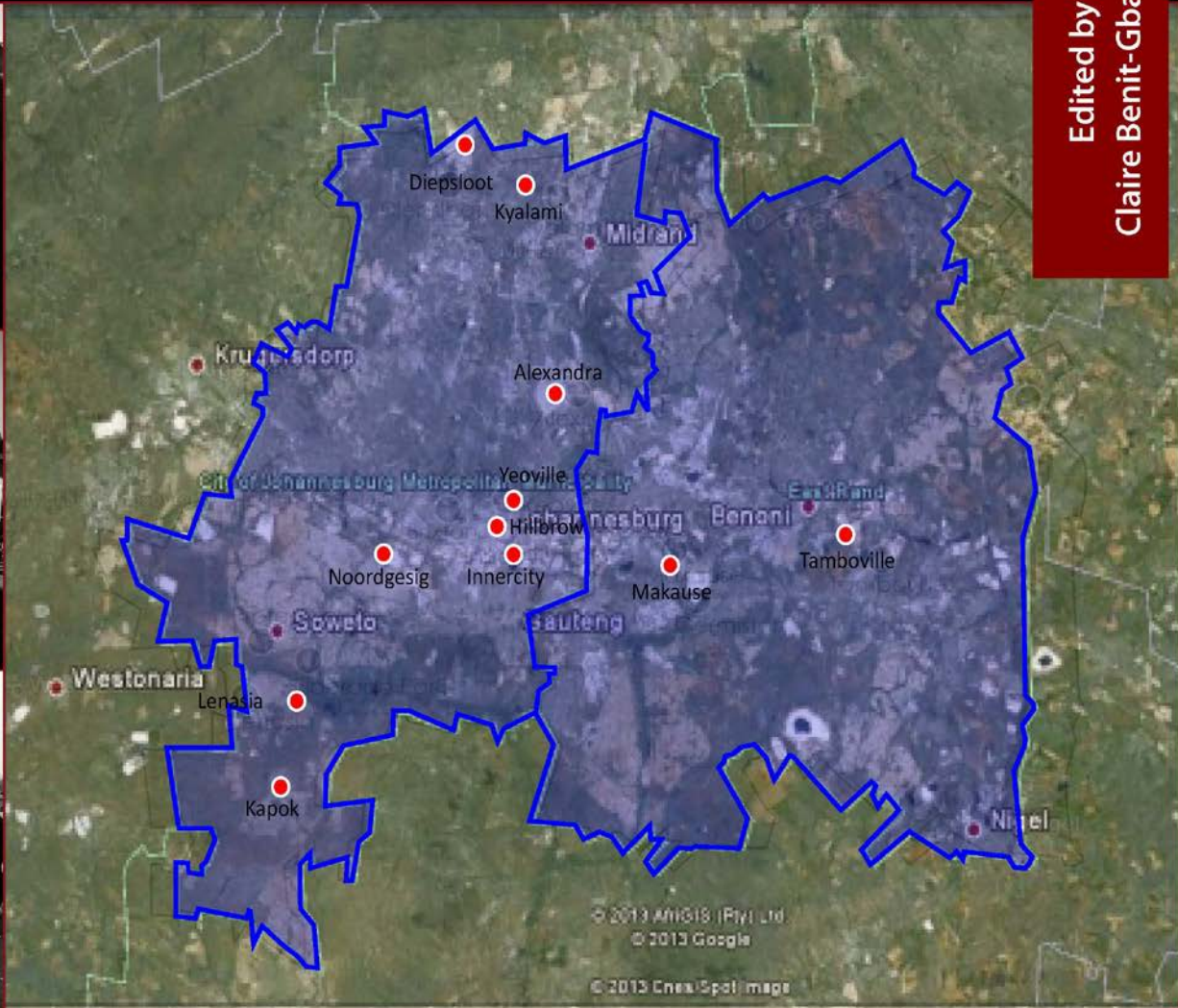


# Community activists tell their stories: Driving change in Johannesburg & Ekurhuleni

Edited by  
Claire Benit-Gbaffou



# **COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS TELL THEIR STORY**

## **DRIVING CHANGE IN JOHANNESBURG & EKURHULENI**

Edited by Claire Bénit-Gbaffou

With: Muneebah Kara, Ntandokwabo James, Seyco Manyaka, Tshanda Mbuyi, Them bani Mkhize, Edward Molopi, Siph elele Ngobese, Lentsoe Pagiwa, Mikhaela Sack, Lesego Tshuwa, Loyiso Tunce.

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

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<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>13</b>
CLAIRE BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, MUNEEBAH KARA, TSHANDA MBUYI, EDWARD MOLOPI, LOYISO TUNCE	13
<b>WHY COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>ACTIVISTS, LEADERS, AND THE CITY</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>WHAT MAKES A LEADER, AND WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY LEADER?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>THE DIFFERENCE THAT CONTEXTS MAKE IN COMMUNITY LEADERS' CHOICES</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>DRIVING CHANGE IN THE CITY: WHAT CHANGE(S)?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>WHY A REPORT &amp; BOOK BASED ON A COLLECTION OF INTERVIEWS?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>CONTEXT 1: ALEXANDRA TOWNSHIP, JOHANNESBURG</b>	<b>27</b>
SIPHELELE NGOBESE, LOYISO TUNCE	27
<b>ELLEN CHAUKE IN ALEXANDRA</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>THABO MOPASI IN ALEXANDRA</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>ELLEN CHAUKE</b>	<b>31</b>
INTERVIEWERS: LOYISO TUNCE AND THEM'BANI MKHIZE	31
<b>BACKGROUND TO ELLEN'S ACTIVISM</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>FACING THE THREAT OF EVICTION</b>	<b>32</b>
THE COURT CASE	33
STAYING IN A TRANSIT CAMP	33
A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN WYNBERG AND BEYOND	35
ON COMMUNITY BUILDING AND XENOPHOBIA	36
BECOMING A PARALEGAL WITH THE APF	37
MOTIVATION AND DRIVE	38
<b>THABO MOPASI</b>	<b>41</b>
INTERVIEWERS: SIPHELELE NGOBESE AND MUNEEBAH KARA	41
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>41</b>
A PASSION FOR EDUCATION	42
BEING A CATALYST TO KEY PROJECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALEX	44
A MEDIA ACTIVIST BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE ANC AND THE PEOPLE?	46
VISION FOR ALEXANDRA’S DEVELOPMENT, AND FIGHT AGAINST THE PROVINCIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT	47
THE GREATER ALEXANDRA DEVELOPMENT FORUM	49
KEEPING A HANDLE ON NARRATIVES ON ALEX THROUGH FILM AND TOURISM	50
ALEX AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA	52
<b>CONTEXT 2: INNER CITY JOHANNESBURG – HILLBROW/YEOVILLE</b>	<b>55</b>
CLAIRE BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, THEMBANI MKHIZE, SIPHELELE NGOBESE, LESEGO TSHUWA	55
<b>HILLBROW</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>YEOVILLE</b>	<b>56</b>
“AN INNER CITY JACK OF ALL TRADES?” PATIENCE NOGCANTSI’S ACTIVIST PATH, FROM ACT-STOP, TO YEOVILLE RATEPAYERS’ ASSOCIATION	57
THE INNER CITY RESOURCE CENTRE (ICRC) TO THE (HOUSING) RESCUE: SHEREZA SIBANDA AS INNER CITY ‘EDUCATOR’	58
<b>PATIENCE XOLISWA NOGCANTSI</b>	<b>59</b>
INTERVIEWERS: SIPHELELE NGOBESE AND MIKHAELA SACK	59
<b>GAINING INDEPENDENCE AND BECOMING ACTIVE</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>ACT-STOP AND ITS INFLUENCE</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>BEING A LANDLORD: STRATEGIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	<b>61</b>

## Table of Content

---

<b>AN ACTIVIST</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>ACCESS TO THE CITY</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>THE CITY AS A MELTING POT</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>FREEDOM, THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AND OWNERSHIP AS A MEANS OF INDEPENDENCE</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CORRUPTION VS “DOING THE RIGHT THING”: THE OCCUPATION OF RESIDENTIAL SPACE FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL PURPOSES</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CLEANLINESS AND SANITATION AS <i>Loc</i> OF LOCAL ACTIVISM</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>LOSS OF CONTROL AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF BEING A LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>YEOVILLE RATE PAYERS ASSOCIATION</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>SHEREZA SIBANDA</b>	<b>71</b>
INTERVIEWERS: MIKHAELA SACK AND LESEGO TSHUWA	71
<b>AN ACTIVIST FROM SCHOOL</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>THE ACT-STOP YEARS</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>FORMING THE ICRC</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>WORKING FROM AND WITH CALS AT WITS UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>MENTORSHIP AND INFLUENCES</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>“PARTIAL ACHIEVEMENTS”</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>LACK OF UNITY AMONGST TENANTS, A CHALLENGE FOR ORGANISATION</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>DISCONTINUITIES IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE – THE FAILED INNER CITY CHARTER PROCESS</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>FOCUSING ON WOMEN AND HEALTH ISSUES</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>THE CITY SEES US AS ‘THE LEFTISTS’</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>YOU DON’T HAVE LAND BUT YOU HAVE BUILDINGS</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>ALLIANCE WITH PROPERTY INVESTORS?</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>AN INNER CITY PEOPLE’S MANIFESTO</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>DREAMS FOR THE INNER CITY</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>CONTEXT 3: DIEPSLOOT &amp; JOHANNESBURG NORTH</b>	<b>87</b>
CLAIRE BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, TSHANDA MBUYI, NTANDOKAWABO JAMES	87
<b>DIEPSLOOT AND KYALAMI</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>SAM SIKHOSANA IN DIEPSLOOT</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>PAPI SATHEKGE IN DIEPSLOOT</b>	<b>90</b>

*Table of Content*

---

<b>KRISTIN KALLESEN IN KYALAMI</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>OLIVIER LÉVÊQUE IN NORTHERN JOHANNESBURG, AND BEYOND</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>LOCAL &amp; METROPOLITAN ACTIVISM</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>PAPI SATHEKGE</b>	<b>93</b>
INTERVIEWERS: TSHANDA MBUYI AND LENTSOE PAGIWA	93
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>WHAT IS AN ACTIVIST, WHAT IS A LEADER?</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>INVESTING IN DIEPSLOOT YOUTH</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>PUBLIC GAINS, PRIVATE LOSSES?</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>POLITICS AND ARTS</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUPPORT NETWORKS</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>GAINING SKILLS AND TRAINING OTHERS</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>MULTIPLE POSITIONS, POWER AND RED TAPE</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>CHANGING DIEPSLOOT, AND PERCEPTIONS OF DIEPSLOOT</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>SERVICE DELIVERY PROTESTS, PERCEPTIONS AND POLITICS</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>DRIVE AND CHALLENGES</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>SAM BLESSING SIKHOSANA</b>	<b>109</b>
INTERVIEWERS: TSHANDA MBUYI AND EDWARD MOLOPI	109
<b>BACKDROP</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>FROM FOUNDER OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FORUM TO BECOMING A WARD COMMITTEE MEMBER IN CHARGE OF CBOs</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>COMPETING FOR TENDERS</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>BECOMING A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKER</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>A BROKER BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMMUNITY COHESION</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>BRINGING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT INTO COMMUNITY WORK</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>REMOVING IGNORANCE</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>FARM COOPERATIVE</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>MOTIVATION</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>KRISTIN KALLESEN</b>	<b>121</b>

---

<b>BACKDROP: EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY HISTORY</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>JUST ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GATHERING ACTIVISTS AND PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>BEING JEA CHAIRPERSON</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>THE GREEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>ACCOMPLISHMENTS</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>ADVERSITIES</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>POLITICAL VIEWS: POLITICAL AVERSION AND NEUTRALITY AMIDST SO MUCH POLITICAL SUPPORT?</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>ACTIVIST ENVIRONMENTALIST? JEA’S STANCE</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>LINKING TO DIEPSLOOT</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>OLIVIER LÉVÊQUE</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>WHAT DRIVES OLIVIER</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>FOUNDING JUCA AS THE CYCLISTS VOICE</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>STRATEGISING IN THE EARLY STAGES</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>A MAP OF CYCLING ROUTES</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>MAKING JOHANNESBURG BIKE-FRIENDLY</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>PARTNERING WITH THE CITY – PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL INITIATIVES</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>ISSUE OF REPRESENTATIVENESS AND FURTHER MOBILISATION STRATEGIES</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>REFLECTION ON FUTURE IDENTITY OF JUCA</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>CONTEXT 4: JOHANNESBURG SOUTH – KAPOK, LENASIA, NOORDGESIG</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>CLAIRE BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, EDWARD MOLOPI, LOYISO TUNCE</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>LOOKING FOR KAPOK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF EXECUTIVE</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>SANCO, ‘LITTLE BROTHER’ OF THE ANC</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>THE ISN, SEEN FROM THE LOCAL</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>SHAHIDA KAZIE IN LENASIA</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>BASIL DOUGLAS AND JOHANNESBURG SOUTH</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE MUKWEVHO</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>INTERVIEWERS: EDWARD MOLOPI AND LESEGO TSHUWA</b>	<b>147</b>

## Table of Content

---

<b>LIFE AND UPBRINGING</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>KAPOK: THE BACKGROUND</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>THE STORY OF LAWLEY AND EVENTS LEADING TO KAPOK</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>MY WORK: STRATEGIES AND CO-OPERATION</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>EDUCATION THROUGH THE TRADE UNIONS</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>BEFORE LAWLEY – COMMUNITY WORK</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>EDUCATING PEOPLE</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>ISN PROJECTS</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>KAPOK STRUGGLES - TOILETS AND HUMAN DIGNITY</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>THE RIGHT WATER PIPES</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>RELOCATION</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>THE FAILED ILLEGAL ELECTRICITY CONNECTION</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>THREATENING A VOTE BOYCOTT</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>INVOLVEMENT WITH APF AND PROTESTS IN KAPOK</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>ANC MISSIONS</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>DISAPPOINTMENTS</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>WHAT KEEPS HIM MOTIVATED</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>SHAHIDA KAZIE</b>	<b>165</b>
INTERVIEWERS: EDWARD MOLOPI AND THEMBANI MKHIZE	165
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY WORK</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>PUBLIC SPACE- THE UPGRADING OF ROSE PARK</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>BROKERING BETWEEN TAXI ASSOCIATIONS AND THE MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>PROMOTING RACIAL, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>REFLECTIONS ON THE WARD COUNCILLORSHIP EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>WORKING AT SANCA ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>MY FUTURE IN COMMUNITY ACTIVISM</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>BASIL DOUGLAS</b>	<b>175</b>
INTERVIEWERS: LENTSOE PAGIWA AND LOYISO TUNCE	175
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>GROWING UP: FAMILY, VIOLENCE AND FEAR</b>	<b>176</b>



<b>POLITICAL MENTORSHIP</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>A COUNCILLOR WITH A STREET BACKGROUND</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>DRIVING CHANGE –COUNCILLORS NEED PRESSURE FROM ACTIVISTS</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>STREET BATTLES</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>INDIGENT POLICY IN JOHANNESBURG</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>FROM NOORDGESIG CIVIC TO SOWEJOCA AND POLITICS</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>POLICE REPRESSION AND THE END OF SOWEJOCA?</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>ACTIVISM AND POLITICS</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>CODES OF CONDUCT</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>REMAINING INVOLVED IN NOORDGESIG</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>CONTEXT 5: TAMBOVILLE &amp; MAKAUSE, IN EKURHULENI</b>	<b>189</b>
CLAIRE BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, SEYCO MANYAKA	189
<b>ABIE IN TAMBOVILLE</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>GENERAL IN MAKAUSE</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>ABRAHAM ABIE NYALUNGA</b>	<b>193</b>
INTERVIEWERS: TSHANDA MBUYI AND SEYCO MANYAKA	193
<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>JOINING THE STRUGGLE THROUGH TRADE UNIONS AND CIVICS</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>NATIONAL AND LOCAL BATTLES</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>THE CONSTRUCTION OF TAMBOVILLE</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>UNDERSTANDING LEADERSHIP AND WHAT AN ACTIVIST IS</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>THE COMMUNITY BANK PROJECT</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>THE TEMPTATION OF XENOPHOBIA</b>	<b>204</b>
<b>SHIFTING TO A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO THE CITY</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>GENERAL ALFRED MOYO</b>	<b>207</b>
INTERVIEWERS: SEYCO MANYAKA AND NTANDOKAWABO JAMES	207
<b>BECOMING POLITICALLY ACTIVE</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>2007 EVICTIONS FROM MAKAUSE</b>	<b>208</b>

*Table of Content*

---

<b>INVESTIGATING THE REASONS BEHIND EVICTIONS</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>BECOMING A COMMUNITY LEADER</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>DLF PROVINCIAL ORGANISER</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>ANC FOSTERING COMMUNITY DIVISIONS</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>POLICE HARASSMENT OF ACTIVISTS</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>SUCSESSES AND ONGOING BATTLES</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>219</b>

---

# TABLE OF FIGURES

---

FIGURE 1 - COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS IN THEIR URBAN CONTEXTS	25
FIGURE 2 - ELLEN CHAUKE, © MKHIZE 2013.	31
FIGURE 3 - SILVER TOWN TRANSIT CAMP, WITH ALEXANDRA TOWNSHIP IN THE BACKGROUND, © MKHIZE 2013.	34
FIGURE 4 - THABO MOPHASI IN ALEX SANKOPANO RESOURCE CENTER, © NGOBESE 2013.	41
FIGURE 5 – THABO IN FRONT OF ITHUTE SCHOOL, ALEXANDRA, © NGOBESE 2013.	43
FIGURE 6 - PATIENCE NOGCANTSI IN HER GREENSTONE HOME, © SACK 2013.	59
FIGURE 7 - MINIDA MANSIONS, ONE OF PATIENCE’S PROPERTIES IN YEOVILLE, REHABILITATED THROUGH TUHF, © YEOVILLE STUDIO 2011.	63
FIGURE 8 - SHEREZA SIBANDA IN HER ICRC OFFICE, © SACK 2013.	71
FIGURE 9 – SAN JOSE BUILDING, BERA, © SACK 2013.	76
FIGURE 10 – PAPI SATHEKGE IN DIEPSLOOT PUBLIC SPACE, ©PAGIWA 2013.	93
FIGURE 11 – URBAN FURNITURE INSTALLED BY JDA IN DIEPSLOOT STREETS, BUILDING ON DACN COMMUNITY ART ACTIVITIES, © PAGIWA 2013.	104
FIGURE 12 - SAM SIKHOSANA IN HIS DIEPSLOOT OFFICE, © MOLOPI 2013.	109
FIGURE 13 - SAM SIKHOSANA AND TWO FARMERS IN THE DIEPSLOOT FARM COOPERATIVE, © MOLOPI 2013.	117
FIGURE 14 - KRISTIN KALLESEN, © KARA 2013.	121
FIGURE 15 - GREATER KYALAMI CONSERVANCY BOUNDARIES.	125
FIGURE 16 – JEA IN DIEPSLOOT FOR MANDELA DAY, © JEA 2012.	129
FIGURE 17 - OLIVIER LÉVÊQUE, © KARA 2013.	131
FIGURE 18 - JUCA’S MAP OF CYCLING ROUTES IN JOHANNESBURG, 2013.	134

*Table of Content*

---

FIGURE 19 - JUCA ORGANISES A BIKE-POLO MATCH IN VILAKAZI STREET, SOWETO, FOR THE 'OPEN STREET' DAY, ©JUCA, 2011.	136
FIGURE 20 – EXECUTIVE MUKHEVO IN KAPOK, © MOLOPI 2013.	147
FIGURE 21 – EXECUTIVE’S HOME AND YARD IN KAPOK, © MOLOPI 2013.	149
FIGURE 22 – SHAHIDA KAZIE, © MOLOPI 2013.	165
FIGURE 23 - REHABILITATED ROSE PARK, LENASIA, © MOLOPI 2013.	168
FIGURE 24 - BASIL DOUGLAS IN HIS OFFICE AT THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG, © PAGIWA 2013.	175
FIGURE 25 - ABIE NYALUNGA IN THE STREET THAT BEARS HIS NAME, TAMBOVILLE, © MANYAKA 2013.	193
FIGURE 26 – A STREET IN TAMBOVILLE, © MANYAKA, 2013.	201
FIGURE 27 – GENERAL MOYO IN MAKAUSE, © MANYAKA 2013.	207
FIGURE 28 - - MAKAUSE INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, ©MANYAKA 2013.	209
FIGURE 29 - MAKAUSE COMMUNITY WATER PROJECT, © MANYAKA 2013.	216

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The work of the class, over the first semester 2013 (13 weeks), was considerable. Each student undertook to interview three activists (in teams of two), involving at least two visits to interviewees (for interview and for their feedback on interview transcripts). Moreover, they engaged in collective work to put this report together, as the class decided that rather than a series of individual reports, they would work on a collective research report as the basis for a book. The class took their job very seriously, far beyond the demands of a usual assignment, and felt a responsibility towards the activists they interviewed. Professor Claire Bénit-Gbaffou gave it then an extra round of editing.

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that was not always easy, and was generally deeply emotional. We thank our interviewees for availing themselves to us beyond the surface. They have ignited a fresh appreciation for the contributions of everyday people to the development of our communities. We are deeply thankful for the opportunity to present their stories to a wider audience. Our gratitude goes to all –Ellen Chauke, Basil Douglas, Kristin Kallesen, Shahida Kazie, Olivier Lévêque, Thabo Mopasi, General Alfred Moyo, Executive Mukwevho, Patience Nogcantsi, Abraham Abie Nyalunga, Papi Sathege, Shereza Sibanda, Sam Blessing Sikhosana, and also to those whose interviews we were unfortunately unable to publish in this report: Josie Adler, Timothy Masoeu, Zanele Mbatha, Marlise Richter.

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# Introduction

---

**Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Muneebah Kara, Tshanda Mbuyi, Edward Molopi, Loyiso Tunce**

This research report stems from our fascination for the commitment, passion, and dedication of community activists in driving change in South African cities. For the seduction of action and the excitement of change, in engineering the demise of apartheid or in reconstructing a post-apartheid society. For the mystery of leadership, or charisma, of the ability to mobilise followers with often very limited resources – sometimes only words. And for the art and skill of political astuteness, vision and strategic thinking that emerge in response to shifting and complex historical and local contexts.

*Community Activists Tell their Stories: Driving Change in Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni* is first a tribute to the work, dedication and commitment of these community activists, in post-apartheid Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni.

## Why community activists?

Community, neighbourhood, local, or area-based activism is, we argue, a specific form of activism, in both its attractiveness and its limitations. To some authors arguing that there is nothing *inherently* specific to the local scale in terms of democratic participation (Purcell 2006), we respond that the local scale is ridden with potentialities that no other scale of action can match. Whether these potentialities are realised or not are another matter.

Community activism offers the immediacy of reacting, being inspired, being involved in one's direct, every-day environment, and attempting to change it for the better. It offers one the sense that change is within reach, a sense of the possibility of change, a sense that one can access, organise, mobilise, people around oneself and influence the way they use and shape the spaces they are sharing.

Community activism relies on a sense of local knowledge, a grounded expertise based on daily practices, observation, and experiences inscribed in a local; accessible space, through networks and interactions with a somehow identifiable set of people. Nothing can replace, especially in highly informal and fluid environments where 'expert' knowledge, maps and data are at best inaccurate, this first hand expertise.

Community activism does offer gratification, through the immediate proximity and physical visibility of the change that one drives; through the recognition and potential gratitude of the individuals and groups that one has assisted. Unlike policy makers working at upper scales of urban governance, impacts of one's actions can be seen immediately, and this immediacy can even be used to correct the direction of one's action.

Of course, these potentials of community activism are also its dangers and its limitations. The first and most important limitation is fairly well documented in academic literature: it is the fact that radical or structural change generally cannot be made at a local level, and that most of this change depends on higher scales of intervention and drive. Activists grounding their work at the local level are limited in their ability to address structural issues, and might even suffer from local myopia when symptoms on the ground depends on much broader and deeper causes. Their localised treatment, or their confinement to a local scale of activism, leads to their depoliticisation (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Williams 2004). Community activists can still try and propose locally driven solutions to urban issues, through the notion of 'pilot' or experimental projects (when they take or are given the space to do so): but the impact

of these projects is often short lived and seldom becomes institutionalised, formalised or extended to other spaces and other scales.

The second, less visible shortcoming of community activism relates to one of its seductions: the immediate, personal interaction of local activists with their 'communities', or constituencies. The danger pertains to the informal nature of their leadership and the ease with which it can be contested, at any local public meeting, by a range of competing leaders-to-be. Local activism can enhance personal social status and provide symbolic and even material gratification, but it can also lead to personal downfall, discredit, and often local leaders are exposed to threats, intimidation and even direct physical violence from their own communities<sup>1</sup>.

## Activists, leaders, and the City

Before we continue, it is important to explain what we understand by community, local, urban activists and leaders. We will often use the terms interchangeably in the course of this report, acknowledging the small nuances each term entails but also accepting that they define, through their blurred but largely overlapping boundaries, our field of enquiry.

By activist we mean an individual who commits his/her personal time, energy and resources to effect change in his/her environment. There can be professional activists – those who manage to transform their passion into a profession or a resource generating occupation. But it is understood that activism takes time, beyond office hours, and requires a broad and comprehensive intervention in order to 'act', to effect change in contexts that are never one-dimensional.

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<sup>1</sup> This would be different from threats, violence and intimidation from the state, which are also, unfortunately, a significant part of activism, but not specific to community activism in itself.

By leader, we emphasize, in our understanding of activists, the ability to organise or mobilise a group, to construct a community or a constituency: a group of followers that the leader claims s/he is representing, and to which s/he is able to provide guidance or vision (possibly in dialogical form, but nevertheless with a sense of direction). Whilst most activists in this research report do engage in public spaces with a collective group, thereby constructing 'communities' in one form or another, many of them felt uncomfortable calling themselves 'leaders' – be it out of modesty, out of fear of being accused of hijacking a title nobody attributed them, or out of the uncertainty of their own political position as 'informal' leaders (i.e. not paid, not appointed and not elected in most cases). This is the reason why we retained the term activists, although most of the ones we interviewed for this report could be defined, in our view, as community leaders. The other difficulty is that leadership can be qualified: it has different degrees, or levels (this one can be said to have 'more' leadership skills and abilities than this other); whereas activism is neutral and encompasses the widest variety of actions. As argued provocatively by one of our interviewees, 'you post something on the net', 'you wear a meaningful T-shirt: you are an activist!'

By *community* activist or leader, we mean those who operate at grassroots, neighbourhood level, claiming to represent collective local interests that sometimes activists/leaders construct as a 'community', embedding shared values and visions for the area where they reside together or that they use jointly. The term *local* activist is broader, as it does not necessarily entail collective engagement with a group: it can be an NGO providing services to a locality on an individual basis. The term *urban* activist is even broader, and only refers to activists taking the city as their object of action.

Urban, local or community activists, all take the city as the object of their intervention: their aim is to change the city, how it works, how it is structured – mostly at the neighbourhood scale but sometimes also at metropolitan scale. Access to the city, distribution of resources,



recognition of specific groups as full urban residents, are different aspects of the 'struggle for the city'.

