

# Targeted investigation reports 2024



## MOKOPANE SEWAGE SPILLAGES

### Team

Mpho Tjale

Rebecca Selomo

Margaret Molomo

Pretty Ndaba

Jerry Mosehlana



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## 1. Background and Context

Mogalakwena Local Municipality is situated within the Waterberg District of Limpopo Province and it is characterized by mining, tourism (it is home to the Makapan's Cave World Heritage Site) and agriculture.

Mogalakwena Municipality is a largely rural area which hosts two big mining establishments, Anglo America and Ivanplat and many other developing mining companies due to the rich mineral deposits within the area. The growing mining sector has had several social disruptions to the local communities and one of the disruptions is the influx of mine workers into local communities.



Apart from the influx of migrant mine workers into communities, another challenge is the increasing pressure for the local municipality to provide basic services like water and sanitation. The municipality now finds it difficult to provide good sanitation to the communities of Mokopane (Town and Township) which has dire implications for the communities.

## 2. Problem description

Mokopane and surrounding communities are burdened by the problem of sewer pipe bursts. The bursts occur in the households and streets of Mokopane Town and surroundings. The spillages are so severe that they go into the storm water drainage system which leads to rivers and streams causing environmental hazards and pollution. The spillages also cause pools of waste water in households. The spillages are a result of an aging asbestos infrastructure. Growth in the population, which is largely caused by increasing mining establishments in Mokopane, is also contributing to the crisis of sewer pipe bursts. Environmental rights of affected communities are violated and the ecosystem is negatively affected by the polluted rivers, thus leading to health problems amongst humans & a loss of wild life. There are also economical implications of the sewer problem, especially if the households are also business sites. When they are flooded it causes some individuals to abscond work or they lose their business while dealing with the crisis at hand.

### 3. Investigation results

The main aim of this study is to validate whether the continuing sewage spillages in Mokopane are indeed having an impact on the communities of Mogalakwena. Mogalakwena Municipality consist of 32 wards, which are mostly rural. This investigation followed up on wards that are affected by the persisting sewer spillages. The method used to collect data was quantitative. The questionnaire link was shared in the community, via a community WhatsApp group and was also advertised through radio. 31 community members from 8 wards responded. The highest number of participants came from ward 12 and accounted for 23% of the total respondents, followed by ward 26 which accounts for 19% and ward 29, which accounted for 13% of the respondents. Nearly two thirds of the respondents were female (64%) and the rest was male (36%).

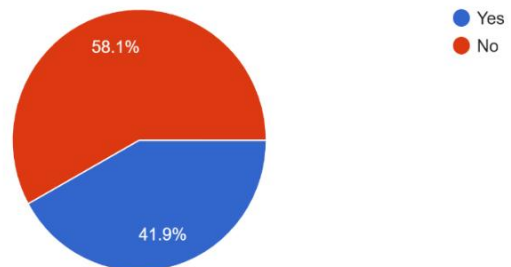
Ward	# of respondents
Ward 12	7
Ward 13	1
Ward 14	1
Ward 15	1
Ward 16	1
Ward 17	1
Ward 18	1
Ward 24	1
Ward 25	1
Ward 26	6
Ward 28	1
Ward 29	4
Ward 31	2
Ward 32	2
Ward 5	1
Total	31

#### Affected people:

The graph below demonstrates that 42% of the respondents had their yard flooded by sewer spillage between 2019 and 2024.

Nearly two out of three respondents (62%) that had a sewage problem said that the problem is still persisting today.

Was your yard or business flooded by sewage between 2019 and 2024?  
31 responses

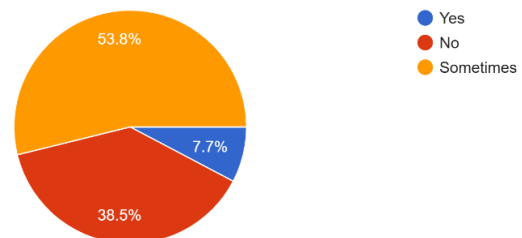


Picture 1: Wet floor from the sewage in a family home

#### Assistance:

All respondents that had sewage problems were residents. Unfortunately, no business owner responded to the survey. When asked whether they get assistance from the municipality with the sewage problem 8% said yes, 38% said no and 54% were sometimes assisted by the municipality.

