

# An Exploration of Community-Based Security Interventions in Addressing Cross-Border Criminality by Illegal Migrants: The Case of Rural Limpopo, South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

The exacerbation of illegal migration has significantly impacted South Africa, particularly compromising the safety of communities in proximity to the Limpopo River. This issue is a global challenge as nations grapple with the ramifications of political and civil unrest, economic instability, unemployment, poverty, and human rights violations. Specifically, the border regions of South Africa, including areas such as Malale, Sigonde, Masisi, and other surrounding villages in Niani in the Limpopo province, have become focal points for the influx of illegal migrants. With illegal migration, the communities within border areas have suffered criminal activities, including stock theft and car hijackings. This paper, therefore, examined the experiences and measures used by community members to respond to cross-border crime in the Limpopo area. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study explored the strategies used by Niani community members to respond to criminal activities within rural areas. The findings elucidated the dire circumstances faced by the local impoverished populace, who attribute a surge in criminal activities, including stock theft, housebreaking, car hijacking, and muggings, to the phenomenon of illegal migration. Additionally, these areas have become conduits for transporting other illicit goods, further endangering the lives of residents. There are achievements noted resulting from community groups responding to crime, including knowledge dissemination, recovery systems, and response strategies to criminality. Given the profound impact on the well-being of these communities, the paper advocates for a comprehensive review and revision of policies concerning illegal immigration and border areas by the South African government to address and mitigate these human security concerns.

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## INTRODUCTION

Criminal activities have become a persistent thorn affecting the globe, with its implications far-reaching communities, including rural areas. Some countries have been impacted more severely than others, including South Africa. Since the dispensation of the new government led by the ANC in 1994, borders were opened to ensure that people from other countries could share within the economy. Amidst the various pathways for undocumented migration, a persistent global challenge has emerged for nations,

manifesting as a multifaceted crisis with significant implications for origin and destination countries.<sup>1</sup> Individuals entering South Africa often utilise various methods, including traversing riverine pathways, leveraging bribery, and exploiting vulnerabilities within border enforcement mechanisms. This issue is propelled by a constellation of factors, including but not limited to political unrest, civil conflicts, economic disparities, and human rights violations, which compel individuals to seek refuge or better living conditions beyond their national borders.

South Africa remains the destination for regional migration within Africa. Contributing factors include economic challenges, conflicts, and political instability, leading to irregular migration.<sup>2</sup> Migrants often enter South Africa through informal border crossings and routes. South Africa faces the challenge of effectively controlling or managing its borders to prevent illegal migration. This results primarily from corruption, limited resources, and criminal networks. Even though the government implemented various measures, including border patrols, immigration enforcement, and deportation, to deal with illegal migration, the scourge continues to rise with negative consequences.<sup>3</sup> With this illegal migration, criminality has increased in South Africa, especially car hijacking, murder, stock theft, drug and human trafficking, and fraud.<sup>4</sup>

The criminality caused by illegal migration has been researched, and at least one issue was considered: border porous.<sup>5</sup> Some studies have focused on measures by community members to address crime. This study adds value as it explores participants' subjective experiences and perspectives on crime and combating criminal activities by community member groups like Niani Prevention and Community Concerns as a measure to fight criminality within the border area. The inability of the legal system to protect its citizens perpetuated measures from communities in ways they deemed adequate to protect themselves. The paper looks at the strategies used by the groups to curb criminal activities, especially car hijacking within the border areas, and the effectiveness thereof. By emphasising the voices and experiences of those directly affected, the study contributes valuable perspectives to the academic and policy-making spheres, advocating for more empathetic and effective intervention strategies. The study reflects on the experiences recorded and evaluates the impact of the community's responses to criminality within rural areas.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Illegal Migration as a Challenge

Illegal migration is among the contemporary challenges facing South Africa.<sup>6</sup> Literature is replete with the dangers of illegal migration, especially the acts of crime and criminality.<sup>7</sup> There are also concerns about illicit crimes, pressure for resources, and job opportunities that are already scarce.<sup>8</sup> As a result, most citizens feel threatened by the influx of undocumented foreigners who come to the country illegally.<sup>9</sup> Establishing non-statutory bodies like Operation Dudula indicates citizenry securitisation in response to illegal migration in the country.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Emrah Atar, Betül Öztürk, and Meryem Enisoğlu, "International Migration Dynamics: Navigating Social, Legal, and Security Challenges for Human Rights," in *International Relations Dynamics in the 21st Century: Security, Conflicts, and Wars* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2025), 63–88.

<sup>2</sup> Loren Landau, *Contemporary Migration to South Africa: A Regional Development Issue* (World Bank Publications, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> F. Musoni, "Operation 'Clean the Nation': (In)Formalizing Zimbabwe's Cross-Border Traders in South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, no. 6 (2018): 1027–42.

