

# Police 'working with criminals'

Cops allegedly help cross-border vehicle smugglers to identify and then transport vehicles into Mozambique with fake affidavits

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AS CROSS-BORDER theft and smuggling of off-road vehicles continues to ravage communities living near the South Africa-Mozambique border in northern KZN, locals said they are frustrated at the police and government's failure to stem the illegal multimillion-rand operations.

An investigation by The New Age, which included interviews with victims, anti-crime forums and residents revealed that a chain of beneficiaries and players are behind the crimes.

Corrupt officers and local criminals allegedly work together to identify suitable vehicles and relay the information to criminal syndicates in Mozambique.

Our investigations revealed that some of the vehicles are smuggled through the Kosi Bay border post (also known as Farazela).

It is alleged that the criminals prepare a fake affidavit stating they had bought a vehicle from a particular victim when in fact they have stolen it together with all its official documents and take it across the border.

Telling the horror stories, Joseph Ngubane, the chairperson of Jozini Victims Forum, a forum of people who had their vehicles stolen and smuggled to Mozambique, said they are a district under siege mainly because even those tasked with fighting crime were aiding it.

"For instance, when they come to your home for your vehicle, they always come with a local who gives them all the information. At times even some corrupt police officers come with the criminals. It is them who wear hats to cover their



**SMUGGLED WHEELS:** Some of the vehicles stolen in Manguzi, being kept in a pound in Maputo. PICTURE: INOSIPHILE DLAMINI

faces and they don't talk while the others are beating you, demanding keys and the the car they want," Ngubane claimed.

He listed four major crossing points that are used by criminals to smuggle the cars. Chief among them is Matekenyeni, an informal crossing point that was meant to be used by residents living on the border line. However, that point

has become problematic as criminals drive the cars out. "That is one of their major smuggling routes for the cars that are stolen here and sent to Mozambique. They smuggle them without any problem as police and soldiers are not always there," he said.

It is Ngubane who also claimed that at times some of the cars are smuggled through the Kosi Bay border post

and other small smuggling routes like KwaMshudu, just after Mhlabuyalingana.

Contrary to popular belief that only Mozambican nationals come for the cars, residents which include Ngubane said it is local criminals who steal the cars and move them to Mozambique where there is a huge market for off road cars as their road infrastructure

remains poor after years of civil war and their areas are largely sandy.

"Mozambique is just providing a market for the vehicles. The biggest thieves and smugglers are our own people which are known. Most of them work with the police. As I speak to you right now, three police officers are in custody for the crime we are talking about," he said.

Ngubane's claim was confirmed by

Xolani Vilane, a resident of Mbazwana, a village 100km away from Jozini but still falls under Mkhanyakude district municipality and lies near the border between South Africa and Mozambique.

"The thieves are known, they live with us and have all the information about cars that should be stolen and smuggled to Mozambique," Vilane said.

Mozambican high commissioner to SA Paulino Macaringue had not responded by yesterday after he was sent several written questions about the matter.

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