

Research Exercise

**To Establish Reasons for the
Closure of Masakona Satellite Police Station**

An Investigation into the Reasons and Motivation for Closure

**Research Unit
September 2008**

Introduction

In compliance with a request received from the MEC's Office, the Research and the SAPS Transformation Units embarked on a fact finding visit to the relevant police stations.

Community members from Masakona lodged a formal complaint against the Hlanganani Police Station (which is located in a village called Tiyani). They claimed that the Station discriminated against members of the Masakona Village – the village is located approximately 6 Km from the station.

It is further alleged that members of the Masakona Village must report crime to the Tshitale Police Station – this station is located about 50 Km away. The road to the station is very bad and during the rainy season, it is practically impassible.

In terms of policing demarcation, the Tshitale Police Station falls under the jurisdiction of Makhado, while Hlanganani falls under the jurisdiction of MW Makhubele Police station.

In terms of the Municipal demarcation, Masakona, Tshitale and Tiyani (including Hlanganani) falls under the Makhado Municipality.

Issues as Identified by the MEC's Office

1. Residents of Masakona Village expressed their concerns about the lack of service delivery from SAPS in area;
2. They further complained about the closure of the Satellite Station in Masakona;
3. Establish reasons for the closure of Masakona Police Station
4. Verify information from Masakona Village (engage with community stakeholders)
5. Verify information from affected police stations [including Accounting Stations, viz. Makhado & MW Makhubele] – the affected stations are Tshitale & Hlanganani]
6. Propose short and long term solutions to the problems identified.

Methodology

Members from the two business units teamed up and conducted on site visits and also conducted meetings with all relevant stakeholders. The Makhado Municipality was also consulted and meetings were held with the Ward Councilors and the Municipal Manager responsible for Community Safety. A list of issues and questions was drawn up and this is attached to this report as Annexure 1

Task Team

The Team comprised of members from the Research, Strategic Planning & Policy Unit.

Site visits and interviews with relevant stakeholders took place between May and August 2008. Additional visits were scheduled as and when needed.

Findings

1. It can be confirmed that community members are not satisfied with the current situation in Masakona;
2. That this dissatisfaction is not confined to policing [crime & justice] matters – it is widespread because essential basic services such as health, transport, roads, storm water management, education, justice services and Home Affairs [there are others] to Masakona are not available;
3. The Makhado Municipality is responsible for providing services to Masakona; Makhado is located about 60 Km away from Masakona;
4. The IDP Manager, Mr. MP Sidimela, confirmed that they have, as yet, not conducted a Household Survey in Masakona;
5. Statistical information for Masakona is not available – however, they have general data for the Makhado Region only;
6. Ward Councilors for Masakona have informed Makhado Council about the priorities and needs of the community; these priorities and needs were tabled in Council in 2007;
7. Masakona does not form part of the “Growth Point” of the Makhado Region – hence Masakona will not benefit from development that has been prioritized in the identified Growth Points of Dzanani, Madombidza, Hlanganani and Vuwani;
8. Masakona did have a “Satellite” Station – this station was functional in 1997¹. It was located in the Masakona Tribal Office and operated a 24hr service, with a staff complement of roughly 16 members;
9. The closure of Masakona Station was a unilateral decision by SAPS² [either the Area Office or the Provincial Office] – the Tribal Authority in the village was not consulted;

¹ The exact dates for the establishment of Masakona Satellite Station is not available – this information was not forthcoming at the time of the interviews.

² Based on information from the Tribal Office – SAPS Area Office [Efficiency Services] were also not aware of the closure of Masakona Satellite Station – in this regard, refer to memo from Area Commissioner MJ Maepa (SAPS Vhembe) SAPS Area Office, dated October 31, 2006.

10. That, at the time of the closure, the CPF structure was not established;
11. At the moment³, the only available CPF structure is located at the Tshitale Police Station and includes representation from Masakona Village;
12. CPF representatives from Masakona made several appeals / attempts to get a Satellite Station established in Masakona – they had communicated directly with SAPS [Area Office and the Provincial Office] and also with the MEC's Office [during the term of MEC Magadzi and MEC Ndou];
13. CPF members from Masakona are transported to Tshitale for their monthly meeting – there is a risk in this because SAPS does not have an accident policy or an insurance policy that will look after the needs of the CPF members in the event of an accident;
14. Masakona has a very poor road infra-structure – the gravel roads in the village are poorly maintained;
15. It should be noted that Hlanganani Police Station is located about 5Km away from Masakona in Tiyani Village;
16. Hlanganani also falls under Makhado Municipality.
17. Cases reported to Hlanganani Police Station by Masakona residents are transferred to Tshitale Police Station;
18. Tshitale is located about 60Km away from Masakona – residents that have opened cases / dockets at Hlanganani Police Station have to report to the Magistrates Court in Tshitale;
19. The road network to Tshitale is extremely poor – the only road leading to Tshitale is a dirt road which passes through mountainous terrain – no regular taxi service is available between Tshitale and Masakona; this further disadvantages residents in Masakona;
20. Hlanganani Police Station has the capacity to serve Masakona Village – and the Magistrates Court next to the station and can provide the necessary judicial services to Masakona residents;
21. Hlanganani Station does, depending on the circumstances, patrol Masakona Village;

³ As at September 2008

22. At a meeting held at the Masakona Tribal Authority in January 18, 2007, representatives from the then Area Office⁴ confirmed that they were not aware of the closure of the Masakona Satellite Station;
23. The Area Office suggested that all cases must be reported to the Hlanganani Police Station – and the dockets will be sent to Tshitale Police Station for further handling;
24. Further, that arrangements will be made with the Tshitale Magistrates Court to handle all court cases in the morning – this will provide sufficient time for witnesses and victims to return to Masakona before it gets too dark;
25. Promises were made by the Area Office⁵ – however, nothing happened; Masakona still does not have a police station;

Recommendations

1. Pressure should be placed on the Makhado Municipality to include the Masakona / Tiyani villages in their "Growth Points" programme as a matter of urgency;
2. In terms of policing, a short term solution would be to make Hlanganani the primary station to serve the needs of Masakona Village;
3. SAPS should conduct an internal inquiry to establish who instructed the closure of Masakona Satellite Station;
4. Hlanganani Station management should make commitments to provide effective service to residents of Masakona and should inform the community about this in a mass meeting at the Masakona Village, and where necessary, to the other affected neighbouring villages;
5. If Hlanganani does not have the capacity to serve Masakona effectively, SAPS Provincial Office must make resources available to Hlanganani Station – this should be effected through the intervention of the MEC's Office.

⁴ Refer to transcript of minutes of meeting held between Tribal Authority and SAPS Area Office on January 18, 2008

⁵ Refer to letter written by SAPS Area Office (Asst Comm Maepa) dated October 31, 2006

6. In addition to the above, a process must be initiated by DSSL, SAPS Provincial Office and the Dept of Justice to ensure alignment of policing precincts and magisterial boundaries in order to facilitate service delivery to Masakona and neighbouring Villages;
7. In the long term, SAPS Provincial Office to make commitment to build a station to serve the needs of the communities that are currently facing serious service delivery backlogs. For example, the new station can serve a cluster of villages [such as Masakona, Mashamba, Serene, and Muwaweni].

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