<sup>4</sup> Landau, *Contemporary Migration to South Africa: A Regional Development Issue*.

<sup>5</sup> Maite Vuyiswa Esther Dithebe and Theophilus Tshisaphungo Mukhuba, "Illegal Immigration and Weak Border Control as Impediments to Development in Africa: A Critical Analysis of South Africa's Borders," *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa (JGIDA)* 7, no. 2 (2018): 139–58.

<sup>6</sup> Johannes Machinya, "Migration and Politics in South Africa: Mainstreaming Anti-Immigrant Populist Discourse," *African Human Mobility Review* 8, no. 1 (2022): 59–77; Dithebe and Mukhuba, "Illegal Immigration and Weak Border Control as Impediments to Development in Africa: A Critical Analysis of South Africa's Borders"; Jonathan Crush and Vincent Williams, "Making up the Numbers: Measuring 'Illegal Immigration' to South Africa," 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Dithebe and Mukhuba, "Illegal Immigration and Weak Border Control as Impediments to Development in Africa: A Critical Analysis of South Africa's Borders"; Machinya, "Migration and Politics in South Africa: Mainstreaming Anti-Immigrant Populist Discourse."

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Crush and Daniel Tevera, "Exiting Zimbabwe," *Zimbabwe's Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival*, 2010, 1–49.

<sup>9</sup> Kudzayi Savious Tarisayi, "Framing Operation Dudula and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in South African Media Discourse," *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2024): 34–43.

<sup>10</sup> Tarisayi, "Framing Operation Dudula and Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in South African Media Discourse"; Machinya, "Migration and Politics in South Africa: Mainstreaming Anti-Immigrant Populist Discourse."

The transition of South Africa from apartheid to democracy held hopes for improved border control to manage illegal migration, but it has fallen short. During apartheid, the government was better able to control illicit migration through laws like the Pass Law and MLS, which regulated the movement of people and helped to identify illegal migrants. The current government has implemented measures such as border control, immigration enforcement, and deportation of illegal migrants, but these efforts have not been very successful. Illegal migrants continue to find ways to enter South Africa, posing a challenge that needs to be addressed. Looking into African illegal migration is supported by the economic challenge that most migrate illegally for a better life, which has many consequences.<sup>11</sup> Illegal routes they use are dangerous: rivers, seas, and others, and they go through seas or rivers. They can kill them, but they consider it the hope of a better life in a better country or continent.<sup>12</sup>

### **Border Management Control and Security**

Borders are the entry point of any country, and all who use them must be legally permitted. The police and the military are responsible for any mismanagement within the border. African countries have faced the challenge of borders for years because of the criminality that is always taking place. Corruption is another cause of border challenges, and globalisation is another cause because the tearing down of traditional borders in the twenty-first century made many states unable to manage their borders well.<sup>13</sup> Globalisation supports the free movement of people so that they can interact with other people from other states and economic integration with the states, and it puts enormous pressure on many countries. This is the thing of globalisation, where many people move from their origin to another country in search of green pastures.

### **Community Safety**

Community safety is one of the significant aspects of society, and it involves implementing measures that ensure the safety and security of individuals and communities.<sup>14</sup> Community safety is the priority of any state because any state has to ensure that its citizens are protected. There are departments in any province of South Africa that deal with issues of community safety, and these departments must ensure the safety of the community by improving quality, deepening meaningful community participation, enhancing unique crime prevention, and fostering integrity and accountability in the criminal justice system.<sup>15</sup> The government has to take a look at this issue to check the progress they have made when it comes to all villages that are encountering the problems of illegal migration and putting their life in danger.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, to explore participants' subjective experiences and perspectives on crime and how the communities combat criminal activities. The phenomenological approach is particularly relevant in contexts where understanding the depth of human experiences is paramount, as it allows for a comprehensive exploration of individuals' perceptions, emotions, and reactions to their environments.<sup>16</sup>

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The research was conducted in villages significantly impacted by crimes attributed to illegal migration, a setting where the community members' subjective experiences are complex and nuanced.<sup>17</sup> The study

<sup>11</sup> Katharine M Donato and Douglas S Massey, "Twenty-First-Century Globalization and Illegal Migration," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 666, no. 1 (2016): 7–26.

<sup>12</sup> M. Samers and M. Collyer, *Migration* (Taylor & Francis, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ayelet Shachar, "Beyond Open and Closed Borders: The Grand Transformation of Citizenship," *Jurisprudence* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–27.

