

**Citizenship, Violence and
Xenophobia in South Africa:
Perceptions from South African
Communities**

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“We were against these people from the onset that’s when terms like “makwerekwere” (derogatory term for foreigners) came about, we were against them in a light manner but now people are getting angry that is why they beat them up, their numbers are growing and some have babies this side it’s as if this is their hometown; this violence happened because people are getting angry, this thing has always been there but it wasn’t as strong as it is now. We never said we are happy to live with them but it was a light thing so people resorted to violence because of the realisation that the situation is getting serious.”

Focus group respondent, HSRC Xenophobia study, June 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

More than 50 people have died and tens of thousands of people have been displaced as a result of 'xenophobic' violence in South Africa during 2008. A number of urgent questions resulted from these attacks: Why are foreign African migrants the targets of violence in informal settlements? How do we explain the timing, location and scale of the outbreaks? Was this sudden and unexpected or should we have known? And, what are the main drivers behind this violence?

The Study

This rapid response study was conducted over a period of two weeks by a team of experts housed at the Democracy and Governance Research Programme of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The report was commissioned by the CEO of the HSRC, Dr. Olive Shisana with a brief to investigate the causes underlying the outbreak of xenophobic violence. Given the urgency of the situation and the policy questions it posed, the project was to commence immediately, and allocated a two week period for project design, implementation, and the submission of the final report. The executive director of the programme is Dr Kwandiwe Kondlo while Dr Adrian Hadland, a director, coordinated the project.

Fieldwork support was provided by Professor Patrick Chiroro of the University of Pretoria who led a team of interviewers. Given the limited time-frame, a snap survey of views, canvassed mainly through focus groups and interviews was deemed the most efficient methodology. Fieldwork focus groups and interviews took place in Alexandra, Mamelodi, Tembisa in Gauteng, and interviews were conducted in Imizamu Yethu in the Western Cape. Six focus groups were conducted in Mamelodi, Tembisa, and Alexandra. The focus groups comprised an average of 6-8 people, and were divided by age (18-23; 26-33 & 33 upwards), and by gender. Since the study was focused on gaining an understanding of the views of community members about 'foreigners' and xenophobia, the focus

groups recruited only South African citizens. The study also included a review of media reports about the violence and a survey of the current scholarly literature and research on xenophobic violence.

The purpose is to inform policymakers, identify areas where more research is needed and to think through how to prevent further outbreaks.

Five themes were identified as being critical to the emergence of tensions:

1. The role of government;
2. The scale of the influx of 'migrants';
3. The impact of migrants on gender dynamics;
4. The pace of housing policy and the administration of housing; and
5. The politics of economic livelihoods and the competition for resources.

Literature Review

A review of contemporary scholarship on xenophobia and of media reports on the attacks reveals a number of elements. These include how predictable the outbreak of the violence should have been; South Africa's long track-record of violence as a means of protest and the targeting of foreigners in particular; and, the documented tensions over migration policy and the scale of repatriation.

It was clear that while most of the attacks were directed against foreign, primarily African, migrants, that this was not the rule. Attacks were also noted against Chinese-speakers, Pakistani migrants as well as against South Africans from minority language groups (in the conflict areas) such as those who speak sePedi and isiTsonga.

The current wave of violence has extended beyond a simple conception of foreign versus indigenous, by traversing the spectrum of ethnicity, indigeneity, citizenship and even legal status (legitimacy).

Settlements that have recently experienced the expression of 'xenophobic' violence have also been the site of violent and other forms of protest around other issues, most notably service delivery.

Role of Government

Although not holding government directly culpable for the attacks on foreign nationals, the research uncovered a range of perceptions that were important in understanding the outbreak of violence. These include:

- Frustration over insufficient pace of service delivery and consultation in general, and over housing provision and administration in particular;
- Ineffective communication and/or engagement with local citizenry around the violence and its underlying causes;
- Perceived corruption and impropriety of government officials, especially in the police service and Department of Home Affairs.

Migration Policy

The issue of illegal migration was a common topic among focus group participants who expressed concern over government's management of cross-border migration and uneasiness about the threat posed by "illegal" migrants over access to resources.

- Key resources perceived as being under threat include: access to housing, business opportunities, formal employment and local women
- Foreign nationals perceived to arrive in the country with cash, skills and tolerant of low wages and hard work

Gender Relations

It was evident that the opinions of South Africans around the question of foreign nationals are differentiated by gender and age.

- Men in the 26 to 33 age group in particular and from 33 upwards appear to be the most overtly antagonistic toward foreign nationals;

- Perception among locals that menial or ill-paid work undermines the hard-won fruits of democracy ('entitlement') and undermines dignity;
- Anger that foreign arrivals are 'showing up' local men by earning more, working harder and take whatever work they can get. This diminishes the locals in the eyes of local women;
- Young women admire foreign men for creating opportunities for themselves and being prepared to do whatever work is available to make a living;
- South African men seen as acquisitive and materialistic;
- Women believe South African men are complicit in criminal activities and corruption;
- Men believe low police wages contribute to corruption, that the government is therefore to blame, and that foreign nationals get away with crime because they are undocumented and untraceable; and
- Perceptions around crime frequently have illegal migrations dimensions, for example the commonly perceived link between Nigerians and organised crime.

Competition for Housing

Housing is a vital area of conflict potential, particularly in informal settlement areas, and one of the most consistent causes of friction in South African society. Situation complicated by locals renting out their homes to migrants to secure regular cash income, by corrupt housing practices, by slow provision of housing and by inefficient administration.

Competition for livelihoods

Competition for resources such as water, sanitation and health services together with employment and business opportunities is also a key dimension to the recent spate of conflict.

Further conflict exacerbated by local practice of preferring non-South African employees, particularly in the domestic, gardening and construction sectors.

The lack of a minimum wage in the casual labour sector also means locals are undercut by migrants, triggering unhappiness.

Focus groups describe a 'state of siege' environment in regard to survival, access to resources, the state of the economy and to competition from external forces. In this context, the 'foreigner' is the nearest 'other' against which this sentiment can be expressed.

Reintegration

There was an overwhelming sentiment that while violence committed against foreign nationals was not legitimate or acceptable foreigners should return home and only be allowed back to their communities under strictly regulated conditions. This indicates that reintegration could take considerably longer time and fraught with complications than perhaps anticipated.

If government does not engage with and address this sentiment, the possibility of successful reintegration will be diminished.

The deepening crisis in Zimbabwe has certainly had an impact on sentiment toward Zimbabweans. This is complicated by the government 'line' that there is no crisis in Zimbabwe. A common perception is then: What, then, are all these Zimbabweans doing here?

Peoples' inability or unwillingness to use local government structures to address their grievances deemed a critical area of conflict aversion

Key Recommendations

We would urge government to consider the following responses to the recent outbreak of violence commonly described as xenophobic:

- **A National Summit or Indaba on foreign nationals and immigrants in South Africa – towards social integration and peaceful co-existence**

It is clear from the evidence heard during this study that many misperceptions, stereotypes and uncertainties exist surrounding the presence of foreigners in our midst. Most importantly, it appears that ordinary South African citizens would like to have their perspectives seriously considered or their voices heard on how to deal with the issues of the influx of foreigners in the country. It would therefore seem imperative that a National Summit or Indaba be held to open space for participation by people at grassroots levels in the discussions around the sources of the recent xenophobic violence, solutions and management thereof of immigrants, towards the development a co-formulated migration policy which will have majority buy-in. In this way a full range of grievances and wishes will be canvassed in order to arrive at a national consensus on the future direction and scope of migration policy.

- **Establish and support local community forums on migration**

Just as it is important to hold a national debate on the many dimensions and aspects of migration policy, so it is also critical for these discussions to take place at the grassroots level. The attacks on foreigners will not end nor will re-integration take place until communities have satisfied themselves that grievances have been addressed. Non-South African citizens need to be encouraged to participate in these forums.

- **Audit RDP Houses and develop a policy on their occupation, sale and rental**

One of the most important triggers of the recent violence has been the occupation of national housing stock by non-South African citizens. RDP houses were constructed to enable South African citizens to reside in them. The sale or rent of RDP houses to non-South African citizens exacerbates the housing shortage, compounds the pressure on informal settlements and foments community tensions around housing. We call on government to

conduct a national audit on the occupation of RDP housing and to take steps to ensure that only South Africans occupy this form of public shelter. Non-South African citizens are welcome to acquire property through the usual commercial means or to take temporary accommodation that should be provided in designated areas until such a time as they are able to move into the private residence. Government needs to establish places of accommodation for refugees where they will be safe and protected prior to integration into communities.

- **Border Control and Citizenship**

It is essential that government move urgently and effectively to protect South Africa's borders and points-of-entry. No migration policy or strategy aimed at alleviating xenophobic tensions can be contemplated if the national borders are porous and people can come and go as they please. Such a lack of control leads to abuse, corruption and heightens the vulnerability of people who reside in the country illegally.

Consider a period of Amnesty to encourage illegal immigrants to Come forward, under no threat of deportation, to apply for formal residence permits and legal identification documents

It is proposed that once the borders have been closed, possibly with the use of the SA National Defence Force, that a period of amnesty is introduced. During this time, any one who is resident in South Africa should be able to claim formal residency, receive an identification card or document and be entered onto the country's taxation and regulatory system. During this specified period, those affected should be registered to comply with the migration law.

