Community Risk Assessment Report

Steenvleit, Touws River

May 2015

A consolidation of reports submitted by Disaster Risk Studies Honours students
Department of Geography & Environmental Studies
Stellenbosch University
This report has been made available to the community of Touws River, the Town Manager, Mr Neville Fourie, the Councillors of Ward 1 of the Breede Valley Municipality in which Touws River is situated, the Cape Winelands Disaster Management Centre and other role players and stakeholder groups.

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- Mr Roy Veldmann, Cape Winelands District Disaster Management
- Mr Searl Derman, Owner and CEO of Aquila Game Reserve
- Sister Fourie, Touws River clinic

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Executive Summary

The South African Disaster Management Act and the National Disaster Management Framework call for increased efforts to reduce risks developmentally. Disaster risk refers to the chance of hardship or loss resulting from the interaction between natural or other hazards and vulnerable households exposed to them. Disaster risk reduction refers to all policies, actions and initiatives that minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks, including prevention, mitigation and preparedness. The South African National Disaster Management Framework explicitly states that “Disaster risk assessment efforts must actively include the participation of vulnerable communities and households” (RSA, 2005: 2.1.4).

A community risk assessment is a fundamental step to inform development measures grounded on local risk dynamics with a view to ensuring the sustainability of interventions and service delivery programmes. Participatory risk assessment is a methodology that has been developed to engage communities, using highly participatory approaches in a bottom-up fashion. It provides insights into how risks are generated and can be reduced. In employing participatory methods a community risk assessment (CRA) has, as its key tenet, a concern to put local communities at the forefront of the risk and vulnerability identification process, thereby allowing ownership and control of the assessment by local residents themselves. In this way a CRA helps to create a framework for a reciprocal exchange of information and strategies between local authorities, key role players and local community members.

The town of Touws River in the Breede Valley Municipality was selected for a Community Risk Assessment after it was identified by Disaster Management as a high risk area. Conducted by Disaster Risk Studies Honours students from the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies at Stellenbosch University similar assessments employing participatory research methods are undertaken every year as a training exercise on behalf of a local municipality in accordance with the principles of Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM).

A preliminary scoping of Touws River was undertaken over several months between January and April 2015 by the Stellenbosch University Disaster Risk Studies Honours Programme coordinator. The community risk assessment followed in May 2015, beginning with classroom-based lectures and training at the University and culminating in the field trip to Touws River from 4 to 7 May 2015.

The purpose of the assessment was essentially three-fold:

- To empower the Touws River community volunteers by involving them in a risk assessment of their own living environment (CBDRM)
- To provide a risk assessment report to key stakeholders and decision-makers with a view to ensuring effective disaster risk management/disaster risk reduction and to inform integrated development planning.
To enhance the field research capacity and community engagement skills of the students.

The students spent three days in Touws River in the suburb of Steenvleit where they collaborated with community members, employing simple risk assessment tools in the co-production of knowledge, to conduct a risk and vulnerability assessment. During the assessment the priority hazards, as they are perceived by local community members, were identified and described.

During the transect walk a skills audit was simultaneously undertaken to establish the nature of the existing skill sets among the youth of the community as well as to ascertain what type of additional skills training they would value. A basic flood risk assessment was also included.

On completion of the assignment, the students were tasked to compile reports based on their findings. This report is derived from a consolidation of these reports. It includes detailed information on the hazards identified by Steenvleit community members, their perceptions of the root causes of these hazards, temporal trends and historical changes, recording the physical and social transformation of the community over time. The participants also provided recommendations for the reduction of risk based on the research findings to inform future risk reduction initiatives and development planning in the area.
1. Introduction

The South African Disaster Management Act (2003) and the National Disaster Management Framework (2005) call for increased efforts to reduce risks developmentally. Disaster risk refers to the chance of hardship or loss resulting from the interaction between natural or other hazards and vulnerable households exposed to them. Disaster risk reduction refers to all policies, actions and initiatives that minimise vulnerabilities and disaster risks, including prevention, mitigation and preparedness. These may typically involve urban planning, education, health and other social vulnerability reduction measures. Closer cooperation and confidence-building between at-risk communities and local authority representatives can improve municipal service delivery and strengthen local responsibility for recurrent risks. Many risks are strongly rooted in social and economic vulnerability along with unstable sources of livelihood.

A community risk assessment is a fundamental step for informing development measures grounded on local risk dynamics with a view to ensuring the sustainability of interventions and service delivery programmes. The key tenet of a community risk assessment is a concern to put local communities at the forefront of risk and vulnerability identification, thereby allowing ownership and control of the continued risk assessment process by the local people themselves. In this way a CRA creates a framework for a reciprocal exchange of information and strategies between key service providers, development practitioners and local community members. Anderson and Woodrow (1998: 14) suggest that by assessing its own capacities a community can build community cohesion through joint action.

Touws River in the Breede Valley Municipality has been identified as a town with high human need and low economic potential, a situation which apparently deteriorated further between 2004 and 2010, although the town is said to be ‘coping’ rather than ‘struggling’ as is the case with some other towns in the Western Cape (Van der Merwe et al 2010). The town was selected for a Community Risk and Vulnerability Assessment after it was identified by the Cape Winelands Disaster Management as a high risk area facing multiple socio-economic problems. The objective was to determine the nature of local hazards and the risk environment in which the community live, the coping mechanisms they implement to reduce these risks as well as the livelihood strategies they rely on.

Historically the closure of the railway yards and associated businesses in the 1980s resulted in extensive unemployment, economic stagnation and social transformation. Community members suggested that Touws River later became a ‘ghost town’. However, since 2000 it has experienced a gradual economic revival due to several private-sector investments which have provided local employment opportunities, as well as the expansion of municipal authority to the local level, with the appointment of a Town Manager. This has brought some measure of self-government back to the town facilitating improved services and resources.
Disaster Risk Studies Honours students from the Department of Geography & Environmental Studies at Stellenbosch University conduct risk and vulnerability assessments employing participatory research methods every year as a training exercise in the service of a local municipality and in accordance with the principles of Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM).

The purpose of this year’s assessment was essentially three-fold:

- To empower the Touws River community by involving them in a risk assessment of their own living environment (CBDRM)
- To provide a risk assessment report to key stakeholders and decision-makers with a view to ensuring effective disaster risk management/disaster risk reduction and to inform integrated development planning.
- To enhance the field research capacity and community engagement skills of post-graduate students.

2. Methodology

Risk assessment is a process that can be effectively employed to determine the nature and extent of risk by analysing potential hazards and evaluating existing conditions of vulnerability that could pose a potential threat or cause harm to people, property, livelihoods and the environment on which they depend. A participatory risk assessment conducted in collaboration with local community volunteers, can inform a richer and more insightful analysis, allowing for the co-production and sharing of knowledge and the generation of deeper and more nuanced understandings of the local risk and vulnerability profile as well as locally developed coping strategies and longer term adaptations.

The risk assessment of the Steenvleit area of Touws River comprised several preliminary steps. These included a desktop study, a scoping survey and meetings with representatives of community organisations to ensure their acceptance of and buy-in to the proposed assessment process. This was followed by a two-day community risk assessment. These steps are described in more detail below.

2.1 Desk top study

Background information about the town of Touws River was compiled from municipal planning documents and a review of media, and professional reports. This enabled a more informed understanding of the area in which the risk assessment was to be undertaken, suggesting additional information to be sought during field work.

2.2 Scoping exercise

A preliminary scoping exercise is an essential part of a risk assessment process. Critically it involves a desktop study of existing information, consultation with a range of stakeholders, from local authorities, essential services, to local community leaders and organisations. It
also requires a preliminary physical survey of the proposed assessment area. These tasks were undertaken between January and April 2015 by a Disaster Risk Studies coordinator from Stellenbosch University.

### 2.3 Field Assessment Methods

The field assessment was carried out in May 2015, beginning with classroom-based lectures and methodological training for the students at the University of Stellenbosch and culminating in several days of field work in Touws River working with community volunteers and several local facilitators between 4 and 7 May 2015.

### 2.4 Community Risk Assessment

Community risk assessment is a methodology that has been specifically designed to engage communities developmentally, using highly participatory tools and methods. It provides insights into how local risks are generated and can be reduced. It is an approach that aims to empower the community concerned by involving them in defining problems, in decision-making, implementation of appropriate activities and evaluation of results and interventions. A Community Risk Assessment (CRA) can be adapted and applied in numerous contexts, for a wide range of risks but is always underpinned by a commitment to participatory engagement with at-risk communities and relevant stakeholders. It acknowledges that risk reduction efforts will necessarily vary from one community to another given their unique historical, socio-economic and physical attributes.

Community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) is an approach that aims to reduce local disaster risks through the application of participatory assessment and planning methods, aiming to strengthen people’s capacities to manage specific disaster risks. It allows a wide group of stakeholders, including residents, civil society organisations and local government role players to jointly understand the disaster risk profile of a particular community.

The Community Risk Assessment comprises three phases:

- Preparatory groundwork to determine the scope of the risk context and existing risk reduction initiatives
- Conducting a CRA in collaboration with the community
- Generating appropriate information for the generation of integrated disaster risk reduction plans and appropriate interventions and solutions.