<sup>14</sup> Nick Tilley and Aiden Sidebottom, *Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety* (Willan Pub., 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Vania A Ceccato, *Rural Crime and Community Safety*, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi, "Phenomenology: A Philosophy and Method of Inquiry.," *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 5, no. 1 (2018): 215–22; A. Mouchet, K. Morgan, and G. Thomas, "Psychophenomenology and the Explicitation Interview for Accessing Subjective Lived Experience in Sports Coaching," *Sport, Education and Society*, 2018.

utilized a document study, focusing on group members' experiences from a case created to fight criminality within rural areas, facilitating an in-depth understanding of participants' views and experiences.<sup>18</sup> Utilising secondary data provides a viable option for researchers with limited time and resources.<sup>19</sup> This approach is practical in qualitative research, allowing researchers to understand the phenomenon better.<sup>20</sup> The choice of a qualitative design was strategic, aimed at collecting meaningful insights into the experiences of communities receiving illegal immigrants and their responses, particularly around the Limpopo area. This study's data was collected through comprehensive WhatsApp communications, recordings, newspapers, YouTube, and desktop information reviews. The data analysis process followed the steps by Johnson and Wickham where the researcher started by developing the research questions followed by an in-depth literature review regarding illegal migration and strategies used by communities to combat criminality within the border areas.<sup>21</sup> Data was evaluated to ensure the appropriateness of the research topic.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ethical Consideration**

The nature of the problem being investigated by the study involves human subjects as informants, hence the need to uphold specific ethical principles. Although the documents available were used, the actual names of the participants were not revealed. Some sensitive responses were withheld, and the number plates of cars were not used. Information already published by newspapers was recorded as it is with citation. By emphasising the voices and experiences of those directly affected, the study contributes valuable perspectives to the academic and policy-making spheres, advocating for more empathetic and effective intervention strategies. The study reflects on the experiences recorded and evaluates the impact of the community's responses to criminality within rural areas.

## **PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Extent of Criminality within Border Areas in Limpopo**

Experiencing and responding to cross-border criminal activities resulting from illegal migration has increasingly become a focal point of scholarly discussion, particularly concerning its repercussions on rural locales within South Africa. This is primarily attributed to these communities' multifaceted challenges, ranging from security concerns to socio-economic strains and the responses from the police force within the areas. The underpinning argument across the body of literature is that illegal migration exacerbates vulnerabilities in rural areas, which are already grappling with limited access to resources and infrastructural deficiencies, and when community members fail to get assistance, the resolve to measures that can assist them to recover their resources and prevent future occurrences of criminality within their areas.

The study results are embedded from the individuals' perspectives. They are narrated through WhatsApp communications, newspapers, and YouTube, where community members around Niani have grouped themselves to combat cross-border criminal activities within their areas. The study aimed to assess the impact of illegal immigration on rural communities in the Limpopo region, specifically focusing on the prevalence and types of criminal activities reported and exploring the strategies used by community members to deal with crime. The initial findings of the research indicate a significant correlation between the influx of illegal immigrants and the rise in various criminal activities. These activities range from severe offenses such as murder and attempted murder to drug smuggling, theft, and car hijacking. The analysis presented herein is based on the crime statistics reported in the first quarter

<sup>18</sup> Jane Sutton and Zubin Austin, "Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management," *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy* 68, no. 3 (2015): 226.

<sup>19</sup> Melissa P Johnston, "Secondary Data Analysis: A Method of Which the Time Has Come," *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 3, no. 3 (2014): 619–26.

<sup>20</sup> Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews* (Sage, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Robert Kwame Ame, "Traditional Religion, Social Structure, and Children's Rights in Ghana: The Making of a Trokosi Child," in *Vulnerable Children: Global Challenges in Education, Health, Well-Being, and Child Rights*, ed. D. J. Johnson, D. L. Agbenyiga, and R. K. Hitchcock (New York: Springer, 2013), 239–55; Rita J Wickham, "Secondary Analysis Research," *Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology* 10, no. 4 (2019): 395.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson Olusegun Ajayi and Bodunde Oluwafemi, "Religious Practices and National Development," *Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2014): 105–11.

by Limpopo Police, newspapers, and WhatsApp reports, shedding light on the challenges faced by Indigenous communities due to illegal immigration.