- **Implement a consistent and transparent program to deal with Corruption at Home Affairs, local Municipalities and within the SAPS**

There has been widespread perception as well as material recognition of corruption in the Department of Home Affairs. The current perception appears to be that corruption is not effectively punished and exists at all levels of the institutional bureaucracy, creating a cynical sentiment towards government. If South African communities believe that they cannot rely on the designated government agencies to perform their line functions, then they are increasingly going to take responsibility for their own security and livelihood. The expulsion of foreigners in this wave of violence is one such reaction.

The difficulty of regularising the residency and legality of non-South African citizens has been greatly exacerbated by the apparently endemic corruption within both the Department of Home Affairs, local municipalities and within some relevant divisions of the SA Police Service. This applies both to the issuing of false or corruptly acquired identity documents, bribing local government officials to access facilities but also to the monitoring of points of entry into South Africa. The study team calls on the government to address this as a matter of urgency.

- **Employment: minimum wage, employer responsibilities and skills development**

A recurring source of tension between locals and foreigners relates to the competition for jobs. Whilst foreigners have been shown to be creating jobs in certain instances, a major source of conflict between locals and foreigners relates to the competition for casual labour. It is well documented that immigrants are prepared to work for a lower wage. A nationally administered, regulated and enforceable system of minimum wage principles will have to be implemented in order to reduce the competition for low paying jobs. Employee

practices will have to be monitored in the areas of domestic labour and construction in particular.

The hiring of illegal non-South African citizens in some key sectors of the economy, such as in domestic work and in the construction sector, needs to be terminated. The only way of doing this is to make it the responsibility of the employer that all employees are registered, legal residents. In some countries, employers are fined for hiring illegal residents. We would suggest a similar strategy might pay dividends.

Poverty is clearly exacerbating tensions, so further efforts are required to assist with poverty alleviation through skills provision. Training in entrepreneurship, for instance, targeted at youth in the rural areas could be a productive strategy.

- **Create incentive programmes to partner the skills of foreigners to assist locals in productive ventures**

There is a widespread perception in South African informal settlements that immigrants are more skilled, and better resourced. Programmes need to be developed at community level which foster partnership between locals and foreigners in order to combat the risk of conflict and enhance social cohesion. South Africans can benefit from the transfer of know-how and skills from foreigners. Foreigners in return can benefit through obtaining certain benefits of citizenship in exchange for playing a developmental role in communities. This can apply to small business initiatives and to cooperatives ventures.

- **Crime**

Much of the recent conflict was underpinned by perceptions of and, in some cases, the reality of crime and who is responsible for criminal activities.

Organised criminals have apparently been opportunistic in taking advantage of the vulnerable, further deepening tensions and grievances. People living in South Africa illegally are vulnerable to coercion and violence, just as local citizens must bear the brunt of these activities. It is therefore imperative that

Cultural Interventions to foster a new consciousness and identity

The effects of this initiative may take long to realise but will ensure a lasting solution for the country. Media, through film, advertising and music; political parties, churches and schools should be encouraged to generate symbolic depictions, memories and images of Africans from outside South Africa, as 'significant others' rather than 'dispensable others', who can be killed and chased away. They need to be acknowledged and their importance in the life and development of our democracy underlined in cultural forms.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains findings from a rapid analysis of the recent 'xenophobic' attacks perpetrated mainly against foreign nationals in some of the South Africa's poorest communities. It was commissioned at the request of the CEO of the HSRC, Dr. Olive Shisana, with a brief to be concluded within a two week period. Given the urgency of the problem, the study is intended at this point as a rapid solicitation of the views of South Africans in the communities where violence was most acute in order to better understand it. The violence and unrest accompanying these attacks, which took place in May 2008, left more than 50 people dead and thousands displaced in locales across South Africa. More than sixteen thousand people in Gauteng alone were forced to find alternative living arrangements. According to most reports, the attacks began in Alexandra then spread to other areas in and around Johannesburg, including Cleveland, Diepsloot, Hillbrow, Tembisa, Primrose, Ivory Park and Thokoza. Violence in Kwazulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Cape Town soon followed.

The scale and intensity of the attacks immediately raised a number of critical questions for government and analysts, the most pressing being: why were foreign African migrants generally the targets of violence; how do we explain the timing, scale and locale (i.e. the violence was largely confined to informal settlements) of the outbreaks? Was this a sudden and unexpected occurrence or the result of long simmering tensions? And what could be the main drivers behind this violence?

The immediate aim of the government and civil society has been to stabilise the situation and address the humanitarian needs of the communities where violence has taken place; to reduce tensions and prevent further violence and bring those responsible for criminal acts to account. Longer term solutions will however have to be implemented in order to prevent a recurrence of what we have recently witnessed. These solutions will have to be informed by an understanding of the

causes and circumstances under which some communities are turning to violent actions against those perceived as outsiders. There was therefore an urgent need to provide explanations to the current crisis, grounded in evidence-based research.

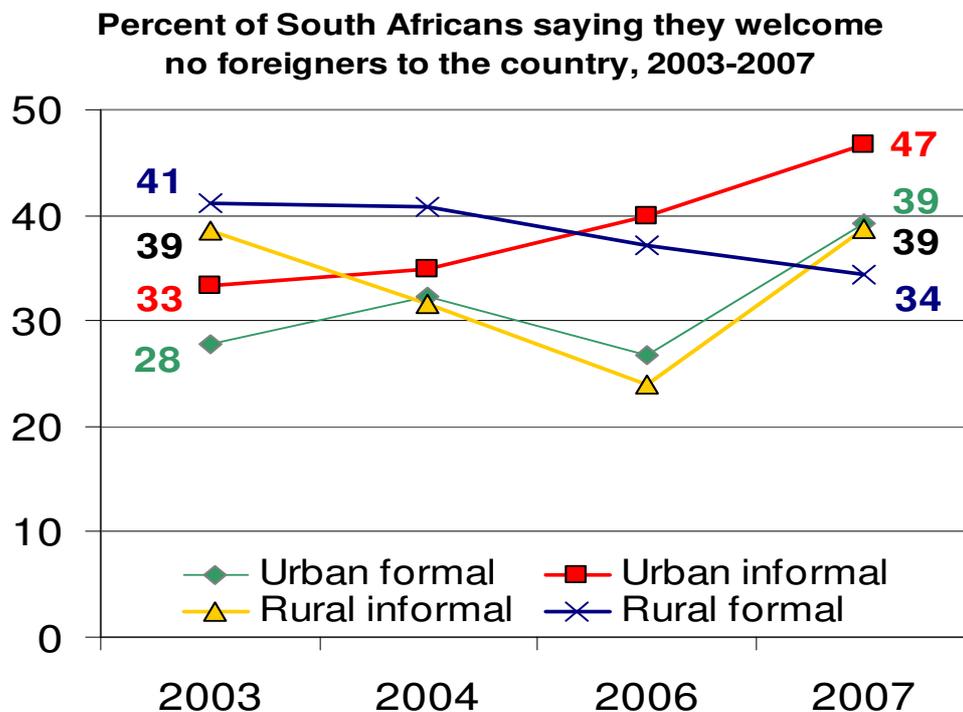
Two patterns emerged in the violence that unfolded. Firstly, the violence was largely, although not exclusively, carried out against migrants from other African countries, and not all foreigners in general. The term 'xenophobic' violence was widely used to describe the violence to apply to groups of people who may be within or outside a society, but who are not considered part of that society. Feelings of xenophobia can result in systematic prejudice and discrimination, mass expulsions, or in extreme cases, genocide. It does not, however, follow that feelings of hostility toward to foreigners or immigrants always leads to violence or genocide. Anti-immigrant sentiments are widespread in many countries, including Europe and North America, and elsewhere in Africa but do not all necessarily end in outright violence on varying scales.

It is, therefore, important to understand the conditions under which differences of origin become so grave so as to result in violence against certain designated groups. South Africa has a particular historical relationship to the African continent, shaped by its apartheid history. Some analysts suggest this may have led to a South African superiority complex in relation to other Africans, uniting black and white South Africans against other Africans. As the Malawian scholar, Paul Zeleza noted: 'this racialised devaluation of black lives is what we are witnessing in South Africa today in the xenophobic violence against African immigrants perpetrated by fellow Africans whose own lives were devalued during the long horrific days of apartheid. Racialised superiority and inferiority complexes continue to stalk us...', and explain why 'shades of blackness have become a shameful basis for distinguishing African immigrants among black South Africans'.

Having said this, it was also evident from the research that neither victims nor perpetrators were simply identified along these lines. There were consistent reports in media, and in our research, of South Africans also being victimised, of South African's warning foreign neighbours of impending attacks, and of South Africans sheltering non-South Africans from attackers. It was also found that significant differences of opinion existed in the communities in which the violent attacks took place when it came to whether the violence was right or wrong.

Secondly, the conflict was largely confined to urban informal settlements ringing some of South Africa's major cities. Large numbers of migrants who have entered South Africa have done so illegally, or are refugees who have fled unstable political conditions. This coupled with their generally poor socio-economic circumstances have led many to establish homes in informal settlements that mostly lie on the peripheries of some of the country's major cities. These settlements are historically home to the poorest of South Africa's poor, who, as figure 1 indicates, display relatively high rates of resistance to foreign migration into the country.

