## Conflict Factsheet

**Land Scarcity and Urban Violence in South Africa 1990-1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of conflict</th>
<th>Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict Locality</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>1990–1994</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Agricultural / Pastoral Land</td>
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### Conflict Summary

Rising population numbers and environmental degradation in rural South Africa accelerated rural-urban migration during the late 1980s. Increased competition for residential land, resources and public services in black neighbourhoods, in turn, combined with the negligence and complicity of the late Apartheid regime to produce gang violence, criminality and political unrest, which culminated in the years preceding South Africa’s first free elections in April 1994.
Conceptual Model

**Climate Change**
- Migration patterns
- Demographic Change

**Environmental Change**
- Natural Resource Scarcity
- Livelihood Insecurity

**Intermediary Mechanisms**
- Reduced State Capacity and/or Legitimacy
- Grievances between Societal Groups

**Fragility and Conflict Risks**
- Anti-State Grievances
- Crime / Violence / Extremism

**Social and Economic Drivers**
- Demographic Change

**Context Factors**
- Unequal Land Distribution
- Water-stressed Area
- High Unemployment
- Political Marginalization
- Political Transition
- Unresponsive Government

Agricultural / Pastoral Land
Conflict History

The last years of the Apartheid regime saw a dramatic surge in crime and violence in marginalised black urban areas, especially in the areas surrounding Durban and Johannesburg. During the run up to the general elections in 1994 gang violence in black neighbourhoods increasingly mixed with political violence between organizations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and the conservative Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Minnaar (1994) estimates, that yearly death statistics from political unrests in the areas around Durban and Johannesburg rose from 1403 in 1989 to 4010 in 1993, while the number of yearly unrest-related injuries rose from 1425 to 4790 over the same period (Percival & Homer Dixon, 1998). The intensity of armed political violence in South Africa has generally decreased since 1994. Criminality and gang violence remain however an important problem in South African cities (UCDP, 2015; Bénit-Gbaffou et al. 2008).

The discriminatory laws of Apartheid played a major part in shaping the conditions for increased criminality and political violence in black urban areas at the end of the 1980s. For one part, they exposed rural black South Africans to important environmental and demographic pressures, thus pushing them into urban areas. For the other part, they denied black urban areas the necessary services, security and administrative capacities to cope with increasing numbers of rural migrants.

Environmental scarcity and rural-urban migration

Under Apartheid different African groups were assigned rural "homelands" on approximately 14% of the South African land base, leaving the remaining 86% to the white minority (Whyte, 1995). These areas were not only characterized by fragile soils, but also by a distinctive lack of capital, fertilizers and veterinary services, further straining agricultural production. High fertility rates in the homelands, partly due to black South African's restricted access to education, combined with forced displacements of black populations from white rural areas, and a series of pass and influx control laws restricting black South African's access to cities dramatically increased population densities in the homelands. This resulted in deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution and loss of rural livelihoods, forcing many black South Africans to move to peri-urban areas, often into informal settlements. This dynamic was further accelerated when the pass laws were repealed in 1986 (Percival & Homer Dixon, 1998).

Crowded cities, inequalities and urban violence

In urban areas, the system of Apartheid had led to high population densities in black townships, leaving them with insufficient services such as electricity and running water, weak local authorities, as well as high unemployment rates. Hence, rural migrants arrived in an already fragile social context. As argued by Percival and Homer Dixon (1998), overpopulation, poverty and the lack of security and service provisions in black townships enabled a warlord economy, in which paramilitary groups were fighting for power through the control of basic residential resources, such as land, home allocations, services, business rights, etc. With increasing migration from rural areas in the late 1980s, competition between different paramilitary groups and violence against rural migrants escalated, often along ethnic lines. The Apartheid regime did little to stop this violence; it even supported certain armed groups in order to weaken political opposition among black communities (Abrahams, 2010; UCDP, 2015).
In the years preceding South Africa’s first free elections in 1994, urban violence was further exacerbated by rivalries between different African parties, with paramilitary groups taking sides for different candidates. Especially the Durban area became the scene of brutal fights between supporters of the ANC and the IFP, leaving thousands dead (Percival & Homer Dixon, 1998).