Seeing the city as the object of political struggles, made and shaped by conflict and negotiation, is not new. Castells, in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), predicts the rise of what he calls "mass consumption movements", claiming their right to material and immaterial goods in the city, that he opposes to the declining, "old social movements" based on trade unions and political parties, and structured around political ideologies such as socialism, whose influence he sees vanishing as early as the 1980s. No need either to recall how influential Castells' work has been in the South African civics' revolt against the apartheid city system. It has inspired the motto 'One City One Tax Base', a rallying slogan to challenge the racially segregated local government and divided city. The motto was popularised through PLANACT, a key planning NGO supporting local civics in their fight against urban apartheid during the transition period (Hunter et al., 2009). It was adopted by the Soweto Rent Boycott, and spread nationally (Tomlinson et al., 2003). The historical moment of liberation, created by the conjunction of international pressure and the internal resistance of 'civics' in South African cities, created huge hopes in the power of local activism to drive political but also urban change. Direct experience by activists on how their localised battles became of national relevance, certainly created a sense of possibilities that undoubtedly has diminished in the post-apartheid context, but has restructured rather than completely vanished (Ballard et al 2006).

The story we are trying to tell through this research report is located in such a post-apartheid, Castellian context, a context of cautious hope and of interest for the politics of urban change. We would like to start contributing, through grounded and diversified stories, to a better understanding of local leadership, and of community activists as city-makers, as drivers of change in the city.

## What makes a leader, and what makes a community leader?

Literature on leadership is vastly disappointing. Most of it is instrumental, and attempts to respond to the question 'how can one become a leader?' – either from a psychological point of view, with an emphasis on leadership's supposed or expected personality traits; or from a corporate management point of view, with more emphasis on group dynamics and power, but still normative and depoliticised.

Much less developed are theoretical attempts to unpack leadership, its politics and dynamics both at the individual leader level, in the relationship between leader and followers, and in the relationship between leader and state or party authority. Some of it has been built from Max Weber's analysis of the three forms of authority and legitimacy that he distinguished: traditional, bureaucratic, and charismatic (1978). Burns (2003) further explores the relationships between leadership and followership, and interestingly distinguishes between transactional and transformational leadership – the former based on an exchange of goods and services between leaders and followers, reproducing status quo; the latter more explicitly aimed at driving change and relying on forms of charismatic, inspirational or visionary leadership. A whole literature on patronage, clientelism and 'big men' has developed, which one could see as unpacking forms of 'transactional' leadership, mostly in political anthropology, debating on the alienation and/or forms of reciprocity of the relation between leader and followers (for a useful account of these debates in Latin American Cities, see Gay 1998).

But the precise focus of the majority of this multidisciplinary literature, is more on the relationship between leader and constituencies, than on the leader him/herself. And, we argue, it neglects one key aspect of leadership, that is not solely inscribed in the relationship between leader and follower, but lies in the ability of the leader to interact and react to broader political dynamics – opportunities and constraints- offered in

particular through his/her interaction with the state on the one hand, with his/her broader party or organisation affiliation sometimes, on the other.

This double site of engagement and legitimation that leaders need to involve themselves in, towards their constituency and towards the state and sometimes their party or organisation apparatus, is one aspect that we need to explore further, to understand in which complex political spaces community leaders need to operate.

Munro has started, in a PhD dissertation entitled *The Difference Community Leaders Make* (2008), theorising on this mediating or intermediary position of the community leader, between the community and the state. He usefully defines community leaders as:

“Individuals drawn from civil society to represent a discernible community (of space or of interest). Their legitimacy is conditional and maybe contested by the community and by the state, business and voluntary and community actors with whom they interact”. (2008: 35)

The sense of the unpredictability of community leadership is crucial. Community leaders are constantly fighting for their legitimacy, which “stems from two primary sources: the community and the state. There may be tensions within and between these two spheres resulting in legitimacy being a constantly contested issue” (Munro: 2008; 29). This unpredictability is increased by the informal nature of their leadership: unlike an elected representative, a community leader seldom has a clear mandate. S/he does not campaign around a programme, and his/her leadership (and potential position in civil society organisations) is seldom framed in time. It is therefore both easier for the leader to ‘betray’ his (unclear) mandate; but also for others to contest his/her leadership at any time (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2012; Piper and Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming).

This position that community leaders necessarily hold between the state and the community is uncomfortable, possibly exciting, but complicated. The community leader needs to gain legitimacy from the constituency that s/he is claiming to represent, and without which it is difficult to legitimise his/her own public discourse. Without this legitimacy, the leader won’t be able to organise, mobilise the community, to get things done at a local level but also to exert pressure (direct or indirect) on the state, for a shift in its policies or projects. In this role, the community leader also often seeks recognition by the state, as representative and able to mobilise his/her community; as having useful and instrumental knowledge of its dynamics; and as a worthwhile and legitimate partner in decision-making processes affecting this community. In this awkward relationship, community leaders are in a state of balancing the two worlds.

“The leadership role is not a comfortable one, squeezed between incorporation into the structures of the state on the one hand and representation of the interests of often quite excluded elements of civil society on the other hand” (Purdue: 2005; 248).

The contradictions between these two forms of legitimation, and the need to attain and maintain a position of power in state or party institutions in order to affect long lasting change as required by local constituencies, have been developed further (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura, 2012), using the Bourdieu-an framework of ‘double dealings’ (Bourdieu 1991). If community leaders are seen by their communities as being too close to the state, this can jeopardise their legitimacy within the community, as “sell-out”. If they are seen by the state, the party or a funder as too radical and critical (in particular when reflecting marginal or disenfranchised community claims), they can lose their position as state partner: the relationship with the resource-provider can be severed, at the detriment of access to resources to drive change. Bourdieu is interesting in this respect, as he does not discard the struggle for position as merely petty politics and thirst for personal power or advancement,

but locates it in a necessary battle to access the position and power that will make change possible. Bourdieu nevertheless is quite pessimistic: he argues that the constituency's needs will generally be sacrificed by community leaders for the sake of maintaining political legitimacy in the eyes of the state or party apparatus.

## The difference that contexts make in community leaders' choices

Understanding community leaders always runs the risk of overstating agency (individual or collective), especially when relying on reflexive accounts of activists' own activism, their choices, their vision, their strategies, and the difference that they think it made. Munro (2008) argues for a more balanced understanding of how community leaders operate, and a deeper analysis and consciousness of the weight of 'structure' in shaping leaders' actions and outcomes: broader social trends, divisions, systems and mechanisms that lead to specific power configurations as symptoms or outcomes of these systems. Studying community leadership entails understanding how the structures affect opportunities and constraints in which community leaders and their constituencies can exert (limited but real) agency.

In some ways this parallels reflections developed in the study of social movements, where three main approaches have been identified as complementary (McAdam et al., 1996, Ballard et al. 2006): how social movements mobilise resources and networks; how they define their own identity, vision and boundaries; and how their strategies are affected by 'structures of political opportunities' (Tarrow 1994). However, the actual articulation of these three approaches is blurred; the nature of what constitutes 'structures of political opportunities' (and constraints) is often left vague and unresolved.

Munro (2008) makes us progress in this respect, as he pays particular attention to the retrofitting effects of outcomes of activists' intervention

on leaders' choices and strategies, on the leaders' understanding of context and his/her subsequent shift in strategy. Here, the use of life stories or reflexive narratives over long periods of time<sup>2</sup>, far from entrenching our understanding of activism on the side of subjectivity and individual agency, is also an opportunity to unpack contexts, results of actions and choices and subsequent amendments to these choices – explicitly or implicitly recognised by the leader.

Our take in this research report is to try and pay particular attention to the contexts, historical and spatial, in which the wide range of activists interviewed locate and ground their action. Being an activist in an informal settlement located in a prime area and planned for eviction does not offer the same opportunities and avenues for action as being the identified community partner in a state-led development project, for instance. Advocating for affordable rents or service rates does perhaps not require the same mobilisation strategies under apartheid and after apartheid: or, perhaps it does, but the state's response won't be the same, and this response will affect future directions and strategies adopted.

Community leaders generally use a range of strategies and approaches towards the state. The centrality of the state in their action might be specific to South Africa, where the apartheid state was seen as the enemy; and the post-apartheid state is still seen as the main deliverer of a better life and public urban goods. During apartheid, there were a variety of confrontation modes used by activists depending on their networks, organisations and the local political culture in which they developed their actions. In the post-apartheid era, it is useful to restate (after Oldfield and Stokke 2006) that most activists use *both* confrontational and cooperative modes of relationship to the state, with different balances, depending on

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<sup>2</sup> See methodology section in this chapter.

opportunities. It is also important to be aware that most civil society organisations depicted here (community-based rather than of a social movement nature) are longing for a positive and constructive relationship to the state. Antagonism and protests are either used to ‘show muscles’ – so that the leader and his/her community organisation are taken seriously by the state- or because dialogue and negotiations are not yielding any result. This is also often the consequences of structural and historical explanations: some activists invading land in the early 1990s relying on deep ANC networks were able to get recognition from the state, and have since developed a reasonably cooperative partnership with the elected ANC municipalities. Other activists invading land also in the 1990s – but without any of these political networks, and located in former mining land that happens to be centrally located, see their communities constantly threatened of eviction and have had no choice but to confront the state and the party.

By asking community activists to tell their stories, to expose and to reflect on their strategies and the difference it made in the city; by juxtaposing and comparing their similarities and differences, we hope to be able to understand how these contexts, very grounded in South African historical moments and localised urban spaces, shaped and influenced their choices.

### Driving change in the City: what change(s)?

The central research question students were tasked with in this project was the extent to which community activists were ‘making a difference’: were driving, or effecting (sometimes unintentionally) one form of change or another in their urban environments. In a way, students only understood the question and the complex nature of change when they came back from their first interviews with community activists. In spite of theoretical engagement on the complex nature of urban change that one can attain through local activism, they expected grand and quick changes; solutions to structural issues; formalisation and development of informal

settlements; influence on urban policies for the environment. Initially they were disappointed, discouraged, and overly pessimistic about the (lack of) difference community activists made; talking about failures and absence of achievements. Then, when they continued interviewing and meeting a broader variety of activists, they started understanding the multi dimensional nature of change; its social dimensions that are not necessarily directly translated in space; its imperfect and ambiguous nature. It is only then that they started understanding the theoretical debates that we had been trying to develop in class.

Munro (2008: 59) had proposed a typology of the changes that community leaders are likely to effect through their individual and collective action - that he calls ‘the difference that community leaders make’. He was distinguishing three dimensions:

*“substantive difference* associated with the ability of a community leader to make gains by securing a redistribution of resources; *symbolic difference* covering the recognition of actors and their acceptance by other actors; and *procedural difference* linked to alterations community leaders have upon the way in which governance is carried out.” (2008: 59, *our emphasis*)

In class, we attempted to discuss the meanings of these dimensions – and proposed to merge the symbolic and procedural difference, since a gain in the way participatory governance is carried out is a specific, formalised way of symbolically recognising the legitimacy of community involvement in governance processes. We also introduced the idea of *different degrees* of substantive or procedural changes, from informal to formal.

Making a substantive difference could for instance take the form of individual or collective access to resources within a community; of influencing and changing the way a specific development project is carried out in the neighbourhood; or (at the highest degree of change) a

change in the policy framework or strategic direction that a municipality is adopting.

Making a procedural difference similarly could take different degrees of formalisation: consolidating a community through recognition of shared values and practices, able to speak with one voice in interactions with the state; ad hoc engagement with state representatives to discuss solutions and ways forward; setting up of a joint steering committee or forum where state and community representatives meet regularly on specific issues; institutionalisation of a state- community partnership around a specific project; change in governance patterns, practices or legislation to incorporate a mandatory community engagement...

Furthermore, it soon became apparent throughout the interviews that urban changes, victories or achievements resulting from activists' interventions, were often informal, impermanent, ambiguous and revocable – something that the term had not initially been understood to mean. Chatterjee's work on 'political society' (2004) was here illuminating. Political society' in Chatterjian terms refers to the groups within Cities of the South that live fully or partly in informality (informal residence, access to services, and/or informal economic activity). He opposes them to 'civil society', a term that he reserves to a small minority of middle-class residents who are tax payers, property owners, and speak mostly a language of rights. The fact that members of the 'political society' individually or collectively break the law means that the state can never fully recognise them and treat them as full citizens, and that it is more difficult for them to use a language of rights. Yet, out of political and social pragmatism, and because of the difference democracy makes (informal dwellers do vote!), the state is obliged to engage with them and cannot adopt a completely formal or repressive attitude towards political society. These residents therefore need to resort to 'politics' (not policy) arrangements with local politicians and officials to continue living or working as they do, and to access basic resources, in spite of their informal status or position within cities.

In this report, many changes community activists initiated consist indeed in these lasting temporary arrangements, revocable negotiations, and incomplete recognition by the state. If an activist and his/her community managed to resist eviction, organise the provision of limited infrastructure or basic services provision, it is generally on a temporal basis, not with the benefit of a fully-fledged victory that would formalise their area and legitimise it for full infrastructure development. How does one judge 'urban change' here? How does one assess the half victory, the half defeat?

## Why a report & book based on a collection of interviews?

This report was conceived as a collection of community leaders and activists' interviews, conducted by students, transcribed, edited and analysed in a comparative mode. We thought that having these stories told, published, as such, was important in several respects.

First, and it here possibly echoes other academic projects such as the History Workshop at Wits<sup>3</sup>, it is about bringing forward 'forgotten voices in the present' (to quote McKinley and Veriava, 2008). Forgotten because the focus has been mainly in collecting apartheid and struggle narratives, to build a liberation history: less so post-apartheid ones. Forgotten because accounting for the 'local' and the 'ordinary people' is often considered of lesser importance than building narratives of national or regional movements (Nieftagodien 2010). Forgotten because urban change is often more easily captured and visible when studying local government policies and business investments, rather than through the more minute, local and hidden activities of ordinary people. Our 'everyday heroes' are seldom known beyond their local communities, or

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance McKinley and Veriava 2008; Bonner et al. 2012.

municipalities (with a few exceptions). But the work they do structure both their lives and the possible fate of their neighbourhoods, sometimes of their city. Not all our interviewees were specifically interested in having their 'voice' publicised: but a vast majority of them did, as a form of recognition and legitimation.

Our project however is not a historical project— and our aim is less to build the 'oral histories' of community activism, than it is to unpack community activism in the current, post-apartheid city, through grounded and long-term narratives of activism in a variety of contexts. Our use of life histories is to be understood in this respect: less for a historical account of shifts in activism, than in order to better understand the construction of the leader's worldview, political culture and experience, and to give activism the time space to affect some change - as urban change seldom can be measured in a couple of years, but is often the result of lifelong efforts.

The aim of publishing these accounts is to start taking local contexts and the constraints under which community leaders work, more seriously. As mentioned previously, literature on leadership and on community activism in particular is scarce and often disappointing, caught between normative objectives, psychological, managerial and depoliticised approaches, and a naive overstatement of the level of agency leaders can exert. In public discourses, in contrast, community activists are often demonised: criminalised by the state when taking oppositional stances, vilified as 'politicians' (as in 'politics is a dirty game') when they integrate party or state structures, their work is seldom recognised - in its complexities and in the self-sacrifice it entails. Providing the fine grain, contextualised and detailed narrative of what it is that community activists do, and with what local, contextualised and often ambiguous successes or micro-impacts, is a step forward into better understanding the essence of local activism and leadership.

A third reason for us to want these interviews publicised and published, edited but as close as possible to activists' own voice, language, contradictions, expressions and images, is that leadership is of course linked to personalities – it would be foolish to deny it, although an 'only psychological' account of leadership is pointless in our view. The interplay between personalities and contexts, between agency and structure, is again what makes this area of research particularly exciting. We did not want to erase the people under our analysis, and decided to gather and construct various 'portraits' in the full sense of the term, of the leaders and activists who engaged with us.

## Methodology

This report was composed by Master students of the 2013 course: Community Participation in Urban Governance, in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, under the facilitation and guidance of Professor Claire Béné-Gbaffou. It was edited by her, so as to consolidate students' efforts into a publishable product, and to attempt to bring more consistency and homogeneity to what is the (necessarily) uneven work of a class of eleven students. It remains a Masters students' work, which is the first step in a broader academic project.

This project is a joint initiative of the Centre for Urbanism and Built Environment Studies (CUBES) and the NRF South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Development Planning and Modelling, two research entities located in Wits School of Architecture and Planning. The project builds on Yeoville Studio, a research partnership between the School of Architecture and Planning at University of the Witwatersrand and various community partners operating in Yeoville<sup>4</sup>. The experience of the students involved in Yeoville Studio helped us to frame the scope and

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<sup>4</sup> [www.bit.ly/yeoville](http://www.bit.ly/yeoville).

form of the interviews and devise the best strategies to relevantly engage with activists. It is also part of broader research projects – on urban activism and leadership; on legitimacy, claims and justice in the city; on driving change in the post-apartheid city.

Students were asked to work in teams of two, and each team interviewed three activists. The interviews varied in length ranging from an hour to over three hours in most instances; they were mostly conducted in English, except when the interviewee felt more comfortable using another language.

To address our main research question – in which ways does community activism affects the city, and how we can understand the difference it makes?-, students prepared semi-structured interview guidelines. They based these guidelines on previous experiences on using life narratives to interview activists<sup>5</sup>, and resorted to what could be called a restricted narrative / life story approach. Activists were left free to select the two or three areas they considered to be critical or central to their activities, but were guided to reflect upon how they thought their action had driven forms of change. Students were tasked to try and direct the conversation in this direction but allowing at the same time for the personality of the activist to come forth, and the multiplicity of meanings of ‘urban change’ to be expressed and reflected upon. Ultimately this was a conversation with the activists, often very much directed by activists themselves. Not all interviewees were equally ready to conduct a sometimes daunting

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 6 below. For instance, some of these experiences warned against adopting a fully chronological order for the interview – from birth and political education to forms and content of activism- as this logical order would often come at the detriment of the latter part, yet at the center of the research. Sometimes therefore, depending on context and personalities of both interviewee and interviewers, the biographical part of the narratives was kept for the end.

self-assessment of their choices, of the achievements and failures that resulted from their actions: but most of them readily embarked in this adventure. It was expected that successes and achievements were going to be highlighted in their narratives, and limitations and failures would sometimes be quickly alluded to: but in all cases, what students tried to uproot was the contexts in which activists’ interventions would occur, and the circumstances that could explain the outcomes of these interventions. Often in any case, outcomes were of mixed nature – ‘partial achievements’, as termed by one community activist.

Interviews were transcribed and edited, and then students’ teams organised a second meeting with activists, to review the content of the text, get their agreement for publication, and sometimes complement missing information. In some instances the second session involved a tour around the activist’s neighbourhood and other spaces in which the activist operates. As often as possible, a third engagement was organised, after the final text was edited, to check that the final edited version was suitable for publication.

We had to select a limited number of community activists, fairly accessible (Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni), in line with time frames (an academic semester), number of students (11 in this class), and resources available (for transcription notably). This led to locate the bulk of the research. This research report has no pretention to representativeness, and many areas in both Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni, known for their prominent local activists and political cultures, are finally and disappointingly not mentioned or illustrated in the report – Soweto, Kathorus are notably missing<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Initially we thought that former Masters students and other CUBES researchers could contribute to the report, formalizing the research they had done for their thesis or other research projects: inner city informal trader leaders (Matjomane

The selection of local activists responded to a number of considerations. First, we tried to stretch our understanding of local activism, and include the widest range of urban activism we could think of, from the most obvious (activists fighting against eviction or pressuring the state for service delivery) to the most unexpected (environmental activism, media and facebook activist). We included activists from a wide range of urban settings (informal settlements, formal townships, inner city areas, upper-class suburbs) and diverse social, racial and political backgrounds. We also extended the notion of ‘community activist’ slightly beyond our initial focus on ‘informal leadership’, to include NGO activists and even local councillors – recognising that these boundaries are fluid, and that community activists sometimes aim at consolidating their activities into full time jobs and more formal positions. For the same reason, whilst in most cases we aimed at community based, ‘ordinary’ activism, we also included activists working at supra-local scale, such as the founder of a metropolitan-wide cyclist association, and a social movement activists, grounded in local communities but whose actions went beyond the neighbourhood.

Another element shaping our selection was our reliance on our wide academic and NGO networks, who could help identify and introduce our project to activists, in an already existing relationship of trust or at least prior engagement. Previous research or professional experience of both Claire Bénit-Gbaffou and Philip Harrison helped constructing the bulk of

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2013); independent ward councillor, CBO-NGO activist in Yeoville (Mkwanazi 2013); foreign migrant activist based in Yeoville (Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi 2012); leaders of the APF-Thembelihle crisis committee (Pingo 2013); leader of the Landless People’s Movement and DA councilor in Protea South (Sinwell 2011). It did not happen due to lack of time, and these interviews are eventually not included in this report. But these expectations affected our choices – where we deliberately excluded their terrain from the Masters class scope. These interviews might be included in a later stage of publication (see *infra*).

the sample; academic and NGO colleagues, former and current students, activist friends or relations, were also asked for advice, contacts and introductions. Whilst this might constitute a bias towards the most connected community activists, the diversity of these networks was sufficient to be able to select local activists according to the urban, social and political criteria mentioned above.

The making of the research report itself, from these various interviews, was another crucial step. Students chose to work towards a collective research report, in spite of the significant additional work this would entail, rather than write individual contextualisation and analyses of ‘their’ interviews that the course facilitators would then be tasked to compile. Students divided themselves into three teams: one in charge of editing the whole report (putting the interview texts and contextualising chapters together)<sup>7</sup>; one in charge of the layout and graphics (pictures, maps, cover page)<sup>8</sup>; one in charge of writing the introduction and conclusion, termed the ‘analysis team’<sup>9</sup> - although the task of editing and structuring the report also entailed much analytical work, as the team chose to structure the book according to local contexts (see below) in order to highlight the way in which different contexts shape and influence the various forms that community activism takes.

Most students took their task extremely seriously, and spent time beyond what is to be expected in a class on the project – evenings and nights in the computer lab discussing, comparing and hotly debating the relevant analysis of such and such activist, the commonalities and differences between repertoires of action, and what in these differences was choice and what was context. It is in this phase - the making of the research

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<sup>7</sup> Editing team: Thembani Mkhize, Siphelile Ngobese, Lentsoe Pagiwa, Lesego Tshuwa.

<sup>8</sup> Graphic team: Ntandokawabo James, Seyco Manyaja, Mikhaela Sack.

<sup>9</sup> Analysis team: Muneebah Kara, Tshanda Mbuyi, Edward Molopi, Loyiso Tunce.



report- that they moved to an analytical phase, beyond the interview skills they had learnt so far; and learnt the joys and challenges of working in a team. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou was then in charge of giving the students report a thorough edit, both in the form and in the content – in a very short time frame as well. The intention is to further consolidate and develop this research report – beyond its publication in print and online versions- towards the making of a book.

This presentation of our methodology would not be complete without a reflection on the ethics involved in this project, from conception to realisation to final edition. Ethical choices in research are never easy, and often imperfect – subject to debates, discussions, corrections and amendments. We do not pretend to have found all the right answers, and perhaps the publication of this research report as a first step towards a book will help better address some of the ethical choices we were confronted to.

A first ethical question was raised when students started approaching the community activists for conducting their interview. We decided against the use of a written and signed, interview consent form. Shared experience amongst a number of researchers in social sciences showed that the formality of the consent form, the technical and medically-inspired terminology used, the position of distrust and suspicion towards the researchers' intentions that it entails, often led to suspicion and distrust between interviewees and interviewers, making it difficult to establish a human relationship. There is obviously power involved in an interview situation – although in this case, our interviewees were community leaders quite aware of the politics of language and speech, and generally able to use it to their advantages: it was often the students losing control of the conversation! We tried to look for different ways of addressing power issues, in particular with the work over the text production. Our ethical commitment to our interviewees was that they were given full information and update on the nature of the project, processes and outputs. We committed to submit the edited interview

transcripts, for interviewees' own edition of the text (failure to do so led to not publishing one text in the current report). We committed to suppress unconditionally any part that interviewees would not feel comfortable with (in one case, our interviewee decided to withdraw, quite late in the process, the whole text of her interview from the research report, to our immense regret and even distress!). It seemed to us that this was a more meaningful, and potentially most empowering, way of engaging with our interviewees.

A second ethical question was around the controversial nature of some of the statements made in several interviews, an issue aggravated by the fact that interviewees, far from being anonymised, were fully identified, portrayed, celebrated. Some activists mentioned the informal or even illegal practices they used to solve practical issues. Many made xenophobic statements or allusions. When interviewees agreed on the publication of those statements, after we had highlighted their potentially controversial nature, we chose to keep most of them (sometimes suppressing or mitigating the most offensive expressions, in the case of xenophobia), as we want to depict community activism as it is: resorting to informal, illegal practices at times; having its contradictory, ambiguities and dark sides. The presence of xenophobic feelings even amongst the most committed anti-apartheid activists; the fact that some interviewees felt the need to state their effort to fight xenophobia in their own communities, show the importance of these issues at the local level, that local leaders are not always sufficiently equipped to deal with in non-violent and inclusive manners, so great are the tensions, competition, and dominant public practices in this respect (see Landau 2012, Bénit-Gbaffou and Mkwanazi forthcoming).

A third ethical question is around authorship, publication and potential profit derived from publication of this research report & book. In general experience, academic books seldom make money. In fact, CUBES and the NRF SARChI actually spent an important amount of financial resources to make this project possible (transcription and translation costs, transport

and airtime costs for students, printing, launch of the report). The report publication is clearly, in that respect, not going to generate profit. When we engage in the book production (which will require additional resources, but will be for sale, at a cost that directly depends on the resources we contribute), we will discuss these issues with the community activists who have contributed through their stories to this very specific collection.

## **Structure of the report**

The research report is constructed around transcribed, translated and edited interviews with 13 community activists, preceded by a short introduction analysing their spatial and political contexts.

These interviews have been structured, not according to themes or categories of activists – which proved impossible, as so many themes are in fact cross-cutting and shared between several interviewees- but according to spatial contexts: Alexandra, Inner City, Johannesburg North, Johannesburg South, and Ekurhuleni informal settlements.

