17	16	-1	-5.9%
Sexual Offences	48	35	24	29	45	16	55.2%
Attempted murder	14	16	12	17	25	8	47.1%
Assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm	159	196	105	183	132	-51	-27.9%
Common assault	193	245	166	258	215	-43	-16.7%
Common robbery	41	58	23	29	38	9	31.0%
Robbery with aggravating circumstances	146	170	166	137	182	45	32.8%
Total Contact Crimes (Crimes Against The Person)	611	737	506	670	653	-17	-2.5%
Total Sexual Offences							
Rape	41	26	17	25	38	13	52.0%
Sexual Assault	7	7	6	3	5	2	66.7%
Attempted sexual offences	0	0	0	1	0	-1	-100.0%
Contact sexual offences	0	2	1	0	2	2	2 Counts Higher
Total Sexual Offences	48	35	24	29	45	16	55.2%
SOME SUBCATEGORIES OF AGGRAVATED ROBBERY							
Carjacking	27	30	38	38	51	13	34.2%
Robbery at residential premises	14	5	21	9	19	10	111.1%
Robbery at non-residential premises	25	28	19	23	18	-5	-21.7%
Bank Robbery	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 Count
Robbery of cash in transit	0	0	1	1	0	-1	-100.0%
Truck hijacking	1	1	0	2	1	-1	-50.0%
CONTACT-RELATED CRIMES							
Arson	5	2	4	3	0	-3	-100.0%
Malicious damage to property	138	127	94	110	134	24	21.8%
Total Contact-Related Crimes	143	129	98	113	134	21	18.6%
PROPERTY-RELATED CRIMES							
Burglary at non-residential premises	78	42	49	8	13	5	62.5%
Burglary at residential premises	131	128	90	85	113	28	32.9%
Theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle	54	43	10	22	31	9	40.9%
Theft out of or from motor vehicle	71	64	27	42	28	-14	-33.3%
Stock-theft	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 Count
Total Property-Related Crimes	334	277	176	157	185	28	17.8%
OTHER SERIOUS CRIMES							
All theft not mentioned elsewhere	223	207	161	152	214	62	40.8%
Commercial crime	26	48	60	43	57	14	32.6%
Shoplifting	16	33	51	46	40	-6	-13.0%
Total Other Serious Crimes	265	288	272	241	311	70	29.0%
Total 17 Community Reported Serious Crimes	1,353	1,431	1,052	1,181	1,283	102	8.6%
CRIME DETECTED AS A RESULT OF POLICE ACTION							
Illegal possession of firearms and ammunition	17	12	23	10	14	4	40.0%
Drug-related crime	229	155	65	113	124	11	9.7%
Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs	35	54	28	35	48	13	37.1%
Sexual offences detected as a result of police action	1	0	0	0	1	1	1 Count Higher
Total Crime Detected As A Result Of Police Action	282	221	116	158	187	29	18.4%

Carjackings

Over the recent years, Mamelodi East has witnessed an increase in the cases of carjackings prompting other sceptics to conclude that driving in Mamelodi is becoming more unsafe (Selaluke 2020a). Indeed, Q2 2022 stats indicate the area recorded 51 cases of carjacking, a 34% increase from the same period last year.¹⁶ The

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Stas SA, 2022. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=73290

narratives of car hijackings were shared by most of the participants. Certain vehicle models are usually targeted by hijackers. One participant said: "...hijacking is one of them (crimes) as you know, Ford Motor Company is here in Mamelodi, so at some point in Mamelodi, you wouldn't be able to drive that car because they know everything about those cars. There are also high-risk cars such as the VW Polo."¹⁷

Extortion

In recent years, extortion-related crimes have increased in Mamelodi. In its simplest form, extortion refers to the practice of using force or threats to obtain material or monetary benefits from other people. As participants noted, the recent years have seen an increase in such cases in Mamelodi, thanks to gangs such as Boko Haram, Farasai, and Al Qaeda. As one participant explained:

Extortion is very common here in Mamelodi. You know about this group Boko Haram, that group was created by the real Mamelodi people, those who were born and bred here because of the lack of opportunities. What they did was when Somali shops came through to open the shops, they took over the spaza shop industry. So, those gangs said that now that you are taking over our community, you are going to have to pay us a protection fee.¹⁸

According to the participants, foreign nationals who own businesses in Mamelodi pay an average of R400 per month as a 'protection fee' to the well-known and feared Boko Haram gang. Below is one of the receipts (Source: SowetanLive 2021).



The Sowetan reported that business owners pay these monthly fees because they fear and trust the gang more than the police (SowetanLIVE 2021).