The participatory methods used in the CRA included the following:

- **Hazard Identification** by local residents to identify the most prevalent hazards affecting their households or the community as a whole
- **Hazard Prioritisation** in which the hazards identified are clustered according to broader risk categories. Community members then vote for the risks they feel are most critical
Problem Tree - A flow diagram showing the relationship between different aspects of an issue or a problem. It helps to analyze the situation by identifying the major problems and the causes and also clarifies the contents of the problems as well as their potential impacts

Livelihoods Calendar - A tool that is used to identify the periodicity of the employment opportunities prevalent in a particular community, identifying periods of stress or particular vulnerability and related social and economic problems or processes

Risk History Table - This helps to build a sense of change over time and to show how developmental or demographic changes within and around the community may have increased or reduced specific risks

Venn Diagram - Illustrates significant relationships the community has with organizations and role players both within and outside the community, identifying their perceived importance and effectiveness to the community

Transect Walk - This involves traversing the study area extensively from one side to the other together with community members, interviewing local residents and making observations.

These research tools were of a participatory nature and provided qualitative information. Simple yet effective, the tools ensured that all members of the public could contribute in the research process.

2.4 Skills audit among the youth of Steenvleit

The local authorities were particularly interested to understand the existing skill sets and capacities prevalent among local youths, and the kinds of capacity-building and skills training they would value should there be an opportunity to provide such empowerment programmes. The students conducted unstructured interviews with over 100 youths during the transect walk of Steenvleit.

2.5 Limitations of the study

It is important to acknowledge several limitations of this Community Risk Assessment:

- Ideally a risk assessment should be conducted over three or more field days to enable a thorough assessment of all hazard types. As this was essentially a training exercise with an allocated time frame it was not possible to conduct a full assessment. This CRA therefore represents an abbreviated assessment process.

- The assessment was conducted on week days when many of the economically active residents were at work and their opinions may therefore not be adequately represented in the findings.
Students struggled at times to accommodate the contrasting opinions from various role players and ordinary town residents. This posed a challenge during the write-up process.

Several students did not have a strong grasp of Afrikaans, the predominant language spoken in Touws River. These students may have missed much of the deeper, more nuanced information provided by residents and youths during interviews. However, students were deliberately tasked to work together in groups in order to reduce this limitation, which allowed them to share all information collected amongst each other.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues had to be considered when undertaking this assessment:

- Each student group was accompanied by a community facilitator well-known to the community who could explain the purpose of the survey to other residents
- Anonymity was guaranteed to all those interviewed
- Community members participated voluntarily
- An assurance was made that the assessment findings would be transparently communicated to key stakeholders, including the Town Manager, the Ward Councillors, the Breede Valley Municipality, and local community organisations. A copy of the report has also been provided to the Touws River public library in order to make it available to the general community.
3. Touws River in context

3.1 Location and geography

The small town of Touws River is located on the southern edge of the Great Karoo, roughly 180 kilometres by road from Cape Town. It lies adjacent to the N1, the national route between Cape Town and the North. Set in an area that boasts the Cape’s famous fynbos and succulent Karoo biomes as well as extremely rare renosterveld vegetation, the town forms part of the national flower route displaying a wonderful vista of Karoo flowers between July and September each year. Up to 80 species of birds have been recorded in Touws River during the summer months, 15 of them not occurring anywhere closer to Cape Town.

Figure 1 Location of Touws River in the Western Cape

(Source SA Venues 2013)

According to Sassen (1977), the name Touws is possibly derived from the San word doas which means ‘street’ or ‘road’ suggesting that this place has always historically been an important intersection. Later it came to be called De Straat, but the names De Draai and Constable were also used by early European travellers and eventually the first settlers. Today the N1 passes by the outskirts of the town, while a road from the Klein Karoo leads directly from Montagu into the town and the road from the fruit-growing area of Ceres...
meets the N1 just a few kilometres outside the town, making this an important stopping point for travellers and truckers coming from multiple directions.

It has traditionally always been a sheep farming area, originally for meat, with many local farmers switching at a stage to wool-producing sheep but later back to meat-production again. The cultivation of grain has been attempted at times, while experiments with tobacco and cotton were unsuccessful. Today, with the advent of new machinery and access to deep underground water sources, other crops are being grown, including lucerne, potatoes, onions and even peaches and grapes.

The town covers an area of 6.39 square kilometres and is situated at the point at which the Donkies River flows into the Touws River. Although generally a fairly arid area, the presence of two rivers running through the town has been the cause of several major floods, both historically and more recently. Although generally considered a winter rainfall area, Touws River actually falls on an unusual transitional rainfall border, also experiencing summer thunder storms that can result in excessive rainfall that causes flooding. Thus, for decades the town can fall into the Boland rainfall pattern then switching to the typical Karoo rainfall pattern. Rainfall therefore varies between 100 and 500mm *per annum*, with an average of around 173mm.

![Figure 2 Aerial view of Touws River indicating the location of rivers and the study area](image-url)
There are several clearly discernible residential areas in the town (See Figure 2 above). These include the old railway houses situated across the railway line from the town (on the far right), the original town centre, comprising sturdy well-built houses, the suburb of Steenvleit where various types of housing can be found, including older railway-built and council housing as well as newer state-built developments, such as ‘Hopland’, which can be seen on the right hand side of Steenvleit, situated closer to the Donkies River. A small informal settlement called Zion Park is situated on the southern-most edge.

3.2 History

The town of Touws River was originally established as a railway town servicing trains travelling from Cape Town to the interior of the country. In the late 1870s the Prime Minister of the Cape, John Molteno determined to establish a route from the shipping port in Cape Town to the Kimberley diamond fields. Despite the obvious engineering challenges that this posed he determined that the route should traverse the Hex River Mountains. In 1875 a survey by Cape Government Railway engineers revealed that there was indeed a viable route through the mountains that could accommodate the construction of a railway, commencing on the Cape Town side with a steep climb from Worcester and descending on the other side into what would later become the town of Touws River.

The railway was constructed fairly rapidly and opened two years later in 1877. At the site where it crossed the Touws River a railway station called Montagu Road was established, named for the town of Montagu some 60 kilometres away. In 1915 the railways installed a water pipe from Bokkerivier, a farm in the mountainous area above the Verkeerdervlei Dam, to supply the town with fresh water. However, a full water reticulation system was only provided much later, in 1952.

The town soon became an important railway depot where the powerful locomotives that hauled trains over the Hex River Pass were uncoupled and substituted with the regular locomotives that continued their journeys North and South. The town was renamed Touws River in 1883. From 1924 the town also served as the railway junction for a branch line that was constructed to the fruit-growing area of Ladismith. Eventually growing to accommodate other railway-related industries and businesses, Touws River later received dorpsbestuur status on 1 September 1959, finally becoming an independent local municipality in 1962.

From 1947 Touws River was administered by the South African Railways under the chairmanship of the chief health inspector serving together with four superintendents based at the head office in Johannesburg. Later, management was additionally supported by a local advisory committee chaired by the district engineer, with the station master as deputy chairman. Other members of the community were selected for the committee which was a multi-racial body at that time.
Thus, the railway was always central to the Touws River economy, which for many years also took responsibility for management and administration of the town. The town was divided into three sectors, namely Loganda (the private town area), the Crescent town area (the railway housing scheme under the control of the local station master), and Wesrand, a suburb where 2 500 Coloured people lived.

The Touws River railway depot was particularly important for the bank locomotives, or ‘helper engines’. These powerful engines provided additional traction to enable trains to climb the steep gradient out of the Hex River Valley. They would be turned around in Touws River, returning to De Doorns to haul the next train up the pass.

The Hex River rail pass served the South African Railways (SAR) for more than a century, constituting the starting point of the country’s first railway line to the Kimberley diamond fields and later to the Witwatersrand gold fields in the North. It had also provided an opportunity for Cecil John Rhodes to thrust into central Southern Africa in terms of his vision to expand British influence to the North – from the Cape to Cairo! With the demise of the steam engine followed by further modernisation Touws River was dealt a significant blow, losing its primary function as an important locomotive depot and marshalling yard provided with big workshops where originally the steam engines and later locomotives were serviced.

However, the Hex River Pass also caused a critical bottleneck for railway traffic, for which an alternative solution eventually had to be sought. This resulted in the construction of tunnel system that eliminated the passage through the pass, greatly reducing operating costs with the elimination of sharp curves and steep gradients, while the length of the section was reduced by 8 kilometres (5 miles). Train running times were reduced by 23 minutes in the ascending direction and 36 minutes in the descending direction. The tunnel system became operational in April 1989, more than forty years after the project was begun, and was officially opened on 27 November 1989. The closing of the Ladismith branch railway line in 1981 and the opening of the Hex River Tunnel, which reduced the gradient for trains

Figure 3 Images of the Touws River station taken in the later 1800s

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travelling between the Hex River Valley and Touws River, signalled a further reduction in the strategic importance of Touws River as a railway town.

With the opening of the new route, the line was effectively doubled since the original line across the pass was initially retained. As a result of diminishing traffic volumes due to competition from road transport, however, the old Hex River rail pass line was eventually closed to rail traffic and the electrification infrastructure was removed when the Hexton line was opened. A large part of the track between Matroosberg and Osplaas stations was left in place, however, and was for some time utilised as a popular tourist destination known as the Hexpas Ecotrek. The system of tunnels significantly reduced the functioning of the town as a railway depot, removing its *raison d’être*. This marked the beginning of the economic decline and general demise of the town that would later escalate with the further decapitalising of the South African railway system and the changeover to road freight.