Figure 1: South Africans perception of foreigners, by settlement



Source: HSRC South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS), Human Sciences Research Council

Our enquiry into the violence has sought to explore the attitudes and opinions of members of four communities – Alexandra, Mamelodi, Tembisa, in Gauteng and Imizamu Yethu in the Western Cape. We believe that is important to understand the violence from the perspective of the communities in which they have occurred. Towards this end we have conducted focus groups in these communities, divided by age and gender. We explored the popular conceptions behind the possible causes of the violence, i.e. a third force, crime, migration, corruption, gender issues, jobs, housing and small business competition. From the discussions, the following five themes recurred, as areas around which considerable unhappiness and tensions emerged:

- The role of government;
- The scale of the influx of ‘migrants’;
- The impact of migrants on gender dynamics;
- The pace and administration of housing policy; and
- The politics of economic livelihoods and the competition for resources.

This report is set out as follows: a brief review of documented research pertaining to violence against foreign migrants in South Africa; the synthesised findings of focus group enquiries; key insights and recommendations; and, an explanation of the methodology used.

2. WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW: A SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE ON ‘XENOPHOBIC’ VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

One of the most striking features of the outbreak of anti-foreigner violence is maybe just how unsurprising, in form that is, it actually is. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report from 1998 for example stated:

South Africa's public culture has become increasingly xenophobic, and politicians often make inflammatory statements that the 'deluge' of migrants is responsible for the current crime wave, rising unemployment, or even the spread of diseases. As the unfounded perceptions that migrants are responsible for a variety of social ills grows, migrants have increasingly become the targets of abuse at the hands of the police, the army, and the Department of Home Affairs. Refugees and asylum seekers with distinctive features from far-away countries are especially targeted for abuse (HRW 1998: 4).

Another analyst extends the description of xenophobia by observing that:

An examination of this phenomenon and its manifestation reveals that 'the foreigner' has become a site for the violent convergence of a host of unresolved social tensions. The difficulties of transition, socio-economic frustrations, a legacy of racial division, and an inherited culture of violence are just some of the factors contributing to violent xenophobia in South Africa today (Vaji, 2003: 1).

It is important to keep in mind that violence perpetrated against foreign migrants, and particularly Africans, was documented as early as 1994. In a study on Congolese and Nigerian migrants in Johannesburg, Morris (1998: 1120) noted for instance that "The increase in the size of the foreign population [in South Africa] has been accompanied by a substantial growth of xenophobia and numerous attacks on foreigners have been reported (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 23 September 1994; *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 3 February 1995; *Mail and Guardian*, 18 April 1997; *The Sunday Independent*, 4 May 1997; *Sunday Times*, 7 June 1997)". He added that some of the most virulent prejudice has been directed against black Africans originating from countries north of Southern Africa. Another reference to South Africa's past experience with anti-foreigner

violence which resonates in the present circumstances was also made by Minaar and Hough 1996 (cited in Croucher 1998: 646): “One frequently cited example occurred in December 1994 and again in January 1995, when armed youth gangs in Alexandra township carried out attacks against suspected illegal aliens – destroying homes and property, and marching suspected illegal aliens to a local police station to demand their immediate and forcible removal...”. Alexandra was of course a central site in the recent violence.

Palmary (2002) has also documented a strikingly similar pattern of violence perpetrated against foreign migrants residing in Cape Town informal settlements in Du Noon and Doornbach (2001), and Joe Slovo Park (2002), where “in these three incidents,...refugee communities were forced off land and their dwellings were looted by South Africans.” She continued, observing that “...city officials indicated that conflict between South Africans and non-nationals was *an everyday occurrence*. Such conflicts were more severe where there was competition for resources such as housing or informal trade opportunities.” Finally, more recent violence directed at Somali residents of Maspumelele (2006) and Motherwell-Port Elizabeth (2007) informal settlements, was captured in a story published in *New African* magazine (Commey 2007). The story noted that shops owned by Somalis were burned and looted, and residents killed, where the argument put forward by local authorities was that business competition was the cause.¹

These references firstly demonstrate that a track record exists of violence perpetrated against foreign and particularly African migrants residing in informal urban settlements. Secondly, these examples begin to give some sense of the factors likely to have fuelled these conflicts: competition over access to resources (housing), and local economic/trading relations. The documented literature on the issue does lend further texture to the inter-personal dynamics between African migrants and their South African counterparts. Morris’ (1998) study of Congolese and Nigerian migrants residing in Johannesburg recorded some interesting

impressions conveyed by these migrants. One migrant recounted that “People are not accepting us...They think that we are coming to take their jobs...” Linking migrants with criminality was conveyed by another respondent, who noted that: “When I go to the supermarket my fellow blacks immediately start watching me. I cannot understand that. The impression is that all the foreigners are criminals.”

These testimonials reflect attitudes captured in past surveys of South African opinion on the question of foreign migration. A 1998 national public opinion survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) using a sample of 3,200 participants found that the majority of South Africans are indeed xenophobic and that opposition to immigration and foreign citizens is widespread: twenty five percent of South Africans want a total ban on immigration and forty-five percent support strict limitations on the numbers of immigrants allowed (Neocosmos, 2006: 114). Large percentages of respondents opposed offering African non-citizens the same access to a house as a South African (54 percent) and 61 percent felt that immigrants put additional strains on the economy. In addition, sixty five percent of black respondents said they would be ‘likely’ or very ‘likely’ to ‘take action’ to prevent people from other countries operating a business in their area (Crush,2000: 125).

The findings of these surveys capturing negative sentiments towards foreign nationals are significantly supported by the sentiments expressed in the focus groups conducted for this study. The critical question, however, is at what point do negative sentiments translate into violent actions? This report will explore some of the converging factors that may explain this shift from negative sentiment to violent action.

Another relevant but insufficient factor associated with the recent violence is the legal status of migrants. Kihato’s (2007) recent study on migrants and urban migration in South Africa noted for instance that:

Because migrants are often undocumented, they are unable to secure formal sector employment even though they are often relatively well qualified (Morris, Bouillon 2001; Reitzes et al 1997). Many are involved in informal businesses such as selling vegetables, clothes and other goods on street pavement or municipal markets...Migrants are vulnerable to exploitation from landlords, employers, the police and often experience xenophobic attacks.

In addition the undocumented status of many migrants has given rise to exaggerated and often inaccurate estimates of the numbers of illegal migrants in the country that have no doubt fuelled perceptions that the country is being 'flooded' by foreign nationals. According to Valji (2003):

Alarmists have continued to circulate figures based on 'pseudo-scientific' research, suggesting that the number of undocumented migrants could range from 4m -12m individuals. Such figures are generally obtained from repatriation numbers...The methodology used is further flawed because it is unable to account for repeated deportations that drive up the figures, falsely indicating a rise in the actual number of undocumented migrants.

However, there is little doubt as to the material increase in cross border migration into South Africa, particularly of Zimbabwean nationals, as the political and economic crisis in that country deepens. A report by the Centre for Development (CDE) enterprise noted in this regard that, by July 2007 the number of Zimbabweans deported from South Africa to their home country had reached 17 000 each month (CDE, 2008: 7). The CDE was quick to add however that:

Cross-border movements on this scale inevitably feed into issues of public concern— whether well-informed or not — such as crime, corruption, and xenophobia. This is especially true in the absence of reliable figures on cross-border flows. Despite lack of information...estimates that place the

number of Zimbabwean migrants in this country at 3 million, are probably significantly exaggerated.

Loren Landau of the Forced Migration Project has also pointed out that:

Zimbabwe has a population of about 12,3 million, of whom 7,6 million are between 15 and 64 years old, and 3,6 million are adult males. It is this latter group – relatively young and economically active men – who are the most likely migrants. As it is unreasonable to assume that all adult Zimbabweans have left the country, there is an upper cap on the number who might have come to South Africa. Moreover, reports from Britain, Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, and even the Democratic Republic of Congo suggest that the pool of movers is shared (Landau, 2008: 9)

To what extent then does the legal status of migrants, particularly African migrants to South Africa, increase their vulnerability to abuse and potential attack? Palmary (2002) has for example observed that:

The Immigration Act [2002] has been criticised by experts in the field as being too focused on the reduction of illegal immigration through repressive forms of law enforcement...The policymakers' concerns with illegal immigration hamper the implementation of the Refugee Act, at least in part because some of those concerns can fuel xenophobia among both South African communities and those government agencies responsible for service provision to immigrant communities.

Department of Home Affairs figures quoted by Crush and Dodson (2007: 446) show that between 1990 and 2002 nearly 1.7 million African migrants were deported from South Africa, with the total number doubling between 1994 and 1999 from around 90,000 to over 182,000 per annum. They noted that

“Enforcement has focused on migrants from SADC in general, and Mozambique in particular.”

While the undocumented status of many migrants may make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, it is also clear that actions taken by ordinary citizens and even government officials against perceived “foreigners” has little to do with their legal status. In a report on violent attacks directed at two Zimbabwean migrants in Atteridgeville, which left both dead, *Business Day* (1 April 2008) noted that the attacks were “...indiscriminate, making no distinction between legal and illegal migrants”. Reflecting on their research in Motherwell, an informal settlement outside Port Elizabeth which was the scene of violent attacks on Somali residents in 2007, Landau and Monson (2008: 322) also observed that: “Importantly, the violence...does not make any discrimination based on individuals’ legal status. In the case of the Somalis in Motherwell, almost all were legally recognised refugees or asylum seekers with rights to own and operate businesses.”