Gender-based crime and violence

¹⁷ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 05 April 2022

¹⁸ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 04 April 2022

Gender based and domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, are other recurring and disturbing challenges confronting Mamelodi. In Q2 2022, Mamelodi East ranked 23rd nationally for sexual offenses.¹⁹ Residents agree that gender-based crime and violence are a serious concern in the area. Indeed, 79% of surveyed residents (N=111) know at least one woman or girl who has been a victim of a violent crime; 86% of surveyed women and girls (N=41) agree that violent crimes against women are a major problem in this area; and 68% agree that women and girls generally fear for their safety on streets and public places.

In February last year (2021), various stakeholders, including community members and members of the police marched in the streets of Mamelodi to raise awareness on GBV and domestic violence (Showme 2021). Since the start of the pandemic (Covid-19), South African communities, like elsewhere across the globe where ‘stay at home’ measures were implemented, witnessed an exponential increase in cases of GBV (see GCRO, 2020; MSF, n.d; UN Women, n.d). The participants expressed that while there are many cases of GBV in Mamelodi, of them remain underreported as the victims often fear revictimization and in most instances, are dependent on the perpetrator. Said one participant:

In D5 there are a lot of GBV cases, but most of them remain underreported because the victims are dependent on their perpetrators. We are also aware that when such cases are reported, the victims end up withdrawing the cases from the police. Now, SAPS has resolved that no charges against GBV can be withdrawn from the police station, and the cases will be heard in court.²⁰

That GBV is a concerning problem in Mamelodi is reflected in the fact that it has drawn much attention to the wider community, such that almost all organisations/institutions somehow deal with issues of GBV on a daily basis. From FBOs, Taxi Associations, Civic groups, and NPOs, among others, the different actors in Mamelodi are involved in the fight against gender-based crime and violence.

The social-economic challenges and hardships described above are a direct obstacle to social cohesion as they undermine interactions between groups and between residents and institutions of authority and leadership. This often leads to collective violence in the form of violent service delivery protests and attacks on foreign nationals.

2.3 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Mamelodi’s community leadership is diverse and comprises a combination of both formal and informal structures. The previous study conducted by the ACMS showed that some level of community leadership is provided by ward councillors and committees, Community Policing Forums (CPFs), the police, and political

¹⁹ Stas SA, 2022. https://www.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1854&PPN=P0211&SCH=73290

²⁰ Interview, Four Plus One representative, 08 April 2022

parties. While political actors such as the EFF, DA and UDM are present in Mamelodi, the dominant political party is the ANC. According to one respondent, Mamelodi has 14 wards, which are all run by ANC Councillors.²¹ This suggests that ANC remains a significant political force and commands a significant political base in Mamelodi. Mamelodi is home to various NPOs, FBOs and several civic organisations who all play various leadership roles in the community.

According to respondents, political popularity and leadership do not necessarily translate into authority, legitimacy, and respect. Due to the perceived inability and unwillingness of the formal authority and leadership structures to address the various challenges (see later discussion), Mamelodi East residents turn to informal leadership structures for help. These include, particularly, civic organisations such as SANCO and Mamelodi Concerned Residents. Respondents indicated that informal structures command more respect and recognition in the community because they help address residents' concerns more than formal or constitutionally sanctioned structures.

Residents' reliance on informal structures to solve their problems is evidence that they generally do not trust the formal institutions of authority and leadership, particularly the police, councillors, and municipal officials. Indeed, 68% and 58% surveyed Mamelodi East residents (N=111) do not trust the police and the councillor, respectively. Residents perceive officials in these institutions as incompetent and corrupt. Talking about the police, for example, a respondent described one of the many incidents that led to people's distrust:

One incident happened recently in April when a group of Zulu people in the hostels were fighting with a group of Pedi people from the community due to illegal electricity connections, the conflict escalated and two people ended up dead. The police couldn't intervene, and when asked why they said that it's not in their scope of work, they are waiting for the public order police who are the ones who resolved the matter. The community really lost hope and trust in the police due to that incident because the police are supposed to protect them, but they failed.²²

Similarly, respondents reported the general lack of trust in councillors and the political parties they represent. As one respondent put it: "... councillors are no longer proactive in communities because most of them have taken the political route to escape poverty, so they do not have the community's interests at heart" (ibid). Another respondent confirmed that councillors and political parties "have lost touch tremendously." This research further confirms that councillors are generally unreachable. Despite our efforts, we were not able to reach any of the councillors for the entire week of fieldwork in the area.