After 1994 the new democratic government restructured the local government system throughout South Africa. This resulted in Touws River losing its municipal status and becoming incorporated into the newly formed local Breede Valley Municipality, forming part of the Cape Winelands District Municipality. The Breede Valley Municipality (BVM) today includes several other small dis-established local municipalities, namely De Doorns, Rawsonville, Worcester and Matroosberg.

Today Touws River is a rather quiet town, a shadow of its heyday when it bustled with activity related to the railway. Surrounded by scenic Karoo mountains, open-air displays of steam engines are all that remain of its colourful history as a key railway centre. Located on the national (N1) route between Cape Town and the interior, and near an intersection leading from the fruit-producing area of Ceres and beyond, it has become a brief stopping place for trucks and for migrant job-seekers travelling these routes.

Figure 4 Touws River railway station today – derelict and vandalised
Atkinson (2008: 41) suggests that many small towns in South Africa have become “unemployed wasteland[s] ... dependent on social grants”. Nel (2012) and Gibb & Nel (2007) have similarly characterised many small towns in South Africa today with declining economic bases, often through the loss of key industries or primary functions, endemic unemployment and growing numbers of poor households. They specifically cite old railway towns as an example of this phenomenon. Touws River appears to reflect this trend.

3.3 Demography

According to recent census data Touws River currently has a population of just over eight thousand people constituted of almost 2000 households. Thus, by definition, it is considered a small town. The majority of people are Afrikaans-speaking, while some foreign nationals have set up homes in the town in recent years. These include Zimbabweans, but also Chinese and Bangladeshi immigrants who have established small businesses there.

There are currently more women than men living in the town (a ratio of 52:48), while the population is relatively youthful, with 32% under 14 years of age, and approximately 65% under 35 (Barbour & Van der Merwe 2012). Generally the town is skewed towards a fairly youthful demographic. The average household accommodates between 3 and 5 people, although there are also a number of single-person households and numerous households living in more crowded circumstances. Many households were found to be female-headed, while it was not uncommon for the household head to be under 21 years of age.

There is generally a low level of education among community members, with 282 people never having attended school and therefore functionally illiterate, only 1294 having attained a matric certificate and very few people having studied or trained after school at a tertiary level (Stats SA 2011). There is a growing concern among the community about the increasing number of children dropping out of school, leading to numbers of bored youths loitering in the streets. This was observed during field research, with numbers of young male youths in particular playing soccer, just walking around, playing cards or huddled in small groups doing nothing in particular. Many young school-age children were seen to be ‘hanging out’ with older youths while schools were in session.

Most of those who have employment work in the formal sector, with few local opportunities for work in the informal sector. Many people are only seasonally employed on farms, while many others work for the local authority or for local shops and services. A significant number are employed by two large local private sector companies, namely Aquila Game Reserve and Commuter Transport Engineering (CTE). However, there is a high level of unemployment and many households have become reliant on state welfare grants to supplement their income.
3.4 Housing and resources

The majority of Touws River residents live in formal dwellings which they own, with growing numbers of people living in rented accommodation such as backyard dwellings. The growth of backyard accommodation is due both to the shortage of available housing and the economic circumstances of households with low levels of income. Several types of formal houses were identified in Touws River and are spatially distinct depending on the residential area in which they are located. Figure 5 illustrates the location of the main residential areas of Touws River.

![Figure 5 Residential areas of Touws River](image)

The oldest housing area, known as Topkamp (outlined in green), is located adjacent to and on the other side of the railway line and comprises sturdy railway-built housing. The old central part of the town, (outlined in blue), referred to as Paddasvlei or Schoemansville, is also made up of large railway or privately built houses. The suburb of Steenvleit (outlined in red) is located across the Donkies River and is comprised of several different housing types, including a mix of formal and informal dwellings.

Historically, like most other South African towns, Touws River was once divided along racial lines, with the Donkies River marking an observable physical boundary between the predominantly white population living in the central town area and the less affluent Coloured population living across the river in Steenvleit, at a distance from the town (See Figure 5). Today, several housing types are found in Steenvleit, each built at different
periods in the town’s history. Thus, one finds sturdy older railway-built staff houses, numerous semi-detached council houses, newer free-standing RDP houses, as well as other privately-owned self-built homes.

According to the census most formal dwellings in Touws River consist of 4 or 5 rooms, have flush toilets connected to the on-line sewage system, and are supplied with electricity and running water. However, there is an identified shortage of available housing.

Many homes in Steenvleit bear witness to an interesting local historic tradition of artistically landscaped gardens, incorporating intricately laid out rock gardens planted with local succulents, locally produced rock sculptures and, in some instances, beautifully painted murals. This hints at a local artistic tradition and existing creative talent.

The small informal settlement of Zion Park (outlined in orange in Figure 5), located on the southern periphery at the base of the surrounding mountains and adjacent to the rubbish dump, currently comprises over one hundred informal dwellings. A perusal of Google time imagery suggests that this settlement was established sometime between November 2011 and November 2012. (See Figure 6 below).

![Figure 6 Zion Park development determined using satellite images from 2011 and 2012](Source Google Earth historical imagery)

Residents of Zion Park are currently provided with communal stand pipes for running water but have no electricity provision. The bucket toilet system is still in place despite recent protest action demanding better services. Residents reportedly rejected the offer of an interim upgrading solution, demanding instead a full-flush system, which has resulted in a stale-mate situation with no improvements being made to the existing facilities. Although originally settled by a group of Rastafarians, Zion Park has expanded with the addition of many households from Steenvleit as well as other newcomers, who either cannot access alternative housing or have insufficient household resources to seek other options.

There are several schools in Touws River, comprising two primary schools, Touws River Primary and Steenvleit Primary, the De Kreiner Secondary School, as well as various child care centres and crèches, one of which is supported by Aquila Game Reserve. The old
‘white’ high school located on Jane Street, the main road which runs through the old part of the town, was abandoned soon after the closure of the railways as people began moving away resulting in this sector of the town depopulating as people left in search of other work. Today, like the old railway station buildings, the school buildings stand derelict and vandalised. According to some local stakeholders, there has been some recent foreign interest in redeveloping the facility as a youth training centre.

While there is a local clinic, a police station and two libraries, there is no local fire station or ambulance service. The nearest fire station is in De Doorns, 46 kilometres away, preventing rapid response time. After a fire almost destroyed the local retirement home in January 2011, an emergency vehicle was subsequently deployed to the town as a first response vehicle and is manned on a 24-hour basis.

3.5 Public Health

There is no functioning doctor at present in Touws River, while the nearest hospital is situated quite a distance away in Worcester. In order to visit the hospital local residents, most of whom do not have their own transport, have to take a taxi or pay someone for a lift, a significant cost for most. The local clinic provides primary health care services and basic health care for under-5 year olds (of which there are currently around 500). The facility also treats about 300 diabetic patients, a significant number of people with mental illness problems (40% of which are related to drug and alcohol abuse according to Sister Fourie who heads up the clinic) and many elderly people. The clinic also provides TB and HIV testing facilities. The sister explained that local people are generally nervous to come forward for HIV-testing due to their fear of disclosure of their status in the community, which she says is unfounded.

Increasing incidences of drug-resistant TB are being recorded as a result of people defaulting on their medication. Sister Fourie, explained that many people suffer from alcohol dependency, spending their meagre resources on alcohol rather than food, with the result that they fail to maintain a regular medication regime or to eat before taking their medication. This poses a serious threat of contagion to other local residents. According to Sister Fourie another fairly recent development is that one or more young girls are testing pregnant every month.

The role out of inoculations to prevent cervical cancer, under the National Department of Health, has met with fierce resistance from some mothers who feel offended, insisting that their young daughters are not sexually active and that this constitutes an affront to their dignity. According to Sister Fourie, although domestic violence, child abuse and neglect is also common, these issues fall outside the scope of the clinic’s responsibilities and are currently not dealt with at the local level other than by the churches and religious organisations.
The clinic is currently understaffed, with many posts remaining vacant. However, because health is a provincial responsibility, neither the clinic nor the local authority can address the situation by employing additional staff. Similar shortages have been noted in other risk assessments conducted throughout the Western Cape (DiMP reports various 2008-2014). Currently a home-based Care group is also at work in the community, with nine care-givers visiting patients in their homes. A national NGO called SWEAT has been working with sex workers in Touws River for the last year, dealing with local issues of prostitution and related drug and alcohol abuse.

3.6 Future planning

Once an independent local municipality, Touws River today, like other small towns in the Breede Valley is managed from the administrative capital, Worcester. The 2010 Growth Potential Study (Van der Merwe et al 2010) analysed the development potential of all the towns in the Western Cape, including those located within the Breede Valley Municipality. The study confirmed the development potential of Worcester, found increasing value for the small town of Rawsonville, but sadly indicated a marked decline in the development potential of Touws River.

According to the most recent Breede Valley Integrated Development Plan (IDP) the key development priorities that have been identified for Touws River include the provision of additional housing, better sporting facilities, such as a sports complex and a netball court, a new reservoir and upgraded sewage infrastructure, as well as street lighting for dark public open spaces at night. Repairs and upgrading are required for the local community hall as well as to many houses in Steenvleit, while the need for a local fire station and an ambulance are listed. Interestingly, although mentioned as a priority in other areas of the Breede Valley Municipality, employment opportunities for the youth is not listed as a critical area of focus for Touws River.