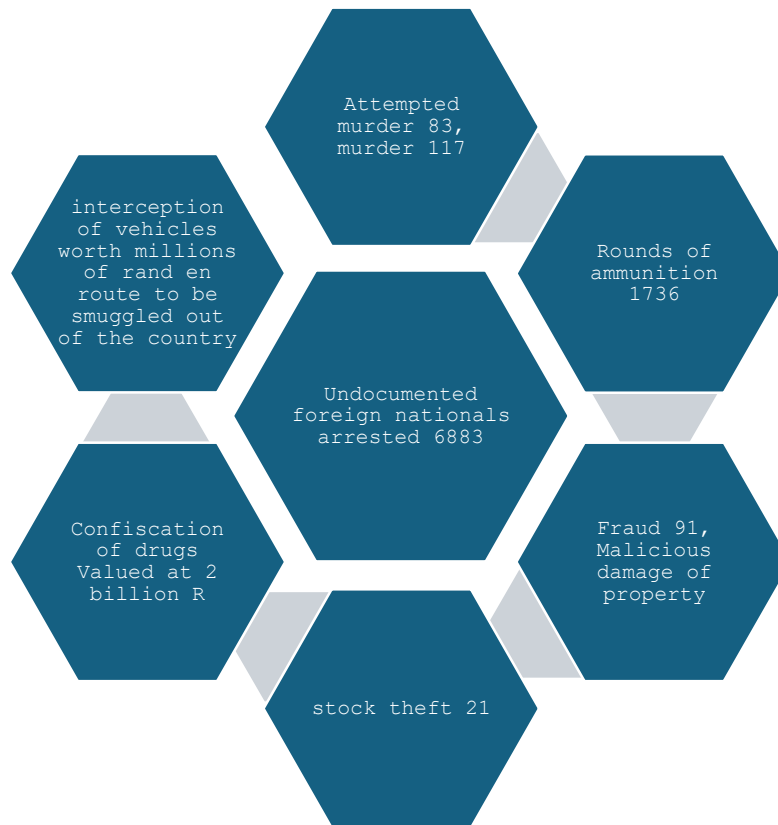


Figure 1: Criminal behaviour in Limpopo during the second quarter of 2024

This analysis focuses on crime statistics related to undocumented foreign nationals in Limpopo, including South African culprits, reflecting a multidimensional perspective on various criminal activities. The data underscores critical concerns about violence, drug trafficking, firearms proliferation, property crime, and fraud, urging a comprehensive approach to crime prevention and policy formulation.

The total number of undocumented foreign nationals arrested in Limpopo Province alone during the second quarter of 2024 stands at 6,883, counted within a quarter, which is indicative of significant challenges related to illegal migration. Economic disparity, political instability in countries of origin, and the efficacy of local law enforcement may contribute to these high numbers.<sup>23</sup> Murder (117) and attempted murder (83) are indications that the prevalence of violent crime is alarming, suggesting escalating tensions possibly fuelled by competition over resources or involvement in organised crime. Such statistics necessitate thoroughly examining community dynamics and socio-political contexts.<sup>24</sup> Confiscation of drugs valued at 2 billion rands, as the figure reflects, epitomises a substantial drug trafficking issue in the region, indicating robust networks that facilitate illegal trade. The staggering valuation highlights the economic incentives driving this criminal activity. Interception of vehicles worth millions of rands and livelihoods, including fraud, though less frequent than other crimes, points to systemic vulnerabilities within local and national economic frameworks and enhanced regulatory oversight. The crime statistics from Limpopo illuminate a complex nexus of challenges related to undocumented migration and its subsequent criminal implications.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mashaba E K et al., “Learner Learner- on- Learner Violence: A Case of Tshwane West District (D15), Mabopane, Gauteng Province,” *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 5, no. 8 (August 16, 2022): 115–29, <https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i8.378>.

<sup>24</sup> K et al., “Learner Learner- on- Learner Violence: A Case of Tshwane West District (D15), Mabopane, Gauteng Province.”

<sup>25</sup> K. E. Mashaba et al., “Learner Learner- on- Learner Violence: A Case of Tshwane West District (D15), Mabopane, Gauteng Province,” *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 5, no. 8 (August 16, 2022): 115–29, <https://doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i8.378>.

Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that these figures may not comprehensively represent the true scope of criminality, particularly in rural areas, where numerous incidents go unreported. This underreporting can be attributed to various factors, including limited resources and a prevailing lack of trust in law enforcement agencies regarding their capacity to restore losses incurred due to criminal acts. Furthermore, the reported figure of 6,883 undocumented foreign nationals is notably significant, raising concerns about the potential for under-representation of additional individuals not captured in official statistics.

### Picturing Experiences

Criminal behaviours associated with illegal migration present substantial challenges, significantly impacting both migrant populations and local communities. These behaviours often stem from various factors, including limited access to essential services and economic pressures faced by illegal migrants.<sup>26</sup> Participants arrested as illegal migrants from Zimbabwe were interviewed by Makungo (2021), and they agreed with Masrorillo et al., as Participant 1 alluded to, *‘I come to South Africa because we want something to provide for our children; there are no jobs in Zimbabwe.’* Participant two added that *“we are trying to get something for survival. We tried to enter South Africa because I could not survive with my family in Zimbabwe.”* The group comprised women and men of different ages without passports who vowed to use every illegal route to ensure they ended up in South Africa.

