

Understanding conflict between locals and migrants in SA

Case studies in Atteridgeville and Diepsloot

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Socio-economic pressures in South Africa are impeding attempts to build social cohesion between locals and foreign-born migrants. Locals see migrants as competitors in every sphere of daily life. Conflict is not rooted in xenophobia but a desperate need for jobs, access to basic services and better living standards. This report discusses the findings of research conducted in Atteridgeville and Diepsloot, two townships in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Key findings

- ▶ Unemployment, competition for scarce resources, crime, drugs and poor service delivery were identified as key impediments to harmonious co-existence between locals and foreign migrants.
- ▶ Locals and migrants have few spaces for social interaction, which accentuates cultural differences and prevents people from viewing each other with compassion and understanding.
- ▶ Fear and mistrust between locals and foreign migrants are exacerbated by inflammatory narratives peddled by some influential public figures, local leaders and community members.
- ▶ Policymakers and key institutions such as the police do not provide information and data on crime and arrests at the community level, which leaves citizens to speculate and spread misperceptions.
- ▶ Young people genuinely fear that foreign migrants will take their jobs and livelihoods. This impedes their ability to relate to and empathise with migrants.

Recommendations

- ▶ The approach to community conflicts should be conciliatory rather than inflammatory. The emphasis should be on supporting local initiatives that create dialogue.
- ▶ The South African Police Service should improve local policing and visibility in these communities to combat crime.
- ▶ Community leaders and civic organisations require significant support from government and non-state actors to continue their work. Community structures are best placed to foster social cohesion.
- ▶ Funding and support are needed to reinforce existing platforms such as integrated development planning processes and the change agencies trained under the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.
- ▶ A detailed review of the efficacy of current interventions is needed to determine their relevance and utility to the communities they are meant to serve.
- ▶ When opportunities arise, foreign-born migrants should participate and identify with locals and not create their own enclaves. Learning the local language and joining community activities could be an entry point.
- ▶ Government departments responsible for home affairs and labour need to enforce migration rules and hold private sector employers accountable when they employ illegal immigrants and pay wages below the stipulated minimum wage, irrespective of employees' nationality.

Introduction

The research sought to understand issues of social cohesion and conflict in Gauteng. This research was conducted in two townships, namely Atteridgeville in the City of Tshwane (Pretoria) and Diepsloot¹ in the City of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The research was aimed at exploring the lived realities in communities that had experienced friction between locals and foreign-born migrant populations.

The intention of the research was twofold. First, to get the lived experiences of the community members and how they understand their circumstances. Second, to provide recommendations that can be useful towards strengthening social cohesion as well as feeding the insights gained in the course of the research into initiatives that are already underway.

Gauteng is South Africa's economic hub, contributing 34% to the national GDP.² The predominantly urban province is the most densely populated, with 13.4 million³ people (24.1% of the national population). The province is gravely affected by inequality, poverty, unemployment,⁴ crime and violence, making it one of the most unequal provinces in the country.⁵

Gauteng has witnessed hate crimes and community conflicts between marginalised and disempowered people

The high youth population, high urbanisation and high inequality make Gauteng fertile ground for violent expressions of dissatisfaction and frustration. With a large migrant community, Gauteng has witnessed high numbers of hate crimes, community conflict and tensions pitting the most marginalised and disempowered against each other.

Diepsloot and Atteridgeville are two of the province's so-called townships. Both have past experiences of targeted violence towards foreign nationals, albeit differently. They are ideal areas to undertake in-depth research to better understand the varying roots of conflict in disempowered and marginalised societies.

The purpose of the research was to understand socio-economic and political dynamics that create conflict between local communities and migrants in Atteridgeville (wards 62, 28 and 72) and Diepsloot (wards 95 and 113). The study was conducted in a way that would develop a better understanding of the dynamics that exist within local communities and among migrants. This research will be used to inform policymaking as well as programming interventions that aim to promote positive intergroup relations between South Africans and immigrants from other countries, as distinct from migrants from other parts of the country, for example from rural to urban areas.

Social cohesion in South Africa: literature review

Since the discovery of diamonds on the Witwatersrand in the 1860s, South Africa has experienced an influx of migrants seeking opportunities.⁶ With the dawn of democracy in 1994 the country has become the preferred destination of many migrants from all over Africa.⁷ The country's relatively stable political environment and, at one time, the leading African economy⁸ attracted many economic and political migrants⁹ from across the continent.

The phenomenon of foreign-born and domestic migrants documented or undocumented is not recent. The local population has had interactions with migrants for nearly a century. However, with the worsening economic fortunes of the country coupled with high unemployment, poor service delivery and corruption, the relations between foreign migrants and locals have become tense at best and volatile at worst.

