



XENOPHOBIA

AND

OUTSIDER EXCLUSION

Addressing Frail Social Cohesion in
South Africa's Diverse Communities

Alexandra Case Study
October 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This case study presents findings of a research conducted by the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) in Alexandra Township (Alex) in Johannesburg (Gauteng Province) during May 2016 and April 2017. This initiative was undertaken as part of research conducted in parallel across 15 South African communities, documenting and explaining the status of social cohesion across the country. More specifically, it endeavours to identify the causes of group-based conflicts, communal violence, and patterns of violent exclusion. Through these efforts, the research should contribute to developing more effective intervention programmes by external stakeholders working with community members to promote social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation.

The findings presented here are informed by qualitative individual interviews and focus group discussions with residents and relevant key informants conducted between 2 and 13 May 2016 as well as between 7 and 20 April 2017. A team of four ACMS researchers spent 15 days in the area and conducted a total of 32 individual interviews and three focus groups discussions with relevant stakeholders. Participants included South Africans and foreign residents as well as key informants including representatives of the local authority, community leaders, faith-based, and community based organisations. Secondary literature provides additional background and insight. Recognising that perceptions drive social interactions and mobilization as much as facts,¹ our approach documents and where possible distinguishes between the two.

1.2 Primary Findings and Conclusions

Alexandra (Alex) is one of the most linguistically diverse townships in South Africa as a result of being home to all South African ethnic groups and foreign nationals from the African continent and beyond. While not inherently conflictual, diversity often brings about social cohesion challenges (e.g., individual or group conflicts) particularly in contexts of socio-economic hardships. When not effectively addressed, these conflicts generate chronic tensions and group-based violent exclusion that negatively affect the socio-economic development of entire communities. The study identifies the following issues characterising social cohesion in Alex. These issues include challenges and symptoms of social cohesion frailties but also opportunities that could serve as a foundation on which to build more positive social interactions and peaceful cohabitation:

¹ See for example Misago, J. P. (2011). "Disorder in a Changing Society: Authority and the Micro-Politics of Violence" in Landau, L. B. (ed.) *Exorcising the Demon Within: Xenophobia, Violence, and Statecraft in Contemporary South Africa*. Wits University Press

1. *Collective efficacy*: Alex residents are able to work collectively together to address common problems such as crime and poor service delivery. That community members are able to mobilize and work collectively to address common challenges is an opportunity for social cohesion as long as approaches to solving problems and solutions sought are for the wellbeing of all residents;
2. *Peacebuilders*: Although their role and successes still need to be verified and confirmed, they appear to be agents of peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts and cohabitation. They could be a useful institution for social cohesion particularly in a context where trust in local official community leadership and authority is absent;
3. *Negative perceptions towards outsiders*: While some locals hold positive or at least neutral views about foreigners, the majority of Alex residents maintain strong negative perceptions and attitudes towards foreign nationals living in their midst. Locals are prone to blaming foreigners for the scarcity of resources and opportunities. As elsewhere, the reinforcement and mobilization of these negative perceptions are a symptom of other social cohesion fault lines;
4. *Mob justice*: Alex residents often rely on collective violence to deal with common challenges, particularly crime. Respondents indicate that mob justice is necessary given the police's and the justice system's failures in controlling crime. There are strong links between mob justice and violence against outsiders given locals' frequent association of outsiders with criminality;
5. *History of group conflicts and violence*: Alex has a well-documented history of group conflicts and violence including political violence, taxi violence, violent service delivery protests and violence against outsiders. These are not only symptoms of social and political fragmentation but also obstacles to any prospects of future peaceful cohabitation as they create long-lasting tensions, a climate of mutual suspicion among population groups, and institutional structures dependent on violence for their survival;
6. *Xenophobic violence*: Alex has an extended history of violently excluding foreign nationals. Violence against foreign nationals dates back to 1994 and continues to date. While criminal opportunism or direct material incentives through looting and appropriation of property are factors, the violence is primarily driven by local political and business players' interest in permanently driving outsiders out of the community. This type of violence is not only an indicator of social cohesion frailties but also an additional obstacle to social cohesion as it causes a long lasting, social damage.

The remainder of the report proceeds through three main sections. The first offers the background information in terms of socio-economic data on the research site. The second details the findings. The final summarises core findings and implications.

2. BACKGROUND

Established in 1912, Alexandra is the oldest and one of the most densely populated townships in Johannesburg. It covers an area of over 800 hectares and is now home to an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 people living in crowded conditions.² Due to its proximity to commercial centres like Sandton and Johannesburg (see Image 1 below) and the variety of employment opportunities nearby, it attracts people from all over South Africa and the African continent. Consequently the area is demographically and culturally heterogeneous.

Image 1: Map of Alex and Surroundings



The research site falls within Wards 75 and 107. Cumulatively, these wards have a total population of 42,117 individuals living in 15,730 households over an area of 1.06 kilometres. Table I below describes the cumulative sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics of wards 75 and 107, based on information from the 2011 South Africa Census and the Independent Electoral Commission.

²Dlamini, Ndaba. "Two Year Extension for Alex Project." 11 July 2008. Official Website of the City of Johannesburg. Accessed July 23 2008. < <http://www.joburg.org.za/content/view/2375/192/>

Table I: Socio-economic Data of Wards 75 and 107, Alexandra, City of Johannesburg Metropolitan

Municipality

Variables	Characteristics
<i>Sociodemographic</i>	
Total population	42 117
Number of households	15 730
Age	40% of the population is aged between 10 -29 years; 25% are under the age of 18.
Gender	48% of the population is female; 52% is male.
Linguistic Diversity	36% of the population mostly speaks IsiZulu at home; 21% mostly speaks Sepedi at home; 9% mostly speaks IsiXhosa; 6% mostly speaks Sesotho and Xitsonga, respectively.
Ethnic Diversity	99% of the population is Black African. The rest is categorized as Coloured, Indian or Asian, White, or Other.
Migration	93% of the population was born in South Africa (SA); 35% was born in Gauteng; 5% was born outside SA.
Voter Turnout	Of the 32,853 registered voters, 52% voted in the 2016 municipal elections.
Voting Patterns	54% voted for the African National Congress (ANC); 23% voted for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF); 13% voted for the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP); 9% voted for the Democratic Alliance (DA).
<i>Socioeconomic</i>	
Employment	37% of the population of workers over the age of 15 is unemployed or not economically active.
Income Levels	27% of households have an annual income of R 0 12% have an income between R 10 000 - 20 000 23% of households have income between R20 000 - 40 000; 17% of households have an annual income of R 40 000 - 75 000.
Poverty Rate	35.5% of households have an annual income below R 9 600.
Education Levels	Around 70% completed Grade 9 or higher
Household (HH)Types	31% of households are shacks/informal dwellings; 44% are classified as houses.
Head of HH	36% of households are headed by women; 64% are headed by men.
<i>Service Provision</i>	
Water	90% of the population receives water from a regional/local service provider
Electricity	12% of households have electricity for some cooking, heating or lighting; 85% of households have electricity for all three; 3.5% have no electricity.
Flush Toilet	80% of the population have access to a flush toilet either with a septic tank or connected to sewerage system.
Refuse Disposal	82% of the population has access to regular refuse removal by a local authority or private company.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Nature of Community and Social Interactions

Alexandra is one of the most linguistically diverse townships in South Africa. All South African ethnic groups are represented in the area. According to respondents, the dominant ethnic groups are Pedis from Limpopo followed by Zulus from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The hostels and surrounding areas are populated almost exclusively by Zulus from KZN who have their own 'traditional' leaders (*Indunas*) many of whom have long-standing ties to traditional leadership and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Similarly, Alex hosts a diverse foreign population mainly consisting mainly of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Malawians, Ethiopians, Pakistanis and Somalis. The main languages spoken in the area are Zulu, Pedi, Xhosa, Sotho, Venda, Shangaan, Tsonga, Shona and English. Zulu is the language commonly used in the area. According to respondents, the size and diversity of Alex population increase every day. When asked the township's population, one local resident summarised the views shared by many other residents:

In terms of the main ethnic groups, I would say 50:50 because you see; I can't really say which people are more, because there are a lot of people in Alex. For South Africans nationals the numbers are more or less the same. The majority of foreigners are Zimbabweans then Mozambicans, Malawians, Lesotho, Ethiopians and Nigerians. You see for Nigerians they are now coming into the area and renting accommodation. For South Africans, I think the majority are the Sotho speaking people, including Pedi and Tswana people. I would say the Zulu people they are mainly concentrated at the hostels. [...] Here people speak all these languages Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu. But most of the people end up speaking isiZulu and Sotho. This is mainly because the Zulu speaking people do not speak the languages of other people. In terms of race, Alex is predominantly black; it is black people. [...] I came to Alex in 1985; I basically grew up in Alex. People still coming into the area and it is worse these days, trust me. Yes so much, today you can see a space or piece of land somewhere and the next day it is gone, because someone has put a shack there. When people go to their rural homes for the holiday, when they come back they bring 5 people with them. They believe that the jobs are here. Those in the rural areas, as soon as they finish school they are thinking of getting out and coming here. I would say equally they are flowing in from different areas.³

Perhaps not surprisingly, Alex's heterogeneous population practice a diversity of religions and spiritual beliefs. The dominant religions include ZCC, Apostolic Faith, Shembe, and mainline Christian churches (e.g., Catholic, Anglican and Methodist, etc.). Religious activities, together with community centres and business/work places, are Alex's main spaces for social interactions. In particular, community centres (e.g., Thusong Centre and Alexson Kopano Centre) are important nodes of social interactions as they offer various cultural activities, community programmes and government services.

In terms of collective efficacy (when community members work together to solve common problems), residents are occasionally able to mobilize and fight collectively against common challenges such as poor

³ Interview with a Zimbabwean national; Alex, 4 May 2016

service delivery and crime. As an example, community members came together in response to xenophobic violent outbreaks. To prevent the 2015 attacks on Emmanuel Sithole and others from spreading across Alexandra, the Alex Peace Committee used its volunteers, informants, community elders, and ordinary community members to look out for and thwart any plans to attack foreigners and/or their businesses (see details on this later in this report). Similarly, community members responded to a recent Pikitup strike by collecting and burning rubbish as the uncollected debris had become a health hazard. One local described the action:

Common problems sometimes bring the community together. For example, recently when there was the Pikitup strike, community members organized that the rubbish be dumped in one place and later on they would burn that rubbish heap. So what I can tell is that here in this township we come together over many things. We live together; respect each other. When Pikitup was on strike, we all came out and cleaned our own street.⁴

3.2 Profile of Outsiders

3.2.1 Origins, social interactions and livelihoods

For Alex local residents, outsiders are foreigners from different countries on the continent and beyond. Yet according to respondents some foreign groups are more 'outsiders' than others. When asked who is considered a foreigner or an outsider in Alex, one local explained:

Foreigners are like Somalis, Ethiopians, Pakistanis, Indians and Bangladeshis. Other people from other parts of Africa, they are also outsiders but they are not treated as Somalis and Ethiopians. [...] I think the reason for this different treatment is because of the language and physical appearance.⁵

As indicated earlier, foreign nationals living in Alex include Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Malawians, Somalis, Ethiopians and Pakistanis. Respondents distinguish between foreigners from countries that have a history of labour migration into South Africa (e.g., Zimbabweans, Malawians, Mozambicans, Lesotho, and Swaziland) and those who recently arrived to take up economic opportunities (Somali, Ethiopians, Pakistanis). The former have large population groups and occupy most of the squatter camps in Alex and the latter rent and live where they have shops. Residents believe that the numbers of foreigners in the areas are increasing every year and that they are contributing to overcrowding of the township.

Regarding livelihood activities, most foreign nationals in Alexandra are self-employed, mainly in informal businesses while others have informal jobs or casual labour. Somalis, Ethiopians, and Pakistanis (the last of which locals generally refer to as 'Indians') run spaza shops. Locals consider Zimbabweans, Malawians, and Mozambicans to be good with their hands. They operate hair salons, repair cars, and make furniture and/or sculptures, operate fruit and vegetable stalls, and hawk on the streets or at traffic lights. Respondents

⁴ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

⁵ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 12 May 2016

reported that foreigners' livelihoods are different from the locals'. They perceive foreigners to be more skilled and business-minded than local people, to know more about business and how to generate money/income, and to be more willing to use their hands and do odd jobs than locals. In one local's words:

Ok, Mozambicans do hair, ladies its usually hair, aahh..., Zimbabweans usually work in restaurants and cleaning or in construction that's one thing I know. Ethiopians run their own shops, aahh..., Nigerians well [Laughs] Nigerians, they usually hustle all the girls, that's what they do and you never know what they do, you won't know what their business is and you see them with nice cars as well yeah.⁶

Another local shared similar views: "We have people from Zimbabwe who have hair salons; people from Mozambique who run the car, tyre repairs businesses. The shops here are run by Indians. So because us as South Africans we can't distinguish them we class them all as Somalis or Indians."⁷

According to respondents, foreign groups related to local residents in significantly varied ways. 'Indians', for example, are seen to be less well integrated with limited social interactions with locals when compared to Zimbabweans or Mozambicans. One local offered the following analysis:

It still depends on the ethnic groups. Most Zimbabwean people are very much active within the society. I understand that even within the structure of SANCO many are participating, even within the CPF. Guys from Mozambique, yes, they are integrated in the community. You find them going to the same churches; same liquor outlets; buying in the same shops that South Africans are buying from. When it comes to Ethiopians and Somalis it is a different case. You'll only see them within their shops or them walking to the shop or where they are going to get stock. It is not normal to see them on a street corner with a group of South Africans having a conversation. Compared to Zimbabweans and Mozambicans.... [...] And i think that contributes to them being isolated when there are incidents of violence. It feels like they have isolated themselves to be seen as foreign people within Alexandra. Whereas when it comes to most Zimbabwean guys ... myself as well, I have a lot of Zimbabweans that we do a lot of project together and we talk. So when this thing of xenophobia triggers it leaves me in a position whereby I'll have to make sure that wherever they are, they are safe and there wouldn't be any attack on them. Because now I take them as my partners in business; my partners in social life. When it comes to the Somali guys, yes I have Somali friends but I know them from within the shop, behind the burglar within the shop. They are friends, we normally chat but they will be standing on the other side of the burglar door, I will be standing outside. So you do see that there are boundaries that are drawn between ethnic groups within Alexandra.⁸

Foreign respondents indeed indicated that some foreign groups, particularly 'Indians', prefer having most of their social interactions with their national communities, which severely limits their socialisations with locals. One foreign respondent stated:

⁶ Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

⁷ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 4 May 2016

⁸ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

When someone is in a foreign land, he always feels fear particularly this country is very troublesome. It is not easy to just interact with the local people. You cannot befriend with everybody. I should consider whom I am befriending with. I should befriend you as a Somali and I have to have fewer friends from non-Somalis. The person from Mozambique will also befriend with another Mozambican person and it is true for the Zimbabweans. Zimbabweans will come for the rescue of their countrymen if anything comes to them. The South Africans will also tell their problems to their people particularly those who are close to them. Although people live together side by side and are integrated, they still seek assistance from their own people when they are in a difficult situation.⁹