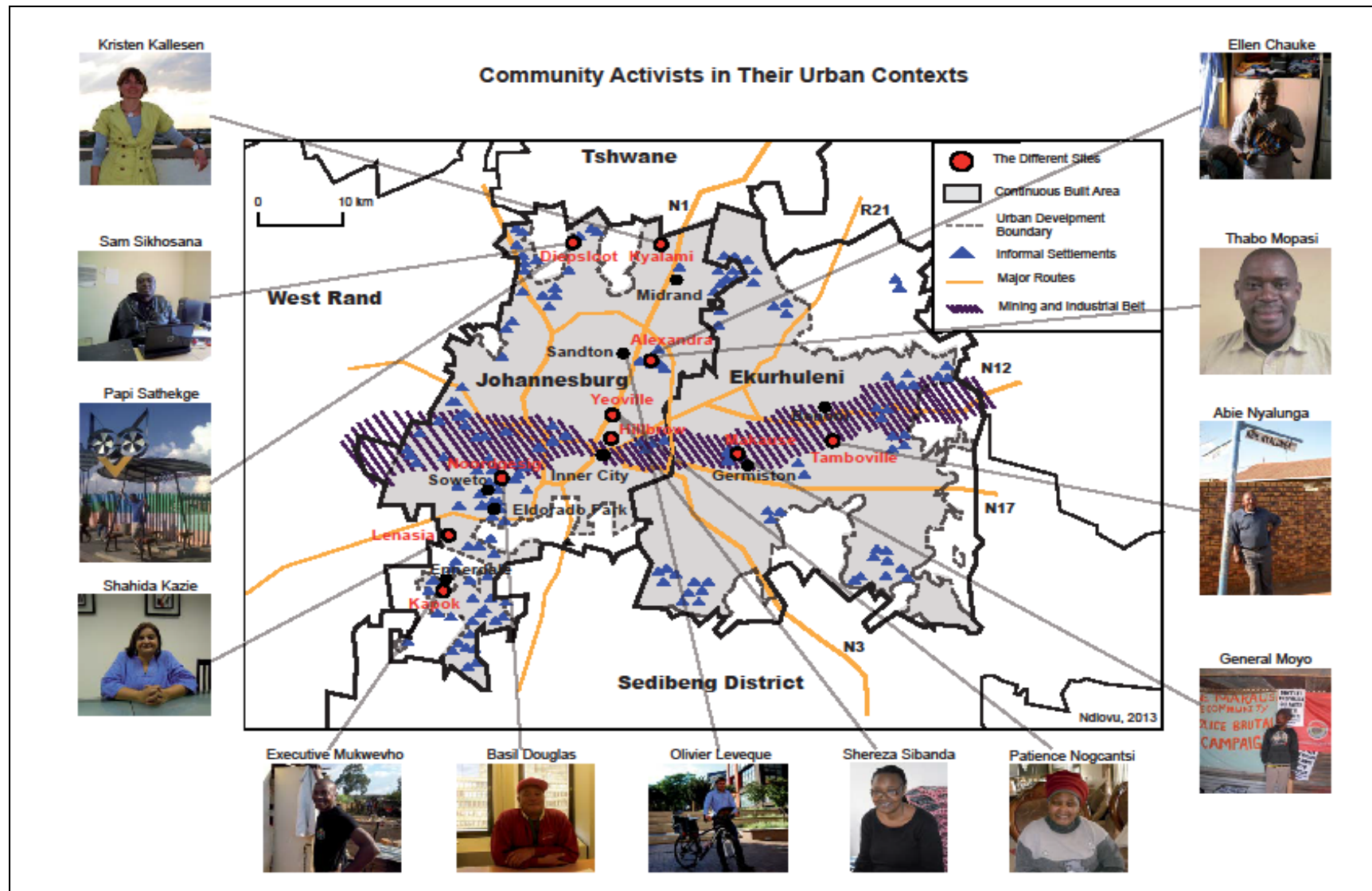
It worked very well for some interviews – the two activists from Alexandra do work from different sides of the state, in a township undergoing a major public upgrade intervention: the one embracing the ANC (or one of its factions) and developing partnerships with municipal authorities; the other (forced into) adopting confrontational positions towards the state and the party. The two inner city activists (one landlady and one human rights activist) work from different class and ideological positions, and react quite differently to commonly identified issues in the inner city – the collapse of collective management of inner city buildings, the urban decay and the indecent living conditions it creates for residents.

It worked probably less for others, but the construction of these introductions depicting local contexts helped raising important questions

on what would be the contextual elements relevant and common to the collated interviews: issue of racial and spatial marginality for the part on South Johannesburg; issue of conflicting views on urbanisation and development on the northern urban fringes of Johannesburg, and the need for forms of social and racial integration for community political projects to bear fruit in a post-apartheid Johannesburg.

The conclusion, drafted by students but that the editor did not have time to consolidate for this report, aimed at looking beyond these regional divides, and at reflecting on common threads as well as contrasting choices, positions and outcomes, across the whole collection of activists' stories. Whilst a consolidated conclusion is clearly missing from this report due to time constraints, it is certainly the part that will be developed the most for the second step of this project, the publication of a book.

Figure 1





# Context 1: Alexandra Township, Johannesburg

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**Siphelele Ngobese, Loyiso Tunce**

Established in 1912, Alexandra Township – locally known as ‘Alex’ – is one of the oldest townships in the country.

It is located north east of Johannesburg, surrounded by white middle class residential and business areas, including Sandton. The stark and visible contrast between the poverty of Alexandra and material wealth across the road at Sandton, has generated lots of talk in the country. But yet again this represents a country wide phenomenon in South Africa, where poverty and wealth reside side by side often in a relationship of uncertainty and unpredictability. In most cases, a buffer zone separates the contrasting settlements, such buffer zones are a legacy of apartheid. In the case of Alexandra, the buffer is multiple: industrial areas, highway, and open *veld*<sup>10</sup>.

The history of Alexandra has been one of hardship and being overlooked by the state (it was nicknamed ‘Nobody’s baby’). As a result there has been rapid increase in density, informal housing, crime and poor sanitation in some areas; but Alexandra is also a place of resistance to apartheid and strong political mobilisation. Alexandra was at the centre

of the bus boycotts of the 1940s and 1950s and part of the outbreak of student resistance in June 1976 (Bonner and Nieftagodien: 2008). Alexandra has also produced some of the finest politicians, struggle heroes and other well-known people in the country.

To turn the fortunes around for the settlement and for the people of Alexandra, and also because of its specific location – close to Sandton CBD (the international shop window of the city), former president Thabo Mbeki launched in 2001 the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), “easily one of the most ambitious urban renewal projects in the country’s history” (Bonner and Nieftagodien: 2008: 402). The renewal project is presented as a partnership, between “the three spheres of government, the private sector and community based organisations”<sup>11</sup>. On the city of Johannesburg website, it reads that the “the national government allocated R1,3 Billion towards the project, which aims to improve the physical, social and economic environment of Alexandra, thereby instilling a culture of civic pride. Its targets include increased local employment, a healthier environment, affordable and sustainable services, cutting crime by 50% and upgraded and additional housing in conjunction with densification in some areas”<sup>12</sup>.

But at various stages the project has faced local resistance, especially against evictions, and its complexities have led to slow progress in its development, in particular in the pace of housing construction (Bonner and Nieftagodien: 2008), in spite of real progress in terms of infrastructure and services delivery.

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<sup>11</sup> City of Johannesburg, 2012 *Alexandra Renewal Project* ([http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=177&limitstart=4](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=177&limitstart=4), accessed 17 May 2013).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>10</sup> Generic South African term (Afrikaans) referring to an open rural or non-urbanized area, covered with grass or low scrub.

Tensions around the project, its priorities, housing allocation principles and their messiness, scarcity of public resources offered to an extremely dense and numerous local population, are some of the key factors explaining that the 2008 wave of xenophobic attacks that swept the country started in Alexandra (Landau 2012). Statements like those made below by Ellen Chauke, our first interviewee, blaming officials' practices for increasing tensions between foreign and South African residents of Alexandra and arguing for their inclusion in local development, are quite exceptional in this respect.

### Ellen Chauke in Alexandra

Ellen Chauke is a resident of Alexandra Township and was the leader and chairperson of the Wynberg Concerned Residents' Association (WCR), which was formed when private developers threatened to evict the people who had been occupying the empty factory buildings since the 1980s.

In 2004, Ellen Chauke affiliated the WCR to the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), after her failed attempts to get responses from ANC local councillors failed (Sinwell 2010a).<sup>13</sup> Ellen Chauke and the WCR were involved in a major eviction court case in 2005-2006. Although the WCR officially won the court case, its members were finally relocated from the industrial premises to a transit camp, Silver Town, where they live 'temporarily' since 2006 awaiting allocation of RDP houses in Alexandra Extension 7 (Sinwell 2010a). To this effect Ellen Chauke commented:

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<sup>13</sup> The APF was set up in the year 2000 in the context of the municipal reform Igoli 2002 which in response to a major financial crisis organised a restructuring of the city along what was denounced as neoliberalisation of the city, including forms of privatisation of public services.

“So even now, we are still fighting with these people because from 2006 to date, we have been staying here. That is a long time to be staying in temporary housing, you understand? The Temporary Facility Act is that people must stay in temporary housing for 3 to 6 months at least, not 6 to 7 years but we have been here for about 6 to 7 years and these shacks leak.”

### Thabo Mopasi in Alexandra

Prior to the 1930s, Alexandra was the only place in Gauteng where black people could legally purchase and own land. This right was later revoked and the land was expropriated by white landlords who exploited the Black owners for exorbitant amounts of rent (Bonner and Nieftagodien, 2008). Our encounter with Thabo corroborates that issues of land ownership are still a brewing conflict in Alex. Claims of ownership are gaining momentum and the attention of the President. These tensions may introduce a new set of challenges around housing in Alexandra.

Thabo also locates Alexandra as inextricably linked to the creation of key apartheid legislation. As he sees it, “for apartheid to happen, it was precisely because of the people of Alexandra. Anything the people of Alexandra proposed, the government created legislation to prohibit that.” The bus strikes of the early 1940s etch Alexandra as a beacon in terms of protest actions that have driven change. The people of Alex opting to walk great distances to work and back was instrumental in blocking the then government's move to raise bus fares. The voice of the Alexandra people can still be heard in cries of protest, but now the demand is not for freedom or equality. Alexandra cries for basic services and infrastructure – they demand the post-apartheid government to fulfil political promises which gain new fervour with every election season. At least this is the understanding on the surface. What is particularly interesting based on our encounter with Thabo is his careful illustration of a nexus between leadership contestation tactics (at Provincial level) and the spate of protest actions in Alexandra. This new twist suggests that

more is at play than the grievances of the people of Alex being voiced. One is then caused to consider the various interests at play; that is, the political wealth vested in issues facing Alexandra versus its development.

The Greater Alexandra Development Forum (GADF) becomes of interest in this respect. GADF, a participatory platform created by the Provincial Government when the Alexandra Renewal Project was launched, and still funded by the ARP. It regroups a number of civil society organisations, including political parties: Sinwell (2010b) argues that about 70 organisations are represented, but that they are strongly dominated by the ANC and as such have limited ability to challenge government and the directions taken by the ARP.

Our encounter with Thabo reveals that while the GADF remains the vehicle for engagement with the ARP, it has fallen out of favour with the community, even within a faction of the ANC. This is owing to a loss of confidence in the abilities of the organisation to champion the development of Alexandra. Chaired by a high-level staffer of the Gauteng Legislature, it maintains legitimacy through its ability to align itself with provincial structures. Thabo asserts that this makes it difficult for the community to overtly withdraw support from the GADF as it could be seen to be boycotting its own government. Indeed, despite criticism surrounding the ANC today, the party remains strongly fixed in Alexandra. Hopes for the township's development remain largely vested in the ruling party. The encounter with Thabo is very illustrative of this aspect. His activism and vision for how Alex can be changed for the better are very much steeped in the politics of the ANC, as well as its strategic objectives. As he sees it, from the pro-Zuma faction that he is proactively supporting, the problems of Alexandra today, stem particularly from a crisis of leadership at Provincial government level. In view of such, Thabo sees discourse blaming inefficiencies on national government as a convenient diversion, prolonging the marginality of what was once a beacon for equal land rights.





# Ellen Chauke

*Born: 1956, Louis Trichardt*

*Family: 4 children*

*Residence: Silver Town Transit Camp, Alexandra*

*Occupation: Currently unemployed*

*Activism: Chair of the Wynberg Concerned Residents, Organiser and Affiliate to the Anti Privatisation Forum, Community leader in Silver Town Transit Camp, Alexandra*

**Interviewers: Loyiso Tunce and Themban Mkhize**

## Background to Ellen's Activism

I was born on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1956 in Louis Trichardt. I then came to Alex sometime in 1986, in my 30s, because there are better job opportunities here in Alex. I lived with my brother for a short while before he helped me organise my own place.

When I was growing up, my father was an *isibonda* ... You know long ago there were leaders referred to as *izibonda*, 'block men', 'councillors'. So, our home was always the setting for discussions and negotiations. I inherited that from my father. My brothers didn't care much about this, it just wasn't in them: this thing was in me especially. I have always been able to mediate and help people who are fighting to resolve their conflicts, to show them the way. That is where I derive my energy and inspiration as an activist until now.

Then I got a place of my own [in Wynberg industrial buildings]. But we were not really happy there because the caretaker, whom we thought was the owner, initially, collected rents from us and he charged us extra money. More especially, non-Muslims were charged extra.



Figure 2 - Ellen Chauke, © Mkhize 2013.

Because that place was inhabited by Indians and when they moved out of the place and came to Marlboro, the place was let out to people, including black tenants. Most of the people who came into that place as tenants were Muslims, black Muslims, Indians as well as those who worked for Muslims ... and my brother was a Muslim, so he got a place for me in that space. So a Muslim staying in a three-roomed house would be charged R50, whereas a non-Muslim staying in a two-roomed house would be charged R120. The caretaker was disrespectful to us. He would kick the door and let himself in and demand the rent even before the end of the month. And sometimes he'd find me with visitors, and he would say, "Oh! I see you now have sub-tenants and you haven't bothered to let me know; Month end you are going to pay R30 extra". Just like that.

There were many Malawians there who were Muslims, and most of them were staying with South African women. So I mobilised those women. I said to them, "But do you see how hard we are having it in here? Being made to pay extra rent? Treated like this? And being threatened with evictions if we can't afford to pay the extra rent? We are oppressed!" So we eventually confronted him, as a group of women. I remember that at the time we used to attend civic organisation meetings at night. We were scared that if the men - their husbands - were to find out what we were doing, they would snitch on us, because they were very loyal to the Muslims. So as time went on, I became the ringleader of the group. I felt myself taking control and felt powerful. I started telling myself, "No, I'm powerful ... and I can't let this person oppress me and walk over me". That's how I started.

## Facing the threat of eviction

Then, later, someone wanted to evict us. We resolved to fight it because the person who wanted to evict us was not even the owner of the place. We looked for the owner, and when we found him- his name was Mr Schwartz from London. We talked to him, and he was surprised to learn that we had been staying there as he was under the impression that

those rooms were vacant storerooms, especially since the people he knew as the inhabitants of those rooms - Indians - had moved out. He took pity on us, and let us stay there. From then on we kept paying rent, we asked for utilities/services but for some reason we just could not get them. Then the court order came; we mobilised and resisted the court order. It never went through so we stayed there for a long time until 2004. We received summons and notices in 2004 that told us that the owner had sold the place to other people and a shopping complex was going to be built there. And so we were no longer allowed to live there. That was when we opened our eyes and said "No that can't happen: we've got history with this place. Some of us have stayed for 25 years in this place, some 22, we can't just be evicted". We sat down and strategized and tried to find a way forward. First we looked for lawyers. We ran all over Gauteng looking for lawyers who could help us. Then we went to the ANC branch and appealed for help from them. But they told us that there was nothing they could do because it was private property. We asked them "But we vote for you, can't you consider helping us?" They told us *Niks* [nothing] and that we had to sort ourselves out. The ANC failed to help us; we are no longer speaking to the ANC councillors because they failed to help us. Then we met up with an organisation called the APF, Anti-Privatisation Forum, and we had told them our problem because we had heard that they had helped oppressed people in the same situation. They got us one of the lawyers that they paid on a yearly basis, who also works with people in an appropriate manner. The lawyer's name was Simon Delaney<sup>14</sup>. We worked with him on the case until December 2005, when he asked the Legal Resources Centre (LRC),

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<sup>14</sup> Simon Delaney is a human rights attorney. He worked at the Freedom of Expression Institute, then headed the pro bono department of several firms, before creating his own law firm, Delaney Attorneys, specialising in legal and consulting services to civil society.

because he had too much work and could not continue with us. So the LRC convened a court case in 2006, in Pretoria High Court.

## **The court case**

We continued with the case, fundraised here in the community; the LRC and the APF also helped us financially, so we could continue doing what we were doing, and marches and things like that.

Our MEC<sup>15</sup> at the time was Nomvula Mokonyane. Eish, it was as if we were bothering her because the judges asked her and her cabinet dealing with housing to attend the cases. The judges asked them, “Seeing as you are moving people out, have you found space for them or are you just moving them and haven’t found space for them?” It was discovered that there was no space that had been reserved for us. We first talked to Ralekgoma<sup>16</sup>: I don’t know what he was but he worked closely with the mayor Amos Masondo. Ralekgoma only sent a two and a half sentence page saying that there was no place for us and he couldn’t help us. The judges were baffled! That was when trouble started, when the MEC and her people were called into court because clearly local government was failing. The MEC came. Things got really bad to a point where I ended up asking parents to dress their children in school uniforms and not let them go to school but allow them to come with us to court. By all means, the parents agreed and even told the teachers about our problems. The reason for that was to show government that the eviction was not only going to affect pensioners and the unemployed but it was going to affect children as well because the children were going to be displaced from their schools and were going to encounter problems getting to school. How were the children going to get to their schools during the year when there was no money for transport? Here we had been in close proximity

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<sup>15</sup> Member of the Executive Council, Gauteng Provincial Government.

<sup>16</sup> Member of the Mayoral Committee for Housing in the City of Johannesburg.

to shops, schools and everything! So, we took the children to court. In court, we met with the MEC and she said, “Shame on you people for taking the children out school and bringing them to court”. Then one of us said to her, “Shame on you as well for oppressing children by displacing them from their homes and their schools! Because these children will lose their homes and their schools. We are never going to find shelter anywhere else in Alexandra”. So she just kept quiet. And, as it turned out, they had no answers. So a decision was taken that national government had to intervene. Lindiwe Sisulu<sup>17</sup> and her cabinet were called -they did not even bother to attend.

Our case dragged on for two years, from the whole of 2005 to 2006 until on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August in 2006 when judgment was passed, 9<sup>th</sup> of August was Woman’s day. The judge said, “There has to be a settlement. I do not want to know how the settlement materialises but the bottom line is that these people are entitled to accommodation. As you have failed from the beginning to obligate yourselves to these people, I am giving you the mandate to give them a place to stay”. That is how we were moved to a transit camp.

## **Staying in a transit camp**

When we were to be moved to the transit camp, the construction of this camp had not been completed and it had no windows so we had to be taken to another camp. The other camp that we were being taken to had people who had been waiting for years for their houses when in fact their houses had been constructed a long time ago. So it was eventually decided that those people had to be moved and given houses so that they could make space for us. We started moving in here on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2006. We were moved group by group after every fortnight, to a camp called Marlboro Transit Camp, which was built by Chinese people. It had

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<sup>17</sup> The then Minister of Housing.

been set aside for old age people, but it ended up accommodating homeless people and people whose shacks were damaged by fire ... until we were moved in there. And then that place was very, very old, it was built using Masonic board, do you see those things put behind room dividers ... They were destroyed by rainwater and rats had created holes in them. It was decided in 2010, or 2011, that people had to be moved out ... Eh, what worried us mostly was that mostly foreign nationals were moved from that camp to formal houses, and then locals were told to wait; so they shifted one group to formal houses whilst another group was moved to a bigger transit camp. So that is how spaces were opened... They did that after an inspection I had done there. I had called human rights lawyers, LRC, to come and see how awful the places we were placed in were. They took it from there and said, “We had better move these people”. The thing is Marlboro Transit Camp had no electricity; there were communal taps and communal toilets. Well, all camps have communal taps and communal toilets, but at least in the bigger camp, the toilets are flushed; the ones in this camp are not flushed but they are drained every Monday and Friday. The painful thing is that the government people draining our toilets –Johannesburg Water – the chemical that they use is just not strong, or they do not use the chemical totally ... We have seen their workers stealing the chemical in gallons for draining the toilets... I don’t know where they take it to, whether they take it to their rural homes in order to dip their cattle, we don’t know. I have tried on many occasions to raise complaints but it has been to no avail.

Before the takeover of Joburg Water, there was a company doing the draining for us. They treated us very well and drained well for us, and on each and every drainage day, they used to bring 24 tissue rolls and then distribute two tissue rolls per week amongst toilets, they also drained twice a week. What didn’t go down well with us was that the ARP [Alexandra Renewal Project] never told us that their contract with that company had ended – they took the toilets and left us with no toilets.



**Figure 3 - Silver Town transit camp, with Alexandra township in the background, © Mkhize 2013.**

When we went to complain, they told us that the contract had ended and we asked, “Well, why didn’t you make arrangements for other toilets for us, because that’s your place? What are we and our children going to do?” We had to go to the ARP offices to complain as a group, and we said we were not going to leave until we had gotten our toilets. We were told that the toilets would be delivered to us by Saturday. We said, “Today is a Wednesday, so, until Saturday, what are the people going to do? We are not going out of these offices without appropriate results until we have toilets”. That was when they called Joburg Water and organised three toilets. So we shared those toilets until Saturday. On that Saturday, they brought five toilets. We told them, “You just can’t bring 5 toilets... We

expect 9 toilets to make it 12 toilets". Then they had to take some of the toilets from the shacks that were vacated by people, and then they brought the toilets to us.

Even now, we are still fighting with these people because from 2006 to date, we have been staying here. That is a long time to be staying in temporary housing... And these shacks leak. Here (*points to roof*) that foil acts as the ceiling; but it's no use because when it rains heavily it doesn't help, so I have to put a plate right where you are sitting so it can collect the rainwater and you see that dish on top there, it's there for a reason because it is supposed to gather the rainwater and prevent it from pouring into the furniture. Behind those bottles, there is a dish that also gathers the rainwater. Basically, this shack leaks everywhere. As for windows, we didn't even have windows and so we asked them to put them up for us: still, these windows were not put up appropriately so some of them fall off, they'll fall off anytime.

These shacks don't even have foundations; the poles used here are rotting, which means that if a strong wind were to come charging, these shacks would be uprooted, *ja* ... What keeps these shacks intact now is the fact that they are tightly packed. Another thing is that we live in close proximity to a river, there is a river close-by called Jukskei River, so sometimes, when it rains heavily, water surrounds this place which is why I have built a stoop<sup>18</sup> around this house so that we can be elevated. These are the challenges that we are facing.

## A leadership role in Wynberg and beyond

The role that I have played as a leader and as a chairperson of the Wynberg Concerned Residents' Association... Even now I still actively play that role, in the organisations that we've joined in our quest for help.

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<sup>18</sup> A veranda or porch.

Right now Wynberg is quite big, I have other cases from Sundown, of people who were almost forcibly evicted from their shacks and I've had to find lawyers for those people. It has been found that the land that they are occupying belongs to the City of Johannesburg (CoJ), so the CoJ cannot evict them, those people won the case. Still, the white person who tried to evict them hasn't fixed the lighting for them; all he has done is install Apollo lights<sup>19</sup> so he is able to monitor them.

I still play an active role in fighting for other people in Alex. For instance the people up there at Boxer Supermarket [in Alex] were facing evictions and I found lawyers for them. The lawyers told the developers, "Nobody is moving out of this place. You will only begin construction of your Boxer Supermarket after the court ruling has been handed out". Boxer Supermarket even tried to get about five people to make way for construction but I asked them, "Where will these people go?" So there are many things that I can say I've done in the community. Sometimes I feel powerless, maybe because of old age, but I'm still fighting for everyone to be given a place to stay...

I am very aware of the people's struggles and their challenges. How can you claim to know the people's troubles if you live in a big mansion far away from them? You can't know the struggles of a shack dweller whose property gets destroyed when it rains, who does not have lights, who takes a bath in a plastic dish. You can't understand it if you live in a mansion and you always have lights and you take your bath in a tub. A person who lives closer to the people is better able to understand the challenges and grievances of the people.

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<sup>19</sup> Apollo lights are high mast lights designed for mass lighting, and were used during apartheid for control of townships. They are used in the post apartheid period as a way of providing public lighting in informal settlements where no individual connection is provided.

Being a leader is something else. A person who leads people does not put money first like some leaders are doing. A leader is someone who fights for people's rights until to the end. I was offered a house here in Extension 7, but I did not accept it, why? I told the community that to be a leader, you can't be selfish but you have to have the ability to think beyond yourself. I told the community that I would never leave them behind but I would go with them or wait until they have all moved into houses... Personally I wouldn't mind being the last person to move from this place. To be a true leader, you have to think of other people.

### **On Community Building and Xenophobia**

I'm sure you have heard of complaints from people about foreigners taking RDP houses from us. It really is happening; it's exactly what's happening because the officials target these people. The officials know that these people are in desperate need of houses and a place to stay and they are willing to pay for them, so when they ask them for R2000 or R5000 bribes, the foreigners will pay and the officials are the ones that create this xenophobia and these tensions between locals and foreigners. But as a South African, I cannot buy something that I am supposed to get for free. How can I pay for something I am being given for free just because I am in desperate need of a house? It just cannot happen.

This is not to say I condone xenophobia; I don't condone xenophobia because I hate the idea of us fighting amongst ourselves as black people. All I'm saying is the officials are supposed to distribute housing legally and accordingly because for foreigners, there are rentals created especially for them and RDPs are supposed to be for South African citizens. But instead of that, these RDPs are being sold to the foreign nationals of which it's a problem in the community. That is why there are all these xenophobic attacks, you understand? If the officials had not been doing this, there wouldn't be all of these tensions; foreigners wouldn't be hated like this.

On this very yard, I live with many foreign nationals; I have fought very hard for them. You saw upon entering this camp that there are some empty spaces that used to be taken up by shacks but now the spaces are empty. Those spaces used to be taken up by foreign nationals but now they have been moved and taken to houses. We don't really have a problem with that because those that have been moved from here have been taken to rental housing, they are supposed to be given rental accommodation and I fought for them while we were staying in the other camp and said to the officials, "You can't just say that this place is full of foreigners and as such you cannot offer them accommodation".

Housing is a basic right for everyone, foreign nationals included, which means that they also have rights as long as they are in possession of the necessary documentation – asylum documentation, passport, IDs, permits, things like that – that points to their reasons for being in South Africa, for example permits; they are entitled to accommodation. A foreign national is still a person just like a local, not a dog. Even dogs and other animals are given kennels and a zoo, which also shows that they have shelter designated for them, isn't it? So why should officials deprive a foreign national of a right to accommodation? If they are supposed to give people houses yet do this, what is going to happen? We blame our government for creating tensions between Africans. I blame government too much, they are making us fight as black people and as Africans just for their love of money.

Of the foreign nationals that I live with, most of them are in possession of South African IDs. But unfortunately their IDs are fake because the South African ID of a foreign national is not like that of a South African national's ID, it states the person's nationality, like it states that he is a Malawian or Zimbabwean or Mozambican... But the ones I'm left with - I'm sure there are about 16 foreign nationals that I'm left with here – their ID numbers are like ours. You can't go up to the person and start asking them why they have fake IDs and whatsoever because they were also trying to secure a livelihood as well as be visible in the community, isn't it? So

there are many things that I am doing for the community even for those who are not South Africans, I still fight for them to ensure that they also get things appropriate for them to carry on with life and secure a livelihood.