The first development priority for Touws River listed in the IDP is the provision of new housing. In this regard, the Breede valley Municipality was recently awarded R3m from the Provincial Department of Human Settlements for the purchase of land located on the other side of the national road to the town for housing development. However, before the construction of housing can commence several processes need to be completed, such as undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment and opening a township register, critical elements which form part of the official town planning process. Thus, the first opportunity to commence construction is only anticipated to be in the 2016/17 financial year.

As is evident from the snapshot taken from the Breede Valley Spatial Development Framework (Figure 7 below) there are some imaginative plans to resolve the economic development issues in Touws River, some of which constitute collaborative efforts that might be stimulated by private sector investment interests. They include plans for business development along the N1, industrial ‘hives’ and the redevelopment of old railway infrastructure for tourism.
3.7 Disaster history and risk profile

A preliminary review of media and other reports established that the Touws River area is prone to several risks, chief among these are flooding, substance abuse and related crimes, frequency of traffic accidents on the national road outside the town, and outbreaks of social unrest.

3.7.1 Floods

Historically Touws River has been affected by many flood events, situated at the confluence of the Donkie and Touws Rivers. Indeed, the Ladismith railway branch line, nick named 'Makadas', was eventually closed in 1981 after a severe flood event (that also caused the destruction of large parts of Laingsberg) caused extensive damage to the railway line. Almost a third of the 144 km-long railroad between Touws River and Ladismith was destroyed in the flood event and was never repaired. Evidence suggests that this was because the economic viability of the repairs would not have been worth the substantial capital investment, given that the South African Railways was already considering closing the Ladismith line due to its declining profitability and reduced rail traffic volumes as road transport became increasingly popular. The Touws River locomotive depot was also facing
imminent closure, with electric locomotives gradually taking over mainline operations from the old engines.

More recently, in November 2008, another flood, likened to the Great Flood of 1981, caused extensive damage and even caused the closure of the N1 to traffic. As the main transport route between Johannesburg and Cape Town his had knock-on consequences for many travellers and freighters using the route (See media article from the Cape Argus in Figure 10). The flood destroyed a pedestrian bridge to Steenvleit and damaged many roads in the vicinity of the Donkies River, cutting Steenvleit off from the rest of Touws River for some time. The well-developed system of canals and storm water channels around the town provides evidence of the need for flood-mitigation to reduce the impact of regular flooding.

The images below were forwarded to the research team by local Steenvleit residents several weeks after the field research concluded. They illustrate localised flood impacts after the first heavy rains of the winter. Figure 8 illustrates the nature of flooding in a residential area of Steenvleit, with the water level clearly risen perilously inside a private yard against the outer wall of a formal dwelling. Figure 9 shows the Donkies River already in flood after the first rains. The picture is taken from the main vehicular bridge that crosses over the Donkies River connecting Steenvleit with the central part of Touws River. This is the same point at which Steenvleit has become isolated from the town during previous big flood events when higher river levels have inundated the bridge causing it to be closed.

Figure 8 Evidence of residential flooding, June 2015  
Figure 9 Donkies River in flood, June 2015
During field work a basic flood risk assessment was undertaken by the students, who interviewed residents living in flood affected areas to ascertain the level of risk and past flood impacts. Although flooding was not a risk actually prioritised by the community, who focused more intensively on socio-economic issues, evidence of past flood events, particularly in the media (See Figure 10 above) did suggest the need to investigate the risk of flooding further. This is recorded in detail in Section 4.2 of this report.
3.6.2 Crime and substance abuse

The local police station currently is staffed by only 22 permanent staff members, a number apparently insufficient to cover the large geographical area under its jurisdiction, which includes not only the town but also extensive outlying rural areas. As South African Police Services (SAPS) crime statistics are not publicly available it was not possible to ascertain the nature of prevalent local crimes, nor the number of reported incidents. However, in a recent stakeholder meeting a member of the local SAPS in Touws River attested to the marked increase in local crime over recent years. In a recent burglary, for example, the local clinic sustained R20 000.00 in damages and loss. As a consequence, they have instituted increased security measures, installing a new alarm and reducing hours of consultation which has direct consequences for the community. The policeman also reported that drug-related crimes have increased by around 140% over several years, with, for example, 140 packets of tik being confiscated from a local house recently.

Community development workers are others are very concerned about the increase in gang activity and related crimes. This is a fairly new development, stimulated by the arrival of gangsters from Worcester who have expanded their operations into Touws River. In an attempt to address this issue outreach efforts and awareness-raising at the local schools is being undertaken by NGOs, the Department of Social Development and faith-based organisations. However, the increasing number of school drop-outs is aggravating the situation. Local leaders have been calling for the community to stand together to combat this new scourge, suggesting that parents should take more responsibility for their children and encourage them to return to school.

3.6.3 Traffic accidents

Situated on the busy main route between Cape Town and the North, traffic accidents occur frequently in the vicinity of Touws River. For example, recently, just before midnight on 12 January 2015, a bus travelling with passengers from the Eastern Cape on route to Cape Town collided with a minibus taxi travelling to Vredenburg killing seven people. This is not a rare incident as the media images in Figure 11 below clearly attest.

![Figure 11 Bus accidents outside Touws River](Source Argus on-line)
3.6.4 Civil unrest

Since 2011 there have been sporadic outbreaks of civil unrest in the area, including running battles with police in the streets of Touws River during which protesters blockaded the N1 with burning tyres demanding houses and other services. The image below was taken in September 2012 when service delivery protests by residents of Zion Park informal settlement erupted into the streets (See Figure 12 below).

![Image of residents scattering](image)

**Figure 12 Residents scatter as police use blue-coloured water on the crowd.**

(Source Cape Argus on-line)

The risks described briefly in this section were recorded during a scoping process that preceded the fieldwork. This included a desk top study of information drawn from media and other reports as well as a meeting held with community role players in Touws River on Wednesday 8 April 2015. This provided a contextual background that informed the researchers’ preliminary understanding of issues likely to be raised during the fieldwork in Steenvlei. The several days spent in the field would later reveal the risks prioritised by the community members themselves and these were investigated more comprehensively during a workshop, several transect walks and many interviews with residents. These are discussed in Section 4 that follows.
4. Community Risk Assessment of Steenvleit, Touws River

This section describes the findings of the Community Risk Assessment (CRA) undertaken by Stellenbosch University Honours students to determine the nature of risks and everyday hazards in the Steenvleit area of Touws River as perceived by members of the community themselves. Although flooding was identified as a physical risk, the field research revealed that everyday social issues such as drug abuse and unemployment are considered more critical by local residents.

4.1 Description of Priority Risks

The prevailing social issues identified by community members in Steenvleit are not unique, but reflect global shifts and trends, commonly found in small towns that have experienced shifting economic fortunes, such as the loss of a primary industry (Nel 2012). However, while the manifestation of socio-economic problems being experienced in small South African towns today is acknowledged, the lived realities of these changes for local communities themselves are seldom recorded.

While it often thought that the attraction of larger urban centres is increasingly luring people away from small economically-deprived towns where there are constrained opportunities for employment, the reality is that people with poor levels of education who have had few opportunities for artisanal or other skills training or capacity development have become trapped in cycles of poverty and dependency, unable to move away from their families and reliant on local support networks.

During a workshop conducted with community representatives numerous and wide-ranging everyday hazards were identified and categorised into several prevailing risk types. Although these included physical hazards such as flooding associated with heavy rainfall, dense vegetation growth constraining the flow of flood waters in local rivers, as well as flooding associated with the overflow of a reservoir located on the hill above Steenvleit, the majority of hazards mentioned were more social in nature. They related to public safety, poor levels of education, constrained skills development opportunities, substance abuse, domestic violence and crime. The brevity of the assessment regrettably did not allow for an in-depth analysis of each of these hazards. Thus, during a hazard prioritisation exercise conducted with community members, unemployment and substance abuse, considered in the context of the youth particularly, were ranked as the two most concerning issues. These became the main focus of the assessment that followed.
4.1.1 Substance abuse

“I was a good child and went to school. There I got involved with the wrong group of friends. You start with just wanting to taste....and then you get hooked on it. I went to rehab for six weeks and then returned to Touws River. Nothing changed so I just fell into the same pattern. I have no hope for the future. No vision for myself. My dreams of becoming an engineer are worthless.”

(Young man, Steenvleit, 6 May 2015)

These are the words of a 24 year old youth from Steenvleit. They epitomise the pervasive feeling of despair expressed by some of the youths interviewed in Steenvleit who have become dependent on drugs, particularly those addicted to methamphetamine or tik, the name by which the drug is locally known. The major causes of drug abuse identified by members of the community included unemployment, problematic household circumstances, peer-pressure, low education levels and generally low levels of self-esteem among community members, particularly the youth. The consequences of drug abuse were also identified and included an increase in the number of drug dealers operating within the community, the rise of gangsterism, an associated increase in rape, teenage pregnancy, child neglect, rising school drop-out rates and dysfunctional families.