3.2.2 Predominant community perceptions about outsiders

While some locals hold positive or at least neutral views about foreigners and sometimes express sympathy for their plight, the majority of Alexandra residents have strong negative perceptions and attitudes towards foreign nationals living in their midst. In particular, locals blame foreigners for the scarcity of resources and opportunities because they steal jobs, houses, women and businesses that belong to locals by right. They believe that if foreigners vacated, locals' socio-economic situation would improve as there would be more jobs, accommodation, and opportunities available to them. They consequently conclude that foreigners should return to their home countries. Similarly, local residents blame foreigners for most of Alex's violent crime. Respondents, both local and foreign, explicitly singled out Zimbabweans out in this regard. Foreign respondents also reported that Zimbabweans are among the perpetrators of crime in the area. Their criminal activities include hijacking and robbing other foreigners, particularly those who do business in the township such as Ethiopians, Somalis, and Pakistanis. In one respondent's words:

That one I can tell you a lot of things, we honestly don't want these people. We don't want them! A lot of times there are these guys that mug people are from Zimbabwe. When the Zimbabweans mug you, they hurt you. If we hear somebody got killed, we know it's the Zimbabweans. South Africans wouldn't kill a person. You hear different stories. There is this place called Stshwetla, it's full of Zimbabweans by Marlboro there. The guys there are dangerous. Strictly dangerous! They are not all the same. There are who are good and some who are not. If those guys mug you at night you going to make a turn at the hospital or you die. [...] we know it is Zimbabweans; you see language? Language, you can hear. Dress code, you can also see it that these people are not from here. Even the food they eat, they don't eat like us. When we have some money you will see us at KFC in the line but you won't find those guys there. You get me? Crime is a reason people don't like people from outside. It is there, there are people we don't like.¹⁰

In addition to stealing resources/opportunities and contributing to crime, locals also accuse foreigners of being carriers of deadly diseases as one local respondent stated:

There are some people, especially older folks, who will tell you that since these people came we have lots of illnesses these days. That's what they fighting about, that we have lots of illnesses since they arrived. So diseases are another reason. And I could believe some of it a little bit. Like this

⁹ Interview with a Somali national; Alex, 12 May 2016

¹⁰ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

thing with ebola. We are now scared what if it gets here? These people get in easy at the border gate. So you get scared, what if they come with it this side? It's from Africa close to them there.¹¹

Other respondents explained hostilities because foreigners peddle fake products and are able to keep prices low because they do not pay tax like locals do. These practices undermine local businesses and allow foreigners to take over the local business space. This ultimately angers many local residents. One visibly irate local resident had this to say about the differences between foreigners' and locals' livelihoods:

Well there is a different, as the locals we hustle to get money while the foreigners are into business, we the locals we hustle to get money and buy from the foreigners, especially from Somali shops but I don't like it because what they are selling to us is not healthy. If you buy washing powder from checkers and compare it to the one bought at Somali shops, you will see a huge different, they sells fake stuffs to us but because of the poverty we are forced to buy from them, people are poor and we all want cheap stuffs. [...] what annoys me is they open lots of shops but they don't pay any tax, how can the government allow that? Why don't they pay tax like all of us because they come in Mzansi collect the money which we don't know what do they do with it. Do they have the right to do businesses in Mzansi, where are the papers, do they follow the correct procedures to do businesses here in South Africa? The government should intervene; they should only allow certain number of the businesses from outsiders, not for them to take the whole corners of the Alex with their businesses. I think this is the major cause of the Xenophobia, and the people in control (government) should consider what I just said. if you can ask yourself such questions as South African, you will end up being angry because ,foreigners has taken South Africa and I also blame the government, they must follow the correct procedures when it comes to foreigners. We are tired as South Africans. You can't have 10 Somali shops in one street, where did they get the approval or papers to sell? The worse part they sell us the stuffs that was made from their own factories, the government does not see that it affects us as the citizens of Mzansi. What if in 15 years this whole thing affect our children mentally? Their products they are not registered in South Africa but they are selling them in South Africa. The problem is with the authorities not us on the ground and is not like they don't know what is happening, they do know, it is just they don't want to fix it.¹²

Some respondents believe claims that employers prefer hiring foreigners over South Africans because foreigners are paid relatively lower wages. One local employer explained:

It is a common thing that locals blame foreigners for not getting jobs but when you go deep into the details, yes, it is the reality of things. Myself as an employer, I'll have a South African that I'll have to pay a certain minimum wage as given by the government. There's a second man standing next to him and does not have all those requirements on him because he does not have the right documents any way. As a businessman it might be taken that I am saving a lot of money if I hire a foreign guy: instead of paying R500, I'll pay R250 per day which saves my business a lot of money. So there are a lot those things happening which is true reflection of this complaint that at times there is that reality. But also, the reality is that people who might be making those complaints have never gone out and looked for job. There's that situation as well, where I'm complaining but I've

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

never gone to this government that I'm saying cannot provide me with a job to say, "these are my skills, these are the resources I have or need for me to make an income."¹³

Many respondents, both local and foreign, reject these accusations. Instead they blamed locals for being unable or unwilling to take advantages of available opportunities like foreigners do. One foreign respondent (who has lived in Alex for decades) countered:

I don't even know what xenophobia means; I mean what is xenophobia. I remember it first came in the 90s when I was still living in the flats. At the time it was just a situation of 'these people are taking our jobs'; there were not many things. At that time there was peace in Alexandra, I remember a meeting was called at San Kopano. I remember I climbed on top of a table during the meeting and said 'I am a foreigner if you want to shoot me shoot me'. It was history and it came out of the paper. Even today people take me that way, and I always say it as a foreigner in this country I am not going anywhere and I did not come here with anybody's address. That was the first time that I experienced this type of problem. The leadership was assisting, the church and baba Linda Twala. The foreigners were told to join the political parties at that time; it finished. Now it has come back in different forms and it always starts with something small, like girlfriends. It can be "this kwerekwere took my wife". They don't believe that someone proposes and someone agrees before they have a relationship. It cannot always be this foreigner took my woman. It even gets worse when a foreigner commits a crime like rape...it's now said all foreigners are rapists. Even the spaza shops, this is a problem. They give them space to rent with no problem especially with the Somalis, Ethiopians and Pakistan. Then it turns around and it's now they are taking our businesses.¹⁴

Similarly, a newly arrived foreign shop owner believed that foreign businesses benefited local residents and do not undermine locals' business aspirations. According to him there is space for everyone who is willing to work hard:

It is not true that foreigners are overtaking the businesses around here. We are not taking the businesses from the local people. We are just doing a favour for them. They use to go to the town for whatever they need. They used to take a taxi and come back with a taxi. We saved their time and money. How can I take the business? I just rented this shop and it was vacant when I rented it. Now the next door to my shop is vacant. Why a South African cannot come and rent it and run a business? All these shops foreigners are renting and using as a business premise belong to South Africans. Why do they not use it as shops? They are just blaming us but are not ready to do something. When we leave the place they start calling us again: 'please come back we need you'. Why do they not open the shops and leave us alone if it is we who are taking their businesses. That is nonsense. Even many of those who work in the shops are foreign nationals because if you give the job to a South African, he will not work properly. He will make all the excuses he can not to fulfil his obligation and when you talk to him, he will threaten you.¹⁵

Asked then why he thinks many local people believed that foreigners were taking their businesses, the same shop owner hinted that some local political players may be behind it all:

¹³ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

¹⁴ Interview with a male Zimbabwean national; Alex, 4 May 2016

¹⁵ Interview with a Somali national; Alex, 12 May 2016

I do not know. It is just an excuse to blame others for their problems. I am not sure but I think some political leaders are also part of this problem where they blame us for failure to service delivery. People always complain about the services they get and they end up looting and vandalizing our businesses. I think some people in the political system are involved. I am not sure. It seems EFF wants to mobilize people and win supporters by blaming everything ANC has done such as allowing foreigners to work in the shops. They usually say something negative about foreigners in the townships.¹⁶

The accounts above clearly speak to the varied level of integration and social interactions among foreign groups. While varied, they indicate limited social interactions and foreign livelihood activities and approaches inform some of the locals' negative perceptions and attitudes towards their presence in Alex.

