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EXAMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EXISTING SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION MECHANISM IN MOPANI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, SOUTH AFRICA

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Crime prevention has been recognised as one of the key national priorities in South Africa since the establishment of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) in 1996. It is viewed to be the responsibility and duty of the South African Police Service (SAPS); however, with a range of crimes, caused by different factors, it is impossible to rely exclusively on the police to prevent crime. Thus, various stakeholders, such as businesses, communities, Non-Government Organisations, civil society, law enforcement and Municipalities, need to take a stand in maintaining peace and ensuring safety for law-abiding citizens within their municipal boundaries. This article examines the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in Mopani District Municipality (MDM). The Constitution mandates municipalities to take a lead in crime prevention to increasing people's feelings of safety and building safer communities. Using a qualitative research approach, a purposive sampling was used to select four municipal officials. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in Letaba local municipality, Greater Tzaneen local municipality, Ba-Phalaborwa local municipality and Maruleng local municipality. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. The results revealed that most local municipalities are involved in crime prevention through the establishment of the Community Safety Forums (CSF) who participate in tourism safety, school safety, road, social crime prevention and health safety. The findings revealed lack of resources, funding (Budget), political instability, lack of knowledge, training and experience as some of the major challenges hindering the effectiveness of local government involvement in crime prevention. The study recommends the establishment of a safety section in a municipality, professionalization of the crime prevention space, exploring other avenue for funding and municipal accountability to address safety issues

Keywords: Community Safety Forum, Crime Prevention, Local Government, Municipality, Safety

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1. Introduction

The role of local government in crime prevention is provided in terms of international instruments. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 posits that local governments are expected to assist countries in ensuring that human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable [1, 2]. South Africa is committed to pursuing SDG 11, among other SDGs. The constitution of Republic of South Africa section 152 further made provisions that the municipality is responsible for promoting a safe and healthy environment for its citizens [3]. The commitment for South Africa to fight crime at the local government level stamped by the establishment of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) [4] and the White paper on Safety and security [5], which promote a multi-pronged approach that incorporates other stakeholders in crime prevention [6].

Crime statistics 2019/2020 report for Mopani District Municipality (MDM), which is the centre of this study, shows that rape has consistently been the most prevalent crime, experienced by households in Giyani, and ranks it amongst the top 30 stations in South Africa. The district reported over 700 burglaries, committed in residential areas during the lockdown [7]. This is because the municipalities are not actively involved in crime prevention duties. The MDM's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2016/2021 shows that the municipalities within the district do not have the capacity to render safety services. However, they have a legislative requirement to render the service [8]. This statement is not new as it has been mentioned in the previous IDP 2011/2016. This shows that this municipality does not comply with the crime prevention standards, set at the national and provincial levels.

It is crucial to make our environment safe because crime constitutes a threat to the economic, political, and social security of a country. Against this background, the primary purpose of this study is to ex-

amine the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety and the challenges, encountered in municipal safety issues. To achieve this purpose, an empirical study was conducted.

2. Literature Review

2. 1. Crime prevention at local government level

[9] article, *The Role of Local Government in Crime Prevention in South Africa*, brought the topic of local governments' engagement in crime prevention to our attention. This body of work has unequivocally exposed that certain municipalities are doing well in their initiatives to combat crime systematically, but unfortunately there are many more that fail dismally. [4] and [5] emphasizes that municipalities should be involved in social crime prevention, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), and law enforcement. This study is based on these key areas of intervention for municipalities. Crime prevention through social development concentrates on secondary crime prevention measures, which involve focusing on the risk factors that contribute to crime. The risk factors include poverty, domestic violence, poor parenting and alcohol-related problems [10, 11].

The concept of CPTED in south Africa is new. The design of buildings and the arrangement of streets and other outdoor spaces can influence crime and level of fear of crime [12]. [13] in [14] suggested that local authorities should reduce crime by designing the environment. The environmental design tries to construct the area or environment in such a way as to reduce the opportunities, deter and make it harder for criminals to commit a crime [15]. This strategy should function as a primary crime prevention strategy that react before the crime occurs [16]. [13] state that by-law enforcement present municipalities with their clearest and most direct tool for engaging in crime prevention because by-laws regulate how the city is used, and the social patterns and behaviour of those who use it. The study, conducted by [6] in Geldenhuys [17], provides that municipalities can get involved in crime prevention by building on their existing functions, including enforcement of municipal by-laws, municipal police and traffic police.

According to [18], the hawkers contribute much to the untidiness of the rank or area, which create an opportunity for crime. [19] writes that alcohol abuse contributes more than any other factor to crime and disorder, particularly in inner city areas, contributes to higher levels of crimes, such as mugging and theft. Vacant buildings in rural areas and towns contribute to the proliferation of other crimes, such as drug dealing, prostitution, theft, damage to property, trespassing and intimidation [17, 20].