Community members explained that substance abuse has a long history in the town. In the past this was predominantly manifested as alcohol dependency and the use of cannabis (dagga), with some cases of mandrax addiction. The prevalence of alcoholism reportedly grew after the withdrawal of the railways in the early 1980s, which led to dramatically high levels of unemployment, psychological trauma, as well as high numbers of fractured families as people sought work elsewhere. All these consequences negatively impacted on almost every local family to some degree.

Between 2001 and 2004 the introduction of harder drugs was driven by the arrival of gangsters or skollies from nearby areas, such as De Doorns and Worcester, but also from more distant areas such as Michell’s Plein. Touws River, although located some 75 kilometres away from the nearest large urban centre, was seen as an easy target by gangsters and drug dealers, who saw an opportunity to expand their operations in a town experiencing high levels of unemployment as well as growing numbers of bored and despondent youths. This period saw the gradual introduction of gangsterism into Touws River which has subsequently expanded significantly. Gang fights and incidences of domestic violence reportedly became endemic as drug dealers and gangsters either moved into the area or sent their emissaries to conduct business on their behalf. Focusing their efforts on young unemployed youths at first, more recently they have begun targeting younger school-going children, encouraging them to peddle drugs and join the gang culture. Young people have been easily lured by the opportunity to earn quick and easy money, while the attraction of a shared identity and sense of belonging, together with the excitement and
power associated with being a member of a gang is strong, especially to those from dysfunctional homes and deprived domestic circumstances.

Community members described how first time ‘experimenters’ are supplied with drugs for free and then become trapped by their addiction in a never-ending spiral of dependency. This has resulted in young girls prostituting themselves for drugs, escalating school drop-out rates and increasing numbers of teenage pregnancies. With high rates of unemployment, the sale of drugs has also become a lucrative economic activity, supplementing many household incomes. It has subsequently also become associated with the spread of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The sharing of so-called hookah pipes facilitates the spread of the former, while sexual favours in return for drugs or drug money is fuelling the spread of HIV/AIDS (Fourie, personal communication, May 2015).

Figure 13 Graffiti at a public transport stop clearly attests to the presence of gangs

Alcohol abuse is also responsible for the high reported rate of foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) in Touws River, mentioned by several members of the community. Many children born with symptoms of FAS struggle to cope with the demands of school work, eventually dropping out of the educational system at an early age. It is these children in particular, without opportunities for remedial support to overcome their learning disabilities, who cannot imagine a future for themselves and are particularly prone to the advances of the drug dealers, seeing an easy way to earn a living or to contribute to constrained household incomes.
The Western Cape Province has the highest reported rate of FAS in the world (Bowers et al 2014). In nearby Wellington, for example, a recent study found that for every 1000 school-entry children aged between 5 and 9 years of age, statistically between 65.2 and 89.2 of them suffered from a degree of FAS, indicating that it has become a pervasive social problem (Bowers et al 2014). Despite the acknowledged prevalence of FAS-affected children, there are currently no support mechanisms or structures for children with learning disabilities in Touws River.

Over time certain streets in Steenvleit have become the domain of particular drug sellers or gangs. Community members explained that the streets affected tend to change over time as those youths involved establish their own families, often withdrawing from gang-related activities. These streets, which are strongly controlled by the gangs through a form of patronage, with many households protected by gangsters or dependent on them for income-generating activities, are generally avoided by other residents, whose children are forbidden to venture into them and with strict avoidance of these areas at night. In interviews some residents living in these streets described how their lives have been transformed by the arrival of the gangsters, causing them to live in perpetual fear, with gang fights and robberies taking place openly, even in broad daylight. Many residents suggested that much of the drug-related activity is coordinated from a ‘drug house’ that is operating in Topkamp’, the older railway settlement located on the other side of the railway line, describing this as the local headquarters of the drug trade. As a consequence, Topkamp is viewed in a particularly negative light by many Steenvleit residents.

Currently, several drug dealers are living in and operating from Violet, Jubilee, Lente and Malva Streets in Steenvleit, which have subsequently become notorious for gang-related activity. The houses of drug dealers are clearly recognisable, generally surrounded by trade mark high fences topped with barbed wire, well-fortified against possible community reprisals and inter-gang conflict. Several alleyways in Steenvleit, such as the one illustrated on the left in Figure 14 below, are also well-known areas of drug distribution, while several drug dens where addicts tend to loiter or ‘hang out’, such as the one illustrated in the right hand figure below, were identified to the researchers. Residents are thus well aware of such hot spots and tend to avoid them.

![Figure 14 One of the alley ways where drug dealers operate (left) and an abandoned house used as a meeting place by drug users (right).](image-url)
Public parks and playgrounds, once the well-cared for playing areas of local children, have become the preferred hang-outs of drug users. Indeed the researchers witnessed this first hand, watching a group of youths playing cards for drug winnings in one such dilapidated park. Thus, once considered safe areas for children, parks have become, as one community member phrased it, the ‘root of all evil’ in the community, and are generally avoided.

The informal settlement of Zion Park, originally established as a Rastafarian community, is said to be ‘a place that youths escape to’, apparently to smoke cannabis. There is an obvious spatial, but also social, division between the residents of Zion Park and other Touws River residents. Interviews with members of the Zion Park community established that they generally feel unaccepted and ostracised by the rest of the town, mostly because of the religious belief of some, though not all, in the use of cannabis, but also because of the circumstances in which the inhabitants live, without access to basic services. A lady living in Zion Park explained that most Zion Park residents were actually born and bred in Touws River, yet are considered outsiders. She claimed that when youth programmes are organised in Touws River, the youth of Zion Park are excluded. There have reportedly been several confrontations between Zion park residents and the police as a result of service delivery protests.

Recent incidents of arson and robbery have been blamed by community members on youths involved with drugs, although this could not be corroborated. For example, the burning down of part of the old railway station building in 2013 is believed to have an act of vandalism perpetrated by drug users loitering around on the property, while more recently, the local clinic, an essential service critical to the whole community, was broken into during the night and vital medical equipment and computers were stolen. This has led to a change in the clinic’s operational procedures and reduced the hours of opening, with security measures increased to prevent further break-ins.

According to community members, one of the root causes of drug and alcohol abuse among the local youth is that many parents are themselves dependent on alcohol, a legacy from the days when farmers paid a portion of wages to workers in a wine allocation, the so-called dop system. Children learn behaviour from their parents and easily adopt similar habits, drinking alcohol from an early age. Alcoholism is also responsible for parental neglect in some households, with grocery money frequently spent on alcohol, with the result that children return from school to find their parents drunk and with nothing to eat in the house. Parental negligence thus leaves children particularly vulnerable to the advances of local gangsters and drug dealers, who offer them both a sense of belonging and access to money. They are also more easily influenced by peer-pressure to experiment with drugs.

Young women are reportedly also specifically targeted by drug pushers. Research shows that young adolescent women are increasingly using tik (Hohman et al 2004). In Touws River young women are known to offer sex for drugs, consequently often being raped. However, rape is seemingly a silent scourge, never spoken about because victims are too
fearful to disclose their rapist’s identity, and also often dependent on them for their drug supply.

Community members described how drug addiction inevitably causes conflict in affected homes. Drug users often become abusive towards other family members and are known to steal from them in order to purchase drugs. Driving under the influence of drugs is common, and has reportedly often had fatal results. However, the ability of local police to deal with drug-related crimes is limited, with families said to protect drug dealers out of fear for their own safety, but also because of dependencies that dealers have deliberately created among the community. For example, drug dealers are said to often provide piecemeal employment opportunities and are known to make personal loans and offer other forms of support to struggling households. In some instances they establish themselves as important fall-back mechanisms for poor households, although their assistance ultimately comes at a price. Among the community it is commonly believed that members of the police force may be complicit in alerting drug dealers about planned drug raids, thwarting attempts to arrest them and root them out of the community.

The National Drug Master Plan for the period 2013-2017 (Republic of South Africa, Department of Social Development 2013) includes several recommendations to combat drug abuse in South Africa. These include the provision of recreational facilities, the development of multi-disciplinary practices for treatment of addiction as well as the creation of employment opportunities. While similar strategies were proposed by residents of Steenvleit to address the scourge of drug addiction in their community, the reality is that implementation of these objectives is beyond the capacity of most local authorities, and particularly so in small towns in rural areas outside of major urban centres. Currently there is no local rehabilitation centre, with the nearest such facility located in Worcester.

Coping mechanisms and support structures

The community have gradually developed some household coping mechanisms both to protect themselves from the effects of drug users’ behaviour and to prevent others from becoming drug users.

The escalating level of neighbourhood crime is directly related to increased drug use and has become a critical community concern. One coping strategy that residents have adopted in response to the perceived threat of crime is to accompany the elderly when they collect their pension grants, a time when they are most vulnerable to mugging. Many households keep dogs in the yard for self-protection. As children are considered the primary targets of drug-pushers, many parents accompany their children to and from school, preventing their children from playing outside in the streets, especially at night when drug activity is most prevalent. Fear of the gangsterism associated with drugs also reinforces the necessity for parents’ stringent control of their children’s movements. However, it was also clear that many parents had either completely absolved themselves of responsibility for wayward children because of the threat they pose to the rest of the household, or had restricted their
access to the home as a safety measure, forcing them to live apart from the rest of the household in a backyard dwelling.