## **Becoming a paralegal with the APF**

I joined the APF because of the evictions. We heard that they often help community that suffer under the hands of government. We approached them and learnt that they specialise in helping impoverished communities against evictions, where electricity and water is cut off because they cannot afford to pay, basically they fight for people's rights. I joined them in 2004 in order for us to work together and I then started attending their meetings. There is no joining fee, no membership cards, nothing. As long as you give them your story and agree to attend the meetings and be able to support them when they have marches against any injustice happening to other communities that are members. They advised us that if we want to fight this case, we need a lawyer and that is when they found Simon Delaney to represent us. Unfortunately over time he couldn't stay with us and that is when the Legal Resources Centre stepped in but he did a lot for us as he was with us for the whole of 2005.

During the court case we had APF, some organisations from Soweto, some firms in Marlboro, also under APF, and our lawyers from the Legal resources Centre. On the first day of the court proceedings, we arrived in court only to find that ANC members had rallied up members of the community in buses to attend the court case and they had lied to the community by stating that we were foreigners that wanted to occupy the houses in an unjust manner. The people that were hauled in buses received lunch from the ANC, we saw them queuing for 'kotas'<sup>20</sup> during

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<sup>20</sup> Kota, or Bunny Chow, is a South African fast food dish consisting of a hollowed out loaf of bread filled with curry.

lunch breaks. We had to stand outside as the court house was full, but when the community members heard the full story they never returned to court the next day as they were there to support Nomvula Mokonyane<sup>21</sup> along with other members of the Housing Department. One of the female members of the ANC, after hearing the true story, shook my hand and congratulated me for standing up for the community of Alexandra.

APF has done so much for us for starters, they held workshops. In these workshops they would call lawyers to come and teach us about our rights. In the beginning, I was just fighting these evictions aimlessly without the knowledge that I actually have a leg to stand on in court. I learned the fact that, regardless of it being private property, I also have the right not to be thrown out into the streets. There are procedures to be followed like obtaining a court order and me having to state my case in court. I also didn't know that during an eviction, the law also needs to investigate as to how many of those being evicted are pensioners, how many of them are women who herd up families, or children who herd up families due to deceased parents. The law needs to look into those things as you cannot throw out a pensioner into the street, where do you expect her to go? It is obvious that she will be homeless and live under a bridge.

All of this is the knowledge I gained through the workshops. The help and knowledge that I gained has led me to being a paralegal. I can now pass on this knowledge to other people in need. Things like, nobody has a right to come to you and instruct you get out and lock the door to the premises, that person must follow certain procedures. Sadly if you are not informed of your right and the sheriff of the court is standing on your doorstep and instructing you to vacate the premises, you will pack your belongings and leave even though that is not what you should do. So, APF

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<sup>21</sup> The then Housing MEC (Provincial Government).

really helped us in teaching us and finding us lawyers to help with the case.

Within the AFP I have been nominated to be an organiser for the whole organisation. I was involved with all 4 regions; Tshwane, Johannesburg, Vaal and Ekurhuleni. There were four of us each in charge of the different regions and I was in charge of Tshwane and we all met regularly. This was in 2010. That's when I was an organiser. Each organiser serves a term: I did it for a year and they added 6 months so, in total, it was a year and 6 months. You can't just serve forever; they have to give other people a chance.

APF can be taken as a mother body... It's where we converge. People from Soweto, from Orange Farm and people from Pretoria, East Rand, Tshwane, Joburg region, Vaal region. What we saw was that it does not help for us here in Alexandra to just *toyi-toyi*<sup>22</sup> by ourselves, on our own, if there were just ten of us *toyi-toyi*-ing on our own one day, it would be around a very small matter, so if we are to do this thing, the whole of South Africa has to do it. If on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April there is going to be a march headed to housing departments, if we are able to proceed to Eskom, then proceed to City Power<sup>23</sup>, then proceed to wherever, those in the East Rand have to do the same thing, those in Pretoria also have to do the same thing, on the very same day!

As we speak, we have formed another organisation, a housing organisation from Cape Town to the whole of South Africa. As for our networking, we meet when there are conferences or big meetings and we plan that, "On such and such a day, we are going to do one two three"

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<sup>22</sup> South African form of protest, using stomping feet and chanting political songs and slogans.

<sup>23</sup> Eskom is the national electricity company. City Power is the municipal one. They provide electricity to different parts of Johannesburg.

and then we do it. So many things, like Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, we meet up with them. They resist water and electricity prepaid meters so if sometimes we have an electricity problem and we don't know what to do about the problem, we call them and they give us tricks or say, "If you can't do it then we'll come and do it for you". There are people in Soweto; they do not pay for electricity, at least the people in this organisation that I am talking about. The minute your electricity is switched off because you haven't paid, you call them and they do it for you, they bridge and do whatever they have to do to connect it for you. Government even cuts water from us, that is how clever our government is, they even cut your water supply. What can you do without water and electricity? Nothing, isn't it? When you wake up in the morning, you have to brush your teeth with water, you have to make food with water, you have to bath with water, you have to go to the loo and you need water! So without water, everything gets stuck.

By meeting with lawyers and getting workshops from them, we get to know our rights and responsibilities. So you get to help the next person for free, isn't it you yourself get that help for free? So, if a person can come to you and tell you, "I've been suspended from my workplace" you know who to refer the person to but unfortunately, I do not have an office which I can operate from, but I'm a paralegal, I have to help the community and give them advice and refer them to a certain law firm that can help them.

## Motivation and Drive

I derive my motivation from seeing a person happy and free of constraints and oppression. What motivates me is seeing a better life for all; I really wish that that could happen. That is why even when I get angry and frustrated and feel like quitting, something inside tells me not to quit but to keep on keeping on ... My love for other people and my community keeps me going. Well, not everyone will like you as a leader because there are some people who will always criticise you and find fault with



you. It's the way life is and I have to get used to it. Not everyone will like you, not everyone will praise you. But sometimes I found that when I speak, people listen to me and they even nod their heads to what I say as a sign that they feel what I say; whereas if another person speaks, the people do not understand what that person is saying.

Actually, there was a time in 2001 when I got really sick. People were really frustrated by my illness, too much! During that time, we had been asking for utilities but we were not getting them. At the time, I had asked everyone to stop paying rents - because we were maintaining everything, lights, bulbs, ourselves. I thought it would be better for us to stop paying rentals and direct that money towards maintaining those things. So City Power cut off the electricity, Municipality cut off our water and we were left with no water and we had to fetch it from across the street. While all this was happening I was confined to the hospital bed and people were frustrated because they knew that if I had not been sick, I would have been able to mobilise and get the lights back on and the water back on. Some groups of people started connecting electricity for themselves. Some people got so frustrated they ended up going to ask for electricity from firms and firms made them pay for the connections. Some people, knowing the good that I had done, were frustrated by my illness and they wished I could recover speedily; whilst those who hated me said, "Ah that one! That one is dying! She is dying because she has a heart of stone!" So I took it from there that not everyone will like you.

When I came back, I had to do something, even though I was too sick to walk properly. I called City Power and asked them to connect the electricity for us, and I managed to get the electricity connected. I asked one person from City Power to check whether the cables were functional or not, and I discovered that some people had used those cables to selfishly connect the electricity for themselves and leave others behind. Some of these people tried to resist this, but I told them, "No, these are our cables, they are for the community so the electricity has to be equally distributed amongst everyone living here. Nobody will use these cables at

the expense of others because we bought these cables together so we must all benefit from these cables. If we can't all get this electricity, then all of us must not get this electricity". Do you realise how selfish and cold-hearted that is though?

So that is how we got our electricity back. People were so happy to have the electricity back. And some were happy about my recovery. One even came up to me and said, "We may talk all sorts of trash but the bottom line is God made you recover for a reason, He did not take you from us because He had a purpose with you. He brought you back to us so you could fight for us and you are doing a great job". Just when I was recovering and becoming stronger again, the issue of evictions came about, and I stood up and resisted that. So, everyday every time I am driven by my love for the community. If I had things my way, I would be President so I could help all those in pain.



# Thabo Mopasi

*Born in 1972 in Alexandra*

*Current residence: Alexandra Township*

*Current occupation: Businessman and researcher in social history*

*Activism: Digital Activist, Member of the ANC, Member of Greater Alexandra Chamber of Commerce*



**Figure 4 - Thabo Mopasi in Alex Sankopano Resource Center, © Ngobese 2013.**

**Interviewers: Sipehele Ngobese and Muneebah Kara**

## Background

I was born in 1972, November 10. This was at No. 53, 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Alexandra. My father was Petros Mopasi, my mother was Martha Mtsweni. I started my early schooling in Ikage Lower Primary School, and then I proceeded to Ithute and furthermore went to boarding school at Masalanabo High school in Modjadji<sup>24</sup>. Thereafter I went to technical college and studied Light Current in Electronics; how to fix radios and televisions etc. I came out of industry to operate my business while also trying to involve myself in community work.

Growing up in Alexandra is quite an interesting life. Alexandra is a place of three rivers. Two rivers used to run parallel towards Jukskei River but now they are no longer there. My family relocated to John Koalipe's property at number 67 in 12<sup>th</sup> avenue. That's when I started to see things to be politically conscious. We left 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue because the Peri-Urbans<sup>25</sup> and the police were giving's us trouble there. Often we would sleep in the garage; my father had a garage at 54, 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. We would seek refuge there as my mom wasn't qualified to reside in Alexandra. So we were able to use the Nkosi family property only at certain times. Moving to the John Koalipe property in 1979, was my first time seeing a TV. John was a big businessman here in Alex. He used to also provide for ANC activities; supporting their initiatives and giving some of them money for their programmes.

My first interaction in the development of Alex was with Mr Linda Twala who managed a refuse removal company when I was in Grade 2. Dead cats and dogs were not taken care of, then. That's when we became involved in a clean-up campaign. That's when I got involved in community activities and gained confidence to express myself.

<sup>24</sup> In Limpopo Province.

<sup>25</sup> Local authority running the North of Johannesburg at the time.

We used to be Christians at home, but my father was a heavy drinker. He would only read political books and newspapers. I was chased away from boarding school as a result of my political activism that developed from higher primary school as well as from the material conditions on the ground. This included the inadequate education system, struggles of water in the community... The taps would be locked sometimes and the property owners would be nasty to visitors who didn't know how the communal yard system worked. Toilets were separate from the landlord's - the rest of the households in a yard would use bucket system toilets.

I started schooling at the Full Gospel Church, at 59, 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue. At school when you had no money to buy something at break time, the teachers wouldn't allow you to go for break as it was them who were selling. You'd have to wait until school knocked off. I wasn't getting any money. I was staying very close to school so my parents expected me to come back home for lunch breaks. But the teachers would keep you in school as long as you didn't bring money. They also often wanted parents to provide paraffin stoves to make tea if you stayed closer to the school. So they would ill-treat you for a long period of time, even failing you, for such reasons. I repeated my Sub Standard A (Grade 1) as a result of the hostility between the parents and the educators. My father was working at PUTCO so teachers knew he had money. They wanted him to forcefully give me money to bring to school. That's my background.

At school they often taught us Afrikaans and I never even understood a single word. They used to teach us poetry in Afrikaans, which I didn't understand. Even the national anthem today is biggest mystery to me. If I ask anyone if they understand it in Afrikaans they would not say yes. Even now I see it as a problem starting from the June 1976 event<sup>26</sup>. Not that it

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<sup>26</sup> Youth revolt against the apartheid system, epitomised by the June 16<sup>th</sup> march against the use of Afrikaans in black schools. The march was brutally repressed and signalled the start of more unrest and the rise of international outrage.

was that bad. In the streets people spoke Afrikaans mixed with local languages. It was nice; we enjoyed it, except for at school. Teachers would teach you Afrikaans but outside school they also want to participate in political spaces and give people strategic direction. At school they'd discipline and beat us but on the streets they spoke the language of the struggle. So we had to turn that situation around to make them negotiate on our behalf even at school.

## **A passion for education**

I want to contribute to making the education of the African child better. But in some instances we fight with trade unions. I always say that trade unions are the biggest nightmare in South Africa. SADTU<sup>27</sup> in particular, although I have made friends with them; I always look for what are they going to say and capitalize on their weakness. Recently I went to an AGM of theirs. They quote the teachings of Che Guevara and Amilcar Cabral: "Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories", etc. SADTU is for discipline but it can't discipline itself. Their branch expenditure report couldn't account for some significant monies. There were trained educators there but they didn't seek clarity. I have fought tooth and nail with SADTU over the issue of respecting our children and parents in schools. This is so that they teach our children well. That is one thing that I do. I've been highly critical of them but they have never stopped inviting me as well as giving me business. They may be angry with me for a short while but they also ask me for political inputs.

I am a member of Greater Alexandra Chamber of Commerce. I am a member of the ANC. I subscribe to media freedom. I say so because I believe in the diversity of opinions and sharing views. When people

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<sup>27</sup> South African Democratic Teachers Union, the most powerful teachers' union currently.

embark on debates, these debates should lead to meaningful solutions. When one takes a position, it should not just meet short-term objectives. For example, the issue of housing in Alexandra, when we are done debating we should be able to conclude on a project that will be a success. There must be quality programmes and government not just spending money for the sake of catering and exhausting the allocated budget.

I am very aware of things that happen in our community in terms of information. With our people not knowing at times, I try to make sense around issues in simple terms. For example, you have a right to shelter, but not the right to housing. It is upon government, when it has all the means, to see to it that they provide you with a decent house. But if the government doesn't have resources, you can't force it because the other money goes to other things. The only thing that you must fight against is corruption. So I subscribe to Corruption Watch<sup>28</sup> as well as to our South African Constitution.

So education has remained one of my theatres of struggle. Having children has made me active. As a parent, you need to think very fast. You cannot relax. You must become an information resource. My motivation is brought by different facets. My experiences: not having acquired the best knowledge. When I see children playing around with this glory called education, not guarding it, it makes me very angry because I studied under the burning sun. I'm also motivated by the fact of the living conditions of our people. Education is a great tool to make life better and change their ability to think. It's hard to reason with a person who is not learned. Our people need to change the way they think. That's why I go to

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<sup>28</sup> Corruption Watch is a civil society organisation that gathers, analyses and shares information on corruption in South Africa. Its activity includes a SMS hotline for people to report on alleged corruption ([www.corruptionwatch.org.za](http://www.corruptionwatch.org.za), accessed 17.06.2013).

schools and demand better education for our kids. I was also an Art and Drama teacher at Ithute primary school. I used to prepare children for Arts Alive<sup>29</sup> – I worked through them. I have a passion for education. I like teachers who are creative in how they impart knowledge.



**Figure 5 – Thabo in front of Ithute school, Alexandra, © Ngobese 2013.**

Children carry heavy bags full of books to school each day but they don't know more. Digital education is something that's very possible and that we could do very easily but the problem is that teachers steal. The worst thieves in the education system are teachers. They'll say a machine is not

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<sup>29</sup> Arts Alive is an international festival organised every year by the City of Johannesburg.

working with the sole motive to take it. They steal textbooks and sell them. Our children then become disadvantaged. Going digital would solve the problem. If children are allowed cellular phones to record classes or are given lessons to listen over through a headset; it can change the way they think. This thing of having 100 children cramming and memorizing from a chalkboard that's metres away from them does not work— we must strive for the best in classrooms.

I always advise university students to use their smart phones for education purposes – put it on silent or use a different SIM card for class so that the device does not distract others. It's difficult for high scholars – some of them just want to use it to play music. Gauteng Online has been the biggest disappointment. It's a tender that was issued to avail internet at schools. I don't know if it's just failed or if it's the schools sabotaging it. Principals also guard access to computers because they are scared of the challenge. Some of them have no websites, a Facebook page, they don't know how to use the internet or Google but they run schools. Computers sit there and they withhold the keys because they don't want to adapt to change. That unwillingness to adapt is also what's killing our education. In the interests of media freedom and taking South Africa to the next level, I say such principals should be removed. You can't, as a Principal, be unable to communicate with the District Manager over a simple WhatsApp or Facebook. So if you can't get a hold of them telephonically you must drive there? It wastes time as you know that when the cat is away, the mice play.

In terms of my education activism I've participated in the area of formulating policy and advising the MEC for Education. In 2001 I was the Chairperson of the local training unit whose work was to ensure that Alexandra has better schools and better Matric results. Some schools in the area are not performing properly. We have said that if next year, the educators are not performing, we will move to restructure the schools. The principal must be taken elsewhere. I've been involved in the expelling of many educators in the Alex who underperform, although now I am no

longer in charge of education, I am in business. I've served in many School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in Alexandra Township. As I explained I have 8 children, so I shape Alex for the better. When the Principals don't toe the line, I say, "who do you think you are? This is how procedures and regulations must be followed." If you are a department official who protects the Principal, or do nasty things like fall in love with educators to a point where those educators no longer take orders, I write a memo describing things as they are: that so and so is in love with so and so. At this particular moment they are partying at school, disrespecting the management of the school, the SGB and the Principal. I forward that memo not only to the people involved. I ensure that each and every MEC and all the Principals in Alexandra read about it. So if you are a government official who visits the school for the sake of catering - the school having to look after you, spending monies because you are an inspector - whose money must braai you meat? I will write about you!

There are many times I've met officials at the shopping centre and they run straight to the toilet. If they're using a government vehicle and they see me, they become scared I will go look for it at the parking lot. And I don't know these things. I will hear often from the Principal, saying they saw me and dashed for the toilet.

## **Being a catalyst to key projects for the development of Alex**

As an agent of change in my community, I have been appointed as a Commissioner of the Small Claims Court. In 2010 I helped bring the Court to Alex. I have also facilitated SARS coming here to assist people every Wednesday. Many people are very close to SARS because of the role that I played in negotiating with them to come to Alex.

I also assist people from this community with history, access to information and research. I offer local students free internet. I have 5 laptops and an office at Alex-Sankopano Resource Centre. When I am

around, they use my programme. Some of the students are now at University, some are with the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). I worked to bring JSE project, Intuthuko, to run their pro-bono service here instead of fly-by-nights teaching people about shares. The JSE teach people leadership skills and some of the students have graduated with leadership skills through an organisation called Common Purpose.

I initiated tourism in the township as Alexandra is a tourist attraction. I started that programme in 1996 when I was working with the South African Heritage Resource Agency looking at strategies to develop Alexandra as a tourist attraction. I worked with Pretoria and Wits Universities to write countless proposals to the Department of Tourism. Today I am happy because Alexandra has tourist attractions that I managed to put plugs around and bring attention to. It's now the responsibility of the City to move forward with it. I assisted with the Green Paper and strategy for Gauteng tourism, also with regard to heritage in the city. While doing that I also got involved with the Department of Arts and Culture to advise them on Indigenous Knowledge Systems, storytelling, traditional attire, culture. I ensured that on key dates like Heritage Month, June 16, Freedom Day, government provides busses to take people where they want to go for events. But then as I grew I gave everything to other people.

I am a social entrepreneur, I'd call it that. Any amount of effort that I put towards my business, I also put towards the advancement of my community. I have a sound system for hire. I show young people how things are done. We work with clients who pay us. I pay them for the work they do, like for photography – so skills transfer as well. So we have photography, laptops, video projectors and cameras for hire. We screen videos of the past politics, the scarcity of water, things discussed at the BRICS Summit – I always try to bring things closer to the young people to see. I assist the Alexandra Chamber of Commerce with advice. I also have a very strong relationship with the Community Policing Forum (CPF). I

give guidance and advice on how to handle the organisation. I also tutor members of CPF – I tutor the chairperson on computers.

We have Edward-Nathan-Sonnebergs (ENS), the biggest law firm, at Alex Sankopano Resource Centre. They often invite me to bring the broader community to their sessions and workshops. Prof. Katze, the director there, gave us the history of how SARS started. He was appointed by President Nelson Mandela to form SARS as the ANC never had a strategy to collect revenue. So I thought he was the right man to make the proposal to – that people in Alex don't have the money to go to Randburg or Edenvale – and he agreed. Whenever I go and make a proposal to ENS they never let them down. They agree because I package it jokingly but nicely. I make proposals then give the responsibility to others to run with it as I go forward to do other things. So ENS are friends of mine. They assist me with anything, legal matters, use of their resources if I don't have a phone, use of their board room, their transport; they do everything.

With JSE, through Common Purpose, knowing people who know other people, they ask me when looking for young people who can go for leadership training. JSE pay for these people to participate in a course (that I went through as well) and when JSE is finished with them, I meet with these young people so my networks form that way. As a result of this partnership JSE will also open their pro-bono office in Alex working jointly with ENS and Investec. We are all in one building in the Sankopano Center. Mzi is the deputy director at ENS, but he comes from Alex. So Mzi felt strongly that this programme must come to Alex. So Alexandra has great leaders and people who can read, so I take advantage of that because we have great leaders in Alexandra that can bring corporate investment to Alexandra.

Alex has a unique multiple resource community centre, Sankopano. When government tried to establish Thusong multi-purpose community centres; they were actually trying to come up with a model like Sankopano.

Sankopano wasn't created by government. It's something that has been created by the people of Alexandra. It's run by the community. I am one of the members of the board of trustees for the centre.

## **A media activist bridging the gap between the ANC and the people?**

People need to be given space to participate in discussions and the building of their own futures. It can't be that so-called leaders just sit in beer halls and push agendas we don't know. The next thing you find is that the ruling party is driving an agenda that was devised in a beer hall. So we must have checks and balances so that people know when leaders who lack credibility have concocted things in beer halls. Plans must be people-driven. People can pitch ideas and they have the right to benefit if they have created a concept but it should not be that outcomes are engineered with malicious intentions. So many plans have gone wrong in this community. For instance, the plan for electricity: a plan for infrastructure was put forward but it keeps changing. The original plan for decent housing has also been exchanged for something inferior. When people were struggling, they were struggling for better houses and land to be made available to them. They were living in matchbox houses<sup>30</sup> then, but what you see in Alex is much smaller than a matchbox house.

Our people don't know the strategies and objectives of the ANC because somebody out there doesn't want our people to know or have this information known. I would put the blame squarely on the leadership of the ANC in Gauteng Province – they understand the strategy of the ANC but opt to keep it to the few. They had an opportunity to be part of the Native Caucus, which was created by President Thabo Mbeki that never

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<sup>30</sup> Matchbox houses refers to the 4 roomed houses that the apartheid government was building in black townships, to house and control black populations.

wanted everyone to understand the debates and strategic talks that take place in affluent suburbs. So my role as a digital activist is to outline these to the best of my ability so that our people can understand them in simple language. It's not only on Facebook that I'm active. I also use radio, like Alex FM, as well as the local newspaper to articulate the vision of the ANC. I also use these platforms as an opportunity to push our people to get into the mainstream economy – I tell them to come to the Sankopano Centre and register businesses with the Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP).

Of course people cannot eat strategy and tactics. But I am very happy because our people do understand – we have a radio talk show every Monday to Thursday, where people engage. I'm driving a campaign there. I've been elected as one of the Community Forum Programme Liaisons so on a daily basis I'm in a position to drive the direction of the conversation. I work with other people but I ensure that any topic that happens to broadcast comes through me, including who is interviewed. So any outside forces that happen to mislead our people over radio are intercepted. We phone in, we lash them and move forward.

In terms of my campaigning for President Jacob Zuma, I didn't physically go to Mangaung<sup>31</sup>. I was office-bound, intercepting opposition. On our Mangaung ticket there was also Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, who was requested until the morning of the elections to call it quits and contest for Deputy President instead. He refused but it was made clear to him that the winner takes all. I must be clear that it was a dirty campaign – very nasty, very hostile – to a point where I was nearly shot and killed. They took my phones – I guess they wanted to see who I was communicating with. I was ready for whatever comes because in that

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<sup>31</sup> Mangaung ANC national conference in December 2012 was the site of a contest for the presidency of the ANC, between (current South African president) Jacob Zuma and (deputy president at the time) Kgalema Motlanthe.



particular instance I wanted Jacob Zuma to take a second term and have specific leaders working under him.

Comrade Obed Bapela is one of them. He is from Alex and is in the Office of the Presidency responsible for International Relations in the ANC. I put all my efforts into campaigning for them. In terms of strategies I used Facebook. Sometimes I'd be cut out by administrators because I was all over. I would always target people I knew to be obstacles of Jacob Zuma and his campaign. I go to their page, paste things repeatedly so when you log on you see endless messages. If you talk about Nkandla<sup>32</sup>, I would repackage that and present a positive spin. So it was a smear campaign turned around. All those who realised it works started to direct information to me. We call it poster propaganda. So I basically ran a poster propaganda campaign for Jacob Zuma using Facebook.

I always say to myself I am the junior Mayor of Alexandra. I always say that jokingly, but immediately after Jacob Zuma won in Mangaung, people called me congratulating me for running the better propaganda machinery.

The President will be visiting Alex on June 30<sup>th</sup> 2013 to address issues of housing in Alex. I think my digital campaign certainly had a direct influence in that. I also send text messages to the presidential line and post on his Facebook page. You may have noted in the previous State of the Nation Address that the President mentioned Facebook and Twitter as some of his key sources of information. When he comes, he will also be responding to issues raised by the Greater Alex Chamber of Commerce – where I sit. The Chamber is what is flying the flag of Alex as opposed to a political party. It represents the people of Alex and is made up of the

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<sup>32</sup> A scandal affecting president Jacob Zuma- where he upgraded his home in Nkandla using an important amount of public money in the name of state security.

business people of Alex. It is about 33 years old and used to be known as NAFCO<sup>33</sup>. It was involved in ensuring the people of Alex claim a stake in the development of Gautrain<sup>34</sup>.

Fortunately I have a Premier [of Gauteng Province] who is accessible via Facebook. Madame Nomvula Mokonyane is very receptive. Recently I found a billboard of the DA inside a local school. I took a picture of it and posted it on the premier's wall. So we began to chat around approaching the MEC of Education in Gauteng to find out how such a billboard ended up at a school yard. Anyway, that billboard has since been removed. But we chat with the Premier on many different issues. We were chatting recently about black-outs in Alex and alternative energy sources like gas power. I proposed to her that we need to diversify power and not rely on electricity. She wasn't able to respond right away in that regard because she has to consult with her constituency first. That is the limitation. But after a while I can always simply ask if she's been able to take my suggestion forward.

## **Vision for Alexandra's Development, and fight against the Provincial Local Government**

The reason why I got behind the Jacob Zuma campaign was that Alexandra has an impending presidential project worth R1.3 billion<sup>35</sup> and I wanted to see justice done. President Thabo Mbeki had allocated R1,3

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<sup>33</sup> National African Federated Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a non-profit organisation aiming at promoting the development of black businesses in South Africa.

<sup>34</sup> Gautrain is the rapid rail system linking Johannesburg CBD to Tshwane CBD, as well as to Johannesburg international airport. This joint national, provincial and municipal transport initiative, has one station (Malboro Station) next to Alexandra.