In rural areas, the manifestations of such criminal activities vary, with participants reporting theft experiences, particularly of livestock and property, as well as mugging incidents as farmers. Robert Tshibalo and Norman Phaphali mentioned that they lost their animals due to unrelenting smugglers. They mentioned, *“We are losing cattle and goats all the time. I just lost 11 goats recently. I looked everywhere; I went as far as Musina to no avail. We are working with the SAPS stock theft unit to stop this. It is painful to lose our animals because we depend on them for a living. This has been happening for too long. We appeal to the police to step up the fight against stock theft (police crackdown 2022).*

Another respondent mentioned, *“My cattle were stolen, 11 of them. I knew they were already in Zimbabwe after looking around villages in Niani in vain. I asked permission to search, and we found them in another village in Zimbabwe. I was fortunate to have trained one of my cattle to sit in my order and greet. So, it was proof enough that they belonged to me. Unfortunately, two were already sold. It is an expensive exercise as one has to travel with petrol, and bringing back the stock is very expensive and takes time.”* (Border Crime Watch WhatsApp: 2024) The pain of the rural farmers who are trying to survive and have to lose their stock due to criminality is immense.

Additionally, the phenomenon of car hijacking has become increasingly prevalent, with certain vehicle brands, namely, Toyota Fortuner (GD-6 and D-4D), Toyota Hilux (GD-6 and D4D), Toyota Corolla Cross, Toyota RAV4, Volkswagen Polo, and Nissan NP200.<sup>27</sup>

Although various car models are susceptible to hijacking, the mentioned brands are disproportionately at risk, suggesting a targeted approach by criminals based on perceived value or popularity. The escalation of these criminal activities poses significant threats to the safety and psychological well-being of rural residents. As indicated by the respondents in various studies, there is a palpable sense of fear and anxiety within these communities, which disrupts their sense of security and normalcy.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, individuals express that their quality of life has deteriorated, as the constant concern over crime renders their living conditions increasingly uncomfortable. This situation underscores the complex interplay between illegal migration and criminality and highlights the urgent need for systemic interventions aimed at addressing both migrant vulnerabilities and community safety.

Research has identified several dominant techniques in examining the various strategies employed by hijackers. One notable approach involves strategically placing a doll resembling an individual in distress, which elicits assistance from unsuspecting drivers. Additionally, hijackers may

<sup>26</sup> M. Mastrorillo, “The Impact of Economic Constraints on Illegal Migration and Criminal Behaviours: A Review,” *International Migration Review* 50, no. 4 (2016): 911–29.

<sup>27</sup> A. Kritzing, “The Dynamics of Vehicle Hijacking in South Africa,” *Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 12, no. 3 (2019): 301–15.

<sup>28</sup> C. Van der Merwe, “Fear of Crime and Its Effects on Rural Communities: A Qualitative Analysis,” *Rural Sociology* 80, no. 1 (2015): 4–30.

utilize objects designed to puncture tires, intentionally causing vehicles to become incapacitated and facilitating a subsequent theft while accomplices remain on standby. These tactics underscore a calculated methodology aimed at exploiting human empathy and creating advantageous opportunities for criminal activity. Criminals often employ various tactics to facilitate their illicit activities, one of which includes the strategic placement of obstacles in roadways. These obstacles may range from minor objects to more substantial items, such as fallen tree branches or detached trailers, which can impede a vehicle's movement. Such actions create opportunities for hijackers to execute their plans. In response to these threats, community members are engaging in dialogue to share insights and strategies to raise awareness and educate others about preventive measures against criminal behaviours. This collective effort underscores the importance of community vigilance in combating crime.

### **Strategies used by group members to combat criminal activities within Limpopo**

The ongoing challenge of illegal migration has incited considerable concern within communities, particularly in regions where residents perceive a lack of adequate governmental intervention. Empirical evidence indicates that communities increasingly resort to self-directed measures to address these issues, exemplified by the Dudula operation in South Africa. While the initiative aims to enhance neighborhood safety by mitigating criminal activities associated with illegal migrants, the subsequent arrests of Dudula members raise critical questions about the efficacy and legitimacy of governmental responses to such grassroots movements.<sup>29</sup>

To combat the escalating incidence of stock theft, it is imperative to implement targeted interventions. Effective strategies may encompass establishing community policing initiatives and the development of cooperative security frameworks among farmers to protect their livestock. Research conducted by Tharakan underscores the potential efficacy of fostering collaboration between law enforcement agencies and agricultural communities in significantly reducing incidents of theft.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, governmental policies that enhance market accessibility for farmers could alleviate some of the economic repercussions associated with livestock theft, thereby promoting greater economic resilience within these communities.<sup>31</sup>

This study elucidates the strategies employed by the residents of Limpopo, particularly those near Niani, in their efforts to combat cross-border crime. These strategies highlight the necessity for comprehensive, community-based approaches involving local stakeholders and governmental authorities to create safer environments.<sup>32</sup> The dynamic interplay between community-led self-regulation and governmental intervention warrants further examination to devise more effective policies that simultaneously address the complexities of migration and the imperative of community safety.<sup>33</sup>

### **1. Creating Policing Groups that Work together to Watch and Fight Criminal Behaviour**

Several community-based organizations have been established in response to the increasing prevalence of criminal activities, including the Niani Prevention and Community Concern Group, Niani Neighbourhood Watch, AFRI Forum, Business Forum Against Crime, and Cross Border Crime Watch. These initiatives have emerged as a direct reaction to the rising incidents of cross-border criminality and a concomitant erosion of trust in government officials' capacity to address such issues effectively. There exists a pervasive concern that certain corrupt officials may be complicit, accepting bribes from perpetrators to facilitate the passage of stolen and illicit goods across borders. Mr. Philemon Munyai, one of the coordinators of these efforts, elucidates that the genesis of cross-border neighbourhood watches is rooted in the ongoing challenges posed by cross-border crimes, notably vehicle hijackings, smuggling operations, and livestock theft, particularly observed in the Zimbabwean context.