Community members are well-acquainted with one another and are aware of the location of drug and crime hot-spots, allowing for the adoption of simple, yet effective risk-avoidance measures. Being a tight knit community, residents explained that their first port of call in any emergency situation is their relatives, their friends and even neighbours. Although police are considered important in the fight against drug abuse and associated crimes, much distrust was expressed towards them and faith-based support mechanisms were considered more important. The community are greatly comforted by their faith, with churches considered to be a critical source of support throughout the community.

There have been many attempts at awareness-raising, for example, through organised marches against drug users. There have also been other more negative outcomes of the fight against gangsterism and drugs, with sporadic occurrences of mob justice in which the dwellings of known drug dealers, or ‘drug dens’ frequented by drug users, have been set alight or stoned by angry residents. Police have also attempted to combat the distribution of drugs by raiding the houses of known drug suppliers. However, residents reported that such police efforts have generally been thwarted because drug dealers receive advance warnings of raids and hide drugs accordingly. Young children are said to often be used to transport drug supplies to places of safe keeping at such times.

The general manager of the Aquila Game Reserve, a major employer in the town, explained how, acknowledging the serious nature of the drug and alcohol problem in Touws River, all their employees are regularly tested for drugs and alcohol and if tested positive are summarily laid off. Aquila believe that the threat of losing employment does act as a significant threat, although the manager reported that someone had been dismissed the week before our visit after testing-positive for a banned substance. Random testing is written into to all work contracts at Aquila as a precondition of employment.

Similarly, Commuter Transport Engineering (CTE), another large scale local employer, has tried several approaches to the problem. Although they have conducted random-testing for drug and alcohol abuse, they do not have a very hard-line approach to offenders. However, they are aware of the lack of local capacity for rehabilitation and have adopted a more conciliatory approach, insisting that any staff testing positive attend a 6-week rehabilitation program in Worcester, where after they are permitted to return to work if they test clean. Both Aquila and CTE have invested time and money in youth programmes as well as local sporting teams, while CTE is considering the development of a multi-purpose Care Centre, providing after-school care and homework facilities.

Steenvliet has established a Community Safety Watch that is associated with the local police services and works towards protecting the community. The Watch regularly patrols the streets of Steenvliet in an effort to combat crime. They also work in conjunction with the School Safety Programme patrolling the local schools. For community members the
Community Safety Watch is usually the first port of call when a crime incident occurs or a threatening situation develops. When interviewed, a member of the Community Safety Watch explained that although the Watch has been in existence for over 15 years, it currently comprises only 13 members. The reduction in membership he explained is because the level of violence has increased significantly in recent years, with members often threatened or intimidated and even physically attacked, making membership of and association with the group an increasingly risky venture. Few people are prepared to risk their lives, often also being the primary household breadwinners.

The South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO) is a registered Non-Profit Organisation that receives funding from government, South African corporate donors, private individuals and international donors. It is the only national non-government organisation currently providing comprehensive crime prevention services across South Africa. According to community members it plays an important role in rehabilitating and supporting juvenile offenders from Touws River. However, this was not described in any detail during interviews.

The local Eye on a Child, a programme, run under the auspices of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vrouvereeniging (ACVV), provides assistance to women and children affected by drugs. Designed to accommodate both children who use drugs and those who do not the programme runs outreach programmes, such as taking children on drug-awareness camps.

Churches play a central role in the lives of the Steenvliet community and are considered critical support structures. Fieldwork interviews revealed that the churches provide assistance primarily through prayer and pastoral support. The Revival Movement, a faith-based local youth programme, visits local teenager hang-outs and clubs, encouraging youths to avoid drugs. Members of this movement support and mentor drug users and undertake significant awareness-raising among the community.

The various coping strategies identified above illustrate that in response to the proliferation of drug abuse and related crimes in the community, strategies have been put in place to combat this threat. However, despite these measures, the situation still appears to be beyond the control of local stakeholders, requiring more focused external interventions and assistance.

4.1.2 Unemployment and youth-related issues

The demise of the railways resulted in mass unemployment in Touws River as most people were at that time employed either directly by the railways or by one of the associated industries or businesses. Many residents received retrenchment packages and purchased their homes, but few invested in the future and were soon left with nothing. A community member explained,

*When the money people received after being let go from the railways was used up, people didn’t have anything. No opportunities. Nothing. It was a big shock!*
Another local woman expressed her despair over the changes in no uncertain terms,

*Ons het dit nie gemaak nie. Kyk hoe sit ons vandag!*  
*(We didn’t make it. Look where we are today!)*

Community members explained that the loss of the railways continues to have consequences even today, especially among the youth. The once vibrant and bustling town of Touws River slowly stagnated both economically and socially, while rampant unemployment and the lack of alternative job opportunities left people without hope or a vision for the future, with many resorting to the use of alcohol and drugs.

**Figure 15** A workshop exercise clearly reveals the causes and consequences of unemployment for individual households as well as growing numbers of disillusioned youth in Steenvleit
Today, seasonal agricultural work is a common source of employment, but is only available in the fruit season, from November to March. (Some fruits, such as naatjies, are harvested during winter months but generally create less work opportunities). During the months in between many people have no work and food security becomes a concern for many households. Community members suggested that local farmers are increasingly employing foreign nationals rather than local residents, while most local ‘house shops’ today are being run by either Bangladeshi or Chinese immigrants who have moved into the area in the last few years. The lower trading prices they are able to offer is increasingly forcing local tuck shops out of business¹.

Other available local employment opportunities include work at the town swimming pool during the summer months, piece meal work around the town (fixing and repairs), and employment at local crèches or as home-based carers. Many more men than women are unemployed and this is partly due to the fact that the range of available local employment opportunities, particularly on farms, is generally more suited to women than men. Contrastingly, in an interview, CTE who provide skills training to their staff members explained that although they are trying to address gender parity, they do in fact currently employ more men than women in their local Touws River operation (Watson, personal communication, June 2015).

The investment by private sector companies, such as Aquila Game Reserve and CTE has initiated a significant reversal of fortunes for the town, creating several hundred jobs for local people at all skill levels. This is evident in the marked improvement in census employment figures from 2001 to 2011. While the 2001 census recorded an employment rate of only 19% of the economically productive population of the town (Barbour & Van der Merwe 2012), recent census data shows that roughly a third of economically active people are now employed.

On a less positive note, the closure in 2014 of the Total petrol station just outside the town on the national road, as well as the Steers franchise that was located at the garage, has resulted in a number of more recent job losses. Although the opening of the nearby solar energy plant offered the promise of employment opportunities, the extent to which this was realised fell short of local expectations, with much resentment from local people who anticipated work opportunities there.

The Breede Valley Municipality’s Community Work Programme (CWE)² provides temporary short-term work contracts to various community members. Although work opportunities are intended to be regularly rotated among the unemployed, many community members

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¹ Local community members frequently made reference to this phenomenon, suggesting that it is fuelling increasing resentment.
² ‘The Community Work Programme (CWP) is a government programme aimed at tackling poverty and unemployment. The programme provides an employment safety net by giving participants a minimum number of regular days of work, typically two days a week or eight days a month, thus providing a predictable income stream’ (http://www.cogta.gov.za/cwp/).
reported that some people are favoured with work contracts repeatedly, suggesting a biased allocation of work.

Since 2010, increasing support has become available from the state in the form of welfare grants, now more accessible to many people living in Touws River. A growing number of households have become reliant on state grants, particularly child support grants (Census 2011).

Employment for the most part is thus still both insufficient and irregular, leading to increasing reliance on state welfare grants as the community continues to grow through natural population increase. However, some of the root causes of unemployment are related to low levels of education, lack of skills, as well as a shortage of local business opportunities. Children today drop out of school, seeing no purpose in completing their education, an increasingly common occurrence which causes conflict in many households. Many youths in particular cannot envisage a future for themselves and have little incentive to find employment in order to uplift themselves and their families.

**Coping mechanisms**

When asked to identify the support structures the community turn to in times of duress or when a problem arises, it became clear that community members tend to draw on a range of specific individuals more than official structures or organisations. This is illustrated in a workshop exercise (See Figure 16 below). It is evident from the distance at which they are placed from the central dot that represents Steenvleit, for example, that although they are considered important, the councillors, police service and local council (municipality) are not perceived to be as important as several key individuals, the taxi service or church pastors.

Both CTE and Aquila Game Reserve support a variety of local projects such as soup kitchens and crèches. Both companies have delivered much needed resources and assistance during times of flooding and even after fire events.

The Touws River Moslem Society, Masjid Salam, relatively new to the town, reportedly provides desperately-needed resources to food insecure households, especially during the winter months when work opportunities are scarce. They were identified during the above exercise and are clearly indicated on the diagram.
Certain local initiatives have had a positive, though not sustained influence on the youth. For example, in response to perceived boredom among the youth, a brass band was formed in the 1990s. It increased the morale and self-esteem of both the youths and their families. In 2008, the young members of the brass band were given the opportunity to perform in Germany. This was a major morale-booster for the community and instilled a strong sense of pride and hope. Unfortunately the group was forced to disband due to a lack of funding and is sorely missed.