Social integration, especially in informal settlements, has been tested. Multiple episodes of violence against foreign nationals have been on the increase since the major xenophobic incidents of 2008, 2015 and 2019.¹⁰

Social cohesion has been associated with concepts such as belonging, unity, equality, social trust, equality, political and social participation and tolerance for difference and diversity.¹¹ Freedom House in its 2017 study describes social cohesion as positive relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions, with shared geography.¹² Further, a socially cohesive society lacks

conflict based on race, gender, class, ethnicity, disability or various other distinctions.¹³

The Freedom House 2017 report aptly describes social cohesion as unity in diversity, solidarity and aspirations for a peaceful, safe, and equal nation or society.¹⁴ South Africa developed a national strategy for developing an inclusive and cohesive South African society in 2012. Whilst the state is applauded for making efforts to engender social cohesion, the policy has been criticised for ignoring issues of ethnicity while focusing on race and class.

Xenophobia and community-level conflict pose a threat to social cohesion. While 'xenophobia' has its origins in the Greek term which means fear of strangers, in the South African context it has been taken to mean actions or policies against foreigners that may cause physical injury or damage to property.¹⁵

Freedom House gives a more nuanced view of conflict in South Africa by showing that people moving within South Africa are often regarded as outsiders and excluded based on ethnicity and language.¹⁶ The study notes that xenophobia manifests itself in various forms such as street-level abuse, discrimination and harassment by government officials, and violence of varying scale and intensity.

Some researchers on the subject have noted that authorities often deny the xenophobic and ethnic nature of conflict in South Africa.¹⁷ Definitions of xenophobia and community-level conflict should be sufficiently broad, going beyond physical violence to include different forms of exclusion and discrimination, overt or covert actions.

Freedom House provides a list of factors that threaten social cohesion. Among these threats is socio-economic deprivation characterised by high unemployment that creates discontent among citizens who usually vent their anger on foreigners. Low levels of social interaction between foreigners and locals due to suspicion and fear of identity exposure and negative attitudes and perceptions towards foreigners have impeded social cohesion in South Africa. ISS's recent research notes that police brutality directed at foreigners legitimised attacks on foreigners.¹⁸ The conflict has not been exclusive to townships but has also spread to different provinces and rural areas.

Vigilante groups such as Operation Dudula and the Dudula Movement have operated with impunity, apprehending and harassing foreigners.¹⁹ In August 2022, in Atteridgeville, members of Operation Dudula were turning away anyone they thought to be a foreigner from Kalafong Hospital.²⁰ In Diepsloot, Operation Dudula turned an anti-crime protest into an anti-foreigner protest.²¹ No action has been taken against these members by the state and this has created a lack of trust in the police. Individuals have taken matters into their own hands, carrying out counterattacks on Operation Dudula members. This potentially contributes to the view that Dudula members are acting lawfully.

In some cases, communities of convenience are created out of economic necessity, without real integration

Xenophobic attacks have occurred frequently in Western Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape. Gauteng perhaps features much in the media because 47.5% of the foreign-born population resides there.²² The attacks targeted people in poor and marginalised communities. The majority of victims are of African origin, and this has led other scholars to term the violence Afrophobia rather than xenophobia.²³ However, migrants of Asian origin have also experienced targeted violence.

It would be a travesty of justice to claim that there is no vestige of social cohesion in South Africa. Pockets of social cohesion have been identified within South African communities. The report by Freedom House notes that communities such as Masiphumelele in Cape Town showed good interactions between foreigners and locals in shebeens (taverns) and braai areas as there have been limited cases of violence since 2008. Masiphumelele was given an award by the Justice and Peace Reconciliation Commission.

Community perceptions of outsiders are not static. Alexandria in Gauteng was hailed as a shining example of social cohesion when the community cooperated to pick litter after PikiTup went on strike.²⁴ At times cohesion may be superficial as some interactions are transactional in nature. Due to the economic necessity to transact,

communities of convenience are created while foreigners are not fully integrated into the areas where they reside.

ISS research noted that public officials blame foreigners for a wide range of social and economic problems.²⁵

In the same vein, some scholars have suggested that xenophobia should also be seen as part of a political discourse where the creation of a South African identity simultaneously leads to the creation of 'otherness' for Africans from other countries.²⁶

Prominent individuals such as Jeff Radebe²⁷ blamed unemployment on the 'monopoly' enjoyed by foreigners in retail trade.²⁸ Such statements were issued without data to support the claim and it has been shown by research that, on the contrary, investments by foreigners led to the creation of more jobs.²⁹

Essentially community conflict in South Africa is a result of competition over scarce resources. Due to the unequal allocation of resources and access to essential services in South Africa, the poor feel unheard and their frustrations are increasingly turning to violence to draw attention to their plight.^{30,31,32}

However, not all conflicts are anti-foreigner or ethnic-based. The contestations for opportunities and economic resources give rise to intergroup conflicts such as political, vigilante gang violence and taxi wars. Violent taxi wars have erupted in South Africa as associations fight for profitable routes. This is evidence to show that even where foreigners are not involved conflicts occur and the basic premise is competition for resources. In these cases, foreigners become victims caught up in the conflict.