<sup>29</sup> S. Makhanya, "Community Responses to Illegal Migration: The Case of Dudula," *African Journal of Migration Studies*, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> J. Tharakan, "Security Strategies for Farmers: A Community Approach," *South African Journal of Criminology* 32, no. 2 (2019): 78–89.

<sup>31</sup> J. Smith, L. Jones, and T. Ngubane, "Market Access and Livestock Theft: The Role of Policy Interventions.," *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 16, no. 7 (2021): 231–41.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus De la Fuente et al., "The Role of Personal Self-Regulation and Regulatory Teaching to Predict Motivational-Affective Variables, Achievement, and Satisfaction: A Structural Model," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (April 21, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00399>.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Jones, and Ngubane, "Market Access and Livestock Theft: The Role of Policy Interventions."

*“As businesspeople and farmers, we realised we cannot single-handedly win the war against these crimes without engaging other stakeholders. Most crimes are cross-border, and we believe we can achieve more in intercepting criminals from both sides if we establish a strong working relationship. This is where our partnership with counterparts in Zimbabwe comes into play,” he said.*

Munyai also mentioned that they would embark on crime awareness campaigns and conduct joint operations with the police. Another initiative to enhance border security involves establishing a patrol group equipped with sniffer dogs operating in the Musina area, along the South Africa-Zimbabwe border. According to a report by News24, Jacques Broodryk, the campaigns manager for AfriForum, indicated that this initiative was launched in response to the support garnered following the release of the documentary *Open Borders*, which highlighted the inadequacies in border control measures between the two nations. Broodryk further noted that the organization's watch groups are critical in safeguarding local communities. Between June and September of 2021, the AfriForum reported the seizure of smuggled goods valued at over R12 million around the Musina region, a notable achievement for community groups engaged in the fight against criminal activities. This data underscores the effectiveness of the community-driven strategies employed to address and combat criminality in the area.

## **2. Taking the Law into Community Hands**

The phenomenon of mob justice is indicative of deeper societal issues, particularly in communities where trust in formal legal systems is waning. Instances of vigilante violence, such as the recent case involving an individual suspected of vehicle theft who was subsequently beaten to death by community members at Khubvi village, highlight a troubling trend. Reports suggest that certain areas, such as Niani, have witnessed similar incidents where suspects were subjected to severe physical punishment before being handed over to their families or community leaders for further reprimand.

This unilateral approach to justice underscores a community's growing disillusionment with the efficacy of legal recourse in addressing criminal behaviour. The protracted nature of investigations and the often-limited outcomes of reported cases of theft and hijacking contribute to a pervasive sense of frustration among residents. When individuals perceive that those engaged in criminal activities reap greater rewards than law-abiding citizens, it engenders feelings of resentment and hopelessness. Such dynamics can ultimately destabilize social cohesion and foster an environment conducive to further violence and disorder, as communities resort to self-help measures in a bid to reclaim a sense of security and agency.

## **3. Alerting Community Members about Criminality as a Group**

The formation of community-driven groups to combat vehicle theft represents a proactive approach to enhancing local security and fostering collaboration among residents. In such groups, members disseminate information regarding stolen vehicles, thereby alerting individuals in nearby areas and along known trafficking routes. This collective vigilance increases the likelihood of recovery and promotes a sense of shared responsibility and solidarity within the community. The efficacy of such networks lies in their ability to rapidly disseminate information rapidly, thereby ensuring that all stakeholders remain informed and engaged in efforts to locate and recover stolen vehicles.

Following the results, previous studies suggest that community education programs are essential in raising awareness about the legal implications of illegal migration and the negative consequences of related criminal activities. Research indicates that informed communities are more likely to engage in proactive measures to address these issues.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, community policing strategies can foster cooperation between law enforcement and residents, promoting the reporting of suspicious activities.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Tharakan, “Security Strategies for Farmers: A Community Approach.”

<sup>35</sup> Smith, Jones, and Ngubane, “Market Access and Livestock Theft: The Role of Policy Interventions.”