Though not mentioned during the workshop, nor noted on the diagram above, a local proactive employment initiative is currently being run by the Breede Valley Municipality. Called Jobs4U (http://www.jobs4u.gov.za/about-us) this innovative project is essentially creating a database of local job seekers. The Jobs4U team was observed running a registration exercise in the local Steenvleit Community Hall during the fieldwork undertaken for this risk assessment. In terms of the Municipality’s Strategic Objective No. 3, which is “To create an enabling environment for employment and poverty eradication through proactive economic development and tourism”, the Jobs4U project is an electronic portal/medium providing unemployed residents, particularly the youth in the Breede Valley Area with access to information about job opportunities and study or training bursaries. The site also
provides interview tips and information about skills development programmes. The website created by the Municipality (See www.jobs4u.gov.za) allows people to register online and to apply for job opportunities via the website while the visits of the Jobs4U team, such as the one witnessed during field work, also allows for manual registration. The registration database provides the Municipality with information for strategic interventions such as:

- Partnership with Private Businesses, Governmental Departments, NGO’s, NPO’s etc.
- Coordination of job opportunities from the database
- Database information used as business intelligence, to influence decision making and integrated development planning of the Municipality;
- Facilitating of developmental programmes (Breede Valley Municipality Jobs4u).

However, in conversations with local youths and residents about the Jobs4U programme many held rather negative views about the success of this programme, doubting the actual availability of jobs for people from Touws River.

It is clear that the problem of unemployment in Touws River is being proactively addressed by both the local Municipality as well as several private sector companies. However, there seems to be little evidence of local small business development and entrepreneurship opportunities that are expressly desired by some community members the researchers spoke with.

Figure 17 Breede Valley Jobs4U programme advertised in Steenvleit
4.2 Flood risk analysis

Although it was anticipated, based on a review of media reports, that flooding would be considered a priority risk in Touws River, field research revealed that community members regard social issues such as drug abuse, unemployment and youth-related issues more seriously. This is because flooding occurs infrequently, generally affecting relatively few households.

This said, there is clear evidence of flood coping mechanisms and protective measures throughout the town. Canals have been built by the municipality to provide drainage and control the flow of flood water, while pedestrian bridges have been built, as illustrated in Figure 18, over roads and canals to ensure access to residential areas during periods of heavy rain when the Donkies River is in full flood.

The Donkies River, a non-perennial river that is generally only a dry river bed, winds through the town forming a natural boundary between Steenvleiit and the rest of Touws River (See the aerial image in Figure 19 below). It has one major crossing point, a bridge that connects one side of the town to the other (See Figure 20 on next page).
Figure 19 The Donkies River winding through Touws River

Figure 20 Vehicular bridge connecting Touws River with Steenvleit (View towards Steenvleit)

(Images sourced through Google Earth)
The river has become overgrown with reedy vegetation as illustrated in Figure 21 below. This impedes the flow of flood water and increases the risk of flooding, particularly to the houses situated in close proximity to the river, such as those in Martin Luther and Dwars Streets, where residents have suffered many flood related impacts (See Figure 22 below).

Figure 21 Donkies River congested with reed growth that impedes flow.

Figure 22 Flood prone houses on Martin Luther and Dwars Streets, Steenvleit
Local flood risk, however, is not only a natural hazard, but is also frequently driven by human action. For example, waste collecting in the storm water drain situated above Steenvleit, on the slopes of the mountain and below a local water reservoir, blocks the storm water system, effectively cutting off the informal settlement area from the rest of the town during heavy rainfall, while also posing a drowning hazard to young children living in the settlement. Figure 23 illustrates the extent of waste accumulating in the canal at the entrance to Zion Park photographed during field work just before the onset of winter rains.

![Figure 23](image1.jpg)

**Figure 23** Pollution blocking the flow of water at the entrance of Zion Park.

Community members also described Top Street as a “very wet road”. The water tank situated above the street is believed to contribute to the damp conditions prevalent in houses situated below the road. Stagnant water was observed beside the road and ponding was seen in the gardens of several houses. Figure 24 illustrates the water tank and canal located above Top Street.

![Figure 24](image2.jpg)

**Figure 24** The water tank and canal above Top Street.
The Donkies River floods particularly after rainfall in the summer months between September and January. Recent flood events which have had significant local impacts occurred in 2008 and 2011, while the 1981 floods, which destroyed much of the Karoo town of Laingsberg, are considered to have been among the most serious on record. At least four houses in Martin Luther Street and also in Dwars Street have been severely affected by flooding events in the past. Figure 25 indicates the flood level on a house in Martin Luther Street. The owner is pointing out the water mark still visible on the brickwork.

Figure 25 The flood water level of a previous flood event on a house in Martin Luther Street.

Figure 26 below indicates a longer term local adaptation strategy on the same house, showing how the threshold of the door has been raised in anticipation of future flooding.

Figure 26 A raised threshold – a local adaption to flood risk
Discussions with local residents established that when a nearby dam nears its holding capacity as a result of a heavy rainfall event, the municipality opens the sluice gates of the dam to relieve the water pressure. The excess water is released into the Donkies River, which cannot accommodate the sudden increase in water flow, partly due to the growth of vegetation in the river bed. Without prior warning to downstream residents living close to the river, the resulting flash flood inundates homes and infrastructure proximal to the river.

The water also floods the major river bridge between Steenvleit and Touws River, and several other access points so that Steenvleit effectively becomes cut off from the rest of Touws River. During past flood events, for example, emergency and rescue services have had to use boats to cross over into the cut off parts of the town to reach people who needed assistance. Army helicopters have in the past had to deliver supplies to stranded residents in Steenvleit cut off by flood water. During the 2008 flood event a pregnant woman in labour was evacuated by boat to a waiting ambulance and then transported to a hospital in Worcester. In another incident a man was swept up by the powerful flood water but was later rescued. (See Appendix for copies of press report related to 2008 flood).

Flooding of the Donkies River has also caused the closure of the national road to traffic. From a brief inspection of the point at which the river flow under the N1 it became evident that the river has formed a series of deeply incised erosion ditches that channel water under the road. Reinforced channelling and regular dredging of the river at this point could help to direct flood water more effectively under the N1 and could perhaps prevent future closure of the N1 due to flooding.

Figure 27 Point at which Donkies River runs below the N1

(Image sourced from a Google Earth street view)
Figure 28 Evidence of shallow channel currently leading under the N1
4.3 Youth skills audit results

The skills survey targeted community members between the ages of 18 and 36 and was conducted as part of the fieldwork interviews. A short questionnaire was employed and randomly administered to youths in the street. The purpose of the survey was to assess existing capacities among young community members, including not only formal training and qualifications, but general skills and talents, including sporting and creative skills. The aim of the survey was to obtain a general idea of existing skill sets as well as possible training opportunities that youths would value and be interested in. This was intended to identify current gaps in skills development and opportunities for appropriate capacity-building and training.

In total the 102 questionnaires were completed during the survey, based on interviews with youths between the ages of 18 and 36. Information was collected relative to gender and age, identified the existing range of local skills and qualifications, levels of education attained and lastly identified skills that young community members would like to acquire in order either to generate or to improve their income.

The majority of those interviewed were born and bred in Touws River, with several originating from De Doorns and Worcester, both towns located relatively close to Touws River, within the Breede Valley Municipality. The level of education achieved by correspondents was generally low, with roughly a third of those interviewed having completed schooling up to matric. Many reportedly dropped out of school due to financial or other circumstances, particularly a lack of resources at household level. In addition, many parents who have not finished school themselves were said not to value education nor to prioritise it for their children. More than half of the youths who completed the survey were unemployed, even those who had achieved a matric, and most were under 30 years of age.

When asked to explain what talents and skills they possessed, many youths listed sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and netball, indicating the important place of sport in the lives of town dwellers and a critical focus area for development initiatives. Many of the male youths interviewed admitted to being self-taught or ‘taught on the job’ in skills such as carpentry, welding, building and plumbing but did not have official papers from a training college or centre. The lack of adequate artisanal credentials to allow youths to compete for work outside of Touws River was raised as a critical issue of concern. While men said they would like opportunities for training in these and other physical skills, women sought opportunities for more studious pursuits, such as nursing and administration or creative skills such as hairdressing. Interestingly, many youths admitted to being aspiring artists and evidence of their work was seen throughout the suburb of Steenvleit in the form of painted murals, landscaped rock gardens and even sculptural pieces.

Failure to finish school and thus not meeting the entry criteria for training colleges is major stumbling block for local youths. However, household resources to afford further education and training for youths are significantly constrained by poor income levels and the distance of the nearest training facilities from Touws River.
Most of the required skills identified by youths for possible further training opportunities were related to existing skill sets in the community, in other words, those known to youths and with which they are familiar. Few of those interviewed had a vision of aspiring to anything better or any different from the norm. However, many youths interviewed had no future vision for themselves at all. Disillusioned and despondent they appear to live from day to day, many resorting to drugs and gangsterism.

5. Recommendations

The findings suggest that there are clear areas for intervention in terms of positive risk reduction initiatives and strategies. Drawing from the workshop, focus group discussions and interviews with community members the following recommendations organised in terms of key strategic areas for intervention are proposed to inform effective risk reduction:

5.1 Education and skill capacities

Touws River today has a limited and constrained number of livelihood activities through which community members can build up their assets. Furthermore, drug abuse within the community is undermining the future prospects of a growing number of youths. Diversification of locally available skills and higher levels of education and training will build capacity among community members, particularly the youth and thereby help to reduce substance abuse within the community.