²¹ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

²² Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

While civic organisations seem to be the most popular leadership structures in Mamelodi owing to their intimate relationship with the community, this research establishes that gangs, and particularly the 'Boko Haram' gang, are the de facto rulers of the area. As one respondent succinctly put it:

...they control everything in this community. There is no development project that they do not control. They determine who gets tenders, they control politicians and even relationships.²³

There was a general agreement among the respondents that gangs in Mamelodi govern everyday life in the community.

While the local authorities and community members know the gang members, they cannot do anything as they also fear for their lives. One participant said: "...even the police, they know them. They cannot do anything about it. Even the community is afraid of them. We know them, but we are afraid of them as a community. There is nothing we can do about it."²⁴

In the following few words, a respondent painted a clear picture of how the group has instilled terror and fear in the area. He said: "This gang even owns the air that we breathe now in Mamelodi" (ibid). While the gang leader was arrested in 2020 (SowetanLIVE 2020), respondents indicated that the gang is still very much alive and operating, and its leader still call the shots from behind bars.

Women and leadership

This research confirms a general trend of a lack of significant women's representation in positions of power and authority in many of the organisations and institutions in Mamelodi. Where women were in positions of leadership and authority, they were the founders of such organisations. The founder and CEO of Impendulo Foundation, a non-profit organisation that specialises in meeting the various needs of marginalised people, including women and children, is a very good case in point. In cases where women occupy leadership positions, they are often looked down upon because of their gender. An official from SASSA had the following to say about her experiences as a woman in a position of leadership:

They do not take us seriously, honestly, sometimes we are being so undermined in our positions. I mean, you can see that even some of the respect is not there. In a household where there is a man, people tend to respect and fear that household than in a household where there is only a woman. The same applies in the working environment.²⁵

In sum, the lack of trust in formal institutions of authority and leaders means that there are no trusted, effective formal conflict resolution mechanisms in Mamelodi East. Indeed, 64% of surveyed residents (N=111)

²³ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022.

²⁴ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

²⁵ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

do not consider local structures effective in resolving conflicts, and 75% do not use the local structures to resolve conflicts. This explains why residents turn to informal leaders for help, but also why they often take matters into their own hands and, for example, use mob justice to resolve crime-related conflicts (see later discussion).

As also noted in the original report, the absence of a fully trusted local authority and of formal and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms is an obstacle to social cohesion and is a driver of collective violence. In a diverse and fluid space like Mamelodi, individual and group conflict is to be expected. However, “a socially cohesive community is one which is able to deal with and resolve its conflicts in ways that do not result in violence, chronic tensions, or extreme marginalisation of certain sub-groups.”²⁶

2.4 COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

According to respondents, there are various types of collective or group violence in Mamelodi East. The most common include political violence, gang violence, taxi violence, violent service delivery protests, xenophobic violence, and ethnic violence.

Political violence: violence and assassinations over political positions

According to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), South Africa is experiencing a rise in local government-related political violence directed towards municipal councillors and officials since the year 2000 (Kanyane et al. 2019). These include threats, intimidation, damages to property and political assassinations. While KwaZulu-Natal has topped the charts on this kind of violence, Mamelodi has also witnessed similar cases of political violence, especially during local government election times (Mahlokwane 2019). A community leader confirmed: “During election time, we witness several cases of politically motivated violence, either internal fights in one party or between political parties. Everyone wants to lead.”²⁷

The sentiments above were confirmed by the majority of the respondents. In July 2021, a political figure was assassinated in Mamelodi by an unknown hitman. His death, together with the assassination of other political figures in Pretoria, prompted the Police Minister, Bheki Cele, to establish a special team to investigate political violence in Pretoria (McCain 2021).

²⁶ Monson, T., Takabvirwa, K., Anderson, J., Polzer, T. and Freemantle, I. (2012:20). *Promoting Social Cohesion and Countering Violence against Foreigners and other Outsiders*. ACMS Research Report

²⁷ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 08 April 2022

Gang violence: terror in the community and schools

According to respondents, Mamelodi has at least six well-known gangs that specialise in different illegal and criminal activities such as carjackings, drugs, hijacking of construction projects and extortion. The most common gangs in the area are 'Boko Haram', 'Farasai' and 'Al Qaeda', 'Harjid' and the 'Parasites'. As indicated earlier, the most dominant gang is Boko Haram. Participants indicated that violence is often used by the rival gangs to claim and protect their territories and operations. In 2021, for example, a gunman only known as 'John Wick' rose to 'fame' in Mamelodi for killing several Boko Haram members (eNCA 2021).