Perhaps of even greater concern is a Human Rights Watch report (1998), which indicated that almost one-fifth of those being held at the Lindela Deportation Centre were, in fact, South African citizens who were denied the opportunity to produce their South African identification. The report stated that people were targeted as “illegal immigrants” because of criteria such as having dark skin or walking in a ‘strange way’ (cited in Palmery, 2002).

References such as these complicate the ‘foreign’ categorisation of people targeted in the current wave of anti-foreigner violence, which has included attacks against ‘darker’ skinned South Africans or those of ‘Venda’ or ‘Shangaan’ origin. A report in the *Business Day* for example noted four South African women camped at the Diepsloot police station where they had fled their homes in the wake of the recent ‘xenophobic violence’ who between them spoke isiTsonga, seVenda and sePedi. The women reported that a group of isiZulu speakers had

told them to leave their shacks and go back to Venda or Giyani². On the other hand an *Induna*, at Madala hostel in Alexandra Township was reported as stating that “South Africans have come out to express themselves against over-crowding and the loss of jobs because of the growing number of foreigners. It’s not a Zulu matter, it’s for all South Africans,”³ In addition, to African migrants, there have also been attacks against non-African migrants, including the looting of Pakistani-owned shops in Diepsloot and Chinese-operated shops in Du Noon, Cape Town⁴.

Moreover, a recent report by Independent online (29 May 2008) citing fieldworkers and residents in some of Cape Town’s poorest communities, noted that foreign migrants into the city were not the only grouping within these communities vulnerable to attack. They specifically cited the distinction between established residents and newer domestic economic migrants arriving from the Eastern Cape: “Many of us who come from the Eastern Cape have a job already waiting for us. In that case, it’s because a relative organised it for you before...But those who have been in the Western Cape for a long time get jealous if they haven’t found work, even though they are also from the Eastern Cape from before. When I came here, I didn’t get a warm welcome”.

Another potentially important observation about the recent violence is that some of the locales in which these occurred have also been the site of violent and other forms of visibly bold protest around other issues, most notably service delivery. For example, Mamelodi, the site of xenophobic violence in March 2008 which saw the burning and looting of shacks also experienced violent forms of protest (attempted vandalism of businesses) against service delivery and the delivery of houses in particular in 2007.⁵ In September 2007 residents of Alexandra, which was the focal point of recent anti-migrant violence were protesting against a lack of service delivery and housing provision by occupying a construction site in the township. In her analysis of service delivery protests, Booyesen (2007: 29-30) recalled that Embalenhle outside Secunda, in

Mpumalanga saw buildings burned as well as "...bitter altercations with senior politicians attempting to address the crowds." Embalenhle was also the site of recent violent attacks directed at foreign migrants, which saw the burning of shops and automobiles (News24.com, 22 May 2008).

In summary, and taking into account some of the details and related circumstances accompanying the recent attacks, it is evident that attaching a simple 'xenophobic' identity to the attacks, which counter-poses the foreign national and the indigenous South African citizen, belies a more complex identity to the divisions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The current wave of violence has therefore extended beyond a simple conception of foreign versus indigenous, by traversing the spectrum of ethnicity, indigeneity, citizenship and legal status (that is, legitimacy). It has also challenged consistent explanations of root causes, which include a range of possible explanations including wage labour competition to competition over local business and access to housing.

What has been relatively clear and consistent about the current wave of anti-foreigner violence is its violent and/or destructive character (killings, beatings, destruction of property and theft); violence largely although not exclusively meted out against socio-economically impoverished migrants from other African countries⁶; and that the violence has largely been confined to urban informal settlements where impoverished foreign and domestic communities are most heavily concentrated. With this in mind, it is suggested that a more effective means of attempting to understand the underlying drivers of recent incidents would be to employ a more spatial perspective, focusing on the character of local economic, social and political conditions as well as the mobilisation of protest in these areas.

2. REFLECTIONS ON THE CURRENT CRISIS

Focus groups were conducted in Alexandra, Mamelodi, and Tembisa on the East Rand. While the informal settlement of Phomolong in Mamelodi experienced

violent xenophobic attacks in April this year, Alexandra and the East Rand have been two key focal points of violence over the last two weeks. Focus groups in these areas allowed us to get an overview of the trajectory of conflict in Gauteng. These areas were contrasted with the informal settlement of Imizamu Yethu in Cape Town. The focus groups were divided according to gender and age in order to facilitate as open a conversation as possible and to be able to disaggregate opinion according to these two variables. Six focus groups were conducted in Mamelodi, Tembisa, and Alexandra. The focus groups comprised an average of 6-8 people, and were divided by three age ranges: a young group of between 18-23; a middle group of between 26-33, and an older group of 33 years and above..

We used relatively open-ended questions to enable people to express in their own words their understanding of the situation and their sentiments towards migrants (see Appendix B). These are the perspectives that often get lost in media coverage and even in the analysis of community leaders. The focus groups were conducted in partnership with Professor Patrick Chiroro of the University of Pretoria, who oversaw a team of interviewers. Focus groups were conducted in the language of the participants where possible, and translated into English.

Conducting focus groups and interviews in the midst of a violent conflict poses a number of challenges. A two-day area scan was conducted in the identified communities to ascertain whether appropriate conditions existed to conduct research, relating both to the safety of interviewers and interviewees. Venues were chosen mindful to allow participants maximum anonymity. Secondly, it was communicated to participants that their participation was consensual, and voluntarily, that their identities were to be protected, and that there would be no direct consequences for them as a result of what they might communicate to the interviewers.

The aim of the focus groups was to get an 'on the ground' perspective from residents of violence-torn townships on their understanding of the problem and its possible causes. From the discussions, the following general areas of concern emerged:

3.1 The role of government and the 'xenophobic' violence

When respondents were probed about the role and/or actions of government in the recent 'xenophobic' attacks, a general sense of dissatisfaction was expressed about government's handling of the conflict, as well as its indirect role in contributing to the escalation of an unhealthy environment between local citizenry and foreign nationals. The responses generally consisted of three sub-themes: the *ineffective communication and/or engagement with local citizenry around the violence and its underlying causes*; the *insufficient pace and processing of service delivery as contributing to tensions*; and more directly *perceived corruption and impropriety of government officials, especially in the police service, in their dealings with foreign nationals*.

Although not holding government directly culpable for the attacks on foreign nationals, a number of exchanges illustrated a general opinion that government bodies, especially at local level, had not been effectively communicating and engaging with residents on a variety of issues ranging from service delivery to probing the community's thoughts and grievances about foreign nationals. Feelings were expressed about government officials ignoring channels through which residents raised general issues of concern (i.e. municipal infrastructure maintenance); not sufficiently communicating with residents about their issues or concerns with foreign nationals in particular; where in one case this took the form of a criticism with how the government responded to the attacks:

...government waits for something to happen first then it reacts and you find that it's late by then. Take Alexandra for instance, they knew that

hostility against foreigners was brewing but they didn't act, if only they can have a presence in the community and take these people out then it will be okay;

Other respondents illustrated concerns with how government communicated with residents about the attacks by essentially arguing that government had talked past communities on the issue of foreign nationals, instead of engaging residents directly about their concerns:

The government officials must come down to the people ask what is wrong...instead of come up with words: they are going nowhere, 'they are here to stay'

Government officials came here and went to the police stations where foreigners are kept, they never came to the people of Alex, why they don't call a meeting to the FNB stadium and ask what the problem is.

A second concern that residents expressed about the role of government in the recent attacks essentially pointed to the increased pressure that foreign nationals were creating on government's ability to render much needed social and economic services to local populations. One respondent blamed the current electricity crisis on 'overpopulation' caused by foreign migration, stating that "... government has enough energy reserves but the problem is due to over population".

In addition, in some cases foreigners and government agencies were criticised for the improper manner in which services were accessed by foreigners. This was perceived as impacting negatively on local residents' access to these same services. To illustrate the former case, one respondent exclaimed that: ", yes they have build houses and toilets but that is not enough, they can't handle the problems that we have now..." In other cases foreign nationals and government

agencies were blamed for fraudulent access to identity documents. One respondent queried whether officials in the Department of Home Affairs were "...getting money..." for giving people other people's [married] surnames".

A final group of responses more directly criticised government agencies, particularly the police services, in aiding and abetting the illegal entry, residency or accessing by foreign nationals of South African identification. As one respondent explained,

They bribe officials to issue them with your ID so that they can get jobs; how many scholars didn't write their exams or who have written them but haven't received their results because they don't have IDs? The generation that is supposed to govern us in future is struggling to get IDs but an illegal alien from Angola has a South African ID, passport and driver's licence, that is why I crush government's call for these people to stay here, if they go South Africa will go back to where it was.