2. 3. Crime prevention issues at local government level

Local government involvement in crime prevention has not been without problems. The resources, meant for crime prevention in local government, are exceptionally limited or not provided for either in the form of staff, time, capacity, training, adequate knowledge and budget. [21] hypothesised that most municipalities do not have the logistical and administrative capacity to initiate and participate in complicated, multi-disciplinary crime prevention programmes comprehensively. The assumption was valid after [22] findings confirmed that there is no budget for safety issues in municipalities. Crime prevention is an unfunded mandate, and usually, local government depends on sponsors for funding [9]. [23] study shows that other municipalities have the budget for crime prevention, although it emphasises that government should seriously re-consider increasing funding for crime prevention programmes.

Corruption is one of the problems, rooted in local government; though some are funded, sometimes funds may be diverted to other projects or individuals' pockets [24]. According to [25, 26], without sufficient budgets, the existing CPTED facilities could hardly be maintained and improved, and new strategies are to be implemented at the ground level might be abandoned. [27] recommend that governments shift their focus from institutional budgets that assume money only goes to the established blaming institutions to operating budgets, explicitly designed to support preventative activities. They further elaborated that operational budgets allow governments to move beyond existing institutions and seek out arrangements within and outside state institutions that enable a wide variety of preventative outcomes.

[9] research on the role of local government in crime prevention in South Africa suggested the need for programmes to gain experience through an incremental process of experimentation or learning by doing. [28] is of the view that there is a significant lack of comprehensive training for crucial government individuals and agencies, tasked with the planning and implementation of crime prevention initiatives and programmes on national, provincial and local levels. Furthermore, it concluded that local governments do not have relevant experts and management capacity in crime prevention as this concept was introduced recently, which means that the local government can employ anyone with a qualification in other fields of study to perform crime prevention duties. This result in misinterpretation of the policies and legislatures governing crime prevention. [23] support the view of [28] that those involved in the development and implementation of safety plans must have adequate knowledge of crime prevention and an understanding of how crime prevention strategies can be applied.

3. The Aim and Objectives of the research

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in MDM.

To achieve the aim of the study, the following objectives were set.

1. To examine the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in MDM
1. To highlight the challenges, encountered by MDM in ensuring safety and crime prevention.

4. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in MDM. Data was collected from four amongst the five local municipalities in MDM, namely Greater Tzaneen, Greater Letaba, Maruleng and Ba-Phalaborwa local municipalities. Four (4) municipal officers were purposively selected, 1 from each local municipality. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews amongst four municipal officers who deal with safety issues in the municipality. Please note that there are five local municipalities in MDM, only four participated in this study, Greater Giyani Municipality did not participate. The ethical clearance certificate No: FMCL/22/CRM/04/0702 was obtained from the University of Venda Research Ethics Social Science Committee (RESSC). Data was analysed using thematic content analysis.

5. Research results and discussion

5. 1. The existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in Mopani District Municipality

In response to the question, posed by the researcher on the involvement of municipalities in crime prevention, the participant pointed out the following as the existing mechanism for ensuring safety in MDM. He said, "...we are involved in social crime prevention, we actually work hand in hand with the police, the reason why I'm saying we are involved it is actually our main focus...". He further said "...under social crime prevention at the local level especially in our municipality we are concentrating on tourism safety, school safety you mentioned it already health safety....." (**Participant 1**)

Another participant shared their involvement "The municipality has a committee called the Community Safety Forum (CSF), which consists of 10 members representing different stakeholders. These include representatives from taxi associations, school governing bodies, traditional authorities, clinic committees, the tourism sector, disability forums, and more (**Participant 2**)" "the municipality is more involved in crime prevention" (**Participant 3**)

When asking (**Participant 4**) He said "mmhh not fully involved in social crime prevention." Further elaborated "CSF does not have an office not reporting to any department, only comes for meetings then I will organize transport."

It is evident that the municipality plays a pivotal role in enhancing community safety through the establishment of a Community Safety Forum (CSF). It becomes worrisome to learn that another municipality is not involved and lack proper coordination. This proves the assumptions, made by [28], that most municipalities do not have the logistical and administrative capacity to comprehensively initiate and participate in complicated, multi-disciplinary crime prevention programmes. The CSF's organized structure and diverse composition provide a clear and well-defined framework for addressing various aspects of safety in the municipality.

5. 2. The challenges encountered by Mopani District Municipality in ensuring safety and crime prevention

The absence of surveillance cameras in the central business district (CBD) emerged as a significant concern for the interviewee. He expressed this concern by saying "The lack of resources prevented us from having cameras even in the main CBD; we don't have cameras." (**Participant 1**). The participant further highlighted political instability as a challenge. He said "At nights we clean the town by collecting all the wooden structures of hawkers.... But it is a war that we are not winning because politics plays an important role".

Another participant, "Mmmhhh, yes, we don't have enough staff. Currently, we work under disaster management, but we end up working on safety because we don't have enough staff. Under disaster management, there are just two of us, and we are tasked with handling community safety. To be honest, it's quite a heavy workload, and we have to deal with..." (**Participant 2**). She explained, "We don't have a specific budget for community safety. Instead, we utilize the budget, allocated for disaster management, to cover safety management because we lack a dedicated budget for safety initiatives.