Conflicts have also been politically motivated. In areas such as KwaMashu and Isipingo violent political clashes have erupted between members of the ruling African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party, leading to the death and injury of many people.³³ There are also perceptions that local communities are divided along ethnic lines. In the aftermath of the 2016 elections, some ANC supporters in the City of Tshwane protested against the ANC secondment of Thoko Didiza as mayor because she did not 'belong' to Tshwane but to KwaZulu-Natal.³⁴

Other incidences of tribalism are in the Malamulele-Viwani protests in 2015, where the inability to speak

fluent Venda was grounds for turning back people going to Thohoyandou for shopping. In Diepsloot, people from Eastern Cape and Swazi-speaking people in Mpumalanga are also viewed as foreigners even though they may be South African by birth.³⁵ These examples show that South African communities still remain divided along racial or tribal lines, thus impeding social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa.

Gang wars have also been visible in the South African landscape. Gangsters are common in areas such as Orange Farm, Diepsloot and Khayelitsha. Incidents of gangster violence at schools were reported. Diepsloot offers a unique example where it was reported that Zimbabwean gangs worked together with South African gangs to commit crimes. In this instance, we find foreign-born migrants who are into criminality working together with locals. These 'cliques' of criminals seem to cut across nationalities.

The poor in South Africa feel unheard and turn to violence to draw attention to their plight

Not all episodes of violence have been xenophobic in nature. Protests in Thangakhukhanya, Piet Retief in Mpumalanga, Thokoza and Diepsloot in Gauteng in 2009 were associated with poor service delivery and incompetent leadership. These areas were identified as crime and violence hotspots. The memoranda of community organisations such as the concerned group in Mpumalanga held protests that demanded accountability from local authorities.³⁶ None of their demands were xenophobic in nature.

Similar groups include the Balfour Youth Forum. This association is of particular interest because it consists of members from different political parties, among them Youth Communist League, the Pan African Youth Congress and the African National Youth Congress. This is a typical example of social cohesion where community members are united by common interests.

The literature suggests that social cohesion has to be deliberately engendered and nurtured or else it will not be sustainable.³⁷ It has to be engendered through deliberate policies, and the state, community leader

and community at large have a role to play. The family and school systems which are important agents in the socialisation of children also play an important role in this regard. Community members have become accustomed to many forms of violence, including that which is targeted towards foreign migrants and have even internalised terminology that is demeaning, such as *amakwerekwere*, referring to Zimbabweans, or *amakula*, referring to Somali, Pakistanis and Ethiopians.³⁸

Methodology

The research was conducted using a mixed methods approach grounded in qualitative methodology. The qualitative approach allowed the researchers to explore in-depth the experiences of both migrants and locals as it relates to social integration, resources scarcity, service delivery and poverty.

The research also followed a layered approach with the community members, community structures, local leadership and experts forming various tiers of the research process. Primary data was collected using semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

Area selection

The process of research area selection was informed by spatial analysis and desktop analysis. Key issues such as the areas with the most recent incidents of violence, service delivery and anti-migrant protest informed the research area identification and selection process.

Recruitment of research participants

Participants in the research exercise were identified using the purposive sampling methods. The research relied on organisations and stakeholders that collaborate with the Institute for Security Studies in the communities where the research exercise was taking place. The profiles of the participants included immigrants and South Africans.

Two groups of non-South African migrants of all ages participated in separate focus group discussions because the topic is sensitive, and discussions were likely to be volatile.

The cohort of young women and men of South African origin aged 15 to 35 was divided into two focus groups

comprising those between 15 and 24 (10 participants) and those aged between 25 and 34 (10 participants). The adult group (aged 35 to 60) preference was for those who have stayed in these areas for at least 10 years.

Focus group discussions

Twelve focus group discussions were conducted with over 140 participants in two sites, including two focus groups with migrants held in both sites (one each per site). The focus group discussion guide required five discussions per site; the sixth was added as to make up for any possible discrepancy. A total of 54 males and females of different age groups participated in these focus group discussions in Diepsloot, and a total of 92 participated in Atteridgeville.

The focus group discussions were designed in a friendly and participatory manner. This created a conducive and safe environment for the research participants to openly and freely express their views. South Africa, like many African and patriarchal societies, is a high-power distance society. This structure is more pronounced with regard to gender roles and engagement. Because of this, the research endeavoured to create safe spaces for women where they were able to articulate their views without cultural barriers.

Key informant interviews

A total of 14 key informant interviews were completed in both sites (Atteridgeville ward 62, 68 and 72 and Diepsloot ward 95 and 113), with seven interviews in each locality. The interviews were held with strategic office bearers (formal and informal), decisionmakers and policymakers and topic experts. Community stakeholders were drawn from institutions such as churches, NGOs, the police and any other institution working around the topic of community cohesion. The interviews were facilitated through a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the socio-economic circumstance and how the locals interpreted their lived realities.

This study was conducted in full adherence to standard ethical norms and procedures and the code of conduct for research as prescribed by ISS Research Policy. The gathering of data was undertaken after approval was granted by the ISS research Ethics Committee. The researchers ensured adequate quality and integrity

throughout the research process and all information collected was treated with confidentiality, ensuring the anonymity of participants. A written consent form was presented beforehand to all focus group discussion and key informant interview participants, in a language they understood, to ensure they had a chance to pre-read it before they signed and that their agreement to participate in the research was voluntary.