<sup>35</sup> The Alexandra Renewal Project.

billion to build 44 000 houses for Alex during his tenure. Nothing was done. President Zuma increased that money to R2.8 billion, only for people to then say President Jacob Zuma is not delivering. It is the leaders of the Gauteng Province that are playing tricks with us here. They basically wanted President Jacob Zuma to leave office before their mess is exposed. If they didn't want him to serve for a second term Alexandra would continue not being developed. That means we are going to be trapped here.

So I said, not on my watch. I dedicated myself for 2 months to work on a Facebook campaign. Any person who said anything about Jacob Zuma, even on a global stage like CNN or BBC whatsoever, I would respond. The media does not write about counter-perspectives, so I would write about it, talk about it and make young people understand. I worked until such time I was nearly killed. People came to me; they shot at me twice and took my phones. I was the most problematic social network user in the Gauteng Province. Even now, the ANC took me to a disciplinary hearing. They say I swore at the Mayor of Johannesburg when I called him a drunkard online. I said, "There is this Mayor who is a drunkard, who will not solve the problems of Johannesburg."

If I visit the Gauteng Legislature and find that the government officials are misbehaving there: suppose somebody takes their red lip stick and uses it during a session, or they work on a phone, I look at how they are behaving and write about it. When you are a government official you are there to serve us. While they are supposed to be our servants, they are now our lords. Communities are scared of them.

When you talk too much you are afraid that you are not going to win a tender. I always say to hell with that. The private sector is big enough and they know me better there. To hell with government officials that think they're in charge. They're supposed to serve the community. I don't care. I know I will survive in one way or the other. I often get some part-time jobs to survive. I do group tours for students touring Alexandra. They

don't pay me like tourists; maybe a busload will pay me R300, it's ok. I will buy chicken portions and mealie meal<sup>36</sup> for us to survive for that particular moment. I see myself as a survivalist.

People in Alexandra bring in a revenue of R3 billion a month but the money does not stay here. At the shopping centre there is a Pick n Pay which generates R30 million a month. The shopping centre sees traffic of about 55 000 on a daily basis; as people go to work there and to shop. Those people make more money than Sandton: the shopping centre here has won international accolades. The Pick n Pay in Alex makes more money than any other in South Africa. So the bosses of the shopping centre see a good investment. So the people of Alexandra will go nowhere; they must stay here to sustain the shops. They talk to the politicians not to remove people. So politicians will go and design the smallest houses for people to stay, because they don't want to lose people. It's a new set of struggles. The politicians will never say to the people of Alexandra, "we got you better land in the surroundings of Sandton city. We shall build you sky scrapers and the private sector will subsidize apartments. There will be a mix of people in decent houses." Alex is extremely cramped. Families share small spaces. When they have another child there's no room. But the re-engineering of Alex is mainly feeding investors that own the shopping centres. The development facilitates the booming of shopping centres. And who own these shopping centres? The political mafia.

I believe in the power of language. I was never taught by any person about language. I just happened to get a book from somewhere and studied more about language in action and language in thought. Where I was struck by the book, it talks about words not being a magical power but that they possess magic. They can unlock responses and actions when

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<sup>36</sup> Mealie Meal is flour ground from dried maize or corn.

used properly. So I'm a person that uses words. I've discovered my strength through words. They are my secret weapon. If I want something, I simply use words and things will happen. I'm an independent thinker. I cannot just follow the mass as it goes one way, so I also go that way. I interrogate first where things started and who is behind what and why.

Why are we scared of politicians? Whenever they take money they no longer take it lightly, they take 99% and give the people 1%. And people are cows. They only resort to small illegitimate strikes against other comrades. The same applies to mine strikes. Malema<sup>37</sup> had an influence because he wanted to bring the Chinese. As soon as the mines fall, the Chinese will come. So we had to arrest it from there to say there is no guy from Italy or from Nigeria or China who is going to play with our system. Everybody sees South Africa as a gateway for anything. You bring Kgalema Motlanthe – he will come and play a bit of soccer and people will suddenly be seduced by soccer and see a leader who can contest the Presidency. I say no, not here. Of course Kgalema Motlanthe is re-developing where my child goes to school for R7 million. He is from Alex as well. But that doesn't seduce me to think he is better than Zuma. Just like in a war situation, there are no red roses that you receive when you differ. You will have casualties as a result of differences in views.

We cleaned the Youth League, we cleaned Limpopo, now we are going to clean Gauteng. We will deal with Gauteng in a special way. The strategy there is simply that Luthuli House should be stationed where Luthuli was born or close to where he lived in KwaZulu Natal. I will propose this on Facebook. It will help us with all those who go to Luthuli House as if they own ANC in Gauteng. It will cut their tracks. So that is the politics that I will be waging next: for Luthuli house to move out of Gauteng. There are

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<sup>37</sup> Julius Malema, popular and populist president of the ANC Youth League, was Zuma's main contender for the presidency of the ANC. He was expelled from the party, for sowing divisions within the ANC.

so many reasons including traffic congestion and Johannesburg not being a friendly city... Johannesburg is ranked twenty-something in terms of friendliness. It's better to relocate; you can't have Luthuli House in a city that is not friendly. And by so saying, I will set the conversation in motion. I will be starting a race towards changing Gauteng province and creating better leaders.

When I'm online I can navigate. When I'm on the street, it's difficult to navigate for information that people don't know. Online you meet a range of diverse people. It's a good and bad thing. It keeps you away from real life and interacting with "species." There's a level of obsession to it. I must indicate that it has made me fat. Secondly I've sort of become a dinosaur of information. I now know so many things and the problem is that people don't want to be around a person who knows a lot. Socially it affects you because you end up dominating them. You are in a class of your own but to have that means money. It affects me in my activism because after being online and reading so much, when I meet real people they don't want that. Even at seminars and strategic break-away sessions, when you drag along with all this knowledge, it's perceived as a threat.

## **The Greater Alexandra Development Forum**

The Greater Alexandra Development Forum (GADF) has fallen off with the community of Alex. It was the main organisation responsible for advising the Presidential Renewal Project about the needs of the people of Alex. But now people want nothing to do with it – they want it disbanded. Last year they said they can't disband, go to an AGM and elect a new leadership because they needed an opportunity to conclude the business of the Alexandra Centenary celebrations – which they never did, anyway. This is their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in office. They were asked to go out last year and hand over power to a qualified NGO but they don't want to. The Alexandra Development Forum became a monster. I was involved until their term of office expired. They want to keep their positions because they want to control the Alexandra Renewal Project. They wanted to run

it as a campaign vehicle to advance Kgalema Motlanthe for president. But we refused for the GADF to be run on a factional basis whereas it is supposed to pursue matters of the development of the community. Now it's driven by a chairperson who works with Paul Mashatile<sup>38</sup> as Director of Stakeholder Intervention. So as a chairperson that person wanted to create a platform for Motlanthe. He did that and GADF has lost focus ever since. Now they hijack key government events as if they're theirs. Their main guy is working at the Legislature so he is using Portfolio Committees to further GADF objectives, whereas Portfolio Committees are supposed to be working independently of any NGOs or forums. Now, immediately when you say you work with GADF, stakeholders view you though you are in a faction or something.

But I must say that I benefited a great deal with the GADF. They would hire my sound system for their meetings. I participated in some of the views being taken forward. But these views ended up in projects geared for individuals to make money. We, who brought the concepts, were left out. We participated in the Economic Cluster, Special Projects, the Social Cluster and in the Physical Cluster. All these clusters presented good documents. GADF held meetings on a monthly basis. They floated these tender things of theirs and the renewal project suffered. In the process the corporates compromised us; they signed contracts for themselves at our expense. We members of the community trusted the GADF to take our matters forward in terms of the renewal project but we came to a conclusion, through various structures of the community, including the South African Communist Party, that GADF is a useless forum. Councillors who were acting as Executive as well as officials in the Gauteng Legislature were getting stipends with our own money. How can public officials be paid with community money?

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Mashatile, born in Alexandra (and one of the champion of the Gautrain project), is the current Minister of Arts and Culture.

There was a lot of response from the community. For one, civil society organisations decided no longer to attend their meetings. But now GADF have decided to repackage themselves. They use state organs (chairpersons of various Gauteng Legislature Portfolio Committees) to survive and we members of the community don't want to be seen to be boycotting our own government; so we are compelled to attend.

## Keeping a Handle on Narratives on Alex through Film and Tourism

I am involved in documentary film making. Now I am doing my own films. At the moment I'm working on a documentary series called *Alexandra My Alexandra*, which is based on the book *Alexandra: A History*<sup>39</sup>. I was also involved with much of the research for that book. I often dictate how research must go in this community as there are people with lots of money who want to dictate how the history of this township must be written in regard to them as they corrupt this community. I never allow such things to happen.

The leadership of Alex have always occupied high moral grounds. I never take tour groups to the corrupt leaders. I am saying this because it has caused me to become an enemy to those who run Gauteng as they expect me to glorify them and say they are our leaders when I know very well they are the ones who are actually stealing people's money. So I'd rather take people to S'wetla<sup>40</sup> to talk to a leader living on the bank of a river. Let him tell us about his frustrations; about how he wants to get his people houses and has been taken from pillar to post; than to a person sitting in Sandton, drinking whiskey and smoking cigars while calling himself our community leader. How can you be a community leader sipping whiskey and cigars while people are living next to a river? You

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<sup>39</sup> Bonner P, Nieftagodien N, 2008, op.cit.

<sup>40</sup> Informal settlement in Alexandra.

can't be a leader like that. A leader never drinks whiskey and smokes cigars knowing very well that the price of one cigar amounts to food for a month, to a person living next to Jukskei River. So-called community leaders give girls houses, get them jobs at government departments without them knowing the strategic objectives of the ANC, which is partly to create a non sexist society. If you don't know what is in our Constitution and the Freedom Charter, then you know nothing as a leader. You are given a position, and then you can hardly address communities. At a community meeting you get all sorts of people. We look at you and know you know nothing and you haven't read anything.

My first interaction with a camera was when I was in grade 4. My father bought me one. As I was learning to take pictures I also learned that a camera or a picture that come from a camera, can actually heal wounds in places where not even a trained psychologist can enter. The biggest injury a man can do to another person is to take their memories away. So memory is power. Pictures represent memory so they are power. They are powerful tools in psychology. So I wanted to get through to our people as they now have television. I'm also a character in the film we are making – I'm on episode 5. Its altogether 7 episodes - we've just completed shooting. What encouraged me to get into film is I used to be involved in drama – as an instructor and also as a performer. Now I've turned the camera around but much as I've done that, I'm also part of the story and part of the research. I get to channel what goes out and what is seen – I also direct scenes and guide on what needs to be cut – so I basically am 3-in-one.

The danger in not being involved in the telling of stories is when the story is not told. A story that sits in files without touching people is a useless story. I recently went to a golf day and auction - it was the launch of the Connie and Obed Bapela Foundation. I was invited to bring my works and exhibit there. I told the story of Alex through pictures and was able to make around R60 000. I got to be invited because when we went to Mangaung we were one force – I campaigned for Minister Obed Bapela

and he was successful. We continue to be a force to be reckoned with – one that wants to advance the needs of the children of Alex township. The Foundation wants to focus on building a school for children with disability. Right now, the kids are studying in a factory. I tried to intervene in that matter about 5 years back but I didn't get a solution. So I figured that it's something that requires the Minister to solve once and for all.

There is consensus within the community on the history of Alex. I realized this at the auction during bids for the book – everybody wanted to grab a copy. There is also consensus that the leader of this community is Obed Bapela. He's highly regarded in Alex community. There are also leaders that are there because of specific objectives to be undertaken, so there are different sorts of leaders within this community. But I must say that a leader is a person who stands beyond reproach and rises above all contradictions surrounding the community and tries to unify us. That has been demonstrated well with Obed Bapela. Some people ask how he could appoint members of another faction of the ANC to the board of trustees of his Foundation. But then he is a leader who doesn't want to see factions go on. He wants to bring us all together. I must also say that a leader doesn't go and live outside his community or claim the right to leadership when he has never even called a single public meeting to address the challenges of the people. That is not a leader.

Some leaders are using state machinery to draw in numbers so that they have an audience. When you use state resources, you know that the state is going to pay for catering. These are things we saw in the lead-up to Mangaung. Gauteng Legislature Portfolio Committee Chairpersons took the decision to come to Alexandra in numbers, for different issues – housing, electricity, safety and security. I don't know what they're trying to prove. They haven't come all these years. But because the President is coming soon, there's an apparent scramble for Alex.

Politicians often say I should focus on the incoming terrestrial television. Remember I also trained in Embedded Systems with universities in the

Northern Cape, the Vaal University of Technology and Telkom. So with television having to move from analogue to digital I have a clue. When we finally convert, people will want to see local content. It is important to tell stories and produce content because this is how people with more money and government positions destroy communities. Like today, South Africa is scared to produce a film about Marikana<sup>41</sup>. I don't understand why. But in America when something happens within a month you will see a movie about it. Here in South Africa you have arms deal: no film. Oilgate scandal: no film. Anything that's published in Mail and Guardian - if we looked at it as film makers - we could be making the best-selling films in the world but we are not doing it. We are scared of politicians. Who are politicians after all, because they are just people who talk politics everyday? Politicians are just in the field of greed, power and finance.

It does happen that I give project to people to run with them, where they don't realize my initial vision and it hurts a lot. For example when I started the project of Tourism in the community, I left people with it, to focus on Heritage so I could try to complement the Tourism side. People messed around and as a result the Tourism Forum has collapsed. I then started a co-operative, ATROAK, also on tourism, hoping it would run but the people in the executive were not active. They were like sleeping partners who become active when there's money. So now I've decided to register my own co-operative with my family, which will focus on tourism investments. I invested so much time and people just dropped the ball on some good investments, so I'm going to pick up all of them and bring them under my family co-operative. That's myself, my children and younger brother. I adapt. I'm not a person who's afraid to change or adapt to change. I'm actually aware of many leaders who don't know how

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<sup>41</sup> Marikana refers here to the brutal repression by the police of a miners' strike in the West Rand (near Rustenburg), that led to more than 40 miners deaths, on 16 August 2012.

to adapt or hand over leadership. When they don't want to hand over - they want to get out when they are in wheelchairs and their hair is grey. I can easily hand over power if that's what people want. It's not detaching - it's handing over reins in a way that I can even serve as an observer or ex-officio or advisor if that's what's best. If I'm not invited I don't impose - I give people an opportunity and space to grow. I easily navigate. If it doesn't work out one way, I devise another way. So if something I do fails I always find a way to take it back and give it direction.

## Alex and the future of South Africa

Grassroots activism died. I died with the word 'activism'. I don't know how we would reignite it, what with backyard *shebeens*<sup>42</sup> - they have affected us a great deal. Community centres are always empty, church institutions with special facilities are not being utilized, people spend their days playing dice. Bad trends that were happening in Soweto previously are now coming into Alex.

Whenever you are going to make a change in South Africa today, by solving the problems of Alexandra, you would be solving the problems of the entire South Africa. The problems of Alexandra are interlocked: what Alexandra is experiencing today, other communities will experience in 20 years. What Alexandra has experienced before, other communities are experiencing now. For apartheid to happen, it was precisely because of the people of Alexandra. When the women of Alexandra said they wanted contraceptives in the 1950s, the government said no to contraceptives. When the people of Alexandra said they wanted reforms, the apartheid government said no to reforms. Whatever the people of Alexandra were proposing during apartheid, the apartheid government counteractively created Acts to prohibit such. When people said they wanted land, the government said we shall take the land from the people.

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<sup>42</sup> Shebeen: unlicensed establishment or private house selling alcoholic liquor.

Alexandra is going to survive. But the issue of property is going to start a new rebellion in South Africa. In Alex dispossessed property owners want their properties back. Some of them are beginning to take over yards and enforce people to pay them rents, because they claim it's their grandfathers' property. The 'tenants' are quiet for now. I see bloodshed on the streets of Alexandra as a result of the issue of properties. I proposed that the president give Alexandra R10 billion because the current budget of R2.8 billion is nothing.

Everybody who is staying in Soweto has links to Alex – it happens that their forefathers owned property in Alex and were expropriated during 1950s. They are coming back, and people who want their properties back could fill a stadium. Their meetings are gaining momentum. And since the president began to pay attention to what they are saying, some are beginning to take advantage of others. The issue is that we have these small push and pull factors amongst ourselves but problems will be resolved. I have confidence that President Jacob Zuma is going to resolve these issues. I have confidence that my company is going to grow; I am going to work like a decent man, earning a decent salary. I'm confident that there will be more educated people as we write papers, create television content, chat on Facebook and go to community meetings. It will become clear how corruption happens in the community and how the people are being used in all this. So I see a better future. South Africa is going to be led by people who are clued up. I wish the government could give each and every household a South African Constitution and make people aware of it through radio. People are behind and the Constitution is far ahead of them. You talk about the pillars of democracy but people do not know their rights. They are misled by people who don't know the Constitution either. People do not know the role of the government, or why they should show due respect to the national anthem. But I believe we are gradually fixing these things. We haven't come to terms with one another, to tolerate one another, but if that gets to be fixed, then South Africa will be a better country.





## Context 2: Inner city Johannesburg – Hillbrow/Yeoville

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**Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Thembani Mkhize, Sipehelele Ngobese,  
Lesego Tshuwa**

The inner city residential neighbourhoods in post-apartheid Johannesburg evoke negative images and perceptions for many, most notably 'Joburgers'. The inner city neighbourhoods are associated with –among other things– crime, grime, violence, chaos, unemployment, high population density and overcrowding, urban poverty, urban decay as well as failed housing management. In terms of housing, this leads to building dilapidation, 'sinkholes', hijacking of buildings, slum-lording, illegal tenancy, and unlawful evictions. The association of these neighbourhoods with disorder and disarray justifies –as much as has been caused by– the 'white flight' from them to the northern suburbs. It is enough to repel investors, and somewhat justifies the redlining of such suburbs by financial institutions (Winkler 2012). Leading the pack are Hillbrow and Yeoville, neighbourhoods referred to in academic literature and novels alike as "derelict slum[s]" (Schnehaage 2012 as cited in Winkler 2012)<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> See *inter alia* the novel by Mpe, P. (2001) *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press; by Moele, K. (2006), *Room 207*, Kwela Books; the movie *Jerusalem*, directed by Ralph Ziman (2008).

To some extent, this dominant image of Johannesburg inner city has led many scholars and politicians to dismiss the relevance and possibility of a strong civil society. Some emphasize the inner city essential fluidity, the mobility of its residents - both South African and foreign-; their national or global networks that would explain the limited reliance on, and investment in, their inner city residence (Simone 2004). Other reflect on the importance of criminal syndicates (slumlords, hijackers, drug dealers, but also white collar speculators) due to the centrality of the area, the huge housing demands and possibility of profit making in the context of urban regeneration (Mayson 2013). All these understandings, obviously highlighting important contextual elements to inner city politics, can be used to dismiss the possibility of participatory governance in Johannesburg inner city (Chipkin 2005, Lipietz 2008). It is however in this context that we chose to interview a number of inner city activists, two of those being published in this book: Patience Ncogantsi, a former ACT-STOP activist and now involved in Yeoville Ratepayers Association; and Shereza Sibanda, the founder and director of the Inner City Resource Center<sup>44</sup>.

### Hillbrow

A high-rise neighbourhood built on the ridge of a hill, Hillbrow is the highest point in Johannesburg. Located one kilometre from the Johannesburg CBD, Hillbrow's central location provides ease of access to areas of socio-economic advantage for the area's approximately 100,000

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<sup>44</sup> Two other interviews of inner city activists, Josie Adler (community organiser for eKhaya CID in Hillbrow), and Marlise Richter (academic and advocacy activist for the right of sex workers in Hillbrow), could unfortunately not be published in this book, as time was missing to finalise and edit their interview.

residents<sup>45</sup>. Many of these residents comprise South African migrants and African immigrants who, following the end of apartheid, flowed from their places of origin to this well-located area (Morris 2000; Winkler 2012). It is mostly Hillbrow's central location that ensures that this cosmopolitan neighbourhood – while redlined, dilapidated, shunned and negatively perceived by many – remains a resilient port-of-entry to Johannesburg for many residents who desire to engage in local and transnational economies (Winkler 2012: 1; Gossmann and Premo 2012).

While located at the doorstep of Johannesburg's CBD, Hillbrow is deemed by some scholars as an area with "a qualitative intangible distance from the state" (Gossmann and Premo 2012; see also Simone 2004) and has long been considered as the epitome of physical decay and collapse governance. Always in the news for all the wrong reasons, Hillbrow is more-often-than-not a point of reference for the most dangerous and seediest no-go areas in Johannesburg (Simone 2004; Richter 2010; Gossmann and Premo 2012). The staggering number of atrocities reported weekly in the neighbourhood – among them the property hijacking-related "murder of three guys in the Florence Building" in 2012 (Witbooi 2012: 45), the death of a police officer in a shooting in 2012, drug and prostitution, to mention but a few – have created the image that Hillbrow is a haven for crime, unsafe for children and difficult to call "home"<sup>46</sup> (Ndaba 2012). Furthermore, until very recently, Hillbrow was infamous for "its dangerous New Year's Eve bashes, where fridges, TVs and couches would be thrown out of flatland windows, endangering lives

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<sup>45</sup> Johannesburg Housing Company (JHC) (2010) *Neighbourhood Development* ([http://www.jhc.co.za/community/ekhaya\\_neighbourhood\\_programme](http://www.jhc.co.za/community/ekhaya_neighbourhood_programme), accessed 25.03.2013).

<sup>46</sup> City of Johannesburg (2012) *Making Hillbrow a Neighbourhood* ([http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2244&Itemid=168](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2244&Itemid=168), accessed 20.05.2013).

and causing chaos"<sup>47</sup>. The ubiquity of social ills in this neighbourhood has solicited the branding of Hillbrow as "Hellbrow"<sup>48</sup> and "Prostitution Hill" (Richter 2010). Ndaba (2012) observes that Hillbrow's bedlam is the cause for the City's need to see the neighbourhood as a stain to be eliminated and, at best, hidden from world view. Unfortunately for the City of Johannesburg, attempts to hide Hillbrow would prove futile because not only is the neighbourhood in close proximity to CBD; its visibility is further enhanced by its world-famous landmarks – the Ponte Tower and the Telkom Tower – which are in effect synonymous with the Johannesburg trademark.

## Yeoville

Harrison (2009) observes that Yeoville – an inner city suburb to the northeast of Johannesburg's Central Business District – has always been cosmopolitan: there has always been a diverse mix of residents from different areas and nationalities, pre- and post-apartheid. Like Hillbrow, Yeoville is strategically located in close proximity to areas of socio-economic opportunity such as Johannesburg's CBD, and is fed by major arterioles such as Joe Slovo, Louis Botha and Rockey-Raleigh Street. These major arterioles ensure that Yeoville is a highly accessible and visible neighbourhood that has attracted a significant number of people from all walks of life (local and international) in search of residence and

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<sup>47</sup> SAPA (2002) Hellbrow, Suip Town warned, *News24 Online*, 31 December, (<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Hellbrow-Suip-Town-warned-20021231>, accessed 23.05.2013).

<sup>48</sup> See for instance Coggin, T. (2009) Hillbrow or Hellbrow, *Urban Joburg*, 9 October (<http://urbanjoburg.blogspot.com/2009/10/hillbrow-or-hellbrow.html>, accessed 22.05.2013); IOL News (2002) Hellbrow's Gates are Open - Enter at Own Risk, *IOL Online*, 31 December ([http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/hellbrow-s-gates-are-open-enter-at-own-risk-1.99276#.UZ\\_mMdVadHc](http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/hellbrow-s-gates-are-open-enter-at-own-risk-1.99276#.UZ_mMdVadHc), accessed 20.05.2013); SAPA (2002) op. cit.

employment (Harrison 2002). The high influx of people into the area has resulted in an increase in residential density and a predominantly tenant-based population, as owners of buildings in this area have been letting and sub-letting their units (ibid.). Some analysts see it as one of the cause of building dereliction and fluid and fragmented civil society (Simone 2004), whilst other argue that Yeoville still holds a quite close-knit, structured and dynamic civil society, especially in comparison with other inner city residential areas (Bénil-Gbaffou forthcoming).

### **“An Inner City Jack of All Trades?” Patience Nogcantsi’s Activist Path, from ACT-STOP, to Yeoville Ratepayers’ Association**

Our encounter with Ma Patience allowed for an exploration of the dynamics experienced within Yeoville. Unpacking manifestations of informality, and identifying how one negotiates their own interests within that arena, was central to our discussion with Ma Patience – where the absence of structure and state support was lamented and responded to by the emergence of new organisations to regulate the environment, such as the Yeoville Bellevue Rate Payers Association (YBRPA).

A former activist in ACT-STOP, the movement that emerged in the 1980s, as inner city spaces were de facto desegregating, to fight against exploitative behaviours of landlords, using apartheid laws to oppress their black tenants, Patience built an understanding of the world based on ‘the right thing to do’, the power of collective organisation, the mix of rights and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords. Based on ACT-STOP networks, she had a privileged relationship to TUHF, the Trust for Urban Housing Finance<sup>49</sup>, a post-apartheid institution aimed at empowering tenants initially, then small scale landlords and property owners in the

inner city, through subsidised property loans. Thanks to TUHF, and her own skills and persona, Patience became a quite powerful landlady, owning several buildings in Yeoville that she refurbished and succeeded in turning back to well-managed buildings, an effort which she still hopes could be extended to the streets and neighbourhood of Yeoville. Her activist trajectory is complex and paradoxical. From a defender of tenants’ rights to the city, she explains how she has felt compelled by the lack of responsiveness of state authorities to use illegal means to evict her building’s hijackers. From a fighter against apartheid laws excluding blacks from the inner city, she is now spearheading the YBRPA, whose fight against *spaza* shops<sup>50</sup> (which they argue denature the residential identity of the area and lower their property values) often adopts xenophobic undertones.

Yeoville has resisted the making of space along the national injunctions for decades. Simultaneously it has remained inextricably linked to the country’s political zeitgeist. It spoke back to the apartheid state with a flippancy unparalleled by fashioning itself into a free-zone. Today it characterizes the tyranny of globalization, migration and the money market. It openly challenges notions of the national. Though a spectacular function of the democratic dispensation, it equally dashes expectations and hopes and visions, at the level of the national, of what a free South Africa would embody. State structures buckle to the character of Yeoville. Cops can easily be paid off. City officials readily turn a blind eye as money changes hands.

Ma Patience is caught between some admiration expressed for foreign migrants’ hard work, business vision, street wisdom, knowledge of their rights (better, she argues, than the South African migrant residents in her buildings), and ability to mobilise (or bribe?) the police; and her new

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<sup>49</sup> Founders and drivers of TUHF are former ACT-STOP leaders (Molefe 2009).

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<sup>50</sup> Small convenience stores generally located in residential areas, often operated from home or the plot.

stance against foreigner-owned *spaza* shops, which she sees as the epitome of urban decay. Migration, whether internal or cross-border, remains the lifeblood of Yeoville, its contribution to the city. Whether this is recognized at municipal level is a question. That is, are the City of Johannesburg's developmental goals cognizant of the contributions of migrants (formal and informal trade, labour) and small and medium enterprises; or are they geared towards the operations of big business exclusively? Yeoville's cultural diversity, though present in social discourse, begs being viewed in progressive developmental terms. The scarcity of such public representations and discourses certainly influence the ways in which active urban citizens, as Patience, frame their understanding of what the city should be.