Does the Municipality respond to the challenge of sewer spillage in your backyard / your business?  
13 responses



**Health impacts:**

According to questions asked on ailments we learnt that about half of the members of the community (46,2%) are suffering from headache, fever and vomiting. Diarrhea and stomach pain occur less often. Headache, fever and vomiting occur more than 3 times a year for affected community members.

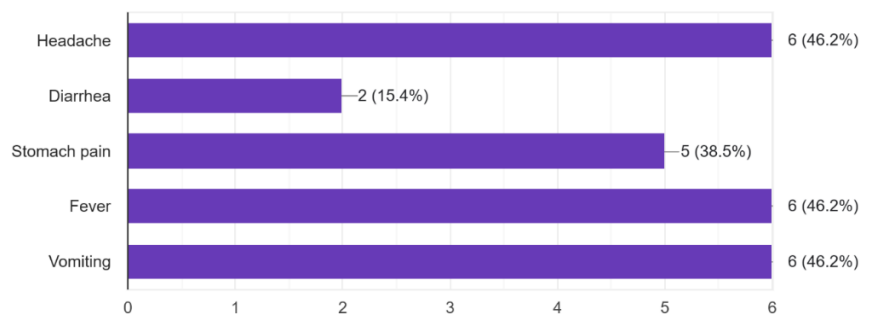


*Picture 2: Skin condition of a lady in Ext 17 who is affected by the spillages, November 2022*

Three out of four community members (77%) say that their illnesses are due to the sewage problem and the same numbers consults the local clinic regarding their symptoms and illnesses.

Which of the following symptoms do you or your family members / your employees often suffer from?

13 responses

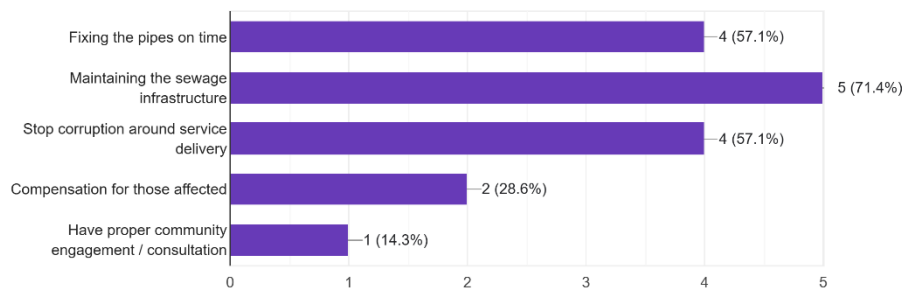


These ailments are symptomatic of illnesses caused by being exposed to sewer spillages. It is therefore suggestive that the sewer spillages have negative health implications for affected communities. Women bear a higher burden of this, because when the yard is flooded, the women are the ones ensuring that they keep the home clean for everyone and when the children get sick it is the women who take them to healthcare facilities, sometimes even skipping work. This is a bad and negative economic impact for the already financially stressed communities.

In terms of going forward the community is most concerned about the sewage infrastructure being maintained, followed by a quest for fixing of the pipes on time and an end to corruption around service delivery.

In terms of your recommendations, please choose from the list below which ones you think are needed

7 responses



When we asked community members to make suggestions on the way forward, they came up with the following:

- They want action from government
- The sewage problem needs to be fixed with immediate effect
- The municipality must have ground forces daily for maintaining the infrastructure
- They must provide good services to the community
- The municipality should have proper consultations and community engagement processes with the community
- The municipality must stop corruption and deliver services

- When there is spillage, the request is for municipal workers to unblock all the main walls of the affected area because, in many times they unblock only the affected and the problem starts again.
- One of the community members suggested removing the drainage from the yard and erecting them outside the yard as a possible interim scenario to handle the situation.

