

Chapter 7 The Ixopo area – KwaZulu-Natal

The Ixopo district

There are many similarities in the social and physical geographies of the Ixopo and the Greytown farming districts. The Ixopo district consists of 201 commercial farms and three large timber plantations, owned by Sappi, Mondi and Timbo. Timber and dairy predominate in the area and sugar is farmed in the south of the district.

As in the Greytown district, the traditional areas in Ixopo were engaged in sustained and violent conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s and remain highly militarised. Two of the traditional areas are controlled by Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) aligned chiefs, the other two by African National Congress (ANC) aligned chiefs. As in Greytown, the single biggest issue in the minds of commercial farmers is land encroachment. The problem, again as in Greytown, is uneven. There is sustained encroachment in two areas, Highflats and Ixopo, but very little in Creighton and almost none in Donnybrook. As is shown later, the reasons behind this unevenness illuminate important aspects of the rural protection plan.

Security personnel report that traditional leaders in the area are facing a sustained and traumatic crisis. Their areas of jurisdiction are massively overpopulated and their land increasingly unable to sustain the area's population of cattle.

Land encroachment

As in Greytown, Ixopo farmers regard land encroachment as the single most important issue in the area. Yet, encroachment has been directly responsible for only one farm attack in the area. It appears that the fears raised by the spectre of encroachment have less to do with personal safety than with the viability of farming in the district.

Security personnel and farmers claim that, immediately prior to the 1994 election, grassroots ANC activists in the area earmarked ten farms in the district and told mass

audiences that they would be redistributed to the rural poor after the ANC came to power. Farmers acknowledge that tensions around land hunger were brewing long before 1994, but insist that the 1994 election campaign acted as a catalyst, and that land encroachment began in earnest immediately after the election.

The intensity of encroachment across the district is uneven. Some argue that the intensity of encroachment is directly related to the strength of traditional leadership in the area. Where encroachment is nonexistent, a delicate *quid pro quo* between the local chief and the local security structures is in place. The local security structures undertake to investigate incidents of cattle theft within the chief's jurisdiction. Subjects of the chief are generously rewarded for information leading to the arrest of suspects in cases of crime on commercial farms. Community projects in the traditional areas, like the upgrading of schools, are subsidised by the local farming community. In return, traditional leaders closely monitor border areas and discipline those who encroach. This arrangement only works where traditional leaders have sufficient authority over their jurisdictions. In Highflats, the area where land encroachment is most severe, traditional leadership, by all accounts, has lost control of its jurisdiction.

Others are less encouraging about working with traditional leaders. Some argue that chiefs have everything to lose by stopping land hungry subjects from encroaching upon commercial farmland, and merely paid lip service to the rural protection plan.

Case study

Murder

John and Paul, a father and son, owned a large farm in the Highflats district, bordering traditional land.¹ Their neighbour was infamous throughout the district for the poor and unfair treatment of his employees. The neighbour's land was continually subject to arson and other forms of sabotage. The farmer himself received a series of death threats in 1997 and 1998 and eventually abandoned his farm late in 1998. Days after he left, several informal structures were erected on his land.

John and Paul bought their neighbour's farm in early 1999 and began plans to put it to commercial use. Immediately, a war of attrition between John and Paul, and the occupants of their new farm began. John and Paul went to the courts to bring an eviction order against the occupants. In turn, John and Paul were consistently threatened and their land and livestock destroyed. In October 1999, Paul was murdered on a public road close to his farm. No arrests had been made at the time of writing.

Like the murder of Mr Redinger in the Kranskop area, the Paul murder poses difficult questions for the rural protection plan. Traditional authority in the Highflats district, to all intents and purposes, has broken down. Those encroaching on the land are unlikely to use it for cultivation. They seem, rather, to be driven by a wild and aggressive political identity. Development solutions, which make land available for small-scale commercial farming are no doubt desirable, but are unlikely to address the causes of the Paul murder.

The rural protection plan and the Ixopo Farm Watch

The Ixopo Farm Watch is a non-profit section 21 company that employs ten full-time employees, six of them professional security personnel. There is a board of directors, consisting of local farmers, a managing director, a central committee and four action committees, one for each of the area's four districts: Creighton, Donnybrook, Ixopo and Highflats. Each action committee employs one co-ordinator, a full-time position funded by the Farm Watch. Co-ordinators wear uniforms and have blue lights on their vehicles. The central committee meets once a month to exchange information and to plan proactive crime prevention measures. The managing director meets with the police's crime intelligence unit, the murder and robbery unit, and the stock theft unit every day. The Farm Watch's jurisdiction covers two police station areas: Ixopo and Donnybrook. Farm Watch personnel meet weekly with the station commissioner, detective commander and proactive unit commander at both stations.

The 1999 annual budget of the Farm Watch was R667 000. All three timber corporations and 197 of the 201 commercial farms in the area belong to the Farm Watch and pay annual fees. Every member of the Farm Watch is organised into a security cell and has a two-way radio. All cell members are within eight minutes driving distance from each other.

The commando in the area is divided into a rural and an urban company. The latter is staffed mainly by coloured members. Its proactive patrols concentrate primarily on the prevention of vehicle theft and housebreaking. The rural company is all white and its proactive patrols concentrate primarily on the prevention of stock theft.

The nerve centre of the Farm Watch is an operations room, situated at the back of the crime intelligence office at the Ixopo police station. In the event of a distress call (usually transmitted by radio or cell phone), both the local security cell and the operations room are activated. The former race to the scene. The operations room does two things. Firstly, it contacts the appropriate district's co-ordinator, as well as the appropriate police unit (eg, stock theft, murder and robbery). The co-ordinator and the police arrive on the scene together. Thereafter, the co-ordinator remains

intricately involved in the police investigation. Secondly, the operations room alerts other co-ordinators who, depending on the nature and location of the crime, move into the area's key access points. (This function is crucial because most armed robberies in the area appear to emanate from Durban and perpetrators flee on a regional artery stretching between Richmond and Durban.)

The Farm Watch's four co-ordinators appear to constitute the pivot of its operation. They play every imaginable policing role, from information collecting, to intelligence gathering, to mediation, to response, to investigation. They spend eight to ten hours a day in their respective districts and have an intimate knowledge of their respective jurisdictions.

As in Greytown, a civilian initiative has taken the lead in crucial spheres of policing work, from intelligence gathering to proactive policing and rapid response and, to an extent, investigation. A crucial difference is that, while Greytown relies heavily on SANDF resources and corporate donations, the financing of the rural protection plan in Ixopo comes largely from farmers' pockets. This is a source of great anger in the district. In October 1999, farmers in the district held a public demonstration and handed over a memorandum of demands to the member of the provincial executive council (MEC) for agriculture. The memorandum demanded that the government should acknowledge that citizens were both performing and paying for what should be a state duty – the provision of safety and security – and demanded that the work of citizens should be subsidised. Ironically, the security forces believe the rural protection plan in Ixopo is a resounding success because of high levels of citizen participation, while citizens believe the plan is a failure precisely because the bulk of the burden falls on their shoulders.

Note

- 1 Real names have been omitted to protect the confidentiality of those involved.