Trends, triggers, themes and problems

This report draws on field research conducted in two settlements, namely Atteridgeville in the city of Tshwane (Pretoria) and Diepsloot in the city of Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The research contributes towards an understanding of the extent of social cohesion amongst communities in Atteridgeville and Diepsloot by providing increased insight into the socio-economic and political dynamics that have been used to create conflict within communities of indigenous community members and migrants. The research engaged existing community structures as well as community members and, in the process, sought to understand local-level dialogue initiatives around conflict and the lived realities in these impoverished communities.

At the heart of conflict is socio-economic pressure rather than an outright hatred of foreign migrants

This section discusses the findings from focus group discussions, key informant interviews, document review and secondary analysis and validation workshops. It aims to draw out the trends, triggers, themes, and problems identified during research on community conflict and division, and to provide informed comprehension of the issues faced in the communities of Atteridgeville and Diepsloot. This discussion is also important in developing solutions for and spearheading social cohesion.

Analysis of the key informant interviews and focus group discussions revealed a common thread in the understanding of the issues that affect social cohesion in the two settlements. The lived realities of the locals is of a daily struggle for survival amidst socio-economic

pressures that have left many locals with limited opportunities for livelihoods and gainful employment.

Further, the rate of urbanisation and subsequent migration from other provinces and towns to economic hubs such as Johannesburg means locals have to contend with domestic and foreign-born migrants. Competition for scarce resources, inadequate infrastructure and poor service delivery make it difficult for locals to identify with and be empathetic to the cause of foreign-born migrants.

At the heart of conflicts and social friction is thus socio-economic pressure rather than an outright hatred of the foreign migrants. From the focus group discussions and key informant interviews contentious issues that hinder cohesion are as follows.

Unemployment

The country is currently experiencing high levels of unemployment with the youth being the most affected. With economic growth almost stagnant, opportunities for gainful employment are slim, leading to cutthroat competition for the few available jobs. Both formal and informal areas of Atteridgeville and Diepsloot have a high number of people who are unemployed, both young and old. This affects both migrants and locals.

Local participants from Diepsloot accused the elected officials of being corrupt. The respondents asserted that employment opportunities are given on the basis of cronyism. For example, there are road infrastructure projects in the area which would create employment and generate income for community members. However, it is alleged that only a few close to the ward councillors and other political leaders are getting those jobs.

Participants held the view that if many people could find employment, they would not turn against each other despite their nationalities. Ward 72 in Atteridgeville, an informal settlement, contains communities of migrants and of locals. The South Africans have accused foreign-born migrants of reversing their liberation struggle gains for minimum wage because the foreign-born migrants will take anything they are offered as cheap labour.

Most of the local participants said that foreign-born migrants must leave the country. This is not because they don't like them but because they feel squeezed out of the job market by the foreign-born migrants, as they

steal jobs meant for locals. What is more, foreigners of Asian origin mostly are seen as entrepreneurial and as such compete with locals for informal businesses such as spaza shops.³⁹

Crime

Crime was identified by most of the participants as an issue that has many community members finger-pointing at foreigners. Both communities attributed high levels of violent crimes to migrants from outside the area, particularly from other countries. In Diepsloot this perception widens the rift between locals and foreign migrants. This was corroborated by the 2022 anti-crime protests in Diepsloot that ended up being anti-foreigner protests. Upon further probing, there was a general admission that crime was not exclusively perpetrated by foreigners.

A few interviewees admitted that the pervasive perception of foreigners being responsible for the high levels of crime was without a factual basis. The focus group discussions for young people in Atteridgeville did not paint all foreigners with the same brush when it came to crime. In fact, the young people expressed the view that no group had a monopoly over crime and that locals should accept that migrants are not the sole cause of crime. They also conceded that people from all backgrounds and origins committed crimes. The participants pointed out that poor policing and the lack of arrests led to people reaching their conclusions about who the criminals were.

Another viewpoint on the issue of criminality was poor parenting in informal settlements. Many participants, especially in the elderly group, felt that the lives of families in the informal settlements were precarious. The lack of proper family accommodation and a lack of gainful employment or decent livelihoods bred multiple social ills, and some parents have lost control of their children, leading to anti-social behaviours.

Poor service delivery

Poor service delivery emerged as another crucial problem, mostly affecting ward 72 in Atteridgeville. The lack of services causes conflict in this area as political parties, said to be predominantly from the African National Congress (ANC) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) serve constituencies that are dominated

by their members. The municipality is not servicing this area. People turn against each other as they jostle for limited services provided by the municipality. Other related issues of socio-economic status, unemployment and homelessness were also mentioned. Homelessness features prominently in Diepsloot.