3.3 Livelihoods and Socio-Economic Conditions

Due mainly to high unemployment rates in Alex, locals rely mainly on informal trading (spaza shops, street vending of fruits and vegetables, sweets and cigarettes, hair salons, shoe repairs, food outlets and taverns); casual labour, and social grants as their sources of income. According to respondents, the magnitude of unemployment and its effects in Alexandra is particularly evidenced by local youth centres overflowing with people seeking work. They indicated that unemployment, poverty and hunger, particularly among the youth, contribute to crime, prostitution, and substance abuse. One local stated: "Number one problem in this township is work, unemployment. The majority of guys here don't work. That's why you find these boys that smoke nyaope hustling and sometimes committing crime. The main problem is that if they find jobs, guys will be fine. Government has to do something."¹⁷

In addition to unemployment, Alex residents reported the following socio-economic challenges:

- *Congestion and overpopulation:* Respondents reported (and the research team witnessed) cramped and haphazard housing arrangements not only in informal areas but in formal sections where shacks are built around formal houses, in passages, and near main roads. Respondents attributed tensions and animosity among Alex residents to lack of space. In one respondent's words: "The proximity of existing homes to each other means that if I opt to increase my house/shack I would inevitably encroach on some else's meagre space and in the process, interfere with water or electricity infrastructure to the detriment of the rest of the community."¹⁸
- *Poor service delivery:* Respondents lamented (and the research similarly observed) poor housing and sanitation facilities. Roads and streets reek from free flowing sewage.¹⁹ Poor service delivery is particularly noticeable in hostels with mounds of rubbish surrounding visibly derelict buildings.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

¹⁸ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 12 May 2016

¹⁹ Research team observations

²⁰ Ibid.

One respondent stated that they are just staying at the hostel waiting for it to collapse on them at any time: “Have you ever gone inside to see the building? It could fall at any time. Maybe you should go in and take photos. In its current state it could fall at any time on us.”²¹

- *Crime*: Respondents indicated that, ‘crime is a major part of life in Alex’; it has become a livelihood activity for some residents. “People have needs and end up doing wrong all in the name of trying to make a living”²², said one respondent. Criminal activities in the areas include murders, armed robberies/muggings, hijackings, petty theft, etc. Some areas (e.g., London Road) are well known crime hot spots. Respondents reported that three cars were hijacked on London Road in three consecutive days during our fieldwork in the area. For one, “something is wrong in the community if this can happen at the same spot for so many days and nothing gets done.”²³ Alex residents generally blame the local hostels as the main source of crime. They reported hostels are full of people from KwaZulu-Natal looking for jobs. However many cannot find employment and instead turn to crime to make a living. Many are reported to have become ‘inkabi’ (hitmen/assassins) for taxi owners. As one local resident described:

You also have young boys coming from KwaZulu-Natal who, when they come to Joburg, come with the view that they are going to get jobs and they end up living in the hostels. There in the hostel they start to gamble, wash cars, get themselves involved in robbery, they are being used for purposes of assassinations.²⁴

Alex residents are generally unhappy due to the socio-economic challenges discussed above. There is a general sense of disappointment in the government and its local representatives. Residents believe the government should have made progress in dealing with housing and other service delivery concerns. In particular, hostel dwellers indicated that the hostels are not up to standard yet they are continuously subjected to live under what they term inhumane conditions. Various meetings and inspections have been conducted over the years yet nothing has been done to improve the situation.

3.4 Community Leadership and Conflict Resolution

3.4.1 Leadership structures and their relationships with communities

The most important community leadership structures in the area are ANC ward councillors/committees and Indunas. Indunas are the leaders in hostels and surrounding areas which are an IFP strong hold. One local described the situation in the following way: “The leaders in hostels are Indunas. Traditional leaders are

²¹ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 12 May 2016

²² Interview with a Zimbabwean national; Alex 4 May 2016

²³ Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

²⁴ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 4 May 2016

there in hostels; ... so the traditional leaders hold meetings, every block has a traditional leader.”²⁵ Outside of the hostels, ward counsellors are the dominant community leaders as one local noted:

It's the councillors who are the leaders because you cannot do anything without their approval, they are included in whatever we do, it's always them that are in charge. If ever there is, or we are doing cleaning campaign services, they are the ones that direct us to the particular place to get help from them and if there is going to be events, people must go to them with letters then they help them. The councillors are part of the daily lives of this community.²⁶

Respondents also identified other political parties (such as IFP and EFF), SAPS, CPF and numerous civic organisations as part of the community leadership. In one resident's reflections:

There are civic organisations, those that are not politically affiliated. By the time I came here there was an organisation called Alexandra Action Organisation today it is known as SANCO (South African National Civic Organisation), this organisation is an affiliate of the ANC. There is also the Alexandra Land and Property Organisation (ALPO) and then there is the Alexandra Residence Association. Also there is the East Bank Residence Association. There is also one for the old flats, which they hijacked and took over. Then all the political organisations are here in Alex except for the DA (Democratic Alliance). All these organizations are leaders in different ways.²⁷

Regarding the relationship between communities and their leadership structures, respondents indicated that there is a general lack of community trust in local leadership structures particularly the councillors and ward committees due to the perceived lack of service delivery. Residents believe that squatter camps exist because the councillors and the government have failed to provide housing since 1994. “We don't see what they are doing for us”²⁸, was a response given by many respondents when asked about communities' relationship with ward councillors and committees. One local noted:

You see in Alex most of the things are...they [leaders] don't do things effectively because...the councillors...I have been here since 2013, it is only now I see the councillor. So I can't say they are doing their all out. They are just there pushing a little. It is not a car that is moving fast so that people can be aware of it. If they were active, there is this place- Marlboro- some people are living in those old firms. If they were really effective, they would have solved the thing of people living in those firms a long time ago. Those people have tried everything, they have protested, done everything but still they are living in the same place.²⁹

Some respondents indicated that councillors are doing what they can to help the community and people trust them even if not everyone is satisfied. Asked about the relationship between the community and their councillors, one respondent replied:

I would say it's ok because if there is a problem with the electricity, they are the ones that connect you with people easily or if there is no water you can go and talk to them about it, or there is a leak

²⁵ Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

²⁸ Interview with South African respondent; Alex 12 May 2016

²⁹ Interview with male South African respondent; Alex, 13 May 2016

at a certain place they give you the number to call for help because some of us are ignorant, you fail to just to think what we will do when we face that particular problem and how you will handle it, so they able to assist you with the number of the specific place to call and get help. Others are active because they too are helping, if you can go to anyone and tell them your problem they are able to..., if they are not familiar with the issue, they refer you to the specific person to talk to and get help. So yes people do trust them, not everyone will be satisfied, people will always complain. A certain number of people might be satisfied with the services though a certain number will always complain as well.³⁰

However, all was not well even for these respondents. They complained about the lack of meaningful involvement in the decision making of community members. The respondent cited above continued:

Honestly, I feel that the decision makers and the decisions are not made here in Alex. We agree to certain things during the community meetings and people come out of that meeting very happy. Then another order comes from somewhere to stop that decision that was made, because certain people are not there or certain people were not involved. So you find that those people on top somewhere stop that decision. People are controlled and given feedback which is lies. That's why Alex is not involved much in toyi-toying. If the people want to demonstrate, the top people quickly grab the community leaders, give them jobs and housing and then everything stops. Especially the leaders of the pressure groups.³¹

Respondents similarly described residents' distrust in a police force seen as unresponsive, corrupt (e.g. work with criminals), and generally incompetent (see details in the next sub-section). Residents also distrust CPFs due to their reputation for brutality, violent conduct, and general ineffectiveness. One despondent resident explained:

I am one of the first people who were there when it (CPF) was set up, this was in 1994. That was the time when it was launched. I worked in the CPF for more than 15 years. Initially it was set up as a way of creating a bridge between the community and the police. People did not trust the police and the police at the time were not living in the community. They were living in the barracks. It was a way to help each other. Now they do not do what exactly they are supposed to do. When people are elected everything is good and then down the line changes start happening and people are no longer doing what they are supposed to do. This is purely because when people see that there is no monetary benefit, their work slacks and they eventually back off. Some people come in there with political influences forgetting that this is a public office and want to influence decisions.³²

Another local echoed similar sentiments:

Okay, let me make an example. Last week, there at London Road a white woman was hijacked. It was not that day only, it was a series of hijackings since, lets' say: Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. But there is nothing that the CPF is doing about that but they are totally aware that London Road has a lot of hijackings. [...] It is not necessarily a police job; after all police are human like us; they are just community and they do what the community does. We need to help them; we can't just leave then and say it's their responsibilities. We need to at least do something.³³

³⁰ Interview with a female South African; Alex, 6 May 2016

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

³³ Interview with a Male South African respondent; Alex, 13 May 2016

Other respondents indicated that CPF has technically ceased to function in their area due to its' wanton use of violence and resultant criminal cases against some of its members. "Police forum what I can tell you is recently it is scarce. I think the people had a lot of cases against them at the police station. So we don't see them anymore. They ended up operating against the law and people reported them,"³⁴ as one remarked.