3.2 Migration and 'xenophobic' violence

The issue of "illegal migrations" or "migration" was the subject of considerable discussion in the focus group sessions, where residents were heavily critical of what could essentially be described as poor "influx control" or regulation of foreign migrant entrance by South African government authorities. There were many references to the government needing to "tighten" and more effectively "patrol", and "control" the country's borders with neighbouring states, encapsulated in passages like the following:

The influx of people has been out of control. The government has taking things for granted. Policies should be revisited – there are no people at the borders that are controlling the situation. Home Affairs should be looked

at, controlling the influx of illegal immigrants. People are getting SA legal documents illegally.

The emphatic sense in which respondents described a need to strengthen border controls in order to regulate the flow of migrants was perhaps not surprisingly coupled with a desire to regulate rather than bar entry to foreign migrants. A not insignificant number of respondents drew a distinction between the “illegal” and “legal” status of foreign migrants, where the illegal status of migrants was criticised for placing added strain on government resources and local economic conditions and dynamics: i.e. illegally operating businesses. The distinction between “illegal” and “legal” was also extended to the perception that illegal migrants were also more prone to engage in “illegal” or criminal activities, as described in this passage:

Good foreigners are those who come into the country legally, with their passports and have a place to stay...The bad foreigners are those who come illegally, they engage in illegal activities and you won't even know who they are. Hence I am saying there must be strict rules, we can't have an influx.

An indication of the level of concern that respondents shared over the government's management of cross-border migration and the threat posed by “illegal” migrants in particular was expressed in some residents proposing that communities themselves should take a more active and direct role in essentially rooting out illegal migrants. The following opinion describes this:

...in every township we need CPFs [Community Policing Forums] to cooperate with the police to keep our areas on the straight and narrow, a foreigner should be here for a reason that way we can relax and breathe easily;...we need an effective solution where they leave according to a timeframe and whoever comes back must do so lawfully,...

A similar opinion suggested that CPFs needed to come together and “...go into each and every house to do an audit on the number of foreigners that reside there and take them Lindela for them to be deported, in a right manner not using violence.”

Overall, a worrying degree of latent resistance to illegally-resident foreign nationals came through in the focus groups, where although the respondents largely eschewed violent means of articulating their issues about these migrants, otherwise demonstrated that the planned re-integration of foreign migrants into communities will at some stage confront this resistance head-on. Given that findings elsewhere in this report demonstrate that the nature of the resistance to foreign migrants stems mainly from local economic and public resource competition, it is perhaps not surprising that in other respects respondents emphasised the spatial manner in which foreign migrants have settled in South Africa, i.e. integrated within existing and largely depressed communities, as opposed to references that South Africans exiled during apartheid in neighbouring countries were segregated from local populations, in “designated camps/locations” .

3.3 The effect of gender relations

What is evident from the focus groups as a whole is that the opinions of South Africans around the question of foreign nationals are differentiated by gender and age. This can undoubtedly be attributed to the differing social location of each of these groupings vis-à-vis the foreign nationals who have come to South Africa. It must be noted that until recently by far the majority of immigrants from Africa who have entered South Africa have been men. Thus, it emerges the focus groups as a whole that is it is men in the 26 to 33 age group in particular and from 33 upwards who appear to be the most overtly antagonistic towards foreign nationals, seeing them as a source of direct competition, in a variety of arenas

ranging from access to South African women, access to housing, access to local business opportunities such as spaza shops and access to formal employment. Foreign nationals are perceived to be able to leverage all these forms of access as a result of fact that they were not 'disadvantaged' in the past and in addition they come to the country with a certain level of skills and importantly cash or capital. As one focus group participant stated, "They have money so they gain access to everything".

On the other hand this perception is contradicted by a concomitant resentment about the willingness of foreign nationals to take employment at low wages or to undertake small entrepreneurial activities such as selling tomatoes or fixing broken shoes on street corners. This group of men, whose consciousness has been shaped by the experience of apartheid, see the willingness of foreign nationals to engage in any economic activity however menial or ill-paid, as undermining the hard won gains of South African democracy, including a work environment regulated by labour laws and the 'right' of South Africans to do meaningful dignified work that will not 'shame' them in the eyes of their community. As one focus group participant explained,

With these people one person takes on the workload of three people because they don't know about the Labour Relations Act. I won't work for peanuts but that doesn't bother them because they know that they will break into your home and steal your possessions.

This older group of men was particularly angry about what they believe to have been a government characterisation of them as lazy, recounting stories of menial labour and general servility under apartheid and a refusal to continue to live in such terms. One focus group participant argued,

The government officials must come down to the people ask what is wrong, why are we fighting those people instead they come up with words

“they are going nowhere, they are here to stay” what is that? I don’t like the way the government said South African people are lazy.

On the other hand, young women between the ages of 18-23, appear to regard the antagonism expressed towards foreign nationals as ‘backward’ and anachronistic in a modernising world. They see the men who resent foreigners as caught in a trap of ‘laziness’, entitlement, failure to take responsibility for themselves and a tendency to allocate the blame for their misfortunes outside of themselves – in this instance with ‘foreigners’. They argue that South Africans, for example, refuse to make the effort to acquire the qualifications to be able to access professional jobs or on the other hand to take whatever work is available in order to feed their families, instead protecting ‘pride’ at the cost of their families. As one woman explained,

a local will first before accepting a job, look at what people would say and then only accept the job if it means his pride won’t be ruined. Instead of first thinking about his suffering children, the local wants a high paying job, with no qualifications.

These young women admire foreign men for creating opportunities for themselves and being prepared to do whatever work is available in order to make a living. South Africans on the other hand are seen as materialist and acquisitive. As one women expressed it,

I think those people (foreign nationals) are hard workers, they will do anything for a job They will work for minimum wages...We South Africans are trying to chase the fast, glamorous life, foreigners work in low positions, they get noticed by the employer for their hard work then they get promoted. Then South Africans get angry at that?

3.4 Crime and Violence

In terms of crime, it appears that again men and women have different views of the role of foreign nationals. In general foreign nationals are seen as being able to 'get away' with crime as well as engage in a range of other illegalities such as bribery of officials because they are undocumented and hence untraceable. As one focus group participant explained, "those who come illegally, they engage in illegal activities and you won't even know who they are". However, there are differing perspectives on the relative responsibility of South Africans and foreign nationals in these corrupt relationships. While female focus groups will tend to point out that South Africans are complicit in these interactions, some male focus groups emphasise the low levels of pay received by the police and therefore place the responsibility for corrupt interactions between foreign nationals and police with the government who fails to pay police enough to resist the temptation of bribes. They also argue that local South Africans who participate in crime with foreign nationals do so as a result of poverty and that this is ultimately the responsibility of government. One participant argued in this vein that,

This partnership happens because of unemployment, poverty creates crime, were it that these locals have jobs the partnership wouldn't have been there and crime would be low. What he says is true but the government is causing this because it is not providing people with jobs.

In general, there is a widespread perception that Nigerians in particular are involved in high level organised crime, in particular drug trafficking, which draws in young people as partners in this crime and has led to an escalating problem of addiction and drug abuse. However, as one woman pointed out, those who are responsible for organising these types of crime are in fact affluent and do not live in the townships:

they [South Africans] fight with them [foreign nationals] because they claim that they commit crime. I say they are torturing the wrong people, those who commit crime don't live here [in townships] they live in town, renting flats. They have money, a lot of money.

On the other hand, Nigerians involved in organised crime are differentiated from foreign nationals living in townships,

They found crime here and maybe realised that this is probably how most people make a living here in South Africa, so they joined what was already there. Its a rumour [that crime is committed by 'foreigners'] these crimes are performed by locals, if you could only see how poor looking our foreigners from my section are...shame.

On the other hand, men appear to see foreign nationals as posing a far more direct threat, arguing that foreign nationals are widely involved in crimes in the township ranging from housebreaking, to murder and rape, even arguing that foreign nationals are able to access 'supernatural' powers to bolster their capabilities. Foreign nationals are also seen as particularly brutal and violent as it is believed that they do not have social attachments to the people they live with. As one focus group participant explained,

we are even afraid of taking guests out after a visit because we might come across people we don't know (foreigners) and they will kill us, it's unlike back in the day when we knew each other; we have become victims in our own country so it's them we must fight against.

The alleged failure of police to address crimes committed by foreigners reportedly because they are bribed to drop cases leads some men to advocate violent forms of retribution against foreign nationals believed to be involved in crime. As one focus group participant explained,

that is why we saw the need to take the law into our own hands... you find a foreigner who has raped a three year old girl being released... *it's better to kill these kinds of people* and the police will want to charge us for murder, they discount the fact that this person raped a child and destroyed her future.

As a consequence of these differing perceptions of the role of foreign nationals in contemporary South African society, there are significantly different perspectives regarding what should be done to address the problem or indeed whether there is in fact a problem at all. Younger women believe foreign nationals add value, creating economic opportunities and providing goods and services at affordable rates. Although far less antagonistic to foreign nationals than older men, older women believe that there need to be increased formalisation of the migration process through documentation and control of migrants entering the country. On the other hand the view of older male South Africans is unambiguous. Contrast these two quotes from male and female residents of Tembisa,

Women

Ok, I do not see problems with these people who come from outside to live in South Africa because these people have been here for so long why only now do people start have problems with them.

Men

...this thing [the recent attacks] has our support because we don't want them here anymore; they must go back and come in a lawful manner...these ones are not here to make a living they are here to steal, rape and murder, in fact they have destroyed our country.