Resolution Efforts

Urban violence remains an important problem in South African cities, especially in the poorer parts of large cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town or Durban. State officials, planners and grassroots organisations blame insufficient service and security provision, unemployment and obvious inequalities between privileged and less privileged neighbourhoods for this situation and highlight the importance of coupling the daily fight against urban violence with more pervasive development intervention in the least privileged areas, hosting a predominantly black population (Jensen & Buur, 2007).

Privatized security and community policing
Efforts by regular police forces to prevent urban violence have been complemented by a series of private forms of security: As a remnant of the Apartheid era, private security companies continue operating in affluent or middle-class areas, sometimes in cooperation with the national police, while different forms of community justice and vigilantism still exist in the townships. Since 1995 Community Policing Forums (CPFs) have become additional drivers for different forms of community policing and privatized security. Set up by the national police these regular meetings of the police and residents are intended at rebuilding trust in the police after years of racial discriminations and violence (Bénit-Gbaffou et al., 2008).

Limited access to housing and clean water in informal settlements
On the other hand, access to housing and the right to clean water has been incorporated in the South African Bill of Rights in the post-Apartheid Constitution in 1996, which the government must gradually ensure within its capacities. Yet, municipalities charge for water and are allowed to restrict residents to a minimum amount per month in cases of non-payment, while important shortages of clean water and housing still exist in informal settlements (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield, 2014).

Lacking capacities and the limits of community security initiatives
Despite notable progress, there are still important challenges to city development and security in South Africa. Public, private and community stakeholders still deplore the lack of capacity of regular police forces to deal with insecurity and violence. At the same time, the effectiveness of privatized forms of security is questioned: Vigilante groups have been linked to a number of terrorist-related activities, such as grenade attacks against alleged criminals and police stations (Abraham 2010). Community security initiatives, such as road closures, can be used as a pretext to ban poor populations from more affluent areas, thus recreating Apartheid like conditions, while the privatisation of security has accentuated inequalities in experiencing crime and violence between residents who can afford supplementary measures and those who cannot. Moreover, several regulations since the late 1990s have limited the power of residents within CPFs. Combined with a lack of follow-up on publicly expressed concerns this has contributed to "their
relative failure to sustain a satisfying dialogue between public authorities and residents' (Bénit-Gbaffou et al. 2008).

Although residents can in theory use their constitutional rights to oppose restrictions of services and evictions from informal settlements, NGOs and activists can become the victims of intimidations and attacks with presumed links to political officials and the metropolitan police (Bénit-Gbaffou & Oldfield, 2014).

### Intensities & Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity</th>
<th>International / Geopolitical</th>
<th>Human Suffering</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salience with nation</td>
<td>National</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass displacement</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Border Mass Displacement</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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### Resolution Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence reduced significantly, but did not cease.</td>
<td>Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There has been no reduction in geographical scope.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievances have been mostly addressed.</td>
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</table>
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

**Strengthening the security sector**
Citizens have taken security in their own hands by hiring private security companies in affluent or middle-class areas, or relying on vigilante groups. However, the privatisation of security has accentuated inequalities between residents who can afford supplementary measures and those who cannot. Thus, an increase in the capacity of police forces is crucial to reducing insecurity and violence.

**Social inclusion & empowerment**
Community Policing Forums (CPF) were established in 1995 by the national police and is intended to rebuild trust in the police after years of racial discrimination and violence.

**Improving infrastructure & services**
The daily fight against urban violence must be complemented with more pervasive development interventions such as an increased access to water, housing, and employment opportunities, particularly in least privileged areas.

Resources and Materials

References with URL

References without URL

Further information