3.4.2 Conflict resolution mechanisms

Residents generally use families, their respective community leadership structures, political parties, the local police and courts to resolve their individual or group conflicts. They rely on different institutions depending on the nature of the conflict and institutional mandate. One respondent observed:

In the community people work together with their leaders. Yes they are working together and if there is a problem anyway the consult help and the matter is resolved. When there are conflicts and fights, leaders are the ones that resolve the matters. When one has a particular problem with someone, they go to the leaders and report the matter, it depends on the matter as well if it requires family or different parties or the police or even courts. If it requires political parties they talk to them then they fix it but when it requires family, then their families must sort them out.³⁵

Despite the presence and help of the above-mentioned institutions however, respondents indicated that communities often use mob justice to resolve community issues, especially crime. They reported that mob justice was inevitable due to the perceived inability of the police and justice system to get crime under control. In one local's words:

I will just do the same scenario. You see the street vendors, if someone comes and tries to rob one of the street vendors and other street vendors catch that person, they will punish them immediately just to solve that problem before the police come. Because even if you call the police it is going to take two or one hour while that person is already gone. That's why I'm saying the community. The community is always there watching. You know, obviously when you talk about the community solving issues, they use violence and they will beat up that person. If you steal something... they call them "*u'mphakati*" [Zulu word for community]. I don't know if you've heard of them before. When someone steals or someone crushes into someone's house, they use a whistle to call "*u'mphakati*" to come solve that person quickly. When the police come, already they have finished and solved the problem. It started, not sure, but when I arrived in Alexandra in 2013, I found them doing that. [...] I think that the community has gone for the whistle and using violence because there used to be this thing that police like to take bribes. So they feel that if they hand over that guy to the police, tomorrow he or she will be out without any punishment. So they want to beat that guy, punish him before they hand him over so that even if that person pays a bribe they have already done their part as the community and they are satisfied: 'that guy we have punished him'! [...] I can confirm that one because I saw one of the police take bribes from one of the street vendors. That street vendor was selling weed (i.e. dagga/marijuana) so every afternoon they will come collect bribe. That's where I saw that this is really happening and I was shocked

³⁴ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 4 May 2016

³⁵ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 12 May 2016

because when you see a man with a uniform driving a state car, you know that person is to be respected and lead by the rules.³⁶

As elsewhere, the general distrust in local authority and the normalization of violence (mob justice) as an effective mechanism to resolve conflicts and restore order are serious threats to social cohesion. In particular, the link between mob justice (as a perceived effective means of resolving conflict, particularly dealing with crime) and violence against outsiders is not necessarily difficult to make given that outsiders are often associated with criminality and considered a serious threat to locals' lives and livelihoods.

3.5 History of Group Conflicts and Violence

3.5.1 Political violence

Alex has a well-documented history of political violence particularly between IFP and ANC supporters. In the early 1990s, violence between the two parties resulted in Zulu-speaking IFP supporters removing ANC supporters and other ethnic groups from Sector 2 and surrounding areas. The evicted groups then settled elsewhere in the township, most notably in Sector 5/Setswetla. In recalling the ANC-IFP violence, one local remembered:

During the 90s it was the ANC/Inkatha violence. During that era. Alexandra as a whole was mixed. During the 90s when the ANC versus Inkatha fought, there is this section which the hostel was in, they killed all other tribal people whether you were Sotho, Xhosa...you were killed. People ran away. Then this place was known as a no go area, a Zulu area, you see...³⁷

The violence has resulted in ongoing tensions and suspicion between IFP members and hostel dwellers and other residents of the greater Alex Township. Many avoid the hostels due to fear. Hostel residents also consider their hostels as a distinct space. When going elsewhere, they say "I am going to Alex..." despite the hostel being geographically part of Alex. One long-term resident narrated:

... I wouldn't say it's a tribalism challenge, it's stigma that was carried from the 80s during that time the IFP had taken the hostel as their domain areas. You would find that anyone who is not staying within those parameters, which were mainly Zulu speaking people, you wouldn't be going that side; there would be a lot of killings which were called political killings which were also motivated by the tribe. If you go that side and it is known that you do not speak Zulu and you are not within the IFP then chances of you being killed were very high. So it's a stigma that was carried from those political conflicts in the 80s and 70s. Currently it's still there. There are a few people that I would say it is not tribal issues, it is lack of education that came and carried the stigma over. You find that people from the hostel, when you ask them where do they stay- '*I stay at the hostel*'- but they move from the hostel to the next street, they would say '*I'm going to Alexandra*'. Whereas that hostel is in Alexandra. This tells you that there's a certain stigma that people in the hostel feel that the hostel is separate from Alexandra which is also influenced by the political affiliations as well. [...] They have made the hostel a political space but it is not a fair political situation. If you walk into

³⁶ Interview with a male South African respondent, Alex, 13 May 2016

³⁷ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 3 May 2016

the hostel there are municipal offices and within them it's only IFP posters. When you go in there you find Indunas that you need to be talking to before you can talk to the residents within the hostel parameters. That means that those people will be mainly leaders of the IFP. So it is not a fair political situation currently. But in terms of tribalism it's very reasonable but it is not a fair situation in a democratic country.³⁸

3.5.2 Taxi violence

Taxi violence is another type of group conflict and violence that has become a regular occurrence in Alexandra. The Alex Taxi Association (ASA), other taxi associations and local taxi owners operating in Alexandra or surrounding areas are regularly involved in violence and disputes that often result in the murder of taxi owners and drivers. Disputes and violence are usually over routes and commuters. Respondents believe that most taxi owners and leaders are hostel residents, more specifically Zulu speakers from KZN. There is a general belief that taxi violence and other types of violence in Alexandra always start with the Zulu people from the hostels". One respondent stated: "The taxi one is bad because there is AMSTA and ATAH and they kill each other because of positions. However that is not so bad now. The executives get more taxis with more taxis comes more benefits. They also fight for routes and at time involve the community."³⁹ Similarly another local added:

*Eyi...., taxi drivers and bosses, they are fighting for routes, you find that a certain taxi must not use a certain route, isn't there is Amsta and Ata, I don't know if there is a relationship between these two, they are saying this area is full of Tsongas and the other one are Zulus mostly. So that is what they are fighting for and people who speak different languages...*⁴⁰

3.5.3 Violence against outsiders

Alex has an extended history of violent exclusion of foreign nationals. As far back as December 1994 and January 1995, armed groups in Alexandra destroyed the homes of suspected illegal immigrants and forced them to go to the local police station, demanding deportation.⁴¹ More recently, the main waves of such violence occurred in 2008 and 2015 (see details in the next section).