### **The Inner City Resource Centre (ICRC) to the (Housing) Rescue: Shereza Sibanda as Inner City 'Educator'**

The ICRC is an organisation that assists communities with housing and legal issues. Spearheaded by Shereza Sibanda – a mother, qualified paralegal and inner city housing rights activist – the ICRC is engaged within numerous city neighbourhoods, including Hillbrow and Yeoville. The organisation is “concerned that expanding private sector development and rising property prices will place greater pressure on ‘invisible communities’ — those working in the informal sector and those who cannot access decent formal accommodation”<sup>51</sup>. Having lived in Hillbrow and Yeoville post-1994, Sibanda is very much aware of the housing-related problems associated with the inner city buildings – evictions, opaque management, building hijackings, to mention but a few – and housing rights. Her recent areas of work have been around

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<sup>51</sup> Wilhelm-Solomon, M. (2012) Not Everyone sees the Light, *Mail and Guardian*, 09.11.2012.

collapsed sectional title buildings, and attempts to work with the City to create a policy targeting this issue; and a growing interest in inner city health issues, where concentration of bad health in overcrowded and under serviced buildings is creating a situation what some have called ‘close to humanitarian crisis’<sup>52</sup>.

Shereza's close collaboration with rights based NGOs, such as the Center for Applied Legal Studies (CALs), based at Wits University, and SERI (Socio Economic Rights Institute), has allowed her to gain knowledge and inspiration on the importance of litigation to fight for residents rights. She has used this knowledge to empower inner city citizens by educating them about their rights.

Inner city civil society seems more fragile and fragmented than civil society based in townships- possibly due to the higher mobility and more diverse, multinational character of its residents, who resort more easily to a tactics of invisibility than to a strategy mobilisation in broad social movements. ACT-STOP, the inner city movement of the 1980s, no longer exists. Broad social movements such as the Anti Privatisation Forum and its affiliates seldom focus on inner city issues. Inner City residents generally mobilise at the building level, when they are directly threatened by eviction. ICRC is one of the few civil society organisations - together with PLANACT and Khanya College<sup>53</sup>- trying and giving these mobilisations more influence in reshaping inner city policies and practices.

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<sup>52</sup> Wilhelm-Solomon, M., (2010), Humanitarian Crisis close to Home, *Mail and Guardian*, 14.12.2010.

<sup>53</sup> PLANACT and Khanya College are two NGOs interested in supporting low income residents' mobilisation and involvement in shaping their environments. PLANACT played a significant role in shaping post apartheid city visions for a number of City leaders and officials (Hunter et al., 2009)

# Patience Xoliswa Nogcantsi

*Born in 1953, Eastern Cape*

*Family: one daughter*

*Residence: Greenstone, Johannesburg*

*Occupation: former nurse, now landlady (several buildings in Yeoville)*

*Activism: Building owner in Yeoville, ex-member of ACT-STOP, member of Yeoville Rate Payers Association.*

**Interviewers: Siphелеle Ngobese and Mikhaela Sack**

## Gaining Independence and Becoming Active

I was born in the Eastern Cape in a town called Ntabankulu on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1953. I schooled that side and came to Johannesburg when I was looking for a job and worked as a clerk, first at Hillbrow hospital. I decided to go into radiography at the main hospital and I trained for 4 years. Coming back I served at Hillbrow hospital and I trained to come and serve at the Hillbrow hospital because you didn't pay for the education then. The government actually paid for that, and you paid back by serving at the hospitals. After finishing that I went to work at Rand Mutual Hospital.

I was looking for a place to stay because I was tired of being in the hospitals - in a nurse's home you are not independent. Somebody is cleaning for you, somebody is cooking for you but I wanted to be independent and I got a room in one of the Hillbrow buildings called Trinity Mansions. It was not easy and as a result I asked one of the white doctors to sign for me. I used to give him the money to pay for my rent because we were not allowed to be in Hillbrow then, unless I'm working for that particular building, cleaning. To be honest, I was the first black woman to be in Hillbrow in the early eighties as a resident. I joined what we called ACT-STOP in the early eighties; that organisation was for tenants against landlords.



**Figure 6 - Patience Nogcantsi in her Greenstone home, © Sack 2013.**

## **ACT-STOP and its Influence**

I did not have any position in the organisation, I was just a member. Being a member there I learnt so many things because in the first place, if you were a black person staying in a building in Hillbrow then you would be expected to clean the building because as a black person you were assumed to know how to clean. Anyway we didn't mind doing that, but all we wanted was the safety in our buildings which was not there. It wasn't easy to mobilize people and tell them look... because some were scared. Like, "No... We can't do that, people will shoot us because of our signatures" and all that. But you've got to sit people down and tell the person. People are very scared of doing the right thing because they don't know that it's the right thing to do. But you've got to tell them that in doing this, you're helping yourself and helping the community. We can't sit with a problem on our hands not knowing what to do.

I have learnt a lot by being an ordinary member of ACT-STOP. Being the first black woman to be in Hillbrow, I had it tough. People that were dealing with prostitutes thought then that I was one of them, a registered prostitute! For instance, when I applied for the land line, I would be called at about 2am wondering why, and somebody would ask me, "Are you in business? When can I come?" Then I had to go to the post office and ask them to please remove my name. In fact don't list me, because I didn't know that when I applied for a land line I was opening for the business of prostitution. I was not for that.

So it was not easy for me to be the first black woman in Hillbrow. But I have gained lots of experience and I have opened gates for many people. I used to share that even in ACT-STOP meetings that this is what I am experiencing. At some stage we used to employ somebody to clean. She wouldn't get paid because the landlords would tell her, "No, tenants can clean for themselves." But what we did was we collected money; with the rental money we would pay Christine her salary, and we would get the receipt from Christine and she signs, and she continued cleaning the

building. We went somewhere in Yeoville where the offices of the landlord were, and he even called the Police on us. We went to confront him for not having a cleaner or firing her and he said no she's there and if we have got the money we have to pay. It wasn't easy to penetrate that but we did it. And she ended up accepting that.

At some stage, we opened an account with human rights lawyers and paid the rentals with them because we were demanding security gates, and that's what made us to join ACT-STOP. We were taught by ACT-STOP to do all those things. What I have noticed there and what I have learnt is to be responsible as a tenant. Because now what is happening is people will not pay their rent when they demand security and other things in the building. You've got to pay, and demand while you pay, because you cannot stay for nothing in the buildings. So we used to pay the human rights lawyers and open up an account and will demand that, or even buy what we need to buy like security gates and we kept the receipts and gave the landlords the surplus and the receipts to show that we are paying for 3 months or 4 months and that we didn't pay whatever because we are demanding security gates. I grew up very much in that way when it comes to this business.

We used to get advice from ACT-STOP on what to do. We even learnt that when some people are making noise, just go switch off the electricity from the box. To be a good tenant in the building I cannot make noise for the next person. If you are having a party, please not in the building because we're here. We're not interested in your party. We actually had a rule that up to 10 o'clock if you are having a party/ after 10 people want to sleep. People want to go for work the following day. Even if you are off and if you continued, we'd go and switch off the electricity there and the party would be finished within 2 minutes. We made a point to other people that we were teaching them the right thing.

## **Being a Landlord: Strategies and Responsibilities**

To become a landlady, I have been financed by a company called TUHF<sup>54</sup> in Braamfontein and I've even asked the CEO Paul Jackson if we could have some workshops where we could meet as landlords and teach one another responsibilities or if the Financing Company itself can get professionals to teach us the responsibilities. About 2 months back we had that from TUHF. So I'm happy that it's responding to that because TUHF is financing people and they are spending their monies to buy properties. And until you finish paying, it's still theirs' by the way...

When I started this business with TUHF, for instance, I knew exactly that the tenant has got rights as much as the landlord. We both have rights. Everyone must be responsible; tenants should pay. If you are a landlord, maintain the building. Make the place clean and presentable. If you want to stay in a place make the place clean; make it clean for the next person as well. When I was approached by TUHF asking if I would love to own a building I was happy to do so because I knew more or less what is needed as a tenant and that I would be a good landlord and I am.

Being in Hillbrow all those years and being a tenant helped me to be in this business without fear. Seeing what the landlord is supposed to be doing, putting gates in for people, cleaning the place, maintaining the building, paying the services, etc., I knew that those are the things I am going to do when I own my business. When gates were open for us to do that it was very easy for me. Now I am the landlord, but the teachings that I got from ACT-STOP that were implemented then are still helping me now and I am still helping other landlords. At the same time I am still getting lessons from tenants as well and knowing that you should treat a tenant as tenant. And the tenant has got rights as much as I have got

rights as an owner. We both have responsibilities to make the building be a building and a home.

I would say most women are still struggling, and some struggle because they feel they belong to the kitchen. If somebody could tell them: "Look, you have got to get out of the kitchen. You can do what men can do!". My partner has got nothing to do with the building for instance. He is a doctor, doing his job. I am doing this alone and some women are still scared in getting into this business because, "I am not married. I don't have somebody who can help me". That is not true. You can do it being a woman as long as you are doing the right thing. What I mean is I am not scared of tenants because I am a woman, but I found out that some women are scared.

I will tell you a short story about a friend in Hillbrow who has a building in Yeoville. When I called the other day, she told me: "I am in Durban. I am so scared of the tenants, I feel threatened at the end of the month". She cannot stand tenants at the end of the month when they are supposed to pay, she would rather go, and maybe kids or whoever, a cleaner will take her part of going and knock at somebody's unit, and say: "You didn't pay you rent". She told me: "I cannot stand this, cannot run this business, I am not fit to run this business". So I think there is still a lot of education that needs to be done by women.

Male landlords feel, "Who are you to tell me how to run my business?" As a result, I have used the strategy of cleaning my place. Maybe by seeing my place clean, they will copy that and do the right thing. It's not easy up to now for me to penetrate those men because most male landlords won't listen to me when I say something about maintaining the place to keep the area neat and to keep the value of the area. Sometimes to others I even propose to buy when I see that this place now doesn't have anyone to look after it. Some of the things that I hear do not make me sleep.

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<sup>54</sup> Trust for Urban Housing Finance, see above, p. 53.

At some stage we had a building in Cavendish Street, there was sewerage going through that street from that building. I went to an extent of getting the signatures from the people on the street to attend to this, because I'd call the owner of the building but he simply said to me, "If your building is ok why do you worry about my building?". That's what I'm hearing from landlords. It's about landlords more than the tenants, they are the ones who need education.

In my role, I am doing a lot, and I wish all the landlords would try to build and teach people the right things. Start by maintaining your building. Sell your buildings to people. When you charge them, they know exactly what they are paying for. And what follows is that are you going to teach your tenants. When the tenant comes, day one, tell the tenant, we have got house rules. For instance you give her or him some days to read and sign. If he is happy about those rules they must be maintained. It's a matter of taking it or leaving it. As long as you know you are doing the right thing as a landlord.

The responsibilities of the landlord are more than of a tenant, let us just be fair. One other thing is that for my places I am firm. I have got an ear to listen to you when you are telling me something, but again, business time is business time and pleasure time is pleasure time. You have got an ear to listen to your tenant but they must know their responsibilities and that's it.

After every three months, I have meeting with my tenants. I want to know how they want me to run the business and from there I will even throw the problem to them. Say, "Look you have got this problem here, people are stealing washing from the washing lines, what do you think we should do in this particular problem?" I have got every security but people are still stealing other people's washing on the lines. What must we do? And people do not have money to go to the laundry. You will be surprised that the solution will be from them, that no we must do 1...2...3. In most of my buildings, people do not mind to pay money and employ

the security to look after the washing. For every household it is R10 per month or R50 a month towards the security. In that way I feel I have done my job; if people do not close the gates and lock it, as a landlord what should we do now? I cannot do that; it is their responsibility. As a result they do not mind to spend money to employ somebody if they cannot close the gates with their hands. So you use techniques of teaching them the responsibility and I like it when I throw the problem in their hands, and they solve it for me.

## **An activist**

I am an activist, because in my business, taking care of buildings, people are learning. It may be harsh when they look at it, but it may be that at the end of the day, I'm building up a person, teaching them something that they didn't know. And most of them come and appreciate. I'm happy that I'm in this business, because I have taught a number of people many things that they didn't know, and I've actually learnt lot of things from them as well. It goes hand in hand in the sense that I've been active. You have the knowledge that you have to pass on to other people. What I've noticed is that, being an ACT-STOP member for all those years has helped me in this business. It helped me in the sense of knowing my right as a tenant, and now my right as a landlord; so it goes hand in hand. Things that you were lucky to know then are still working up to now.

People will respect you for being honest, and taking the blame when you're wrong. And that teaches them to take responsibility as well because you're never right all the time. Having tenants that moved from my area to other areas, hopefully they took that with them. For example, having those problems where they are, and say "By the way, when I was in Yeoville, we had a problem like this and this was how we solved it". And even if I haven't been there, at least one of my tenants or one of my people on that street who moved to those areas, will use the same strategy to deal with those problems.



I would also love to see one of my staff members own a building one day. Taking from me... I will be happy to see that. For instance if I employ somebody in most cases you find that it's young people. And the salary that I give those people, I always tell them, "I know this is not enough". You find that most people that you employ are people that do not go far in school. But I always advise them, "Get yourself a license. You'll be able to drive a truck and deliver cold drinks, deliver bread and flowers. Do something while you're here. If you're working in the day, go to night school. Further your education". I'm not prepared to keep a person coming with Grade 2 until he's old. He won't be able to run his business.

It's not an easy thing, like a drop in the ocean.



Figure 7 - Minida Mansions, one of Patience's properties in Yeoville, rehabilitated through TUHF, © Yeoville Studio 2011.

## Access to the City

It is important for these places to remain alive and kicking. Hillbrow is next to town. It has got a hospital, it has got clinics. You walk from Hillbrow to Berea; you walk from Berea to Yeoville. But if you are going to move from Hillbrow to Sunninghill and you work in Eloff Street in town, where you used to walk from Hillbrow to Eloff Street to your work place... what is going to happen to you? Now you have got to take your car and petrol is up every day. It is so difficult for us, for everyone. But because of the way the places are being demolished, you feel, "Gosh! Who am I to make this place work? I better move". One forgets that moving is going to drain you somehow, whether you are using public transport or your own transport.

And if we leave these places we leave them for whom to occupy? As South Africans if we keep on moving away from these places because the foreigners are in or even some of us are in and we doing all the wrong things. If we do not teach people and make things right, we going to move on until when? It is important for us to remain where we are. It is ok when you move because you can manage a certain area. But do not move because there is a kind of fault. I cannot afford to stay here anymore. I cannot bring a child up in an area like this. I have got to go but somehow you are going to suffer. You leave the schools, these places have got schools, they have got hospitals, they have got clinics. But now going to some other places you are only looking at the place that is better - at least it is not like Hillbrow - but I am short of a hospital, I am short of a clinic, I am short of a school, or the child, because maybe I will not afford the school there, will still go to Hillbrow and Berea for schooling. I am still going to pay for transport to go there.

There are no forces that are pushing people out of these places. The places now are open for everyone. It is not bad it is a matter of affording the place. For instance a room in Soweto you pay something like a R100. But a room in Yeoville you pay a R1000. It is about affordability... Before,

whether you managed to buy a house in Greenstone, you would not be able to buy because you are black. But now, if you can manage to buy a place in Sunninghill you are free to do so. So what is happening today and compared to the last years is just not the same.

## The City as a Melting Pot

Somehow you would think that other people from other countries came here to take our spaces and jobs and whatever; to be honest, yes and no. One other thing as South Africans we are lazy. We are very very lazy. Let us not run away from that. Maybe it is the upbringing, or the way we were brought up in the country that, go to school... If you don't go to school, you will stay at home and still have something to eat and a shelter over your head. One thing that I have noticed with people from other countries is that they are hard workers. They work very hard. There are people that really have got hidden agendas of getting things easier in the country, and looking at us now maybe they think they are cleverer than us maybe? Most of them are very much hard workers those people. You know you will find a South African standing on the corner – suggesting that there are no jobs. I noticed when I was in Yeoville for the years that I lived in there, if you go to a flea-market in Yeoville, you find that most people that are working are foreigners. And they are having stands as big as this table, selling whatever. Why is that when we have got so many people in the country, it is South Africans that are not working?

I was there when that market started. I was there when people were registering themselves and booking those stands. I would see foreigners booking for those stands and they are still working there. And you find our people are not employed. But they are not in those stands. There is a lot of tension in those areas because of the mixture of people that are from different countries. Some tensions are genuine, some are really not.

Because if I have got a *spaza*<sup>55</sup> here and somebody else has got a spaza here and I feel people that go there and buy they do not come to my spaza, meanwhile mine is empty and theirs is full of people: when they go there they get everything, and my spaza doesn't have what they need. I'm going to say, why are the people coming to your spaza? And the tension starts there. But again there is something behind the whole thing, in the way we think. I do not know how to put it, but what I have noticed in those areas - that is why I am saying yes and no - because you find out that some fights are genuine, some really are not fair.

But, I'll be honest with you, foreign nationals are not good tenants. There's not even one South African that never paid, that took me to police station or tribunal. Not even one South African. But when it comes to foreigners... -I can even mention the countries, but I don't want to do that. Those people they know the police station. They know there's a tribunal. I never even knew there's a tribunal as I'm sitting here. I understand it is at number 1066 Biccard Street, but I've never been there. That is for tenants and landlords. But our foreigners in this country, they'll take us to these places. As a result, I don't have foreigners in my buildings, period. One other thing that I have noticed: if you tell somebody to get out of your building because he has not paid, he will not even go to tribunal because he knows he is wrong. Look, you pay or you go. And that is exactly that is going to happen. I tell a man from Nigeria with big shoes, big hands that this is my building, you pay me or you go. He is not going to go.

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<sup>55</sup> Spaza Shop: an informal convenience shop in South Africa, usually run from home or in residential areas.

## Freedom, the Right to the City and Ownership as a Means of Independence

Freedom comes with responsibility. Maybe people don't understand the word freedom. That word freedom comes with a lot of responsibility. Not just that you're going to make a *zozo*<sup>56</sup> out here in the street. And say, "I'm free in my country, so I can build *iZozo* in the street". Freedom, as far as my experience is concerned, is that from Soweto where I used to live with my sister, I am free to go anywhere in Johannesburg. For me to be out of Soweto now... I used to go to police stations because of 10-1-A<sup>57</sup>, that's what they called it. Being somebody from the Eastern Cape, I was not allowed to come to Johannesburg. I did not have a permit to come then, so we used to have to go to the police station every day. You'd go to Hillbrow to buy rolls from the café, there'd be a big van going around, taking people if they didn't have ID. That's freedom to me; that I'm allowed to go anywhere and work. Before, I was not allowed to be in Johannesburg; I only belonged in Transkei.

So, when I voted for the first time, I was excited. I was! Because I wasn't free. Freedom allowed me to achieve because, being in my sister's place, or somewhere in Transkei, I was just in the hut there. And if I belonged in Flagstaff, I had to work there in Flagstaff. But coming to Joburg, where Gold is I was free to come here, and I was free to come out of Soweto, my sister's place and come to Hillbrow, from Hillbrow, Berea, from Berea to Yeoville, from Yeoville to Greenstone. That's freedom.

Freedom, I'm sure you must understand what freedom is. People are not going to get from Soweto to town and hijack places. Freedom, I said,

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<sup>56</sup> A shack.

<sup>57</sup> An influx control regulation) that disqualified black women from being in urban areas for longer than 72 hours, unless they were born there and/or lived there continuously

comes with responsibility. If you are allowed right now to buy a place in Hillbrow or Berea, you must know that I qualify in the bank to buy that place. I have a title deed. Not just go and stay there and say, "They've been enjoying this house, white people have been enjoying this house for the past 35 years, or 40, now it's my turn." That's not right. You're not going to get things for nothing because you're free to do so. No! Not at all! You must qualify to be where you are. Now you can buy your house anywhere. That's freedom. But another thing, there's business.

I mean, if you don't qualify to get a certain amount of money at the bank, they're not just going to give you the money. Let's just be honest and real. There's no way that I can get 3 millions from the bank when I'm earning R2000 for instance. I will go where I manage to buy. Where I'll be able to pay the bank back and pay the utilities. That is it. Being in Yeoville, you only have tenants that are able to pay R800 rent. That person can't go to a better area. Maybe it's because I was in Yeoville, a resident there, and seeing the buildings around me, I got the money from TUHF to buy those buildings. That's where I am. But I wouldn't mind going to upmarket areas and running the same business if I get an opportunity to do so.

## Corruption VS "Doing the Right Thing": The Occupation of Residential Space for Non-Residential Purposes

Landlords do not maintain their buildings. We report this to the City Council people and you see nothing happening. For example I reported the crèche across the road from Minida Mansions. Some inspectors came, they wanted the owner to build small toilets for the young kids in that crèche. They demanded that they open the balcony, so that in case there's a fire, the kids are able to go to the backyard. They never looked at the place itself, how a two-bedroom flat is able to have 40 kids, that these kids have nowhere to play. Kids come in the morning, with the

parents who are bringing them, and they only move out when the parent come later.

I even asked one of those health inspectors, "Would you bring your child here?" "No I can't". I asked him, "Why not? Why can't you bring your child from Lenasia here?" That was an Indian person that was from Lenasia, an Indian inspector. I don't allow this to happen. Not that I don't want the owner making money. I'm worried about the upbringing of the kids. The owner of the flat is just trying to make the money, that I'm getting R5000 a month. Inspectors just came to advise the owner of the crèche to build more toilets for the kids, and to have 1-2-3 like opening up the balcony. I saw the plumbers that were busy digging up for the pipes. That building had a plan. It's got a plan in the City council that is like that. Not being messed up. When I bought a flat there, I was told, "Look... Outside the building, you don't do anything, not allowed. Those are bylaws". But inside, I can close this, if I don't want the corridor. Put a door, or whatever. But never do anything outside the building. Hence now I'm asking, where those bylaws are now, when somebody can just open up a crèche, and do whatever...

There's a lot of corruption in this country. At some stage, I called the police station when I saw there was a hijacked building opposite my building. And when I was standing there one morning, I saw two guys holding up things covered. You could see that this was a record player; a DVD, and you could see that this was a hijacked house. And immediately, I called the police and said, come here and see what is happening. People are running there with things hidden, and those are stolen goods. Believe me, they came immediately. But they came out holding hands and shaking hands with the people that went in. I was sure that the things they went in with were stolen goods. And you think what happened? They just gave them the money and they forgot about it. They never phoned me back. They wanted my number and my name. I thought they were going to tell me, okay, there's blah blah blah. At the same time I didn't want to be exposed but they never did anything.

One of my buildings was hijacked. I bought the building, found it just next door where I was living. When I actually sent one of my cleaning guys to go and clean there, they found out that there are people staying there. I didn't know that there were people living there! And where it's funny now, with the law in this country, if you tell the hijackers to move out of your building, you must put them somewhere else. Who are these people? How do I place them somewhere? Where, when they come and stay in my place illegally? That's what's happening lawfully today. If you go to court, you just can't evict these people.

But let me tell you something... I actually did it my own way. I got the private security coming with the guns to take them out of my building. I had no other way of doing it except that. I paid about R55 000 for two securities in the day, two securities at night. They wouldn't allow me to go in, and it was not safe for me to go near my building. But I had to pay the bond, because I took the money from TUHF, and they expected their money to be paid. I paid, but the hijackers were there for the whole year. I tried the right way of going to the lawyers. The lawyer is sending letters to the hijackers, that our client Patience came to us blah blah blah... They don't even know what is written there, they put it under the carpet and they continue staying. It was too much.

Then I thought of the court, but I felt that this one was going to take 5 years. I felt this was not on. I had to get another plan. Plan B was to get private security to come and chuck them out and that is exactly what I did. And I wanted to go to court. I went to the City Council; I went there for seven months, just to ask them to cut the services because I knew, they're using water, and it is in my name, and I'm going to pay. But I counted the months. I went to the City Council and said, "Please this building is being hijacked, and it's in my name, cut the water". When the water wasn't there, for 7 months, they went to a Flea market to get water with buckets. And believe me, they used the yard as a toilet, I had a lot of manure in the yard there. Now I have people that are staying there that are looking after the place. I've got securities, I've got cleaners. They'd do

exactly what I'd do if I was there. I go there three times a week and I find that things are up to date.

## Cleanliness and Sanitation as *Loci* of Local Activism

The role of the landlord in Yeoville or anywhere in Johannesburg is to maintain the place. If you sweep the street and clean here the very next door person will see that his or her part is dirty and will also sweep. It sounds like a stone in the ocean but it is going to work at the end of the day because the opposite person seeing this place is so clean, will feel... maybe I should use the word jealousy: "if she can do that I can also do it". And that is how we are going to clean Johannesburg. For instance in Dunbar Street in Yeoville, there is a cleaning up campaign; every Saturday morning they wake up as owners and clean. They have 1 or 2 hours to clean their street. Obviously if you do that in the street the next street will do the same. Everybody likes something nice and a clean place and a clean environment. If, as landlords, you can work hard, not always point fingers to the Government, do things ourselves, it will work. Members of Parliament won't come into our streets. We must do it ourselves.

If I had money, if I had a way of buying more buildings, I'd be having one building in every street, keeping that building safe, clean and whatever. Then other buildings would copy from that. Just a pity. I can't be in every street in Hillbrow, Yeoville and Berea. You wish you'd be in every street. It's not just about money. Yes it's about money at the end of the day...but there's more. To teach the people this is the way of living, we need a neat place, a healthy place. That's what we need as community, really.

I feel the landlords have got to change. For now, as long as they get money from the tenants they don't maintain their buildings, also because they are living somewhere in the suburbs. I'm throwing this back to the landlords, that if the landlord is disciplined and knows his rights... I lived in Hillbrow for 18 years. And I moved in 1993 from Hillbrow to Yeoville. It

makes my heart sad when you see Hillbrow going down, but now it seems it is picking up a bit. Back then, in Hillbrow you could walk in the evening and do window shopping. I used to show people the blouses and smart jerseys that I used to buy in shops in Hillbrow when it was *the* suburb. When I saw it going down I wasn't happy. I actually left Hillbrow because it was on the ground already. I could see I cannot bring up a child in an area like this and I moved to Yeoville. And in 5 years, Yeoville went down as well and my baby just actually started primary school. I was worried because the money that I had I bought a flat. I did not have money to go to a suburb. I moved after 18 years; came to Greenstone but I am not selling any of my buildings. I want Yeoville to be a place of South Africans; a good place. It is not easy but if we do it together with other people we can make it.