Housing

The lack of proper shelter and corruption in the allocation of stands in both communities were highlighted as significant problems and sources of conflict. The struggle for accommodation is seen through the lens of scarce resources. Locals view the presence of foreign-born migrants as exacerbating the situation and further pushing away any hopes to gain access to government-issued housing. Most of the key stakeholders interviewed noted that the housing situation is compounded by other issues such as unemployment.

Interviewees admitted that the facts didn't show that foreigners were responsible for high crime levels

Foreign-born migrants are generally more willing to accept low wages and thus can pay for accommodation. According to the young people who participated in the focus group discussions, locals are not willing to accept low wages⁴⁰ and as such they find it difficult to get jobs and subsequently, they can't pay for proper accommodation. As a result, you are likely to find foreign-born migrants living in fairly decent accommodation such as 'back rooms' in municipal accommodation. Local participants accused foreign-born migrants of bribing officials for accommodation ahead of the locals.

Undocumented foreign migrants

Undocumented foreign migrants emerged as another common problem raised in many key informant interviews. The main view held by the local participants is that undocumented migrants engage in criminal activities and the police cannot find them because they don't 'exist', meaning they have no identification and at times they don't have known accommodation. This view is very strong in Diepsloot. In Atteridgeville there's also an element of resentment against Pakistani

spaza shop owners who are accused of killing local small businesses by selling cheaper products that are at times fake and substandard.

Fear and mistrust

Participants mentioned that fear and mistrust polarise the communities. The locals expressed fears that some foreign-born migrants are aggressively taking up space and economic activities dominating the locals. Examples were given of the creation of places such as 'China Town, Somali Town, etc'. This fear is compounded by such conduct on the part of foreign-born migrants who are also accused of refusing to socialise with locals. However, several examples were given of Somali and Pakistani spaza shop owners who play a role in community building where they run their businesses. Examples were given in instances where there are funerals and a spaza shop owner has made financial contributions to assist the bereaved.

Some participants made mention of the apartheid legacy as affecting social cohesion. The participants mentioned that the apartheid system of divide and rule still endures and it has caused Africans not to trust each other. The participants held a general view that sufficient community-level conversations that include the migrants would be useful towards creating a sense of oneness and not 'us' versus 'them'. All focus groups mentioned that increased police visibility, arrests and convictions would also help in removing suspicions amongst residents. Without arrests, the communities are likely to continue with stereotypes that are not backed by evidence.

Perspectives of residents and stakeholders: Diepsloot

The main problems faced by the community stem from unemployment, which has led to a high crime rate perpetrated predominantly by youths seeking income and involved in drug abuse due to idleness. Three focus group sessions were held with young people in this area. The overall sentiments of the young people can be understood from the realities of their daily struggles for livelihood, voice and opportunities. Young people especially expressed frustration with how local and national governments were approaching issues that affect them directly and at the same time found an outlet

for their frustrations by linking their struggles to the presence of foreign-born migrants.

The focus group discussions with the elderly revealed a more measured understanding of the dynamics in their community. The majority of the elders felt that the integration of people of different backgrounds presents its own problems. They mentioned that prior to the significant influx of foreign-born migrants, the locals who first settled in the area would experience some friction and clashes with 'new' migrants from other parts of South Africa. The big challenge is that local migrants make reference to their common identity as South Africans and as such will 'otherise' non-South Africans.

Participants said community conversations involving migrants could reduce the sense of 'us' versus 'them'

The sentiment from this group was that social ills are not monopolised by any particular group. The observation of some of the elders was that where another basis for differentiation exists, such as nationality, people can gravitate towards camps that they identify with. The respondents said that there is a significant level of co-existence and accommodation, pointing to the fact that violent clashes are few and far between.

However, both the young people and the elderly expressed the view that some migrants were condescending towards locals. They felt that the foreign-born migrants do not acknowledge the locals, and this makes it difficult to integrate beyond mere co-existence. Both the elderly and the young people acknowledged efforts made by local organisations and the government, but they noted that some of the initiatives have not taken root. The young people said that they knew of the anti-xenophobia task force, but they had mixed feelings about it. Some of the young people felt that the initiatives were not organic and as such depended on the relevant government department having a regular presence in the community.

Young people were aggrieved by the lack of employment opportunities. The respondents in the youth groups mentioned that malls and business centres surrounding Diepsloot mostly employ migrants

regardless of whether the jobs require critical skills, thus ignoring the laws regulating the employment of migrants in South Africa. This perception could not be substantiated, and a distinction has to be made between activities of informal businesses in and around malls and well-established businesses that actually employ locals rather than foreigners.

Respondents also averred that undocumented migrants take part in corruption by paying bribes to get jobs that should be lawfully available to South African residents. Participants also noted that the only local youths who get jobs are those who are politically connected or willing to pay bribes. For instance, the construction jobs which are heavily relied on in the community are accessed based on nepotism, affiliation to the ANC and other influential people, and payment of bribes.

Stakeholders have no problem integrating with migrants as long as their status is legal

With such problems of employment, the unlawful and unfair employment of migrants further dwindles the opportunities available for residents, especially the youth. This causes resentment towards migrants and impedes opportunities for social cohesion between the residents and migrants.