Respondents indicated that gang violence is also very common in local schools. Names such as 'Skhothane', 'International Duk Donner (IDD)' and various Arabic names are popular among school gangs in Mamelodi. A school official, for instance reported that gangsterism by school kids is common at Lehlabile Secondary School, even though much of the violence happens beyond the school premises. Last term, a case was brought to the school's attention that some of the students from rival gangs had stabbed each other outside the school. The two were later suspended from the school.²⁸

Gang violence in Mamelodi schools was further confirmed by one of the CPF members, who expressed that several cases of gang violence by school kids are always brought to his attention. As we were busy with our interview with the CPF member at a local police station, we were interrupted when one of the police officers walked in to notify the member about a case of gang violence they had just received from a local school. One of the students had been badly stabbed and injured. The CPF member attributed the rising gangsterism to a lack of sporting facilities and activities in schools and the community at large. He explained:

...like now, as you heard, we are going to a school case, these kids are stabbing each other. So, it's a serious problem and the reason behind it, according to me, especially in schools, is due to the lack of extracurricular activities in our schools; there are no sports, we don't have sports facilities in Mamelodi.²⁹

Taxi violence: fighting over routes and commuters

South Africa's taxi industry is infamous for its frequent spurts of deadly confrontations or taxi violence, as operators often fight amongst themselves for routes and commuters (Mmakwena 2022). In Mamelodi, local taxi associations such as Mamelodi Taxi Association (MATA) often compete and fight for routes and customers against big companies like City-to-City, PUTCO, Tshwane Metro Buses and e-hailers.

²⁸ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 05 April 2022

²⁹ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 08 April 2022

According to a representative of a local taxi association (Four Plus One), violence often erupts when other operators or actors ignore the rules and regulations that govern the operations of the industry.³⁰ For instance, there are certain sections in Mamelodi where local taxis are not allowed to operate. The boundaries are often demarcated by main roads. He said: “Our route is to the west side of the main road and the right side of Nellmapius, Location 16, Buffer Zone, Khutsong, Vista, Ext 6 and 5, Mahube Ext 1-10. Unfortunately, we are not allowed to transport in Ext 3 and 11, Lusaka and Stofell park.”³¹

According to Mitchley (2020), taxi violence incidents in 2020 were attributed to internal fights within the Mamelodi Taxi Association (MATA), especially over leadership positions. In an attempt to quell the tension, the Gauteng High Court in Pretoria granted an order to dissolve the MATA executive committee following spates of violence and instability in the township, which had claimed the lives of at least 19 people, including taxi drivers (ibid).

Violent service delivery protests

Due to poor service delivery (real or perceived), Mamelodi residents often embark on violent service delivery protests as a form of expressing their anger and frustrations. As discussed in the original report, the protests are often organised by civic organisations like Mamelodi Concerned Residents, Phomolong Residents Association and SANCO. Violent protests are often used as a mechanism to attract the government’s attention. For example, in 2020 and 2021, residents from different informal settlements in Mamelodi barricaded roads with stones, bricks and burning tyres, protesting about a lack of electricity and RDP houses they had been promised by the City of Tshwane (Ndlazi 2020; Tshikalange 2021).

The organisers of the protests are, in many instances, arrested for the violent protests. One participant said:

In 2019, the DA once took us [Mamelodi Concerned Residents] to court for organising a service delivery protest. We won the case. It was for bad service delivery. We had marched to the municipal offices, requesting the services that we are paying for. So, they decided to arrest us, and we went to court, and we won the case. They were told to obey the rules.³²

As also discussed in the original report, some of the service delivery protests culminate in attacks on foreign nationals who are often blamed for undermining service delivery by burdening public services. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that some of the protest organisers strongly believe that foreign nationals are to blame for poor service delivery in the area. A SANCO representative, for example, stated:

³⁰ Interview, Four Plus One representative, 08 April 2022

³¹ Ibid

³² Interview, Mamelodi resident, 07 April 2022

[...] there is this issue of services because we are too many... they (foreign nationals) are using our clinics and hospitals; we don't have access to our facilities like we used to previously because of these people. I often remind the community that the country is going, it is being taken by the foreigners under their watch. They should do something because soon, we will not have a country of our own.³³

Xenophobic violence: "I think it is reaching a boiling point"

Mamelodi has had major waves of xenophobic violence particularly in 2008, 2014, 2015 and 2017. A detailed discussion of these waves, the actors and their motivations is provided in the original report. While no major attacks have been recorded in the recent past, small-scale attacks, particularly on foreign-owned businesses, are often organised by Boko Haram and other gangs as part of their extortion enterprise. Boko Haram has been accused of encouraging residents to attack foreign-owned businesses to compel them to pay more 'protection fees' (Mothiba, 2022).