## Loss of control and the impossibility of being a law-abiding citizen

The challenges that one has got, for instance, is that when you have a problem with a tenant, and you switch off the services, they go to the police station and report that. The police will come to you, and tell you that those are the basics that the tenants should have. But if I don't pay the basics of the building to the City Council, they will come and there's a big button in the garage, and boom the electricity will be off for everyone in the building. Now, I fail to understand... If I switch off your electricity in your unit, and you go to police, and the police station will come and say, 'We are going come and open a case for you'. They'll open it now, and not later. Where will I get money to pay the Council for the building if the individuals do not pay? But I'll go to court. They'll open a case for me if I don't put on the electricity of that particular tenant that did not pay. I've got a problem when it comes to that. I really do. And again, with the City Council of Johannesburg it's a problem to every landlord in Johannesburg or an owner of a house. You go there with a query, and they will punch something and say, "Mummy this is what it is. There's nothing I can do.

Next!” The problem is not solved. The challenges are broad in the business. Sometimes you feel like selling your buildings, all of them. But then again you ask yourself, what am I going to do after selling them? So, those are the challenges that we are having in the business. A building has got one account number. The body cooperative trustees must see to it that individuals are paying. But if you’re not paying and it comes from four or five tenants, how do I pay? If the tenants are not paying, there must be a law that forces the tenants to pay. It’s a problem. How do I give somebody services that they’re not willing to pay for? You lose hope in the authorities.

I lost hope when my building was hijacked, and I went to a lawyer to do something for me. I’ve actually found myself at the end of the day paying that lawyer for the letters that he wrote that didn’t help me. I paid for private security – the person that took those people out, forcefully. I had no choice. We don’t have trust in our authorities anymore. You find somebody stealing in your building. You feel that you better hit this person and call all tenants to hit this person together. That’s not right. But you call the police and do the right thing, and the next two hours you see the person passing again. Things are bad. People take the law into their own hands because of the hope that is lost in the authorities of the country. You do the right thing first day; you feel the second time there’s no use for me going there. Let me do things my way. We are lost and we are still going to lose a lot of good people in the country. Hence I say losing hope is not going to take us anywhere. That’s why we’ve started the Yeoville Ratepayers Association. We hope and pray that things will change. It’s difficult. It’s not easy.

I was hijacked one time when I was trying to buy a house in Yeoville. The car was recovered after two hours. Up to now I don’t even have a case number of what happened. That’s how bad it is in this country. Nothing was done. That happened in 2011. It’s now 2013. I was told that I could collect the car because it was found. When my child was going to East gate one day, she was followed by some guys in a car wearing caps and

whatever. She was so scared; she thought, “My God, they’re coming again”. And you know what? They were the police. The car was never removed from that list, it was still wanted by the police. There was nothing in their system that said, the car was found. And you know, they were saying, “if our girl was a boy, we would have shot him because we’d have thought that there’s the car, they’re running away”. And this was my daughter. When I went there making a noise, one of them said, “You know, it’s difficult these days, if somebody doesn’t pay something, anything, nothing happens”. So I was supposed to bribe somebody, for them to do their job. I pay tax in this country, so they get their salaries. But I must pay more money for one to do his duties. I would have lost my child. If things were my way, I would have gone to another country... I don’t have energy anymore.

## Yeoville Rate Payers Association

But, losing hope is not going to take us anywhere. This is why we’ve started a Rate Payers Association, which is still a very young organisation. Hopefully it is going to do something and have a voice that the government and City Council are going to listen to and do something about. What we are asking the City Council to do is to intervene when it comes to people who are opening *spazas* in houses and buildings. Now, we don’t understand, we don’t even know which is residential, which one is business. I’m not a town planner, and I’m not a builder, but you just see a place where people are building without plans. You pass a place and you see bricks and you see that people here are going to build a double storey on top of this house. You can see something that’s illegal.

For instance, in my building I have got people who want to open up crèches. Crèches is a good thing because you bring young kids and developing them, but there is a place that is for business and a place that is for residents. I cannot open up a shop or a *spaza* shop here. This is for residents. If I want to open up a shop I must go to Greenstone Mall. That

is important. You cannot mix the two. So we are fighting things like that as this new organization we just started.

And to be honest most of the times it is foreigners that are doing that. South Africans, some of them they do it, but they copy it from the foreigners: "If these people from Congo from Nigeria can do it, why can we not do it? We are also not working". And now he is going to open up a salon in a flat, and open up a church in a flat, and open up a crèche in a church which is wrong. Reporting this one by one never worked. I've tried it. Hence we decided to build an organisation that will have one voice to the City Council, because we want that change. It is not going to help us to leave these areas because there are people who have taken over like hijackers and people that are building without plans. It seems now there are no bylaws anymore that used to protect the area.

We need to teach people that this is the way of living. That's what we need as communities. You pass in one street and you see from corner to corner, that, "My God, not even one building is appetizing here". Unfortunately you can't own Johannesburg and make it clean and healthy. You just wish that you can come together as landlords or as owners of the properties and have one world.

I would do a lot of things differently if I could. The City Council would take responsibility of the houses and the buildings that are finished in Yeoville where people decided to take occupation illegally. The City Council needs to take these buildings and do something about them. The City Council has got to know every member of the community; that Xoliswa has got a building, where's Xoliswa? What's happened to Xoliswa? They've got a right to make sure that if Xoliswa is not available; they do something about those buildings.





# Shereza Sibanda

*Born: 1959 in Tshiawelo, Soweto*

*Current residence: Johannesburg inner city*

*Current occupation / activism: Director of the Inner City Resource Center (ICRC); paralegal and inner-city housing rights activist*

**Interviewers: Mikhaela Sack and Lesego Tshuwa**

## An activist from school

I come from a way of throwing stones in 1976. I am a comrade of Soweto. I was very much involved in the Soweto Youth Congress during the uprisings of 1976, and when the June 1976 uprisings<sup>58</sup> started I was schooling at Meadowlands High School, and that's where it all started. We started fighting, having meeting after meeting, harassed by the police at night and beaten up, people were killed, going to funerals, going as far as Zwidie. And then there was UDF<sup>59</sup>, which was there and which was involved, ANC Youth League. And you know lots of children in 1976 dropped out of schools, they couldn't go back to schools, so after that it was hell because we were breaking everything that came our way which belonged to the government. My family was not well to do, but I was taken to boarding school, in Limpopo where I schooled in Venda.

<sup>58</sup> Uprising of the youth in Soweto against the apartheid system, that crystallised around resistance against the compulsory teaching of Afrikaans in schools.

<sup>59</sup> United Democratic Front, national federation of civil society movements of resistance to apartheid. It emerged in the 1980s while the ANC was still banned.



**Figure 8 - Shereza Sibanda in her ICRC office, © Sack 2013.**

I was not even actually, Venda but my father was taking me away from this, because I was too much involved in the struggle. And so I went to Venda boarding school and there also I was involved in the Student Representative Council. There was a lot of discrimination there too because I was doing Xitsonga and there was no teacher for Tsonga, that was a Venda school. And I was looked at like, “What is she looking for here?” And so I had to learn Venda. What I did too was that I had to teach myself Tsonga. When it was vernacular time we had to go to the library and teach ourselves all this, but the librarian, she was a Sotho lady from Pretoria, she told me “This is hell, we need to do something you know”, and the whole spirit of June 16 started again. We went one day to the principal, we said we were tired and we wanted to be in the classroom as well. We told him we could understand Venda so why should we be sitting there isolated when our parents were paying. And the other student representatives joined us and supported us, so we were eventually in class. We were called the troublesome people, you know.

I passed well and so I was supposed to get a bursary in Venda, but because I was not Venda so I couldn't get to Venda University, I was denied a bursary because of that. So I went somewhere else, but because I was in the Student Representative Council also, I was chased out. My father got tired; he said “You see? What can I do? I cannot keep on paying for this”. Then I continued with the struggle. When I left University I went to Shoprite to look for work. I worked at Germiston I remember, at Shoprite Germiston, and there as well I was a trouble maker to the management. I remember I was once arrested, locked up in a cell somewhere in Benoni. So it went on and on, I didn't leave the struggle.

## **The ACT-STOP years**

In 1995 I moved to the inner city of Johannesburg. I stayed in Hillbrow in a flat, and it happened that I didn't pay rent one day and I was locked out.

And so I went to get the locksmith; I opened the door, got in and said, “You can't lock!” You know if you are an activist you keep on reading, especially when you really went to school, whatever you grab you will read. There was the civic organisation, ACT-STOP, which was there whereby we used to read these books about tenants' rights, so I knew that you can't lock my door without an order from the court. So I opened the door and that person who had locked me out called the Hillbrow Police, they were there thinking that I had broken the door, and I said, “No, I have opened the door; if you get in here these are all my goods so how can you say I have broken in, because what is inside there is mine”. And the police just left and I stayed there. So we went on, and I was doing some piece work, investigative work maybe with *Carte Blanche*<sup>60</sup> sometimes.

## **Forming the ICRC**

One day, it was in 2000, we woke up; there was an eviction in the City of Joburg. We went there to find out exactly what it was, because in our minds we thought those people were evicted because they were not paying rentals. And it continued, in a week you would find 3/4 evictions happening in the inner city and we thought, “No, we need to do something about this”. The site of evictions was terrible: kids were there, women and all these people crying, people losing their goods. We said, “Let's form an Inner City Forum now we are going to fight these evictions”. That's when we started fighting the evictions and that spirit of 1976 came out now and we said, “But what did we vote for?” Some of our brothers and sisters were killed and some were dropped out from schools because of this, and we said we were fighting for a better life for all. And the Constitution and our Freedom Charter is saying that there shall be housing for everyone, but there we were being thrown to the

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<sup>60</sup> A popular TV show on current affairs.

streets. So it has gone back to the apartheid era where people were evicted, forced removals. So that's where we started.

In 2000 the City came out with the Inner City Regeneration Programme, which was like to get rid of "bad buildings"<sup>61</sup> in the inner city of Johannesburg. People were evicted from the properties and so we got together as activists and we had what we called the Inner City Forum. The Inner City Forum was basically challenging the evictions in the inner city, but not in the legal manner because we were still not aware of why people were evicted. We were a forum fighting without direction, just going there when there were evictions and then fighting with the Red Ants<sup>62</sup>. But we couldn't even succeed to put people back into the properties because there was a legal document, which somebody was holding, to say people must move out. As times went on we realised that we needed to get litigation.

Because we were working in the streets, we didn't have an office as an Inner City Forum; we were working out on the streets, going out into the building, mobilising people, having meetings in the buildings, new start, trying to mobilize and inform people about their rights to housing and so forth. But in 2005 we realised that we needed to have something that could generate funds, because while we were doing that we realised that there was more human rights violation in the inner city. The minute we started engaging with the tenants in the buildings, we realised that it was not just evictions and access to basic services issues. There were lockouts by landlords who locked tenants out just because there would be

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<sup>61</sup> "Bad buildings" as defined by the municipality are buildings that are in major arrears (rates and taxes owed to the city), as the result of a multiplicity of possible factors (absentee landlord, hijacked building, slumlord, collapse of body corporate, etc.).

<sup>62</sup> Private security company often used by the state to carry out evictions. They are called the Red Ants because of their red overall uniforms.

somebody who owes R50, and they would disconnect that person's electricity. There were also children who could not have access to schools; there were immigrants who could not have access to hospitals because they didn't have money. There was also child abuse involved; domestic violence; there was a range of things. So we said, "OK fine, this we cannot do in the streets, let's come up with something that can generate an income where we can get funding so that we can do a lot of work from there". So we eventually came up with the Inner City Resource Centre.

I had Masala Kwinda, Jeff Gadebe (the both passed away since), I had Benny Ltsolo, Beatrice Kalimash and I had Mr Solomon Zwane. We met during the wake of iGoli 2000<sup>63</sup> and we joined the Inner City Forum which was formed by Claire Ceruti, Lebo Matete, Molefe and others, and we worked as Inner City Forum until we decided to come up with Inner City Resource Centre in 2005. This was formed by all the former founders except for Lebo Matete. We registered as an NGO so that it can also be an advice centre especially on the issues of domestic violence.

During that period still we didn't have funds, but that didn't make us not to continue with our work. We got a small office at Biccard Street, here in Braamfontein. The owner was so helpful because he said we could pay R350 per month for rent. So we got a small computer and a prepaid telephone. It was just a small office where we operated, this was a lot of work to do because people were coming there and people had to wait outside while we assisted others, and we had a problem with that. We

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<sup>63</sup> Igoli 2002 was a plan to restructure the City of Johannesburg according to new public management and neoliberal principles, to respond to the fiscal crisis that bankrupted the municipality at the end of the 1990s. The Anti Privatisation Forum started in response to this plan, which was launched in 2000.

had Khanya College<sup>64</sup> and APF<sup>65</sup> doing photo copies for us, we had pamphlets that we drafted with whatever work that we were doing, and we started distributing them in the buildings. Our advocacy work was good, we used to have marches and all that people could see that in the papers, so that's how we grew.

## **Working from and with CALS at Wits University**

While we were there, CALS saw our work and took us in. They gave us two offices at the CALS at Wits because they were now doing more of our work and so it was easier for us to now communicate, rather than always walking from Biccard Street to Wits. They gave us access to the internet and the telephone; it was good and so we started working. When some of the people that were funding CALS came to visit CALS – like the Centre for Housing Human Rights in Geneva - they were interested to our work. At the time we had that old computer there, and they were like, “Guys, lets partner; we can like give you R40000 to buy office equipment”. And then we bought this computer, we bought the printer and we made some T-Shirts because at least we had money now. We had a stipend for travelling, which was good, and we were not paying for offices because CALS was there for us, and so we worked and we grew; that's how we grew.

But it was difficult I don't want to lie, it was difficult to such an extent that everyone that I had started with from the Inner City Forum, and then started the Inner City Resource Centre with, left and I was left alone. In 2007 I did the work alone. Because there was no money, there were no funds, people were not getting paid, and you need to understand people had families. CALS sometimes would ask me to do some work, I would

invoice and then I would get something from that, but no one wanted to stay so they all left the organisation. It meant I would be running around the streets assisting CALS, getting socio-economic status of the people. While I was in the street the office was closed, I could not assist people. But I said to myself that one day things would be alright, this is what I have chosen, this is what is in me, we started this and it's not going to go out just like that.

Then everyone, even the City, started realising that, “This is Inner City Resource Centre that's doing this”, and even managing agency, landlords became aware that people were starting to know their rights and were being empowered. We realised that if we are going to let go people are going to be exploited because we were the ones that were like putting pressure on the City. So I continued with it, and in 2009 CALS took us over for 3 years because they wanted to build us, and we tried. We tried to get funding but it was difficult, eventually, with CALS' assistance, we got funding from the Centre for Human Rights, which was not much but at least somebody could get a stipend at the end of the month, somebody could get transport money, you know? The Centre for Human Rights were funding us for 2 years, and after 2 years the funds dried up because they said South Africa is now no longer their priority. So we moved into this office in 2010, and we have continued working until today.

In 2010 we found some funding from a German organisation. This is also when Philemon Makweng came on board as a volunteer, because I was assisting in their building and so he volunteered. Every time we had meetings I used to ask, “Who want to come and volunteer at the office? There are no funds”. Some of the comrades, some of the tenants, some of our members were generous; we would collect R30 each in the building just to assist the office with paying the telephone, which was great because they could see the work we were doing for them. So Philemon came in and it was fun and we worked together. We got someone else coming to volunteer: Mujinga Yabadi, a lady from Congo.

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<sup>64</sup> An NGO established in 1986 in Johannesburg to educate and train low income communities to mobilise and fight for their right.

<sup>65</sup> Anti Privatisation Forum. See note 57.

She speaks French, Swahili, Lingala (even though now I speak a little bit of Lingala), and as we get different kinds of people coming, it helps a lot.

## **Mentorship and Influences**

When I started I said when we were working we were just in the streets until the CALS came in, but we had people that had influence on us and one person that I can say was an influence was the person who started by giving us an office. It was Cathi Albertyn, the Director for CALS at Wits: she played a crucial role, by giving us offices to share at the Centre as well by assisting in getting funding. And then there were people like Stuart Wilson<sup>66</sup>; I worked closely with him. Wherever he was, I was with him, working with him, and I was like, “Wow this is the man that I need to be close to” because he gave me whatever information I needed, wherever I was. I would call him and say, “I need a legal opinion”, and he would tell me what to do. Even at night Steward would wake up, would be there in the night, and then we would be running around fighting for the people. So he was really very influential. And I would also call Jackie Dugard<sup>67</sup> and say, “Jackie, they have disconnected water here and what should I do?” She was also more influential in my life to such an extent that when I started with this work.

I was not a paralegal but because I also wanted to be like them, I said because I don’t have money to maybe do a degree, to be an attorney, I

have to do paralegal. And I enrolled with UNISA<sup>68</sup>, because I just wanted to reach their standard and understand more of these Acts.

They were influential, to be honest. Jackie Dugard, I won’t forget her, Stuart Wilson, Cathi Albertyn, those are the people that I really value. And then I had Moray Hathorn<sup>69</sup> from Webber Wentzel; he was also influential because they were like, “Don’t let go”, and I stood tall and proud to say I have got people backing me, who got litigation around me, whatever I am doing I know they are there, and they are going to assist the people in the inner city.

And then there was Kate Tissington<sup>70</sup>. She was also very good, assisting us a lot and we had Simon Delaney<sup>71</sup> was also there even today, he is no longer on the pro bono work, but his got his own litigation firm; but when you call him he will give you advice, he will do whatever you want. Those are the people that were more influential and those who said, “Yes, human rights shouldn’t be violated and we should be there” because they stand for that. You know when you meet people who are dedicated you also become dedicated and you want to be more dedicated than them, which is great, and really influential.

## **“Partial Achievements”**

In terms of achievements, I would say yes we have achieved but to me it’s partial achievements, not totally achieved.

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<sup>66</sup> Stuart Wilson was heading the litigation unit in the Center for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), before co-founding in 2010 (with Jackie Dugard) the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI), of which he is currently the director.

<sup>67</sup> See previous note. Jackie Dugard was a researcher in CALS, co-founded SERI where she is currently a senior researcher.

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<sup>68</sup> UNISA is a South African University based in Pretoria that specialises in adult training and education, for instance through providing distance and online education.

<sup>69</sup> Head of the Pro Bono unit of Webber Wentzel, a major South African law firm.

<sup>70</sup> Senior researcher and advocacy officer at SERI.

<sup>71</sup> See note 11 above.

The first thing I will start with is the housing issue and is around evictions, in the inner city. Tenants were basically evicted under section 12 of the Standard Buildings Act, of which no one was even aware of the fact that that Act was no longer working. It was an Act of 1977, and it was being utilised by the City of Johannesburg to evict people in the inner city. We involved the Center for Applied Legal Studies, CALS in a matter of the CoJ versus the San Jose tenants, the tenants of Joel Road, as well as the tenants of Main Street. The City was using that Act to evict the tenants, and CALS took over the matter on our behalf because those were our members, and CALS challenged the matter in court. So CALS and some of the organisations that joined the case - COHRE [Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions] from Geneva, Moray Hathorn from Webber Wentzel (because Moray Hathorn was dealing with the Main Street case) - so they joined those three cases together and they worked on them. We have a victory at the High Court and that was in 2006/7 where it was declared that the City cannot evict the tenants from those buildings under that Act on section 12. But the City turned around and took the matter to Bloemfontein<sup>72</sup> for appeal to say yes people need to be evicted from those properties, and the matter set down in Bloemfontein. But the judgement in Bloemfontein was a bit shaky for us because it was saying that the City is not obliged to give people alternative accommodation but they need to go and look at their housing policy, how it stands and how they are going to assist the people. We felt that there was no justice at all there. The matter was then taken to the Constitutional Court, where we then got a victory, because at the Constitutional Court it was ruled that the City has an obligation to give people alternative accommodation.

The judgement was read by Judge Jacob, and he said, “You cannot just evict, you need to give people alternative accommodation, and the City and the attorneys of the tenants should go and sit down and start

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<sup>72</sup> Supreme Court of Appeal.

engaging in the process of getting alternative accommodation for the people”. It was a long journey but there was victory, because people were moved to two buildings which were earmarked for them - BG Alexander in Joubert Park and PAM building in Hillbrow. That’s where people are living now with minimal rental. Yes of course, it’s not cosy.



**Figure 9 – San Jose Building, Berea, © Sack 2013.**

This is what I want to say: there are victories that you win but you feel it’s partial. Because what happened was that they had to be moved to where they are using communal kitchens, communal toilet facilities, as well as sharing the rooms they are staying in. There is still no privacy, but at least they are living in places with water, electricity, security. So that’s why I said it’s partial because in other rooms you find 4 people sharing the

room, and people couldn't take in their furniture into the buildings. They were given beds by the City; they were given lockers, and their clothes and all their belongings were locked down in the storerooms, and they are still there. So you can't say that it's a full victory; it's victory legally, its victory to the nation that the Constitution has played its role. But coming to the living conditions, I don't feel that there really is justice that was done. I am not against communal toilets and communal kitchens, but for 4 or 5 or 6 people to be sharing one room is not good. Someone can simply say, "But where I was staying in San Jose, even though there was no water, there was no electricity, I still had my own flat, where I was having privacy with my family".

Another victory that we had was the water issue. We had buildings that didn't have water, water was disconnected from these buildings. We engaged with the City as well as with Joburg Water: "But these people who are living there are unemployed, and you can't let people live without water because the Constitution says everyone has the right to basic services, so why disconnect water?" And our engagement was fruitful because we had quite a number of buildings where water was reconnected and people have water. Two third of the buildings had rusted pipes and couldn't be reconnect; in some of them they could put standpipes from outside. It was easier for the tenants to get water from the standpipes because it was in front of the building. And the tenants got somebody to put the water inside the building because people were stealing the standpipes. In other buildings water was reconnected, and even today there is still water, which was great for us.

The third partial achievement is education of immigrants' children. The children were denied access to schools due to documentation or they were waiting for their parents to have documentation before they could have access to schools. And we also get more involved in that because children have to have access to school. Again, we were assisted by CALS; they did more of the litigation. In the water issue they were also involved in negotiating for that water.

I can say the communities are well informed. You know I will say the workshops that we are running are very educative. People know their rights; they can even go to the Gauteng Housing Tribunal and lodge a case against the landlord; they can go to the Equality Court and lodge a case. Some -I won't say all - some of the immigrants can go to Court and report domestic violence, they are not as scared as before. And some can now go to schools for their children to get access to schools because we have educated them, and because when we do it, we do it with them practically: they see how we do it. So they can go there, some can have access to the hospitals now because they know they have a right to go there without having to pay for anything. There have been rape cases in the inner city that people - especially immigrants - couldn't report, but right now they can do that, and they know if somebody is exploiting them; labour issues they know how to do it. So people are well informed.

And what I am very glad about is that the Rental Housing Tribunal is aware of us because the Rental Housing Tribunal only deals with rental issues. But when people have conflicts in sectional titles, they will call us and say, "We are referring people there, please assist", which shows that there is a working relationship. The police, when people go report that they have been locked out, they refer them here. If you go to SERI and say you have a dispute with the Rental Tribunal they will tell you that, "The people who are dealing with those matters are the Inner City Resource Centre". And if you go to immigrants' organisations - because there are immigrants organisations that are running in the inner city - when there are problems, they will write a referral letter and refer people to us to say we must assist, and we assist them. Some of the landlords as well; when they have disputes with their tenants, they come here and say, "Please can you assist? This is the matter" and we do assist in creating understanding between the landlords and the tenants. At the City, people working with accounts would call us also and say, "We have a tenant here; she wants to open an account but she doesn't know who the owner is, please assist". And those people come here and we then trace the

owner, write a letter to the owner and say, “Come let’s sit ... You are not in the property, the tenant wants to pay for the services, what do you do? Can you go and sign with the tenant that you are handing over the account?” Then they do that.

So it’s great that we are known, and it’s great that we are having a good working relationship.

### **Lack of unity amongst tenants, a challenge for organisation**

You know we have had a lot of challenges and we are still having challenges. You know when tenants have a problem, and they unite, they will listen to you, they take instructions and so forth but when the problem is solved, they start getting divided amongst themselves and not listening and they will not be doing the right, the proper thing. And the problem is that they forget, they think that when the problem relaxes it’s solved. And when it starts again they will come back and say, “You need to do this; this is a problem it’s starting again”. So those are the challenges, lack of understanding and lack of respect amongst themselves as tenants. Because what we do when we start working in a building is we say we can’t meet with everybody. We can have general meetings in the building, but normally we suggest that they have a committee that they elect. So those committee members become their representatives in whatever we are doing, so that we don’t have to deal with individual people.

But they tend to disrespect the committees, they tend to not respect us, and they tend to disrespect each other. The minute they are living there in the property where they see that there is no owner in the property, the owner has left the building, and they tend to relax and have attitude, and then they say things like, “There is no owner here so what are you going to tell me?” And if you say to them you need to keep the building clean, you know some of them don’t want. Then everything goes bizarre. But we

try to bring them together and explain to them the consequences of not understanding. Even the organisations doing litigation get tired, because the tenants sometimes don’t even listen to the litigation unit, the very same people who are saying, “We are fighting for you, and we are going to court on your behalf because of this case for you to not be evicted”. So even the litigation, even SERI, even CALS, they also get the same problem of tenants who don’t want to listen; some tenants want it their own way, you know?

### **Discontinuities in the Public Service – The failed inner city charter process**

Dealing with other stakeholders like the City is challenging. People who are working at the City don’t know what is happening. It becomes challenging when you go into the City offices and say, “I have got this problem, how can we resolve this?” and then they say to you, “You have to go speak to Lesego”; you go to Lesego and Lesego says, “I don’t know about it, go speak to Philemon”. It becomes challenging at the end of the day when some even end up giving you telephone numbers that don’t work; you become frustrated. Tenants are looking upon you to be assisting them and when you get to the City officials can’t engage with you. Some go as far as asking you, “Who are you working with? Are you working with SERI, are you working with CALS?” The moment you say, “Yes those are our partners”, they will say, “Fine, we will arrange other meetings, call us on this number”. They will never come back to you.

There is a problem when you have a department where people work for 6 months, after which the person will resign without handing over to someone else before leaving office. The new person won’t be aware of what has been happening previously. Yoh! The City is changing employees every day. The crew that we started working with, under the Mayor Amos



Masondo, was Graeme Goetz<sup>73</sup>. He facilitated workshops on housing issues especially on sectional title, but he left before we could even finalize the project. And then we had a new crew coming in and we worked with those people, we had meetings. Officials themselves also complain, "But how do we do this?" Because they do realise that the change of staff in the City causes problems.

The policy is there, it's beautiful, but... Once I was interviewed by the *Mail and Guardian*<sup>74</sup> after they had interviewed Mayor Masondo, and I said, "Yes, the Inner City Charter is well drafted, it's beautiful, black and white on the paper, but are they going to implement what is there?" And really it didn't work. Nothing was implemented, even the Mayor said it would work. What is happening now with this new charter that they are doing, there is nothing new. Yes they have done something on the roads - I can see the streets look beautiful - but on the housing sector where there is a policy on housing, nothing has changed. What has changed in the housing sector is that the investors are making more money at the expense of the poor people. As I said to you that the staff which was dealing with the inner city charter in 2007 is no longer in office, and the new staff doesn't know what the old staff did. Kate Tissington, in CALS, had done a lot of research; her work was compiled and given to Graeme Gotz and Santhurie Naidoo, from the Housing Department. But when we started having a meeting with the new crew, they all knew nothing, they were like, "What are you talking about?" Because we said we were engaging with sectional title issues, for instance. I kept quiet, but lastly I said, "Let me tell you something. I have worked with Graeme, I have had meetings that were minuted, the Mayor himself on the mayoral meeting told me to work with Graeme on the sectional title buildings and we had to have 10

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<sup>73</sup> City official working in the Central Strategic Unit, and driving the Inner City Charter process.