3.5 The issue of access to housing

One of the most consistent areas of friction in South African society relates to the access to low cost housing, and the dynamics that are unfolding in relation to housing delivery, ownership, and rental practices. The community leadership in Imizamo Yethu (IY) in the Western Cape, for example, made it very clear that foreign nationals, by law, are not supposed to benefit or qualify from the low-income houses that the government has built for locals. The foreign nationals living in IY stay in shacks which are built in backyards or in the adjacent shack settlement situated on the slopes of the mountain. They live with local people in these areas. The foreign nationals that live in formally built homes are renting from local people. Rather than isolating corruption in the housing administration, the community development leadership noted that the local people earn an income by renting their homes and backyard shacks to foreigners, as they are willing to pay the amounts owners want not only for a place to stay but also for electricity which is reportedly difficult for local people to do. This gave an impression that the foreigners are 'overcharged' for the accommodation and services they are receiving from the locals.

It was also reported that in Du Noon, one of the causes of violence was that the local MEC for housing sent an investigation team to find out whether people were selling their low-cost houses. The locals resisted this and claimed that they had followed the legal procedure in selling their houses to foreign nationals. This they proved by having documents drawn up by lawyers. The investigation was initiated because the backlog in housing delivery appeared not to have been effectively addressed, partly due to the practice of those who were allocated low-cost homes going back to shack settlements, renting out the allocated houses, and reinserting their names on housing lists.

Respondents in Mamelodi and Tembisa identified a similar trend. As one respondent explained,

On that issue [housing] South Africans are the problem, they get houses and rent them out to foreigners. They even sell them to foreigners. So the crime is committed by South Africans. And the people who are in charge of distributing these houses are also guilty because when they accept bribes from foreigners because, foreigners have money. They always get houses first because they bribe the officials. This corruption is therefore instigated by South Africans.

Some members of the focus groups strongly objected to this practice. One participant said that "...what is stupid about this is that the locals let their children stay in the squatter camps, whilst the foreigners are living in their homes".

Another group in Alexandra identified the resentment that is caused when foreign nationals are seen to be occupying houses that South Africans have been on waiting lists for years to acquire. They blamed the government and corrupt officials for allowing people with mortgaged homes to qualify for low-cost housing. These locals then sell the RDP homes to foreigners. One of the participants had this to say,

Even I don't have a RDP house but go to Madalakufa you'll find foreigners owning houses which they bought from South Africans... the community needs to learn that you get a house in order to use it, not to sell it for R20 000 as down-payment for a house in the suburbs.

3.6 The politics of economic livelihoods

This section focuses on issues such as competition for resources including water, sanitation and health. It also looks at issues raised by the focus groups regarding jobs, employment and small business opportunities that have been created or taken by the foreign nationals.

3.6.1 Employment

Imizamo Yethu in the Western Cape has experienced tensions in the past with local people losing their jobs because of foreign nationals. This according to the local leadership was caused by the employment of Namibians as fishermen and the firing of local fisherman, mostly living in Imizamo Yethu. This caused conflict and the local people threatened to chase the foreign immigrants away. The Namibians were chosen over the local labour because they were “cheap and affordable” for the employers and are better skilled. The Quaker Peace Centre was called in to help resolve the situation together with the leadership of the area by going to the people employing the fishermen and persuading them to re-employ the old staff and adjust payment in order for everyone to earn the same amount of money regardless of their nationality. Since this issue was resolved, there have been no problems with the fishing community.

On the other hand, the local leadership said that there was tension in the area caused by locals feeling that they are losing employment to foreigners. These are mostly women that have been working in the surrounding Hout Bay areas as domestic workers and chars. The feeling was that “men” from other countries, specifically Malawi, are taking jobs previously performed by local women. They say that foreigners manage to secure these type of jobs because they agree to do anything, such as cleaning, laundry, looking after the children, driving the children to and from school and working in the garden. If a South African employer had to get a local person to do all of this, it would be expensive for them, but they prefer getting foreigners because they are cheap and willing to work hard. One community leader commented,

They must visit these labour laws because our African brothers are being used ... your wife used to work in the kitchen and they (employers) used to employ the gardener, these days, that African brother is going to do all these things, do the shopping because he can drive, painting only for R80.

In Tembisa, the female group's view was that foreigners find jobs easily because they are not as fussy as South Africans. To emphasise this, they mentioned that "... these people are hard working, they can do anything... the problem with us South Africans is that we want professional jobs yet we are not qualified".

On the other hand a strongly competitive sentiment was expressed by male respondents in Alexandra, who argued for example that the government had failed to provide jobs for the local people. "The government has failed us; they (foreigners) are the ones getting jobs, not us".

The legacy of apartheid, which had deprived older male respondents of opportunities to acquire skills, was strongly articulated as having placed local residents at a severe disadvantage vis-à-vis foreign nationals. One respondent argued,

Now we have the new government, but they never consider the fact that we were deprived the chance to acquire skills. The government must design the programme to give us skills so that if I get a hundred Rands, I can make it a million tomorrow. Instead, foreigners came in with their skills and they took our jobs and our business... a foreign man can come and tell you that you are stupid, you don't know how to use money. How would you feel?

3.6.2 Competition for resources

It was also felt that the local informal business people are not happy with competition from foreign nationals. The local leadership in Imizamo Yethu, for example, said that the local business people do not like the competition of businesses run by foreign nationals particularly because they allegedly their goods more cheaply. On the other hand local South African do in fact benefit

from business run by foreign nationals as they often rent premises from South African to operate their businesses and South Africans themselves are able to buy goods cheaply from them.

4. CONCLUSION

This report highlights perceptions of members of South African communities, particularly those living in informal settlements, where violence has occurred. In general, the perceptions of citizens matter in democracies. As Max Weber noted, democracies rule by consent and not coercion. They rely on the support of citizens for the implementation of policy. Citizens therefore need to feel that the government is using its authority in a proper and fitting manner in order to feel that they should cooperate with it. This is the balance between rights and obligations. A high level of support indicates a high level of legitimacy, while a low level of support indicates low legitimacy. Where a government does not enjoy legitimacy at high levels, the implementation of policies becomes increasingly difficult. At a range of levels, we found that the members of the communities in the informal settlements studied did not approve of the government's handling of the current crisis, nor the way in which it has communicated its developmental objectives. In the concluding section, we highlight the areas which emerged most forcefully from the focus groups which we believe will impact on future efforts to reduce tensions between South African's and foreign Africans, and manage the problem of xenophobia, which we believe cannot be addressed in isolation from other factors which promote tensions.

4.1 Housing

It was generally found that in the media, housing has been reported as a significant cause of tensions between South African's and foreigners. What we found was that housing mattered, first and foremost, to these communities, because they did not have formal houses. They are living in shacks, or *zozo's*, and this is an ongoing frustration since it is not considered proper or adequate. In

winter, the experience of these housing conditions is harshest, and one key informant noted that there is an annual cycle of violence in Phomolong, in Mamelodi, during winter. Housing becomes a source of unhappiness between foreigners and South Africans at two levels. Firstly, it becomes a source of conflict where South Africans indicate that they have been on housing lists for long periods, in some instances, since 1998 and are still waiting for houses, whilst they see foreigners living in RDP houses. We found that foreigners are getting access to houses through financial arrangements with South Africans, who rent out these houses or sell them for very low prices. Another way to get access to houses is through corrupt means of acquiring citizenship and access to a house. Most cases, however, are of rentals or sales by South Africans. The question of housing here must be viewed in relation to the slow delivery of houses, and the lack of regulation of the existing provision of houses. Are those to whom houses have been allocated, utilizing the houses as was intended? If not, why not? What are the mechanisms to monitor this? Do some aspects of housing policy and practice need to be revisited, particularly if South Africans are 'renting' or 'selling' their allocated homes to foreign nationals, where this might fuel perceptions that these foreign nationals have unjustly acquired these homes ahead of South Africans.

The lack of adequate communication from the relevant governmental agencies on the housing issue allows misperceptions to flourish, some of which implicate foreigners as the source of lack of housing delivery, and therefore contributes to a view of their presence as negative. The practice of housing usage must also be understood in the context of economic livelihoods, as explained below.

4.2 Economic Livelihoods

The dynamics in the informal settlements around economic livelihoods is a central challenge to address in order to alter the relations between locals and foreigners. The dire economic conditions, unemployment, poverty and lack of skills among South African's have created long term effects with severe social consequences. Multiple tensions arise where the poorest of the poor are

competing for resources and trying to survive in an uncertain economic environment as food prices spiral and employment possibilities are extremely insecure. We found that the perception that foreigners were taking jobs was strongly felt in the informal settlements. The jobs being referred to were ones that did not form part of the formal economy, but jobs that constitute the backbone of the casual labour force: domestic work, gardening and construction. There was a general consensus that foreigners were willing to work for a lower wage than South Africans and that foreigners generally, were able to be more economically resourceful and 'successful' than local citizens. South Africans, we were told, were more likely to seek employment, than create opportunities. Many young men had given up looking for jobs, and had resorted to other practices, or become despondent, turning to alcohol and drugs. Foreign men, the perception goes, are more resourceful, create opportunities, and are more socially stable. Some of this resourcefulness relates to criminal activities and the perception that their 'success' is through ill-gotten gains. This has impacted on gender relations, as explained in another section of the report.