- The skills audit revealed that little more than a third of youths interviewed had finished high school with a matric certificate. This undermines the ability of youths to enter training programmes as they fail to meet basic entry requirements. This suggests an urgent need for alternative and innovative capacity-building initiatives, provided through more appropriate education and training programmes such as artisanal training that will help to address current high levels of unemployment, but also contribute to building self-esteem and self-confidence among those who are currently unable to find employment.

- The community suggested that appropriate information sessions and workshops could be provided at the community hall to reduce boredom, provide useful information, and functioning as a youth-focused empowerment strategy. Programmes might include entrepreneurship, career advice, health education and crafting workshops as well as constructive extramural activities such as dance, music and art classes.

- Upgrading the local sport facilities is considered critically important, especially in terms of providing the youth with alternative activities to alleviate boredom. The town has a well-established history of sporting prowess, especially with regards to cricket and rugby. Many youths claimed to have under-utilised sporting talents and said they would value improved sporting facilities.
The shortage of teachers and generally large class sizes was also identified as a problem, especially in light of the reportedly large number of children with learning difficulties and poorly educated parents, who require more intensive supervision and guidance. Having identified this problem through their interactions with community members, both Aquila Game Reserve and CTE have sponsored additional teachers, but many more are required. Increasing the number of teachers and providing remedial services can significantly contribute to improved school performance and reduce the high drop-out rate among school children of all ages.

5.2 Socio-Economic Development

The community believe that Touws River is not being prioritised in terms of development planning in the Breede Valley municipal area. It is locally perceived that Worcester and other towns receive the lion’s share of budget allocations and more focused developmental efforts. The following recommendations pertain in this regard:

- Skills development programmes to stimulate and encourage local entrepreneurship are critically important but currently lacking.
  - As an example, the Aquila Game Reserve is currently employing innovative sustainable agricultural practices on the reserve with a view to stimulating local interest in this as a viable, alternative, small-scale, low-cost agricultural option. Not only could this initiative stimulate local entrepreneurship but also help to reduce seasonal food shortages currently experienced among poor households dependent on seasonal work. However, government recognition of and support for such local initiatives through private-sector incentivisation and/or provision of start-up capital for local communities is currently lacking and is a critical oversight.

- Local small-scale development initiatives linked to the allocation of locally-available resources such as access to small-scale farming lots or provision of affordable business space could have positive outcomes.

5.3 Improved relationships and communication

- Poor levels of communication and weak relationships between the community and municipal officials who infrequently visit the town to make assessments were cited as a community concern. Such visits, it was said, generally yield few if any positive outcomes and stimulate a false sense of hope among community members who are frequently disappointed. Improved lines of communication should be fostered between the local community members, municipal officials and councillors to ensure genuine public participation in decision-making;

- Improved feedback from municipal role players through the scheduling of regular public meetings could ensure more transparent communication of information pertaining to local developmental issues;
The rehabilitation centre in Worcester, the nearest such facility to Touws River, is not considered effective enough. Rehabilitation is seldom sustained on return to the Touws River environment. The need for more effective and sustained rehabilitation is critical in establishing a turn-around strategy for Touws River;

Family support underpins the rehabilitation of drug users, but is often lacking or ineffective. Psycho-social support mechanisms providing professional guidance to families dealing with drug addiction are currently lacking and should be considered.

5.4 General recommendation
Touws River Town has much to offer in terms of its rich historical railway legacy. The development of a “Railway museum”, including the historical restoration of the Touws River railway station building, which once housed the Frere Hotel in the late 1980s, as well as the development of other railway-associated tourism ventures could be considered, potentially attracting international train enthusiasts and stimulating other local businesses.

6. Concluding remarks
The findings presented in this report are intended as a guide in addressing the risk reduction imperatives identified during the Touws River assessment in order to prevent and mitigate everyday hazards and to reduce community vulnerability.

In terms of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Breede Valley 2012) the following developmental priorities have been identified for Touws River:

- Improve internal road infrastructure and provide taxi facility
- Improve access between residential areas to the east and west of railway line
- Investigate redevelopment of “Old Location” for land restitution purposes
- Develop unused school building as health centre
- Develop hiking trails
- Develop play parks on vacant residential erven in Steinthal
- Develop entrance routes to Touws River to attract passing motorists through appropriate development (tourism-related)
- Develop “Station Precinct”, including Touw Park area as hub of tourism development
- Identify land for “steam train memorial” as tourist attraction
- Upgrade railway infrastructure and reintroduce steam train route as tourism niche
- Encourage resort type development with conference facilities at municipal nature reserve and link to Aquila
- Encourage development of business erven along N1 to attract passing trade (truck stop, etc.)
- Encourage land reform programs for starter farmers (vegetables and olive production)
It is clear from this itemised list that economic development is primarily prioritised. The risk assessment findings have identified that many local concerns are indeed related to lack of employment and the critical need for economic development, aligning with key priorities identified in the IDP for targeted interventions.

The Touws River community, particularly the youth, have insufficient recreational opportunities and facilities. Upgrading existing facilities and providing additional forms of recreation is critical in combating boredom among the youth. Rebuilding and upgrading communal and sporting facilities, priorities identified in the 2012-2017 Breede Valley Municipality IDP, may constitute a positive turn-around strategy or starting point for social upliftment in the Touws River community.

However, it is also evident that the IDP does not adequately address many of the serious social issues prioritised by the community that are increasingly undermining quality of life and household security, such as the rise of gangsterism, youth delinquency and drug-related crimes. More focused attention to existing social problems is needed in both the short and the longer term to combat drug abuse, rising school drop-out rates and increasing levels of crime.
7. References


**Interviews**

- Nurse from World Health Organisation study, Touws River August 2012
- Neville Fourie, Town Manager
- Patrick Smith Ward 1 Councillor
- Gerrit Jaftha, PR Councillor for Touws River
- Searl Derman, Owner and CEO of Aquila Game reserve. Sea Point, 24 March 2015

**Stakeholder Workshop Monday 4 May, Logando Lodge, Touws River**

- Neville Fourie, Town Manager
- Patrick Smith, Ward 1 Councillor
- Gerrit Jaftha, PR Councillor
- Lieutenant Sass, Acting Station Commander, SAPS
- Pastor Botes, Full Gospel Church, Touws River
- Honours Students and staff

**8. Time Series Photographs of Touws River**

The following pages contain Google Earth images of the Touws River area, captured in 2006 and 2014. They illustrate little change in spatial development other than the establishment and growth of the Zion Park informal settlement.
Figure 29 Aerial view of Touws River 2006
Figure 30 Aerial view of Touws River 2012
### Appendix

**Risiko Geskiedenis**

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**Figure 31** A risk history table created by community members during a workshop in Steenvleit illustrates the changing fortunes and critical moments in Touws River's recent history.
Cape crippled by flood

Extract from IOL Report November 14 2008 at 12:06pm
By Murray Williams, Ella Smook and Esther Lewis

The Cape was all but cut off from the rest of South Africa on Friday morning after flooding closed the N1 and a number of other key routes, leaving the N2 as the only remaining artery linking it to the country's economic heart, Gauteng. The N1 was closed in the worst flooding since 1981 in Touws River and this morning trucking traffic was backed up for 5km on either side of the Donkies River. Towns in the area have been left without electricity and hundreds of people are stranded, with many rescue operations under way. The police's Danie de Bruin explained that the two alternate routes, via Montagu and Ceres, were also closed due to flooding. "So currently there's no way out. They're stuck," he said at 8am.

Touws River, described by locals as "the forgotten town", was hard hit by flooding after the Touws and Donkies rivers burst their banks. Coupled to this, rain water and melted snow ran down from the Ceres mountains. Late on Thursday afternoon, the Bokkeveld dam was in danger of crumbling under the pressure. The sluice was opened to release the pressure, causing an even greater deluge of water to run through the town, situated just off the N1, about 40km after Worcester. The water engulfed part of the N1 at the Donkies River bridge in less than three hours, cutting off the highway. Hundreds of trucks, taxis and other vehicles have been trapped on the road since 11pm.

....The only access road to one half of Touws River's population of 7 000 had been flooded by Thursday afternoon. About 80 people, most of whom lived in the RDP houses on the river bank, were moved into the community hall. On the other side, roads and houses were submerged in water, trapping several elderly residents.

But as Searl Derman's Aquila game reserve became flooded and tourists were evacuated, he deploy-ed his team to transport those trapped, including their pets, to safety. He also supplied blankets and 200 meals to affected people. Among them were Fiela, 70, and Willem Beegenaar, 77. Fiela said that as the water levels started to rise, she had packed some of her best clothes into black bags and placed them on her bed. When she was evacuated from her house, her bed had been floating. She didn't have time to take anything with her but her handbag. "I had to leave everything behind. I don't even want to think about what my house looks like. It's heartbreaking," she said. She and about 25 other people are being housed in a primary school hall. ....the bridge over the Donkies River appeared to have been permanently damaged and was being inspected by engineers at the time of going to press....

Meanwhile, a 19-year-old girl, trapped in her Touws River home by flooded roads, went into labour last night. Her contractions were about five minutes apart when Breede Valley Fire and Rescue officials got to her. She was rescued by boat and taken to a hospital in Worcester.