3.6 Violence against Outsiders

3.6.1 Profile of the violence

Notwithstanding the long history and the on-going nature of such violence in Alex, respondents recalled that the main waves of violence against foreign nationals in 2008 and 2015. The now well-known 'May 2008 xenophobic violence' that swept across many townships and informal settlements in the country

³⁸ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

³⁹ Interview with a Zimbabwean national; Alex, 4 May 2016

⁴⁰ Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

⁴¹ Rabkin, Franny. "Alexandra, South Africa: Frustration boils over into violence." *The Weekender*, 17 May 2008.

http://www.csvr.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=909&Itemid=21 Accessed 7 Aug 2008. 1. Originally written for the Centre on the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

started on 11 May 2008. In Alex, the violence lasted for two weeks. Foreign nationals' shacks and shops were looted and destroyed; foreign nationals were stopped on streets and taxis, assaulted, beaten and killed. Women were raped. Attackers carried guns and other traditional weapons and sang: "They must go... Mayiphume inunu [*animals must get out*]", said a South African woman who witnessed the attacks. She also stated: "... it started on London road. I saw people running in the streets. Anywhere they could find a foreigner, he was beaten till he is... could not move. They stopped people in the street and in taxis; if you failed to respond in convincing Zulu, then you were beaten."⁴² Respondents reported that the attacks were organised by Zulu-speakers from Madala Hostel located along London Road. Many people, including South Africans, were killed.⁴³

In 2015, violence followed a service delivery protest and targeted foreign-owned businesses but also other foreign nationals living in the township. Foreign shops were looted, shop owners and street vendors were beaten and foreign nationals were displaced. As in 2008, respondents believe that hostel dwellers planned and coordinated the 2015 violent attacks. It was also during that time when two local young men attacked and killed a Mozambican vendor, Emmanuel Sithole. Somewhat unusually, his killers were arrested and convicted of murder. Respondents recalled the 2015 events as follows:

Remember the last one was triggered not by a xenophobic thing. It was guys who were taking cigarettes from someone who happens to be a foreign person and he ended up being stabbed. Then there are these criminals that started planning that "*no, it means that it's on; it's xenophobia. Let's go attack those who have shops so we can loot*". So it's a matter of the reaction that comes after a certain incident. People would start organizing themselves in a different kind of groupings. There will be some which are criminal minded to say "*no this is the chance. Now we can get into foreign ran shops and we take the stock and we loot whatever we want*". And there are some certain business people that would feel that "*it's true that they are taking our customers*". They would just talk. They are not going to be practically involved. It's just them saying: "*yeah, these people are taking our business*"; influencing certain groups that are more influenced by crime to continue with the issue of xenophobia. [...] Yes, it happens every time there is a xenophobic attack within the community. The shops are targeted and looted. Mainly, it would be the Somali, Ethiopian owned shops. People from Zim and Mozambique mostly their shops are not attacked during those attacks. It's mainly guys from Somalia and Ethiopia. So even when we are talking xenophobia there are degrees because from what I hear it seems that Mozambicans and Zimbabweans have been part of the community for years based on the history of the country.⁴⁴

I cannot remember the way it started. I felt that there were some tensions in the township. The Zimbabweans and the Mozambicans who do hawking around here did not work in those days. I cannot tell you the exact tension but there was a tension in the township and one of the men who killed the victim when arrested was confirmed to be under age and hence could not be indicted but the rest were arrested and charged with their crime. It was over after that killing. There was no more violence after that. [...] The men who killed the Mozambican national they were not that

⁴² Interview with respondent A1D5. Alex Sector 2, 29 September 2008

⁴³ See details on 2008 violence in Misago, J.P., Landau, L. & Monson, T. (2009). *Towards tolerance, law and dignity: Addressing violence against foreign nationals in South Africa*. Pretoria: IOM

⁴⁴ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

much organized. They were only three men but there were many people who were watching the incident. The problem in South Africa is that when someone is doing something wrong, the rest will not stop them. This is what astonishes me in SA. In other countries, if someone is doing wrong, the rest of the people will stop them. But in South Africa, even if you are robbed in the middle of the road and there are many people watching you, they will not even talk to the robbers. It is up to you to defend yourself or be robbed.⁴⁵

The conversation below between a researcher and one of the victims of the violence reveals not only what happened but also the instigators of the violence and their motivations as well as the lack of response or interventions by mandated institutions:

I⁴⁶: Could you please tell me what happened?

R⁴⁷: They were breaking and looting the shops and when I saw that they were coming to our side and my shop will not be spared, I closed the shops and ran for my life.

R: I went to Johannesburg, Mayfair

I: Then how did you know that your shop was broken and looted?

R: I phoned the owner of the building also I phoned a Pakistani who was my neighbour who came to the place. They both informed me of what happened

I: Then how did you come back again?

R: I came after the violence calmed down. All the shop owners came only when the violence was calmed down

I: Who calmed down the violence?

R: No one. People who were doing it became tired of it. There were no more shops to be looted. They did all they can and then got tired of doing anything more. No one can stop these people when they got angry. This is their culture and this was how they became independent from the white government.

I: Did the police come in?

R: They came in but what could the police be doing? They cannot stop all these angry people. Even the police vans were stoned and they runaway for their lives.

I: Was there any other government department who came in to calm down the situation?

R: I have not heard anyone doing so

I: And the NGOs or any other party?

R: No, no one can help in such cases. Everyone was scared for their lives. Maybe some were happy to see it happening.

I: Who are those 'some'?

R: EFF supporters, some local business people and also the taxi drivers

⁴⁵ Interview with a Somali national, Alex, 12 May 2016

⁴⁶ I: Interviewer

⁴⁷ R: Respondent

I: Why the local business people will want that?

R: They are jealous of us, they want to get us out of the township

I: But why?

R: They think they will make good profit if we leave here. They can charge customers whatever profit they want to. They are not happy us to be here.

I: have you ever tried to have a meeting with them and agree on prices of the items?

R: No

I: Why?

R: I do not know. It seems they will not be happy with us anyway

I: And the taxi drivers? What makes them want you out of the township?

R: there were not enough shops that people can buy what they want here. So people use to go with them and buy their needs from the town and when we came here, people got their needs from their neighbourhoods and therefore, taxis lost many of their customers.⁴⁸

3.6.2 Logics, underlying causes and triggers of the violence

The previous discussion clearly indicates that while there elements of criminal opportunism or direct material incentives through looting and appropriation of property, but the main purpose is to eliminate business competition. Indeed, for many respondents, local politics is to blame for creating the hostility of local people against foreign nationals. In addition to IFP/hostel dwellers usually behind the violence against foreigners in Alex, respondents indicated that EFF is currently mobilising the local people to force foreigners out of the township. Local business players' involvement is mainly motivated by the desire to get rid of what they perceive to be illegitimate completion brought about by foreign traders. One local explained local business owners' involvement:

Competition, one, is a factor. Scarcity of resources; people are competing over that. When people compete, in the process other people become so jealous. For instance, to give you two examples: there are shops owned by South Africans. As they are owned by South Africans, they rent these shops to people from Somalia. These are South African shops, property that is owned by South Africans. Then the next person sees would see that person making money with these new tenants. The next person who is a South African, having seen that that shop is progressing, begins talking these things in the shebeens with other people. They start talking bad things about the neighbour's shop. Because young people are easily taken when they are drunk or given drugs then they start to attack people's shops. At some point it might not be that. It might be a situation of, giving an example about the guy that was badly stabbed and killed, Mr Sithole. Where the incident started, it started where there are a huge number of people from Maputo and Zimbabwe and they are selling there. It's like a market of some sort. And here are these two boys that..., I think there are four boys. The come to ask for a cigarette and they force their way to get the cigarette. As he gives them the cigarette they want to come back and take the whole pack and they happen to stab him. And

⁴⁸ Interview with a Somali national; Alex, 12 May 2016

when they stab him what happened? Some who are there, chose to just look. They fold their arms and look. You get what I'm saying? And then they chase the guy and kill the guy next to the toilets in some other area while he was running towards the clinic. I'm trying to say that at some point you might find that these things were not planned from where they were planned. You may find that they were competing amongst people who are running shops. People who are running stalls and one wants to occupy that space. He might have sent these boys to come and do these things there. But it does not make all South Africans to be xenophobic. At some point these are incidents that happen by few people and at times the community comes very hard to condemn those issues.⁴⁹

