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Khutsong: Pre-emptive “crime-stopping” leads to police brutality

Bongani Maponyane

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Khutsong has not been at peace, facing a high police deployment, supposedly to combat crime. The government was adamant about cleaning up the streets in Khutsong. This followed certain brutal crimes.

Police Rapid Response Teams were put in place, monitoring the usage of alcohol and drugs, and the illegal trade in goods, to try to combat and eradicate crime. The Technical Response Team was also a big part of the crime bust.

From 3 to 31 December 2013, all the taverns in Khutsong were raided by police looking for drugs, wanted persons or public disturbances. They also dealt heavy-handedly and immorally with vendors: small township businesses on street corners where most of the teenagers hang around during the weekends. Older people say that these kids are thugs and nyaope smokers, and conclude that those who stand on the corners are the culprits causing disorder in society.

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These raids were accompanied by multiple arrests, increasing with the approach of the festive season. The gang fights that were happening in the township declined substantially.

But the big issue was the police's brutal handling of crimes. For example, they beat up everyone who had any illegal substances on them. Some people, including random visitors to the township, faced police brutality for nothing.

The problem became the police force, and how they went about combating crime. On 18 December 2013, community members set alight burning tyres on the streets, demanding an end to police brutality. The streets of Khutsong are still upset with the legal system and people are of the view that the police force is failing them.