The inclination of employers taking on foreign workers rather than locals has produced significant resentment towards both employers and foreign national employees. However, the general proximity of foreign nationals and their vulnerability vis-à-vis South African citizens, contributes to their 'othering' since there is a perception that they do not show solidarity with the poor in the areas they reside. The lack of an enforceable minimum wage, and the intense competition for these jobs at the lowest level of economic activity pits poor against poor. This is a situation that occurs internationally, and can only be addressed by legislative enforcements which prevent exploitative wage relations at sectoral levels. The tensions within these communities, between the economically vulnerable, are linked to the economic geography established by apartheid where wealthy areas directly neighbour extremely poor townships. This problem would therefore have to be approached not only as a challenge to Alexandra, for example, but of Sandton too. These economies are

interdependent, one receiving cheap labour and services, and the other as the source of wage employment. A solution would have to be addressed in an integrated fashion which changes the practices amongst those who pay wages as well.

Paradoxically, and despite perceptions that foreign nationals are more economically resourceful, poor South Africans are also showing economic resourcefulness by leveraging state housing resources to acquire capital and cash income in ways not envisaged by government policy, practices which have, however added to the tensions between South Africans and foreign nationals. As mentioned above, South Africans are renting RDP houses illegally to foreign occupants. The rental of houses ensures a regular cash income. On the other hand, it creates feelings of anger amongst those South Africans who have been on waiting lists for many years and who end up channelling their frustration towards the foreign occupants of a house and not the owners. Some renters also take the opportunity created by community anger to reclaim houses they have 'sold' to foreigners, knowing that illegal migrants enjoy no legal recourse. These forms of behaviour must be seen in the context of a range of practices to secure economic livelihoods varying from the opportunistic looting of stores and homes, which have accompanied the current violence to the illegal selling of houses to foreign nationals. What is clear is that South African communities themselves are highly differentiated in their values and opinions.

4.3 A context of 'siege' and lack of communication

The focus groups conducted for this study indicate that the violence which was perpetrated against foreign nationals during the past months has to be seen in the context of a general sentiment of 'siege' within impoverished communities in an environment of considerable macro-economic hardship, in particular rising food and fuel prices. As one respondent explained,

One thing that I have noticed is that this fight started when the food prices went up, then South African began acting in a wrong way. They started thinking since the foreigners are here lets just blame them before the food and other resources run out. They then started acting in a wrong way, pushing them out of the country and beating them up.

South African citizens literally feel 'besieged' by a range of socio-economic challenges. This feeling is particularly acute for men of working age who are struggling to find employment or make a living and feel most directly threatened by the migration of large numbers of 'working men' from other parts of the continent. In this context, the 'foreigner' is the nearest 'other', against which this sentiment can be expressed,

government is fighting against us, employers are fighting against us and foreigners are fighting against us, that is why we fight against them because they are nearer; they don't support us in our struggle

4.4 Reintegration? 'Foreign nationals should 'go home'

It is in this context that the critical overall finding from all the focus groups across age and gender divisions must be seen. This concerns an overwhelming sentiment that while the violence committed against foreign nationals over the last few weeks was not legitimate and not acceptable, that nevertheless foreign nationals should return to their country of origin and should only be allowed back under strictly regulated conditions.

Various suggestions were posited to implement such a return, for example giving foreign nationals a 'time frame' within in which they should leave. 'Time tables' suggested by focus group participants involved a period of a month or two. It will be critical for government to engage with these sentiments as it embarks on its 'integration' strategy. This is particularly important given the fact that another key

finding of the focus groups was a considerable feeling of alienation from both local and national government based on a sense that government was not 'listening' to or acknowledging the problems that are being faced by ordinary South Africans. If government does not engage with the sentiment being expressed by ordinary residents that foreign nationals should leave the country, the risk is that these feelings of alienation between government and South African citizens will deepen and the possibility of successful reintegration, which will require strong leadership, will be diminished.

It is evident that local residents in informal settlements feel they have been left to deal unaided with the consequences of national government policy, particularly in relation to migration and the political conflict in Zimbabwe. The undocumented migration of large numbers of people into informal settlements to directly compete with South Africans struggling to maintain a basic livelihood in cramped settlements within a context of considerable macro-economic hardship has proved an explosive mix.

There is no doubt that the deepening political crisis in Zimbabwe has had a direct impact on sentiments towards Zimbabweans in this country, who have been increasingly conflated with all migrants to South Africa. One respondent stated in this vein that, 'We can't even differentiate them by their nations. They are all Zimbabweans to us'. In general respondents express resentment towards Zimbabwean nationals who rather than attempting to address the political situation in Zimbabwe, come to South Africa and allegedly place an excessive burden on scarce resources to which South African citizens are entitled.

The situation has further been exacerbated by the fact that the focus group participants generally felt unable or were unwilling to use local governance structures to address their grievances based on a general opinion that government bodies, especially at local level, had not been effectively communicating and engaging with residents on a variety of issues ranging from

service delivery to probing the community's thoughts and grievances about foreign nationals.

5. SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the study team's acknowledgement of the critically important role played by citizens of other countries, including from around the African continent and beyond, in South Africa's economy and in our cultural and social life. Our country needs the energy, the capital, the knowledge, the experience and the diversity that foreign citizens bring, particularly those who are determined to contribute, work and live among us.

We would urge government to consider the following responses to the recent outbreak of violence commonly described as xenophobic:

- **A National Summit or Indaba on foreign nationals and immigrants in South Africa – towards social integration and peaceful co-existence**

It is clear from the evidence heard during this study that many misperceptions, stereotypes and uncertainties exist surrounding the presence of foreigners in our midst. Most importantly, it appears that ordinary South African citizens would like to have their perspectives seriously considered or their voices heard on how to deal with the issues of the influx of foreigners in the country. It would therefore seem imperative that a National Summit or Indaba be held to open space for participation by people at grassroots levels in the discussions around the sources of the recent xenophobic violence, solutions and management thereof of immigrants, towards the development a co-formulated migration policy which will have majority buy-in. In this way a full range of grievances and wishes will be canvassed in order to arrive at a national consensus on the future direction and scope of migration policy.

- **Establish and support local community forums on migration**

Just as it is important to hold a national debate on the many dimensions and aspects of migration policy, so it is also critical for these discussions to take place at the grassroots level. The attacks on foreigners will not end nor will re-integration take place until communities have satisfied themselves that grievances have been addressed. Non-South African citizens need to be encouraged to participate in these forums.

- **Audit RDP Houses and develop a policy on their occupation, sale and rental**

One of the most important triggers of the recent violence has been the occupation of national housing stock by non-South African citizens. RDP houses were constructed to enable South African citizens to reside in them. The sale or rent of RDP houses to non-South African citizens exacerbates the housing shortage, compounds the pressure on informal settlements and foments community tensions around housing. We call on government to conduct a national audit on the occupation of RDP housing and to take steps to ensure that only South Africans occupy this form of public shelter. Non-South African citizens are welcome to acquire property through the usual commercial means or to take temporary accommodation that should be provided in designated areas until such a time as they are able to move into the private residence. Government needs to establish places of accommodation for refugees where they will be safe and protected prior to integration into communities.

Border Control and Citizenship

It is essential that government move urgently and effectively to protect South Africa's borders and points-of-entry. No migration policy or strategy aimed at

alleviating xenophobic tensions can be contemplated if the national borders are porous and people can come and go as they please. Such a lack of control leads to abuse, corruption and heightens the vulnerability of people who reside in the country illegally.

**Consider a period of Amnesty to encourage illegal immigrants to
Come forward, under no threat of deportation, to apply for formal
Residence permits and legal identification documents**

It is proposed that once the borders have been closed, possibly with the use of the SA National Defence Force, that a period of amnesty is introduced. During this time, any one who is resident in South Africa should be able to claim formal residency, receive an identification card or document and be entered onto the country's taxation and regulatory system. Within a certain specified period, everybody residing in the country should be registered, traceable and legal.

- **Implement a consistent and transparent program to deal with
Corruption at Home Affairs, local Municipalities and within the SAPS**

There has been widespread perception as well as material recognition of corruption in the Department of Home Affairs. The current perception appears to be that corruption is not effectively punished and exists at all levels of the institutional bureaucracy, creating a cynical sentiment towards government. If South African communities believe that they cannot rely on the designated government agencies to perform their line functions, then they are increasingly going to take responsibility for their own security and livelihood. The expulsion of foreigners in this wave of violence is one such reaction.

The difficulty of regularising the residency and legality of non-South African citizens has been greatly exacerbated by the apparently endemic corruption

within both the Department of Home Affairs, local municipalities and within some relevant divisions of the SA Police Service. This applies both to the issuing of false or corruptly acquired identity documents, bribing local government officials to access facilities but also to the monitoring of points of entry into South Africa. The study team calls on the government to address this as a matter of urgency.

- **Employment: minimum wage, employer responsibilities and skills development**

A recurring source of tension between locals and foreigners relates to the competition for jobs. Whilst foreigners have been shown to be creating jobs in certain instances, a major source of conflict between locals and foreigners relates to the competition for casual labour. It is well documented that immigrants are prepared to work for a lower wage. A nationally administered, regulated and enforceable system of minimum wage principles will have to be implemented in order to reduce the competition for low paying jobs. Employee practices will have to be monitored in the areas of domestic labour and construction in particular.