In addition to local politics and business competition, violence is also driven by i) locals' negative attitudes toward the presence of outsiders and their perceived socio-economic ills they are associated with (see earlier discussion); and ii) individual disputes that often degenerate into group conflict and violence. One respondent elaborates:

You may find that someone had conflict with someone from outside and then the next thing he calls his friends to attack this person. Next thing it spreads. So it could start with a disagreement between two people, maybe over change or something. From there you fetch your crew and come back. This happens a lot... Well, you know influence. It can start involving two people and you go and get your friends to come take your side. Then next thing it has spread. It has become group fighting with another group because a guy from outside won't allow you to get at him as a group; he will also want to form his group. So they defend themselves and it becomes a bigger fight; it is now two groups fighting.⁵⁰

3.6.3 Responses to threats and violence

There are few effective response mechanisms preventing or stopping violence in Alex. According to respondents, the attackers in 2015 were a huge crowd of angry people who wanted to loot the shops of immigrants and were telling immigrants to leave their township. No community leaders or local authorities tried to stop the angry crowd. The police tried to intervene but were unable to halt the attacks. The police came to the scene and requested some foreign nationals to close, evacuate or leave their shops in order to save their lives. A strong police presence did not stop people from looting shops. Police were also not able to stop the May 2008 violence; it stopped only when there was nothing more to attack (i.e., after all foreign nationals had been chased out of the area and after perpetrators had finished looting and 'attaching' foreign-owned property.)⁵¹ One respondent described:

They would use the police but I don't know why they, they do use the police but there is no prevention before something happens and when you see that something is going to happen it's not prevented from happening but they leave it for later and the police have to come and do the..., I don't like that.... Even when they come, they can't stop it...⁵²

⁴⁹ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 4 May 2016

⁵⁰ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

⁵¹ See details in Misago et al, 2009

⁵² Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

That said, a local group of 'Peace Monitors' claim to be working closely with the police and CPF to prevent violence in the area since the xenophobic attacks of May 2008. They claim frequent successes in resolving conflict peacefully and preventing violence but complained that they lack resources and support from government. With further investments they hope to do more and spread their influence and responsibility. One of the founding members explained the group successes thus far:

Then we said that the people we call 'kwerekweres' are our own brothers because they are Africans. Let's understand our Africanness. We thought: you know what, we know what the people are planning. If we go, this boy leading this group I know him, when he sees me he calls me uncle. I go to him and say "young man I understand you are frustrated there is no service delivery but you taking your frustrations out on the wrong people. Why don't we cluster together and talk to government. These people are not doing it to themselves coming from outside. You would also do the same thing." As peace monitors basically that is how we started. I think it was 2008 when it actually started. We were able to curb it that particular month after that and they said that is small. Through engaging it became quiet and we were able to action. We agreed that you will stand here and you there. When it starts please tell us. We will then apply peace that we know. That is how it started. And then it went to Action Support Centre with Peace Monitors. That's how it started and now we can identify those people playing those roles. We can say: we know who and who; we heard from such and such. We know somebody who can come and whisper to us and we can go and say: we know you are planning to attack. Do you know that the person who owns refrigeration company, the Zimbabwean, has a child with your cousin's sister? If you kill him what are you going to achieve? Just let it go. It became a model that was carried through by working together it reached Orange Farm. With time, you know when people don't get paid, they fall aside and we had to revive it with other members again. [...] We would also get involved when other issues appeared as peace monitors in Alexandra involving people from the hostel. We have a section with the hostel here in Alexandra where, during the 1990s violence, the Zulu speaking people sort of dominated and chased people away. We engaged them as well... let's look at things as Africans not as strangers. Now when we were fighting this xenophobia thing, especially targeting our Somalis and whatever, we were able to engage them as well and say let's look at this issue. The people are already here and selling things. We went into the shops and spoke to them and also built working relationships with Indunas in the hostel. [...] With the Sithole saga, there were also a few other incidents around that time. But let me tell you what happened. A night before the Sithole issue, there were some shops that were broken into once again. They broke those ones around here and they were supposed to attack somewhere else. We went there and prevented it from continuing. That of Sithole happens in the morning on a different level for these boys to kill him. We managed to help by preventing it from spreading. Two shops were attacked. It was supposed to go further but we intervened.⁵³

Follow up fieldwork in April 2017 revealed that the Alex 'peace builders' team was indeed active with (much appreciated) support from Action Support Centre. An Induna at Madala Hostel, who is also a member of the team, recounted their success thus far in the following conversation with the research team:

⁵³ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 3 May 2016

I⁵⁴: I can't help but notice you are wearing Action for Conflict Transformation and we are talking about social cohesion. What types of conflicts are here in the community in Alex? Not only in the hostel but also around in the community?

R⁵⁵: You see we learnt from Action Support Centre that when there is conflict, people must be handled a certain way so that a fight does not happen. Especially on the issue of xenophobia. We are now able to tell our people that "they are people as well trying to make a living. You also have a right to leave here and go to their countries and learn something there and maybe even decide to stay and open a business". Action Support has taught us that when people disagree, you must do 1, 2, 3.

I: Okay, this year there was xenophobic violence in Rosettenville and Mamelodi but I did not hear anything about Alex.

R: No, no! We are here now. When we hear that something is going on, we go there as peace builders- that were started by Action Support Centre- and listen and sit them down and show them the right way. [...] They help us open up our minds so that we don't focus on one thing because we learnt how it is to deal with people. We are able to ... You see we even went to Jeppe when things were bad and we got there and we spoke to the people there.

I: So you even went to Jeppe to intervene?

R: Yes we have been trained. The arrival of Pretty has helped change our minds as we know what is important in life. Even now we wish to go further. But we will be very happy if someone as to come and give us small amounts.

I: How is the intervention received by certain groups here who might feel like they are facing competition for resources and for business. How is the intervention by peace builders received by community members and other groups?

R: You see have been staying in Alex for a long time and the whole of Alex knows us. We are able to go and address any problem wherever it is and sit down with the community there. Today there is no longer a need for people to live a certain way. Everybody needs to get educated so they can stand for themselves. So if you are just sitting down there is nothing that you will get. So those who are crazy, we are able to tell them that "hey! That is not the life, this is life".⁵⁶

Another visible sign that Action support Centre work may be having a positive impact in Alex is the fact that, in April 2017, the ACMS research team was given easy access into Madala hostel and warmly received by Indunas. This was not the case in 2016, when the team faced hostility and was refused access by the same indunas.

3.6.4 Return, reintegration and perspectives on future interactions

As was the case following the 2008 violence, foreigners displaced in 2015 returned once violence subsided. As respondents indicated however, the return of the displaced is not due to successful efforts by

⁵⁴ I: Interviewer (Researcher)

⁵⁵ R: Respondent (Induna)

⁵⁶ Interview with an Induna (Madala Hostel) and Peacebuilders Team member. Alex, 15 April 2016

government of any other formal interventions. It is rather usually negotiated at the social level by individuals concerned. Respondents further reported that, while there are usually community dialogues in the wake of violent attacks, there are no long-term initiatives or programmes to address anti-foreigner sentiments or drivers of the violence.