Further, respondents indicated that while there have not been reports of major xenophobic violence incidents, there is a general sense that Mamelodi residents are increasingly angry over the presence of foreign nationals whom they blame for their socio-economic hardships and are waiting for an opportunity to attack. On describing the mood of the community concerning immigrants, one participant said: "I think it is reaching a boiling point. The community is not happy. Everyone is complaining. It only needs one spark to set everything ablaze."³⁴

Some respondents believed that attacks have not happened yet because of the protection offered by local gangs. As discussed earlier, foreign business owners regularly pay for this protection.

Mob justice as a 'problem solver'

Respondents confirmed that mob justice remains an accepted and perceived effective means of addressing crime in Mamelodi given the 'absence' of an effective and trusted law enforcement system. Below is what respondents said when asked about mob justice in the area:

Last week, there were guys who were driving a golf car, and when they passed by a garage, they saw a person withdrawing a huge amount of money at the ATM. They turned around and robbed that person, not realising that there were taxi drivers who saw everything. The taxi drivers stopped the car and beat the thieves until the community came and asked what was going on. When they were told, the community wanted to burn them.³⁵

Another respondent lamented:

³³ Interview, SANCO representative, 07 April 2022

³⁴ Interview, SANCO representative, 07 April 2022

³⁵ Interview, Mamelodi resident, 8 April 2022

In the township, there is community justice. The perpetrators are dealt with by the community before they reach the recognised institutions. Unfortunately, community justice is biased as the perpetrators will be dealt with differently due to the status of the perpetrators. Mob justice is a problem solver in townships due to loss of trust in the system, even though it's not a solution as the institutions' need to be corrected. There is a level of lack of trust in the SAPS due to the minority that is corrupt, even though there are diligent workers.³⁶

3. CONCLUSION

This research identifies the following main challenges that have direct or indirect implications for social cohesion and collective violence in Mamelodi:

Group conflict and tensions: Like other townships in the country, Mamelodi is a highly diverse society, hosting different population groups from within or outside the country. This research finds that, while these different population groups are able to 'co-exist', interactions and relationships are often characterised by ethnic conflicts and tensions between locals and foreign nationals. Mamelodi is an ethnically diverse community. According to respondents, ethnic groups often engage in fights and violence, particularly to control the hostels and protect and expand their criminal activities. The tensions between locals and foreign nationals are a result of the competition for scarce resources and opportunities, as well as the locals' conviction that foreign nationals are an unnecessary and illegitimate burden to local public services. Group conflicts and tensions are symptoms of social cohesion fault lines.

Socio-economic challenges: Mamelodi battles with rising levels of unemployment, poverty, crime, various forms of violence, and poor services resulting in shortages of basic services such as housing, electricity, water and sanitation, and policing amongst others. As elsewhere, social-economic challenges and hardships are a direct obstacle to social cohesion in Mamelodi as they undermine interactions between groups and between residents and institutions of authority and leadership. This often leads to collective violence in the form of violent service delivery protests and attacks on foreign nationals.

Gang authority and informalisation of community leadership: Mamelodi has a diverse leadership base, both formal and informal. This research establishes that, due to lack of trust in formal institutions of authority (e.g., the police) and community leadership (e.g., ward councillors), informal leadership structures particularly civic organisations such as SANCO and Mamelodi Concerned Residents commend more respect and recognition in

³⁶ Interview, anonymous, 6 April 2022

the community because they help address residents' concerns more than formal or constitutionally sanctioned structures. That said, this research further finds that gangs and particularly the Boko Haram gangs are the *de facto* authority and rulers of the community owing to their influence in politics, the economy and social relations. "This gang even owns the air that we breathe now in Mamelodi", said one community leader.

The lack of trust in formal institutions of authority and leadership means that there are no trusted, effective formal conflict resolution mechanisms in Mamelodi East. This explains why residents turn to informal leaders and violent gangs for help, but also why they often take matters into their own hands and, use mob justice to resolve crime-related conflicts. It is therefore a direct driver of collective violence.

Collective violence in all its different manifestations is a common feature of everyday life in Mamelodi. The most common types of collective violence in Mamelodi East include political violence, gang violence, taxi violence, violent service delivery protests, xenophobic violence, and ethnic violence. As elsewhere, collective violence is simultaneously a cause and effect of social cohesion fault lines. It is not only a result of social cohesion frailties, but it also further exacerbates group tensions and undermines peaceful co-existence.

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