It can be deduced that the stakeholders have no problem integrating with migrants if they are documented. The focus group discussions for elders intoned that strict enforcement of immigration laws would ensure that only documented foreign-born migrants come in. The assumption that the respondents shared was that documented migrants are likely to have specialised skills and as such, they would not compete for low-income jobs with locals.

Local participants of all age groups agreed there should be strict workplace inspections to remove illegally employed migrants from employment and the country. However, as much as there is a positive attitude towards legal or documented migrants, the focus group discussions also showed that migrants, whether legal or illegal, face some degree of resentment in Diepsloot.

Some participants expressed the view that all migrants must be removed from the community because they receive preferential treatment from the government, in employment and even regarding the placement of children in school at a time when locals struggle to get their children school places.

Service delivery and other social amenities were noted in the elderly focus groups to have been deteriorating over the years. Amenities such as recreational facilities have long been turned into makeshift accommodation, i.e. shacks. This was supported by key informants who mentioned that a number of illegal settlements in Atteridgeville are on the premises of recreational facilities. Lack of recreational facilities worsens idleness among the youth and in turn, exacerbates drug abuse and engagement in criminal activity. Another issue that was raised was the problem of corruption. Participants said they believed that community leaders and other government officials take bribes from foreign nationals to allow the building of illegal settlements and churches in the community.

This lack of well-serviced and resourced facilities has pushed young people to negative coping mechanisms such as drugs, prostitution and gangs. It was also revealed in the focus group discussions with the stakeholder demographic in Diepsloot that spaces that previously accommodated recreational activities have been replaced by illegal settlements.

The youth focus groups expressed displeasure towards the tendency by people with allocated houses to rent their backrooms to foreign-born migrants. The overall sentiment from the three separate focus group discussions with young people in this area is that they feel squeezed out. The economic pressures and the social ills they described left them with a sense of defeat and in the absence of clear communication from community leaders and influencers, the anti-migrant sentiments are likely to fester.

The focus group discussions and key informant interviews revealed that the current socio-economic situation in the country forms the basis upon which people interact and relate. Some of the participants expressed the view that migrants are only accommodated and tolerated but they are not welcome. Even marriage between migrants and South Africans was

frowned upon by the participants. Some participants in the youth focus group discussions suggested that when migrants marry South African women, such women must also leave the community and South Africa together with their migrant spouses and live in the migrants' countries of origin.

Perspectives of residents: Atteridgeville

The residents of Atteridgeville provided inputs that revealed the socio-economic structure of the community. Two of the wards that took part in the research are predominantly formal settlements (wards 62 and 68). Ward 72 is a mix of formal and informal settlements. The elderly respondents who lived predominantly in the formal side of the area provided insights into conditions before the mushrooming and expansion of the informal settlement. From this perspective, the majority of the participants drew parallels between the increase in crime and the expansion of the informal settlement. The elderly participants in Atteridgeville, being predominantly female, expressed general opposition to the presence of migrants in the community and attributed the problems faced by the community to the presence of migrants.

While similar social ills and economic woes identified in Diepsloot were prevalent in Atteridgeville, the perspective and understanding of the problems differed somewhat. The same problems of lack of unemployment, drug abuse, and a high crime rate are prevalent in Atteridgeville. However, the participants, like participants in the elders' focus groups, explained why they perceived their social ills as attributable to the influx of foreign-based migrants. The elderly were more conservative and carried more anti-migrant sentiments than the youth.

The youths in Atteridgeville had a more 'cosmopolitan' view on migration and foreign-born migrants. The youth acknowledged that migration is part of life and they themselves could move, given the opportunity. They also called for residents to be accountable and not blame foreign-born migrants. The young people mentioned that the notorious gangs are locals and many social ills are due to both migrants and locals. Accountability was reflected in the focus group discussion, with youth admitting that their behaviour can be socially destructive,

such as crime and drug abuse, and attributing this to broader economic and political issues rather than the existence of migrants in the community.

The lack of social cohesion and integration from the perspective of the youth in Atteridgeville was attributable to the lack of employment opportunities, to corruption and poverty. A more positive attitude to integration with migrants is shown by the youth, for instance, through the expressed sensitivity towards the looting of migrant-owned stores during protests. According to some of the participants, protests are sometimes used as a front to loot migrant-owned stores, an act which these participants consider to be xenophobic violence and unhelpful.

Youths in Atteridgeville called for residents to be accountable and not blame foreign-born migrants

The youth are also concerned about the lack of integration between long-term residents and migrants that stay briefly, including domestic migrants, and not only between South Africans and immigrants. From the perspective of the youth, support for youth-led NGOs aimed at social cohesion, more dialogue on social cohesion and integration, and an improvement in employment and the economic situation in Atteridgeville would improve the community. This improved community, for the youth participants, equally included long-term residents, transient residents and migrants.