Safety is the main concern for foreign nationals currently living in Alex. While some foreign respondents indicated that they feel tensions and incidents of violence against them have generally decreased in the recent past, they reported that foreigners generally live in fear as violence can erupt again anytime. One foreign respondent described the situation:

I cannot even walk in the township. They will follow me and rob me. I need to exercise and make walks. But I am afraid for my life. They think I have money even if I do not have anything. If a Somali or Ethiopian or Pakistanis walk in the township, they follow him. They assume we are always full of money. They call us Makula and treat us differently. [...] My friend there is no future for us here. These people are not the best people to live with especially if you are doing a business and if you are a soft target for them. They can recognize us much easier and they think we have some wealth. [...] Our main challenge here is the safety and security. If this place has security, it will be a good place to live and do a business.⁵⁷

Similarly, South African respondents did not rule out the possibility of violence occurring again. In the words of one local respondent:

I wish there can be a relationship between South African citizens and foreigners but if you look mostly at people who come from Natal, the Zulus, I always feel that they don't like foreigners, I don't know but I just wish it stops. It will stop for some time but still I may happen again. The conclusion? It's that they will end up going back to their countries, but I really wish that we can be one people, that is my wish, so that we help each other, you see..., because you never know what it is that will happen, you see...⁵⁸

Similarly, another local believed violence was likely to happen again while insisting that only individual efforts, not government programmes, could forge positive interactions between groups and in doing so build lasting social cohesion in the area. In his words:

It's very possible that we could still have another outbreak of xenophobic violence, looting and things like that. If you look outside Alexandra, there's a lot of them still happening whereby if a thief goes into a Somali shop and the Somali reacts then it becomes a xenophobic issue: "he killed a South African, in fact all of them must go!" It's an issue that I cannot say "no chances of it happening are not there". It depends how much leaders in the community and government are willing to educate our own people, and also the foreign guys how much we educate them about social cohesion and how to actively be part of the community. It can start with simple participation in the street you are in. If you heard there is a death and you have a shop, you from Somalia. Why don't you go there and drop off two cans of tinned fish and say "I heard there was a death, I'm here

⁵⁷ Interview with a Pakistani national, Alex, 12 May 2016

⁵⁸ Interview with a female South African respondent; Alex, 5 May 2016

to donate two tins of fish”. So it will still take a personal level... I wouldn't say leadership need to play a bigger role here, it's an individual thing. You know when leadership speaks, they speak about the environment in which they are in and the way they relate with the foreign people. He will speak from the education that they have on the issue of social cohesion and how to integrate people from neighbouring countries. He won't be there in the street where people are fighting for one customer, for one loaf of bread. The more emphasis is on us as individuals and residents to say on how we relate within that street on our own before a ward councillor can come. A ward councillor cannot be in every street all the time. So our relations as residents will therefore guide our ward councillor. It will embrace our relationship instead of the leadership starting a programme which us, as residents don't understand its purpose; therefore we won't even attend that programme. But if we ourselves within our yards, within the street we stay, we manage to have that relation in terms of good times and bad times. They help us, we help them in all spheres then I believe it will be a good start. [...] There are new shops being opened, which means that the number is increasing it is not declining. Like I said it is the responsibility of the residents not the government. The same residents that are complaining are the same residents that are renting space out to the Somalis. That's why I'm saying government cannot have much impact in the role that they can play, it starts with ourselves. I see, maybe, I cannot find a job or I cannot maintain my small shop, you find one tin of fish and sometimes there's no stock. Then I think let me give it to a Somali for R3000 a month rent. Then government is not involved there anywhere. Someone next door sees that you moved in a Somali, then they start saying “no, the Somali is taking my customers”. Which is the issue I should have addressed with the first person running the spaza before they rented it out to a Somali. They saw that business going down. They never acted and said “neighbour, I see your business going down, how can we assist?” He had to make means on his own which was “rent my space out so I can make an income.” So what are you saying? Are you saying that Mr Mkhize shouldn't make an income and his children must go hungry because he couldn't run a business? Renting space out is also a business idea, there are people making money through estate agencies. So you can also rent your shop out and say “come and rent”. Malls are all about rental and space! ⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Interview with a male South African respondent; Alex, 6 May 2016

4. CONCLUSIONS: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Established in 1912, Alexandra is the oldest and one of the most densely populated townships in Johannesburg. It is one of the most linguistically diverse townships in South Africa as a result of being home to all South African ethnic groups and foreign nationals from the African continent and beyond. While not inherently conflictual, diversity often brings about social cohesion challenges (e.g., individual or group conflicts) particularly in contexts of socio-economic hardships. As this study shows, if not effectively addressed, these conflicts generate chronic tensions and group-based violent exclusion that negatively affect the socio-economic development of entire communities and not just target groups. The study identifies the following issues characterising social cohesion in Alex. These issues include challenges and symptoms of social cohesion frailties but also opportunities that could serve as a foundation on which to build more positive social interactions and peaceful cohabitation:

1. *Collective efficacy*: The study finds that Alex residents are able to work collectively together to address common problems such as crime and poor service delivery. That community members are able to mobilize and work collectively to address common challenges is an opportunity for social cohesion as long as approaches to solving problems and solutions sought are for the wellbeing of all residents (i.e., not discriminatory or intended to disadvantage those perceived not to belong);
2. *Peacebuilders*: Although their role and successes still need to be verified and confirmed, they appear to be agents of peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts and cohabitation. They could be a useful institution for social cohesion particularly in a context where trust in local official community leadership and authority is absent. If claims of success are indeed true, the mechanism warrants additional human capacity/capital and material resources;
3. *Negative perceptions towards outsiders*: While some locals hold positive or at least neutral views about foreigners and occasionally express sympathy for their plight, the majority of Alexandra residents maintain strong negative perceptions and attitudes towards foreign nationals living in their midst. Locals are prone to blaming foreigners for the scarcity of resources and opportunities (because they steal jobs, houses, women and businesses that belong to locals by right), crime, for carrying deadly diseases; for not paying tax, and failing to contribute to the local economy because they send money made in Alex to their home countries (resource outflows). As elsewhere, the reinforcement and mobilization of these negative perceptions are a symptom of other social cohesion fault lines;
4. *Mob justice*: While Alex residents use varied institutions (including families, community leaders, the police and local courts) to resolve individual and group conflicts, they often rely on collective violence to deal with common challenges. This is particularly so regarding crime. Respondents

indicate that mob justice is necessary given the police's and the justice system's failures in controlling crime. The general lack of trust in local authority and the normalization of violence as an effective mechanism to resolve conflicts and restore order are serious threats to social cohesion. There are strong links between mob justice and violence against outsiders given locals' frequent association of outsiders with criminality and threats to locals' lives and livelihoods;

5. *History of group conflicts and violence:* Alex has a well-documented history of group conflicts and violence including political violence, taxi violence, violent service delivery protests and violence against outsiders. These are not only symptoms of social and political fragmentation but also obstacles to any prospects of future peaceful cohabitation as they create long-lasting tensions, a climate of mutual suspicion among population groups, and institutional structures dependent on violence for their survival;
6. *Xenophobic violence:* Alex has an extended history of violently excluding foreign nationals. As far back as December 1994, armed groups in Alexandra destroyed the homes of suspected illegal immigrants forcing them to go to the local police station and demanding their deportation. More recently, such violence peaked in 2008 and 2015 although there continues to be sporadic attacks, particularly targeting foreign-owned businesses. While criminal opportunism or direct material incentives through looting and appropriation of property are factors, the violence is primarily driven by local political and business players' interest in permanently driving outsiders out of the community. Indeed, local politics is largely to blame for creating the hostility of local people against foreign nationals. In addition to the IFP affiliated hostel dwellers who are regular instigators, respondents indicated that EFF is currently mobilising locals to expel foreigners from the township. Local business players' involvement is mainly motivated by the desire to eliminate what they perceive to be foreigner traders' illegitimate competition. This type of violence is not only an indicator of social cohesion frailties but also an additional obstacle to social cohesion as it causes a long lasting social damage. Due to repeated violent attacks, locals and foreigners in Alex are not sure of their future cohabitation and cannot rule out the possible of the violence occurring again, particularly given that there are few effective preventive measures in place.

The study concludes that the issues described above (both challenges and opportunities) and many others detailed in this report need to be taken into consideration if interventions to promote social cohesions and sustainable peaceful cohabitation are to be successful.



Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that supports democratic change, monitors freedom, and advocates for democracy and human rights.

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