#### 4. Responsive Searching Teams

The communities created a responsive team that not only alerts others but also goes out to hide in the bush, looking for cars that will be passed illegally through the rivers or roads crossing the borders from South Africa to neighbouring countries. It is assumed that cars are transited to countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, and other places where they are sold at a cheaper price, and some are even abandoned, as the group depicts pictures underneath. In the interview with Boboyi, a community member was excited about the search team, as he mentioned that after reporting that the car was hijacked, the response team traced it.<sup>36</sup> A report was given that the car was seen along Tshikondeni, passing Vhuri-Vhuri towards Ha-Gumbu, where it was going to transit to Zimbabwe. The task team recovered the car as they worked with communities in different areas. The same day, the car was recovered. One respondent mentioned that instead of reporting the case to the police, it is better to start with community watch groups as they respond quicker to car hijackings than the police.

The statistics for car hijacking and stealing are staggering daily in South Africa. Illegal citizens from other countries mainly work with South Africans to execute their crimes. This paints a more significant structural challenge resulting from poor governance, poor policing, border controls, and unemployment affecting the country.

#### 5. Protests

On the 30th of August 2024, residents around Niani decided to protest by closing the Boabab toll gate next to Musina along N1 in Limpopo, protesting against high incidents of vehicle and livestock theft, hijackings, and smuggling of vehicles into neighbouring countries through the Beitbridge port of entry. Uyaphi (where are you going?) is one of the strategies recently used to curb criminal behaviour when community members blocked the toll gate linking Musina town and the Beitbridge border post. The villagers said their village has been hard hit by crime, and the government seems unwilling to address it; hence, they decided to strike to fight crime.

One of the protesters, Jackson Mashamba (46), said they had no choice but to join the protest as they were under siege.

*“We are no longer safe even in our homes because these criminals are attacking where we thought we would be safe.”*

*He said law enforcement agencies have failed them as crime in their area escalates.*

*“Our village is being used as a gateway for luxury vehicles through the bushes, and nothing is being done because we do not see any change,” he said.*

Another protester, John Makhuba (38), said they had to block the toll gate to attract the attention of the relevant authorities.

*“We needed to show them we are very serious about this issue because our lives are at risk. We have had enough of living in fear and need to feel free,” he said.*

The villagers said countless meetings were held with authorities where they raised their issues, but they are angered by not seeing change.

#### 6. Digging Trenches in the Border Areas

The Business Forum Against Crime has implemented a strategic intervention by excavating a trench along the Limpopo dry riverbed, aiming to obstruct the routes used for the illicit transportation of smuggled vehicles from South Africa to Zimbabwe. In an interview with members of various community response groups reported the significant challenges they encounter when confronting heavily armed operatives involved in these smuggling activities.<sup>37</sup> These respondents noted the difficulty in preventing the swift transit of stolen cars across the border, as authorities in Zimbabwe often refuse to assist in the recovery of vehicles, citing issues of trespass.

<sup>36</sup> Asanda Boboyi, “Exploring Ubuntu Philosophy as a Foundation for Holistic School Social Work in South Africa,” *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 9, no. 1 (March 6, 2024): 253–64, <https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.14>.

<sup>37</sup> Boboyi, “Exploring Ubuntu Philosophy as a Foundation for Holistic School Social Work in South Africa.”

The community stakeholders perceive the excavation of the trench as a viable short- to medium-term strategy to mitigate the ongoing issue of car hijackings. This measure reflects a proactive approach to enhancing local security and disrupting established criminal networks operating within this region.

## 7. Roadblocks

In the surrounding communities of Niani, residents have increasingly resorted to implementing roadblocks as a strategy to enhance local security. This approach is often undertaken in collaboration with law enforcement agencies; however, respondents have noted instances where the police have reported limitations in both manpower and vehicle availability during both daytime and nighttime hours. This situation has been attributed to the escalating audacity and coordination of criminal activities within these areas. Community members uniquely emphasize that coordination with police authorities leads to a significant reduction in fear among residents. Through these initiatives, they have successfully recovered a substantial number of stolen goods, which are reportedly being trafficked to neighboring Zimbabwe.

## Exploring Sustainable Solutions

One of the pivotal studies in this domain was conducted by Crush and Dodson who explored migration dynamics in the Southern African context, highlighting the complexities of border management and its implications for rural security and development.<sup>38</sup> Their findings underscore the porous nature of South Africa's borders, particularly along the Limpopo River, which has facilitated the influx of migrants into rural communities. Crush and Dodson argued that this influx strains local resources and heightens tensions between migrant and indigenous populations.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Wentzel and Tlabela delved into the socio-economic impacts of migration in South Africa, emphasising the rural-urban dichotomy.<sup>40</sup> Their research provides insights into how illegal migration impacts agricultural practices and local economies in rural areas, often resulting in labour disputes and alterations in traditional farming practices. As Wentzel and Tlabela articulate, these alterations have long-term ramifications for rural sustainability and community cohesion.