Despite the differing attitudes between the elderly participants and the youth in Atteridgeville, both focus groups raised an argument that migrants are responsible for criminal conduct and other challenges faced by the community. The youth participants, most of whom are involved in the Community Policing Forum Youth Desk, expressed the view that some migrants distribute drugs to South African youth in the community. However, drug distribution and abuse are, to a greater extent, blamed on economic hardships, particularly unemployment.

From the perspective of the elderly group of participants discussed above, such socially destructive conduct is solely blamed on the migrants with a proposed solution

to remove them from the community. In contrast, the youth participants accept that while some migrants are to be blamed for the problem of drug abuse, this problem is to a greater extent attributed to a lack of employment opportunities which raised the need for an alternative source of income and causes idleness leading to substance abuse.

Another trigger for conflict and the lack of integration between South African residents and migrants which is evident from the youth focus group discussions in Atteridgeville is that the lack of employment, which in turn causes drug abuse and crime, is also attributable to the presence of migrants in the community. There is an expression that migrants 'gatekeep' opportunities from South African residents by obtaining and sharing knowledge on employment opportunities only among themselves. While the lack of employment opportunities is mainly blamed on corruption and the government, this expressed lack of integration and sense of community coming from the migrants triggers conflict and a sense of inequality between residents and migrants in the community.

Another grievance raised based on inequality is that non-profit organisations established by migrants are disproportionately gaining support and funding while those led by young South Africans lack the same support. There is therefore an argument that, while opportunities are scarce and there is hardship in the community, the limited opportunities disproportionately benefit the migrants at the expense of the residents.

However, the youth participants were more focused on the need for government support, particularly for the South African youth, as a resolution. There was also an argument raised during the discussions with South African youth in Atteridgeville that South African youths fail to get the same job opportunities that migrants get due to their inclination to refuse certain types of work and opportunities that migrants accept.

The youth participants in Atteridgeville felt that there is a need to remove all undocumented migrants and send them to their countries of origin and reserve room in the community only for documented migrants who are in South Africa for skills and transference. From the discussions, there was a general sentiment that

undocumented migrants commit crimes and therefore make co-existence unsafe.

With regard to undocumented migrants, participants bemoaned the fact that the Department of Labour seems to be complicit as it was neither carrying out regular inspections nor enforcing the law. The youth participants also suggested that the South African Police Services, Departments of Labour and Home Affairs work together to reduce issues of identity theft and identity fraud by undocumented migrants. An issue of corruption was also raised, that government officials accept bribes from undocumented migrants for them to access benefits and resources that only documented migrants and South African residents should be benefitting from.

Youths noted that while some migrants fomented drug abuse, the problem is mainly linked to joblessness

Operation Dudula was popular among the youth participants. Young people credited it for being more effective than the government in ousting undocumented migrants. They added that community protests and marches involving the looting of migrant-owned businesses are also justified to the extent that they are provoked by illegal business ownership by migrants. Some participants shared the view that this looting may be an act of revolt against the illegal and corrupt existence of migrant-owned businesses in the community.

There is a sense that anti-migrant sentiments are towards those who are perceived to be undocumented. However, further probing during the focus group sessions for locals revealed that they had no way of knowing who is documented and who is not. The participants focused more on the overall perception that migrants from certain countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Lesotho are undocumented.

It was suggested in one of the elderly FGD sessions that undocumented migrants have corrupted officials. The participants stated that these migrants offer bribes upfront to get employment. There was consensus that once the community accommodates only documented migrants who do not contribute to the crime rate, the residents and migrants can live together cohesively.

There can be peaceful integration and they can pursue economic development, employment opportunities, safety and security as a community. The resident youth who participated in Atteridgeville were more welcoming to social cohesion and integration, but only with documented migrants.

Migrants' perspectives

The perspectives from the migrants in the research closely resemble the responses from other focus groups and key informants. The migrants lamented that they find themselves at the receiving end of retribution from locals because of more structural problems. The migrants in Atteridgeville are concerned with the high crime rate in the township, which they raise as the cause of conflict and lack of cohesion between the residents and the migrants.

The migrants said that they approached employment as a matter of survival; hence they were willing to take up wages that the locals would not accept. The participants acknowledged that undocumented migrants in the community must be removed, and residents who are landlords for such migrants must not shield them from the police and the law.

In the discussion with migrants in Diepsloot, the lack of cooperation and failure to live and work together as a unit was caused by the discomfort and frustration resulting from the high unemployment rate. The same issues of criminal conduct and substance abuse arose in the group discussion with migrants in Diepsloot. Youth are often involved in crime and drug dealing to get income that they could otherwise get from employment. Drug abuse and crime also arise from the idleness resulting from unemployment.

By preferring crime, which makes quick money, over available employment opportunities and other youth empowerment programmes, it was also raised that some youth play a role in causing the crime rate in the community. The crimes raised in this discussion include rape, robberies and gang-related crimes and it is admitted that these crimes, together with substance abuse, are equally committed by the migrant youth and South African youth.