The hiring of illegal non-South African citizens in some key sectors of the economy, such as in domestic work and in the construction sector, needs to be terminated. The only way of doing this is to make it the responsibility of the employer that all employees are registered, legal residents. In some countries, employers are fined for hiring illegal residents. We would suggest a similar strategy might pay dividends.

Poverty is clearly exacerbating tensions, so further efforts are required to assist with poverty alleviation through skills provision. Training in entrepreneurship, for instance, targeted at youth in the rural areas could be a productive strategy.

- **Create incentive programmes to forge partnerships between skilled foreigners and locals to promote productive ventures**

There is a widespread perception in South African informal settlements that immigrants are more skilled, and better resourced. Programmes need to be developed at community level which foster partnership between locals and foreigners in order to combat the risk of conflict and enhance social cohesion. South Africans can benefit from the transfer of know-how and skills from foreigners. Foreigners in return can benefit through obtaining certain benefits of citizenship in exchange for playing a developmental role in communities. This can apply to small business initiatives and to cooperatives ventures.

- **Crime**

Much of the recent conflict was underpinned by perceptions of and, in some cases, the reality of crime and who is responsible for criminal activities. Organised criminals have apparently been opportunistic in taking advantage of the vulnerable, further deepening tensions and grievances. People living in South Africa illegally are vulnerable to coercion and violence, just as local citizens must bear the brunt of these activities. It is therefore imperative that any bid to improve community relations and stamp out xenophobia needs to be partnered by a serious and dedicated project to tackle crime.

- **Retention of skilled foreign workers**

A package of measures is needed aimed at inviting and retaining skilled migrants and their families, recognising the important role these people play in building and developing the country.

Cultural Interventions to foster a new consciousness and identity

The effects of this initiative may take long to realise but will ensure a lasting solution for the country. Media, through film, advertising and music; political parties, churches and schools should be encouraged to generate symbolic depictions, memories and images of Africans from outside South Africa, as 'significant others' rather than 'dispensable others', who can be killed and chased away. They need to be acknowledged and their importance in the life and development of our democracy underlined in cultural forms.

Appendix A:

Methodology

The study focused on a sample of areas most affected by xenophobic violence. These were consistently informal settlements. It also, for comparative purposes, considered one area- Imizamu Yethu in the Western Cape, which had not seen an immediate outbreak of xenophobic violence in this current wave, and from which insights could be drawn.

The study utilised three sources:

Desktop Study

In order to provide a context, this part of the study comprised a review of literature related to xenophobia in the South African context. Although the current 'outbreak' of violence has shocked many observers, xenophobic sentiments have been increasingly evident in South Africa since 1994 and the opening up of South Africa's borders. The literature review drew on studies that have already been conducted on the phenomenon of xenophobia in South Africa. The literature review unpacks the variety of factors that have contributed to the development of xenophobic sentiments, including government policy responses to illegal migration and the role of the police in implementing that policy. The literature review looked at numerous other factors that appear to be related to the antagonism currently being expressed towards migrants including lack of service delivery, competition for resources, jobs, housing, health and the basic necessities of life.

Key stakeholder interviews

In addition to the views of the ordinary residents of the affected areas, it was important to draw on the views of local leaders and stakeholders in the affected areas. These interviews were conducted by the researchers of Democracy and Governance programme. The interviews supplement the data gained through focus groups by enhancing the understanding of the local dynamics that have preceded the outbreaks of violence.

Focus Groups Questions for a Survey on the Xenophobic violence in Alexandra, Mamelodi and the East Rand

Key Brief-To understand the *causes* of the violence

Facilitator: Welcome and introductions

Hello. My name is _____ and my colleague's name is _____
_____. Thank you very much for coming to this Focus Group Discussion

We are from the HSRC and we would like to discuss various issues relating to the recent violence involving foreigners in some parts of the country.

Please feel free to express your opinions since there is no right or wrong answer. We are also not going to share what we talk about with people who are not part of this group. Also do not judge what others are saying. During this discussion we are not going to use our real names, in order to remain anonymous. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you are free to withdraw at any stage during the group discussion.

The discussion will take about an hour to an hour and a half.

Participants: Requested to introduce themselves to the group, using pseudonyms of their choice

Facilitator explains how the discussion will be conducted, highlighting the following issues:

- The role of the moderator (facilitator) and rapporteur
- The need to use a tape recorder in order to capture the information accurately
- Consent required before proceeding to record;
- Importance of only one person talking at the same time in a clear voice
- Outline the ground rules with the group members after explaining how the FGD should proceed
- If participants are reluctant to be recorded due to the emotive nature of the study, be prepared to take down some detailed notes.

1) What have you heard people saying about the violence in this area and what have you seen yourself? [10 minutes]

(**Prompt**-this question to be kept very open. Allow people to talk freely about what they've seen and heard.)

2) What do you think led to the violence happening in your area? [40 minutes]

(This question should take up a substantial part of the discussion)

Prompts

- Again allow people to talk generally about what they think caused the problem.
- We need to see **whether people think that the violence is completely sporadic/random or whether it was 'instigated' or organised. If so by whom?**
- It would be important to understand and note the key underlying issues that emerge around the causes of the violence eg; housing, crime, lack of service delivery and then if time allows probe further on these issues.
- It would be useful to **unpack the category 'foreigner' i.e. to understand exactly who people think is the problem. Are there some foreigners people feel are more of a problem, e.g. Zimbabweans, Nigerians etc, and what about people from South Africa who have been attacked? Or is there generally a problem with 'outsiders' coming to the township?**

Specific issues to look out for include

- a) **Housing** ('foreigners have taken our houses').
 - We need to understand why people think this, is it just an impression, did they hear a rumour, do they have an actual example where this took place?
 - What are their experiences of trying to access housing, do they feel they have been prevented from getting houses because of foreigners.
 - How do they think foreigners get access to houses illegally e.g. bribery, corruption, other?
- b) **Jobs** ('foreigners are taking our jobs').
 - Is this a general impression or do they have direct experience of this?
 - Why do they think foreigners get the jobs they want?

- Are they prepared to accept lower pay, are they more skilled, are they corrupt?

c) **Competition for resources including water, sanitation and health.**

E.g. there is only one water tap for so many people and we run out of water because of foreigners using it up.

- Health-issues around foreigners accessing free health care, the local clinic runs out of medicines because the supplies are being used by foreigners who come to the clinic
- Providing goods and services: are foreigners selling things cheaper than locals or are they seen to have an unfair advantage in pricing their goods?

d) **Crime**-‘foreigners are responsible for crime’.

- We need to probe a bit beneath this perception.
- Are there some foreigners that people believe are the most responsible for crime? Or is it all foreigners.
- What types of crime are they usually involved in?
- Is this just a general impression or have people had direct experiences?

e) **Illness/HIV/AIDS**-‘foreigners are responsible for spreading disease’.

- Why do they think this is the case, have they had any experience of this.

f) **Gender related issues.**

- Do they feel relationship issues are involved?
- Are foreign men seen to be in competition with local men for local women?

g) **Migration**-have a lot of new people moved into this area recently?

- Where are they from?
- Do they have a good or bad relationship with them?
- Is this causing conflict?

h) **Policing issues-**

- Do they feel that the actions of the police have anything to do with how bad the situation has got, i.e. colluded with or not acted against foreigners who do ‘wrong things’, crime etc.

i) **Government**-local especially and national

- Do they feel that the actions of the government at local level (councillors, local MPs) etc have anything to do with the situation e.g. giving jobs or houses 'unfairly' to foreigners.
- What about local politicians, local civic leaders, other leaders?
- What channels exist for you to report your grievances to the authority?

3) Has there always been animosity towards the foreigners living in this community? [5 minutes]

- Has this always been the case or had you lived peacefully before?
- When did people start seeing foreigners as the enemy?

4) What do you *feel* about the violence which has been happening in your area? [10 minutes]

(Looking for attitudes towards violence, either negative or positive.)

- Do people maybe agree that foreigners are 'a problem' but feel there *shouldn't* be violence against them?
- Do they think they 'deserve' the violence, that violence has been effective in dealing with other 'criminals' and should now be used against foreigners?

5) Is there anything that should or could be done about this violence? [10 minutes]

(**Prompt**-trying to non-judgementally see whether people think the attacks should or will continue.)

- Also trying to draw out possible ways to intervene in the violence, how people think it could be addressed in terms of community or government initiatives, or is it a matter of the government simply addressing the problematic underlying issues outlined in the discussion, or is it a matter of arresting and deporting foreigners?

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¹ A different perspective on what happened was however put forward by Loren Landau of the University of Witwatersrand, who found in his field research in the community that few local businessmen were in direct competition with the Somalis.

² *Business Day* (21 May 2008)

³ (Mail and Guardian, 23-29 May 2008).

⁴ (IOL.co.za, 15 May 2008; SABC News, 23 May 2008)

⁵ *Mail and Guardian* (20 June 2007)

⁶ Quoting the then Minister of Home Affairs in 1994, Palmary (2002) noted the reference to competition for resources with the "...millions of 'aliens' that are pouring into South Africa,..." She interestingly commented that "This is a view that seems to be reserved primarily for migrants from other African countries and the same stereotypes are not applied (or at least not to the same extent) to, for example, Chinese immigrant communities."