#### 4. Views of stakeholders on the issues



Figure 1: First meeting with the current Mayor as leaders of MCAC on 27 January 2022



Figure 2: Follow-up meeting with the Mayor on October 2022

We had numerous engagements with Mogalakwena Local Municipality, which is responsible for the sewage infrastructure. We also attended municipal budget presentations. During 2020, the municipality was under Section 139 (1) a, where the provincial government placed an intervention team as the municipality was dysfunctional therefore our meetings were fruitless. When the current administration took to office, our engagement with the municipality resulted in the Municipal leadership indicating that the persisting spillages are due to old and ailing infrastructure, which can no longer handle the capacity of the growing population. The municipality also indicated that they have a long-term plan of replacing the aged infrastructure but in the short term they have received a donation of a jet machine (sucker) from Anglo Platinum and related fleet to help unblock the pipes in 2023. Now, more than one year down the line, the jet machine has not yet found its way to Mogalakwena Municipality, even though the problem is persisting.



Picture 3: A Representative of the SAHRC assessing sewer spillage in Mahwelereng on 22 May 2022



Picture4: SAHRC and MCAC Monitoring Sewer Spillage in Mahwelereng on 22 May 2022



Figure 5: Picture taken by an official of the DWC on her assessment duties, 23 March 2024

We have also been engaging with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) over the years on the situation, as the sewage problem had already violated human rights for dignity and a healthy environment as enshrined in our constitution. The SAHRC has done their own investigation and can report on the extent of the violation that the affected community is suffering from due to the sewer spillages. They have resolved to take the matter to court and said they will give us a court date by the end of October 2024.

We have also reached out to the Department of Water and Sanitation in 2022 about the sewer spillage as a regulator for the water sector. The Department also made their own assessment and witnessed the spillages. They opened a case against the municipality in 2023, case no 185/11/2023. Yet, even today the matter has not yet reached the courtroom. In our most recent interaction with the department, they said they have availed resources for the municipality to fix the infrastructure, but they are no longer talking about the case they have opened. When we inquired about the case, we were told that the prosecution said the case is not strong enough to go to court.

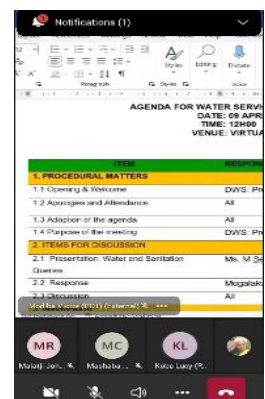


Figure 5: Agenda for online meeting with the DWS 18 April 2024

## 5. Action and Advocacy approach

It is proven that sewage spillages have been occurring for many years in Mokopane and until today the power holders are unable to change the narrative. The working-class families in affected areas continue to pay the price with their environmental health and dignity being severely impacted and thus compromising the quality of life in poor communities.

Our first call for action from here is to push for the Department of Water and Sanitation to continue with their case and ensure that the case reaches court. With all the evidence collected by the Department's legal team, the South African Human Rights Commission and the Mogalakwena Concerned and Affected Communities we will fight for justice for voiceless communities in court, with a special focus on the loss suffered by affected communities and the compensation thereof.

Besides the health implications due to sewer spillages, affected communities also lose property as sometimes the flooding gets so severe that it flows into the houses damaging furniture. The spillages flow into the storm-water drainage system leading into rivers leading to a loss in livestock as a result of the animals consuming the toxic river water. There is also a psychological impact caused by sewer spillages to affected communities, as members of the communities are now living with the trauma and pain associated with constant exposure to toxic waste.

Our advocacy approach will include writing to both the Department of Water and Sanitation and the South African Human Rights Commission requesting the two parties to accelerate their cases. We will also inform the South African Human Rights Commission about the cases from the Department of Water and Sanitation that have not been pursued further.

We will also do media campaigns to further inform the community about the situation and we will do outside court demonstrations during court appearances. We also want to request Friends of the Court to monitor proceedings from their side, to support us in communicating about the matter and to ensure that there is quality monitoring of the court case(s).

Lastly, we call for the Mogalakwena Municipality and mining houses to be serious in implementing projects that aim to remedy the situation of sewage spillages. The remedy must include a people centered housing and human settlement project that will relieve the ever-growing demand for housing due to overcrowded households. This call will be amplified by continuous engagements with all the parties including community meetings.



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Greenacres Office Park, Cotswold House

Rustenburg Road & Victory Road, Randburg 2196, South Africa

PO Box 62538, Marshalltown, 2107, South Africa

Email: [info@bench-marks.org.za](mailto:info@bench-marks.org.za)