The attribution of criminal activity to migrants in South African communities is, according to the migrants interviewed in Diepsloot, an exaggeration and

stereotypical, as young migrants are no more involved in socially destructive behaviour than South African youth. However, there is a distinct grievance raised against Nigerian migrants. The migrant participants in this research said that Nigerians are the leading drug dealers in the community and must be ousted by the community for the sake of safety and peaceful coexistence between the other migrant groups and residents in the community. The drugs distributed by such Nigerian dealers are blamed for the violence, crime and conflict that exist in the community.

The migrant participants justified protests, particularly against corruption and criminal activity, including drug dealing by Nigerian migrants, but were opposed to the looting of migrant-owned businesses during such protests. According to these participants, looting is destructive to migrant community members who are trying to overcome the economic challenges faced by the community. Looting was also blamed on drug abuse which worsens criminal conduct, the high crime rate caused by unemployment and the drug dealers who are responsible for the distribution of drugs such as nyaope.

In the past, Diepsloot residents lived and worked together in harmony, regardless of nationality

Social cohesion, according to the migrant participants in Diepsloot, is not alien to the community. They expressed the view that in the past the community lived and worked together in harmony and as a unit regardless of nationality. An example was given of a time when there was a soccer team in the community comprising youth of different nationalities, a recreational activity that both cultivated unity in the community as well as preoccupied the youth and prevented them from engaging in drug abuse and crime.

Some migrant participants said that such cohesion still exists in Diepsloot, with residents making their back rooms available to migrant lessees and the economy in Diepsloot being accommodating for migrants to open and operate businesses. These participants identified that conflict and division arose only when there was the

commission of a crime, which the community generally attributed to the presence of migrants in the community. The current coexistence, although applauded by some participants, is believed to be much less than the cohesion that existed in earlier years.

The migrant participants in Diepsloot recommended that there be community-based initiatives with community leaders that protect the rights and interests of migrants, and combined efforts between residents and migrants to restore social cohesion and address the challenges faced by the community as a whole. It is also generally agreed that migrants must take an interest in initiatives and meetings started by South Africans, with the aim of a united community rather than a community in conflict during crises and challenges.

Conclusion

The research endeavoured to ascertain the lived realities of community members in Atteridgeville and Diepsloot. These areas have experienced several community conflicts that have targeted immigrants. The research was premised on the belief that it is imperative to hear the perspectives of the affected communities to design more informed interventions.

What emerged from the research is that community members have not integrated sufficiently to identify with each other and build significant relationships. There's an overwhelming emphasis on the 'otherness' of foreign-born migrants. The cultural and linguistic differences further accentuate the difference between foreign-born migrants and locals.

What is more, the failures by responsible institutions to discharge their duties professionally and to communicate effectively only accentuate these differences, suspicions and mistrust. For instance, the issue of crime, which was pointed out as one of the major sources of mistrust by both locals and foreign-born migrants, is exacerbated by the fact that there is ineffective policing in the area. The police are regarded as not visible and unresponsive to crime alerts and emergency calls.

Moreover, the participants mentioned that the lack of arrests or communication about arrests leaves the population free to speculate and feed on inflammatory narratives that foreign-born migrants commit crime.

A situation where police are visible, responsive, and provide local crime statistics in community platforms would go a long way in changing perspectives.

Poor service delivery was another issue pointed out as a cause of community conflict. The lack of access to overstretched government services has been interpreted as caused by foreign-born migrants flooding service institutions. This narrative has been perpetuated by statements made by influential politicians and community leaders. As a result, hospitals and schools have become sites of struggle between longer-term local migrants, recent domestic migrants and foreign-born migrants. With rapid urbanisation outpacing the rate of service delivery and infrastructure, conflicts are likely to persist even among South Africans who will be migrating from other provinces.

The economic meltdown and subsequent increase in unemployment have seen cutthroat competition between locals and foreign-born migrants. This has fed into the perception that foreigners 'steal' jobs that are meant for locals. The local population does not engage with the macro-level issue of economic stagnation and the structural causes of unemployment. Rather they make their deductions based on their daily lived realities such as joblessness. This situation creates volatility, given that the most restive age group, the youth, are disproportionately affected by unemployment. This leaves them with feelings of despair and hopelessness.

These daily struggles make it difficult for locals to see foreign-born migrants as 'comrades-in-arms' but rather as competitors in every sphere of life. This reality makes it easier to understand that at the heart of the conflict is not xenophobia but rather a desperate need for economic opportunities, access to basic services and better living standards.

During the course of the research at no point did any participant express violent anti-migrant sentiments. The conversations centred on lack of access, on deprivation and on increasing poverty. Community leaders and influential stakeholders must create spaces for engagement where the locals feel that their concerns are being heard and action is being taken to address them, even at the community level.

Notes

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- 18 A Kaziboni, L Lancaster, T Machabaphala and G Mulaudzi, Scapegoating in South Africa, Busting the Myths about Immigrants, *Southern Africa Report* 53, Pretoria ISS, 2022, <https://issafrica.org/research/southern-africa-report/scapegoating-in-south-africa-busting-the-myths-about-immigrants>.
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