Participant 3 pointed out one key challenge as the lack of adequate training in crime prevention. **Participant 4** included "resource limitations," which encompass financial and personnel constraints, "a lack of office space" for municipal operations, and notably, "the absence of coordinators for community safety activities." Additionally, issues such as "the absence of a portfolio of evidence" and "the perceived lack of motivation among CSF members" stand out as notable obstacles.

The issue of budget has been raised by all the local municipalities as a major challenge that hinders effective crime prevention in municipalities. This issue remained a problem since the municipalities were mandated to take a lead in crime prevention. [9] pointed that crime prevention at local level is seen as unfunded mandate. [23] found out that other municipalities have budget for crime prevention, however. [22] disagree with [23], [22] found out that there is no budget for safety issues in municipalities. The findings on this study, 25 years later, still show that no budget of the municipalities in crime prevention. Lack of resources, such as cameras in towns, paints a vivid picture of the municipality's limitations in ensuring comprehensive security. According to [28] routine activity theory, crime occurs because of absent of guardianship. The theory is also supported by [29] who revealed that CCTV camera is highly effective in crime prevention, specifically crime against person and property, by recording the scenes that can help in solving the reported theft or robbery incidents. This means that areas that are not guarded by cameras within the municipality boundaries are at high risk to crime. Although municipalities can rely on CCTV, its effectiveness is a problem during this era of energy crisis in South Africa.

One participant raised a concern about political interference when trying to clean the town by removing street hawkers as they contribute to crime hotspots in town. [18] concurs with this finding that the hawkers contribute a lot to the untidiness of the rank or area. Therefore, the more the place is untidy it creates a room or suitable space for nyaope boys. Subsequently will end up committing contact related crimes, such as pick pocketing, theft and etc. [30] confirms the finding by [18] that poor management of spaces results in the creation of crime hotspots and further degradation. The other participants highlighted the issue of a lack of office space for municipal operations, the absence of coordinators for community safety activities, lack of staff, lack of skills and adequate training. [28] concluded that local government do not have relevant experts and management capacity in crime prevention as this concept was introduced recently. This is evident in the findings, that most participants hold a Grade 12, diploma, degree not in the field of Criminal Justice. Meaning that the municipalities employ anyone with a qualification in other field of study to carry out the duties of crime prevention.

Recommendation. To enhance the municipality's role in crime prevention, the following recommendations can be considered:

Professionalization of the crime prevention space, this means the formation of a national professional body where crime prevention practitioners will be vetted and accredited. This will ensure that only qualified individuals will occupy the relevant positions with government structures, from top to bottom.

Municipalities should explore avenues to secure a dedicated budget for community safety efforts to ensure that resources are not diverted from disaster management.

Accountability: Most issues at municipal level are caused by internal politics and a lack of direct accountability. There is a dire need for consequential management whereby individuals (not just the police) within the crime prevention field can be held liable for an increase in crime statistics. Crime prevention needs to become a key performance indicator for the Municipal Manager and those individuals, tasked with keeping the municipality safe.

Lastly the study recommends the establishment of a safety section in a municipality to specifically address safety issues. Now, safety issues are serviced in disaster management sections.

Limitations of the study. The study area Mopani District Municipality is consists of five local municipalities. Unfortunately, this study reflects the findings from four municipalities, which are Greater Tzaneen municipality, Ba-Phalaborwa local municipality, Maruleng local municipality and Greater Letaba local municipality. The research did not get permission to conduct this study at Giyani local municipality.

This study encountered several limitations during the research process. These challenges included delays and difficulties in obtaining permissions from all local municipalities, incomplete participation from some participants, resistance to recording interviews, scheduling conflicts leading to cancellations, and cultural barriers hindering participation.

Prospects for further research. Future research ought to investigate the effectiveness and the practicality of the implementation of the CPTED principles in a rural setting.

Further make a comparative study on the effectiveness of safety and security section and disaster management section in municipal crime prevention. And lastly, the effectiveness of adequate resources in municipalities to fight crime.

6. Conclusion

The study, aimed to examine the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms in ensuring safety in Mopani District, concluded the following:

1. There is evidence of active municipal involvement in crime prevention through Community Safety Forum (CSF) desks, which includes health safety, road safety, tourism safety and social crime prevention. The municipality's proactive approach to addressing safety concerns within various portfolios demonstrates its commitment to ensuring community safety.

2. The study demonstrates the challenges, such as limited resources, staffing, and inconsistent stakeholder attendance at meetings, need to be addressed to enhance the municipality's role in crime prevention. These resource-related challenges were eloquently articulated, collectively explaining the demand for more judicious resource allocation to buttress and sustain crime prevention initiatives effectively and maintaining community safety.

3. Lastly, this article shows that training emerged as a recurring theme, this indicates the importance of investing in training programs to equip personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the multifaceted challenges of crime prevention effectively.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on reasonable request.

Use of artificial intelligence

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the current work.

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