Musoni examined the role of informal networks in facilitating migration across the Zimbabwe-South Africa border.<sup>41</sup> Musoni's work is critical in understanding the mechanisms through which illegal migration occurs and the subsequent impacts on rural communities in South Africa. Through a detailed analysis of border crossings, Musoni sheds light on the security challenges rural areas face, which are often the first contact points for migrants.

That statement is evidence that people are indeed being affected so severely by this issue of illegal migration. Illegal migrants, after committing crimes, can hardly get arrested because they are not documented. This investigation into the experiences of South African communities afflicted by illegal migration underscores the substantial socio-economic and security challenges these areas face. Drawing on a robust methodological framework and adhering to stringent ethical considerations, this study provides nuanced insights into the lived realities of individuals in the villages of Malale, Gumbu, Sigonde, Masisi, and other areas in Niani. The findings reveal that illegal migration compounds existing vulnerabilities and catalyses more profound socio-economic disparities within rural locales, resonating with and expanding upon the discourse established by Doe and Smith.<sup>42</sup>

Some people are affected by this issue of illegal migration on the services delivered by the municipality, whereby the services that are rendered are not enough for the people because the number of people who are staying in the villages has risen due to the people who come illegally, including the unavailability of health care services like medication within rural clinics. The rising incidence of theft involving domestic animals in Limpopo is a multifaceted issue that warrants in-depth academic

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Crush and Belinda Dodson, "Another Lost Decade: The Failures of South Africa's Post-apartheid Migration Policy," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 98, no. 4 (2007): 436–54.

<sup>39</sup> Crush and Dodson, "Another Lost Decade: The Failures of South Africa's Post-apartheid Migration Policy."

<sup>40</sup> Marie Wentzel and Kholadi Tlabela, "Historical Background to South African Migration," *Migration in South and Southern Africa: Dynamics and Determinants* 71 (2006): 96.

<sup>41</sup> Musoni, "Operation 'Clean the Nation': (In)Formalizing Zimbabwe's Cross-Border Traders in South Africa."

<sup>42</sup> J. Doe and A. Smith, "Projected Trends in Car Hijacking and Smuggling: An Analytical Forecast," *Journal of International Security and Crime Prevention* 16, no. 3 (2024): 202–20.

investigation. This region, renowned for its agricultural productivity and heavy reliance on livestock, is facing increasing challenges as incidents of livestock theft escalate. Such criminal activities threaten local farmers' economic stability and pose significant risks to regional food security.<sup>43</sup>

The economic implications of livestock theft are particularly severe in rural communities where agriculture is a primary source of income. According to Wiggins and Keats, theft can lead to substantial financial losses in regions heavily dependent on livestock, creating a ripple effect that impacts individual farmers and the broader agricultural economy.<sup>44</sup> As farmers experience declines in income due to theft, they may be compelled to reduce their herd sizes, subsequently limiting their ability to contribute to local food production.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the socio-economic consequences of this crime are profound. Livestock theft can erode community trust and social cohesion, leading to fear and insecurity among farmers. This environment diminishes agricultural productivity and reduces investment in the rural economy.<sup>46</sup> The loss of livestock, which often holds significant cultural and economic value, can destabilise familial and community structures, further exacerbating the socio-economic challenges these communities face.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the discussion, the following recommendations are made.

Targeted law enforcement operations in high-risk areas should be conducted with sensitivity to community trust. Practical training for law enforcement officers can give them the tools to address migration issues while respecting human rights.<sup>47</sup> Such approaches ensure that law enforcement efforts do not alienate migrant populations but encourage cooperation.

Reforming immigration policies to address the root causes of migration, such as violence, poverty, and lack of economic opportunities, is essential.<sup>48</sup> Policies designed to create safe and viable living conditions in migrants' home countries can reduce the push factors that lead to illegal migration. Addressing illegal migration and its associated criminal activities in rural areas requires a nuanced approach that considers the complexities of migration and community dynamics. By employing strategies rooted in academic research, communities can work collaboratively to create safe, resilient, and supportive environments.

## CONCLUSION

The scholarly discourse on illegal migration in rural South Africa presents a nuanced understanding of the challenges and implications for communities at the receiving end of such movements. The literature emphasises the need for nuanced policy interventions that address border security, community resilience, and the socioeconomic integration of migrants into rural societies. The study's findings indicate a significant failure on the part of the government to safeguard the inhabitants of rural areas along the Limpopo River, where illegal migration is pervasive. Residents from Malale, Gumbu, and Masisi have endured substantial hardships due to this ongoing issue. The level of community safety has deteriorated to such an extent that participants in the study reported a pervasive sense of insecurity within their homes due to the detrimental effects of illegal migration. The rise in criminal activities within these villages is alarming, as crime fosters a climate of fear among residents. Consequently, the villagers urge the government to prioritise community safety, as their well-being has been severely compromised.

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