<sup>74</sup> Weekly newspaper.

pilot buildings which we did, and we selected the 10 pilot projects but nothing happened". Then they were like, "We don't know about that".

When somebody goes he takes everything, every file, and officials will have to start afresh, so how are we going to achieve what we want? How are they going to implement? And it's not us even some of their staff gets frustrated, because they even tell you that, "Listen, there is no handover, we don't care, we are here to make pensions for our children so why should we care?". It becomes much difficult and frustrating.

Look at Sizanani<sup>75</sup> - it is a project that was launched by Amos Masondo, whereby people earning less than R3500 should come register as indigents for basic services. It's not working; you go there and speak to somebody working in the City about Sizanani, they don't know what you are talking about, to them you are talking about a monster but they are working there at the City and that project is in fact there.

Guys we need to do something; I think maybe we need to take over. We can take over as CBOs, have litigation, and maybe start our own government on housing. Because it's people like us the CBOs and whomever like too share, and sit down and share - they do not want to share. They are taking inexperienced people and putting them there to go and work there.

## Focusing on women and health issues

On Monday at 10 o'clock I am going to be having a meeting with the Department of Health. I have been trying to get this meeting for the past 6 months, and yesterday I got a call that we can do it 10 o'clock on Monday. We have realised that there are so many people who are living with HIV, especially in those buildings in the inner city. Some have got TB

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<sup>75</sup> 'Help one another' in isiZulu.

due to using paraffin in those buildings, because they do not have electricity - and some of them don't even have access to ARVs. We are fighting this issue as well and we trying to say to the Department: "can't SASSA<sup>76</sup> assist them with grants?". SASSA give them food parcels, but because there is no water, they can't do anything. My argument really with Joburg Water and the Department of Health is that, "Why give someone an ARV in a building which doesn't have water and no proper facilities where people can relieve themselves? Aren't you aware of the fact that you are killing that person? Aren't you aware that the sicknesses are increasing at the end of the day?" And we have had a lot of deaths in those inner city buildings I assure you, because some have lost hope, especially immigrants. Because they can't access their ARVs, immigrants are afraid to go the clinics because of stigma, and because of the language barrier, and because when they go there they are told that they are the ones bringing diseases. Some even give birth at home in those flats, they don't want to go to the hospital because they are being discriminated against. If you sit down with those women and listen to their stories, you will feel bad.

We as the ICRC have formed an organisation called Rivoningo Women's Forum. Rivoningo means light to the women of the inner city. We do have general meetings where there are men, but women can't open up. When we are all women, women feel free to talk about all abuse. If someone says, "My man brought me all the way from Congo saying there is a job, there is this, but when I got here, he left me in the flat, I am staying with eight men, and when all these eight men come back from work they are drunk, and they all sleep with me", how do you feel inside you? This is what's happening in the inner city. And the diseases are multiplying. You

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<sup>76</sup> South African Social Security Agency, national agency of the South African government aimed at administering the application, approval and payment of social grants in South Africa.

must understand there is a lot of prostitution as well, when a lot of buildings where there is a lot of prostitution some tell you that these men don't want condoms, you understand? It's difficult; you come across a lot of stories in the inner city. Sometimes when you sit at home you feel like crying because of such stories.

I also ask myself who is going to respond to those issues, and that is why we are trying to say, "Let's highlight the issues and see whether people will try to respond to these issues". We have done this for quite a long time, to say this is the situation. I can say some of the people that are taking ARVs especially immigrants now, it's because of our push, because we take them to Esselen clinic<sup>77</sup>. Some are now even getting grants, it's a process. We take them to where they need to be checked by their doctors. And at SASSA there are these doctors who are arrogant; you get there, they say, "You are still fit so you can still go to work", even if your CD4 count is below 300 – it's low at 300. I remember that the Minister of Health Aaron Motsoaledi said when it is 400 downwards you need to be getting ARVs but it's not done like that. So we are also saying maybe one day a good Samaritan will come out and say, "OK, we can assist these people who are living there" because there are lots of orphans who are living in the inner city I can assure you. We have tried to highlight this, we have tried to speak to people. We don't have responses, and the people that are getting funded to be doing that work in the inner city are not doing anything. What is the Department of Health doing? What are the social workers doing? They are sitting in their offices doing nothing, and at the end of the day the person who will feel the pain is the person working in the ground, who gets all this information that we get. Because by engaging with the people, people start trusting you and they open up, they tell you all stories.

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<sup>77</sup> Clinic in Hillbrow.

Sometimes people lose trust, though not all the trust because we do have meetings, we do give report backs. For instance, I go to the Department of Health, and when I come back I do my minutes, I call a meeting and report back to the people and say I have gone here. So they see there is something we are doing, somewhere somehow there is a problem but as soon as you say, “Yes I am going to have a meeting, I am engaging with the City”, they know that lack of delivery comes from the government itself. We tell people to not expect anything overnight. It’s a process; we know we come a long way, and we have been fighting. Even this freedom has been achieved after a long struggle. We go to the buildings and hear people saying, “No let’s join the DA. Let’s leave this ANC, maybe when the ANC sees us wearing the blue t-shirts<sup>78</sup> they will start coming to the inner city”. But I said, “You can’t do that. If you go to the DA, the DA won’t change anything on the ground, the DA is the National Party<sup>79</sup>; it doesn’t change. We need to work from the ground in order to push our government to do something, we have elected them to be there, let’s push from the ground. If we don’t do that and we are relaxed they will think we are satisfied while we are not. It’s very difficult but we need to work together”. If I am going to wake up in the morning as the Inner City Resource Centre and take a burner marching to the City, I am wasting my time. If you are going to stand up as Soweto Crisis, taking a burner and marching as Soweto Crisis to the City you are wasting your time. We need to have a way of joining all these organisations, and build one thing. When we take to the streets, it’s all of us. All the organisations in one voice, to say this is what we are doing. You look at COSATU<sup>80</sup>; when they take to the streets, it’s all the unions gathering one time and making an

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<sup>78</sup> Democratic Alliance (DA) colours are blue and white.

<sup>79</sup> Party that has implemented apartheid.

<sup>80</sup> Congress of South African Trade Unions, federation gathering most of the trade unions in SA.

impact. This is what we basically need to do as well in order to make an impact, in order for our voices heard.

## The City sees us as ‘the leftists’

The City is not partnering with us. There is fallout, and I understand why we are being side-lined. We were in the spotlight during the San Jose case<sup>81</sup>, because we were there and in most cases where there are inner city evictions you would find that we are *amici curiae* there - so they see us as the Leftists. But in most cases they do call us to stakeholder meetings, and right now they wanted some inputs for the Inner City Road Map that they are driving, because the 2007 one didn’t go well. They wanted to adopt it and we said, “We cannot adopt it without the inputs of the poor people”. They have sent the draft to me, saying, “Bring some inputs” and we did send some inputs, and we are still waiting for it to be adopted. That was last year, and we don’t know when it’s going to be adopted because the City is using consultants to draft this Inner City Charter. Consultants are not aware as to what is happening in these buildings; they don’t actually engage with the people. They don’t engage the civil rights organisations and the NGOs that are working on the housing issues in the inner city. If they write to you, if they send you an email on say, the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, and they would say, “On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April we need your input and it’s the closing day at 3pm”. It becomes difficult because you are given short notice; they draft the whole thing and come to you just so that they can say, “We have consulted the CBOs<sup>82</sup>”.

When a person like me gets to a meeting called by the City, I will stand up and say I want to get an understanding, I am not going to be given time to

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<sup>81</sup> The case of eviction from an inner city “bad building” (San Jose) which was lost in court by the City, was seen as a turning point, de facto putting municipality-driven evictions to a halt in the inner city.

<sup>82</sup> Community Based Organisations.

talk because I am not an ANC - you can feel the atmosphere that it's ANC that is there. I remember there was a meeting on housing at the Civic Centre<sup>83</sup> and the Deputy Minister of Housing was there and I was raising a question. I was told to keep quiet, I was saying, "But is this an ANC meeting or is it a community meeting? Do I have to come here as an ANC in order for you to respond to my question?". That's how they do it in the meetings. You go there because someone said there is a meeting there and you get crushed. That is why most people in the inner city don't attend meetings, people don't attend meetings which are called by councillors. But I can call a meeting, and I can assure you, you will find the hall full of our members with our T-shirts. It's either Rivoningo T-shirts or the Inner City Resource Centre T-shirts, they are there and they will listen.

I have attended the meetings that were chaired by the Mayor for a long time, and you will find that an organisation will say, "Today it's housing, it's consultation process with the organisations". You don't find the communities there. You only find it's the business people and the inner city officials and one or two civil society organisations maybe. And then when they write their reports they say they consulted with the communities, they have consulted with the NGOs and whatsoever, which is not there. So you ask yourself, "When was this meeting? Where was it?"

## You don't have land but you have buildings

There is a quite a lot of structures in the inner City. The municipality argued in court that they have money but they don't have land. Our argument was that they have got empty buildings that they can convert - and there are lot of them: the buildings are just standing empty. The City evicted people in 2000, and those buildings are still standing empty. Why can't they utilize them?

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<sup>83</sup> Metropolitan central offices.

We are also saying, "No one is going to Soweto", and that was when the litigation team was arguing the case of San Jose when they were saying people should go and relocate to Soweto. We said, "You cannot move them to Soweto because there are buildings, and these people are working around here. Some are not working, some are doing informal trading, some have part-time jobs, some working, some are domestic workers; transport money is too expensive for them?" There are a lot of buildings, and the City is channelling these buildings to the investors and giving them for next-to-nothing. They give it to their own brothers and sisters Malema-style<sup>84</sup>. So that is our strategy; we are coming with this project, telling the City: "You don't have land but you have buildings". Even private houses, there are a lot of them which they can use, or maybe they can remove all those houses and build up 3/4 story units for people to live in. There are factories standing there which owe a lot of revenue to the City of Johannesburg, millions; the City can expropriate those buildings and do something. If you say there is money standing in front of the Constitutional Court and say there is money to build for the poor in the inner city but we don't have land, where is that money? Every year we are talking about budget, which means the money is growing, but where is that money?

If they don't want to engage with us, we will also go to make sure that we make things difficult for them. There are a lot of buildings which have tenants waiting to be moved - I am sure there are 10 of them right now - and the City must get them alternative accommodation. The owners of those properties, those who bought those properties can't move in because the Court judgement says, "Give them alternative accommodation". So we want to get the owners and the investors to

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<sup>84</sup> Julius Malema, the populist leader of the ANC Youth League, who presents his own rapid self-enrichment, in particular in the name of black economic empowerment, as a model.

come on board to say to the City, “I am still waiting for my building, give those people alternative accommodation because I want to use my building”. Maybe then the City will start acting and doing something, but as long as they relax and stop using lots of money going to Court wanting to evict, knowing very well that the Court is going to say, “Give them alternative accommodation”. So it’s easy for them to join us in the battle; we fight the inner city of Johannesburg together; we fight the government, the Department of Housing together.

### Alliance with property investors?

Because when we meet challenges we also sit down as partners and discuss the way forward, PLANACT, ICRC, and SERI. We want to start engaging with the City, and also bringing all the stakeholders together - churches, every CBO in the city, as well as the investors themselves - to come on board, and we will discuss on how we can best engage the City.

Some investors may buy a building without being well informed about the happenings in the buildings, and then you will find them moving an application in Court. They normally call people “illegal”, you can’t call me illegal whilst I have 20 years living in that property, you know? So we want to bring them on board and to see how all of us can push the City to implement whatever we want, so this is what we will be doing; it’s our pipeline project for this year, on the housing issue in the inner city.

This was discussed in October last year, because we had been asked to submit a proposal for funding by a German organisation. They also want us to go to and see how other countries have solved their housing issues, as they have done that project in Germany and it has worked. We are still looking forward to be going to Germany to look at how they did it, so that we can come and implement it here.

We still have to sit down and draw up our strategies and plan of action as to how are we going to do this. We are also going to bring on board

members of the community as well from the buildings - maybe one person each – and after we have done that we will call a general meeting where we will have a discussion and have input from people as well. Then we are going to sit down and say, “These are the inputs that we got”.

We know they will have similar inputs, but it’s good if they are all there because everyone will say housing - you can call a million people in the inner city of Johannesburg and say, “What is your challenge?” everyone will say housing - even if someone says it in another way round, it will be housing, it will be basic services. So that will be a stepping stone to a project that is coming jointly with other stakeholders. While we are trying to bring the investors, we are trying to say to them, “We are not saying tenants should take over your properties, but there should be an understanding amongst you two. So if you come on board, you won’t have this issue of going to Court paying money for court battles to evict people from the properties, join us, and let’s push the City together to provide accommodation for the poor people. Then you can have access to your buildings”. We ask the investors to also lodge their cases against the City, take the City to court and say to the City, “I want my building, I bought it, give these people alternative accommodation”. Maybe we will come up with something, I don’t know. It’s a strategy that we want to use and I hope it will work and we will achieve something in the inner city.

### An inner city People’s manifesto

I wish we could take the power but the fact is that we cannot take the power from them. The only thing we can do is we need to push, highlight the issues that are happening there. And maybe it will work, I don’t know. We need to use the language which they can understand, which is throwing stones... Actually I don’t believe in marches and *toyi toying* anymore. We have done that, we have handed over memorandums. We don’t even get responses to those memorandums even if we say 7 days - just waiting, *toyi toyi*-ing in the streets. It’s part of advocacy, we should still do that in order to highlight our plight, but there should be another

mechanism that we can use. We are tired of going to the street and marching because I don't know whether after collecting the memorandum from my hands they throw it in the dustbin in their office. But I think it will be good if we engage and come up with idea as to what we can do.

How can we really build an understanding amongst ourselves? Hey I think we can maybe have a People's Manifesto, something like that. I am saying this because even in the CBOs and the NGOs there is no good understanding amongst members. The CBOs and the NGOs need to come together and have a better understanding and move away from the issue of power struggles. As long as I am saying I am the ICRC, I will work alone and APF will work alone, there is nothing we can come up with. I am saying this because organisations are not on good terms; everyone is pulling its own way. And that is what the government is utilising because they are quite aware that we are not united as civil movements and as well as NGOs, we are not strong enough to tackle them. Do we have enough influence on the government? We don't have, so it's time that all the organisations come together and have one common understanding. If we say hey, everything is standing still; it should be all those CBOs, those NGOs making it happen. All the organisations coming together would really be able to make an impact - saying for 3 days, "The inner city is ungovernable"<sup>85</sup> and no one going into the buildings or to work, you know? We give them a forceful strike.

## **Dreams for the inner city**

There are facilities, government schools are available, they are next to where people are living but most of the immigrant people are not aware

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<sup>85</sup> Reference to the United Democratic Front (UDF) campaign against apartheid in the townships in the 1980s, one of its objectives being "making the townships ungovernable".

that there is free education that they can take their children to school without having to pay their school fees. Because whenever they went there to those schools they will be charged monies by the principal making money out of them while South African children are not paying. And they will take these children to these fly-by-night schools, some schools are registered but are in these tall buildings, which is not safe and so those who are not attending especially some who are living in bad buildings, it's so difficult to access those facilities but those who are in school going age they go to school because we make sure that they go to school. As I have said, we have achieved that goal of taking them to schools without them having to pay school fees. But the problem lies on these younger ones - the 1, 2, 3 year olds, because their parents cannot afford. You must remember one thing: there are immigrants who are not even aware that they can also access social grants for their children - grant money - and we are pushing that now they can also get it so that they can assist the kids. I have a problem with that.

I have a project of my own which I am thinking of, I know it won't cater for boy children but it will cater for girl children; give a girl child education and see what you get. I want to take a girl child from 2 years and see if I can raise them up to the university level. This is a project that I am looking at; I have registered it already, I have got the project in mind, everything is ready, what is left is just sourcing to get people to say, "We are coming on board to assist you in doing this project". We have come up with this project because I am brushing those kids; you know they are there, they are dirty, you know they can't go to school, they can't go to crèches, its better if there is somewhere they can go and do something. We don't have facilities which say we can take these kids without them having to pay something. Or maybe you are a mother getting a R230 grant; we can take this kid for maybe R50 per month and it's something.

You know sometimes it demoralises you, sometimes you get to want out, but from my side, you know I normally say to people, "If we achieved our freedom after so many years of fighting and battles, let's not give up

hope, someday somehow we are going to achieve what we want". Because really I just want to see everyone having a better life in the inner city. Yes I want to see a clean inner city where everybody is happy and where everybody has access to better services, access to hospitals, access to social grants, and where we stay together without these xenophobic issues. Where you can walk safely in the streets of the inner city without being afraid that you will be mugged or you will be raped. An inner city where we don't have these buildings without water or electricity. We are not looking for very fancy things...

I see the future of ICRC growing, doing much better as well as getting recognised and listened to. I hope to see the government understanding and taking our issues seriously, not mine alone but together with the partner organisations in the inner city. We want to see every community in the inner city having being empowered to know their rights, to know how to participate in local government affairs, and how to deal with their own issues. Having empowered women towards knowing their and children's rights, and seeing the very people that we have been empowering being the ones that say, "We will run this inner city resource center; we will run with it so that we achieve our goals". That will make me happy to say, "Yes, we have empowered people who know how to deal with these issues, how to challenge the government, how to be an organisation that even the kids born before it was established can know about it and its working towards the goals and achievements of our Constitution". We want that.





## Context 3: Diepsloot & Johannesburg North

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**Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Tshanda Mbuyi, Ntandokawabo James**

The three next interviews are located at the northern urbanisation margin of Johannesburg. Partly outside the Urban Development Boundary – an artificial line established by the City of Johannesburg to better manage the spatial directions of its growth, and aim at a compacter city - this region, extraordinarily contrasted in terms of social and racial groups, is increasingly subjected to urbanisation pressures. On the one hand, we have Diepsloot, the apartheid site-and-service scheme turned informal settlement and RDP housing programme, where activists' accounts remain of marginality, isolation, stigmatisation and survival: they give no real sense that urbanisation forces are shaping the environment, even though massive housing delivery is happening. On the other hand, From in Kyalami, activists' narratives are tales of resistance to urbanisation for the protection of a semi-agricultural environment: but this resistance seems to take new dimensions in a post-apartheid context, with the necessary integration of Diepsloot in the picture. This is the thread that links these three interviews with the fourth one, Johannesburg Urban Cyclers Association, not strictly located in the northern fringe of Johannesburg, but sharing with Kyalami's activists both a concern for environmental sustainability, and the need to cross social and racial boundaries to meaningfully deploy its political action.

### Diepsloot and Kyalami

Diepsloot is 30 km away from the Johannesburg CBD and 20 km away from Sandton CBD, north of the Johannesburg. In the early 1990s, the area had been planned as 'Norweto' (North Western Township), the Northern equivalent of Soweto, by apartheid authorities (Bénit 2002). At the time, and like any site considered suitable for the settlement of urban 'Natives', it was located in a peripheral area, separate from 'white residential' areas but close enough to white residential suburbs to provide with a reservoir of domestic labour. It was conceived initially as a site-and-service area. Between 1995 and 2000, during the interim local government phase, the area fell under the Northern Metropolitan Local Council. Since the creation of the Unicity in 2000, Diepsloot falls under Region A of the City of Johannesburg and is divided into two wards, both led by ANC councillors.

20 years down the line, commercial and residential developments that have mushroomed to the North of Sandton, the decentralised growth of Fourways, Dainfern on one part and Midrand (all within Region A) have significantly changed the 'potential' or strategic value of Diepsloot's geographic location. It is now situated on the Johannesburg-Midrand-Tshwane development corridor. It is also easily accessible from all sides with the Mogale/ Tshwane Highway (N14), which borders Diepsloot to the North; William Nicol Drive (511) in the East; and the Ben Schoeman Highway (N1) to the West. Diepsloot's proximity to some of the most sought after real estates in Gauteng is quite ironical given the sorry state of the basic urban infrastructure found in the settlement. The only form of public transport linking Diepsloot to the rest of the city is the private minibus taxis. Metrobus and other bus companies do not service the area.

There is no denying that Diepsloot evokes a very negative image in the minds of many South Africans, who see Diepsloot as the place where criminals come from, vigilante action is rife and service delivery protests

happen every other week. This image is probably one of the reasons why the residents of the leafy suburbs around Diepsloot have continuously fought against its establishment first, then against its formalisation and expansion. Diepsloot is indeed quite an exception in an otherwise upmarket and low density area, still composed of large plots, agricultural holdings, equestrian centers, nature reserves and conservancies, at the fringe of Johannesburg built area. Pressure for upmarket urbanisation in luxurious gated residential developments, such as Dainfern, but also for low-income housing developments (to dedensify Diepsloot and provide the residents of Diepsloot's reception area<sup>86</sup> with much awaited public housing), is triggering resistance from organised residents associations and environmental NGOs. In post-apartheid South Africa however, resistance to urbanisation by the wealthier and still whiter parts of society is a difficult political position to hold. Be it for strategic reasons or for genuine concerns for existing levels of inequality and the need for some racial and social interaction -if not integration, most environmental NGOs have had to engage with former townships and informal settlements in their vicinity, and include them somehow in their vision and development strategy.

Anton Harber's book on Diepsloot (2012) is a must read for anyone trying to get a more balanced view on the past and present of the area. From the various interviews one gets a sense that 'Diepslootians' feel a deep sense of unfairness about the way the media in particular has casted the area. There are other stories to be told, that are not only about mob justice and vigilantism. Diepsloot is not different from any other area having to deal with the complex issues of unemployment, crime and lack

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<sup>86</sup> Diepsloot is divided in several sections (extensions) that are numbered following concentric sections around the initial site-and-service area called "reception area", or Extension 1.

of service delivery; they have hopes and aspirations as well (Harber, 2011).

Telling the history of Diepsloot is telling the story of the struggle for decent housing, service delivery and employment in Johannesburg and within the Gauteng city region. The area is divided into two main parts, Diepsloot Reception Area or Extension 1: a dense informal settlement; and Diepsloot West, where a mass of RDP houses are getting built. The area is still characterised by insufficient bulk water facilities to supply the area, leading to water shortages and low water pressures. It has also been marked by competitive leadership (Bénié 2002), stemming from the history of its settlement, as Diepsloot served in the mid 1990s as the reception area for a number of relocated people from informal settlements across Northern Johannesburg (including Zevenfontein), as well as from Alexandra township.

The City of Johannesburg, through the Johannesburg Development Agency and other departments (Johannesburg Road Agency, City Parks, Pikitup) has invested a lot of funds into the upgrading of Diepsloot and the construction of new amenities such as a police station, a new taxi rank, a shared services centre, the upgrading of existing parks, of roads and pedestrians walkways, support for sanitation programs, etc. but there is obviously still a lot to be done.

At the broader, regional level, the City has defined parts of this area as falling beyond the Johannesburg Urban Development Boundary<sup>87</sup>, partly

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<sup>87</sup> The Growth Management Strategy (GMS) adopted by the City of Johannesburg defines an Urban Development Boundary (UDB) beyond which densification and township application are discouraged. The GMS defines, besides the UDB, different categories of space (Consolidation Area, Peri Urban management Area, Expansion Area, Marginalised Area, Public Transport Management Area) depending on relevance and priority for their development.

classified as “Peri Urban management area”, where no further development should occur, in order to limit urban sprawl and energy inefficiencies, and to maintain a metropolitan green belt. In this respect the environmental value of the Greater Kyalami Conservancy (GEKCO) is recognised in municipal documents, also in terms of the open space they provide for the whole area, across social and race divides<sup>88</sup>. The issue is however complicated, first by Diepsloot’s development needs, in terms of infrastructure, housing development, and employment opportunities. Diepsloot is defined as ‘Marginalised area’, and its surroundings (including parts of GEKCO) as ‘Consolidated areas’, where possibly economic opportunities should be developed<sup>89</sup>. To some extent, the announcement by Mayor Tau that Lanseria airport (to the north of this area) would become a major economic node, is going in that direction<sup>90</sup>. Secondly, regional assessments highlight the regional transportation needs, especially in terms of east-west road linkages in the north of Johannesburg. Although these roads developments (including the K56, contested by GEKCO) are mostly driven at the Provincial level, municipal documents<sup>91</sup> define these road links of great importance to decongest the whole urban region. One could argue that these complexities, that can become contradictions, are not clearly addressed in municipal policies. This municipal concern for the environment has however been growing in the last decade, and has found expression in the 2006 and further in the 2011 Growth and Development Strategies (GDS), confirmed by the 2013

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<sup>88</sup> GEKCO is one of the bodies under the umbrella of the Johannesburg Environment Action, an organization led by Kristin Kallesen whose interviewed is reproduced in this chapter. For the recognition of GEKCO by the municipality, see City of Johannesburg, 2010, *Regional Spatial Development Framework (RSDF) 2010/2011, Region A*, p. 50.

<sup>89</sup> City of Johannesburg, 2011, *2012/16 Integrated Development Plan*.

<sup>90</sup> Hlongwane S, 2013, “State of Johannesburg: Parks Tau promises big spend”, *Daily Maverick*, 10 May.

<sup>91</sup> CoJ 2010, *RSDF Region A 2010/2011*, p. 103.

mayoral State of the Cities address, with its strong emphasis on sustainability, the environment and investments in collective transportation<sup>92</sup>. Whilst environmental activism has often been used to oppose development, especially aimed at housing lower income and non-white groups (Brett 2011, Harber 2012), this gives a new tint to environmental action, which starts to be rethought as having potential for benefiting the broader society rather than for protecting a wealthy minority.

## Sam Sikhosana in Diepsloot

Sam has always been a mediator, a go-between. From his past in Zevenfontein where him and his family were part of the ‘Umpakhati’ or ‘people in the middle’ who chose not to be involved in the fights between the ANC and the IFP, to the days when the two parties both trusted him enough for him to act as a mediator between them, he was always someone who went between and did not get involved in party politics.

The desktop study brings back Sam’s name as a Community Development Worker<sup>93</sup> and as a facilitator in some of the WASSUP<sup>94</sup> workshops. He was a member of the Diepsloot Community Development Forum (DCDF) since its inception, a politically neutral body which tried to federate and unite an initially very divided community. When the DCDF became obsolete

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<sup>92</sup> State of the City Address, by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Councillor Mpho Parks Tau, Johannesburg: Wits University, 9 May 2013. <http://www.info.gov.za/speech/>, accessed June 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Employed by the Gauteng Provincial Government to facilitate community participation and serve as a link between civil society and the state.

<sup>94</sup> Water, Amenities, Sanitation Services, Upgrading Programme, is “a community based program that repairs and maintains communal ablution facilities in Diepsloot’s Extension 1, home to an estimated 50,000 people living in shacks” ([www.wassupdiepsloot.com](http://www.wassupdiepsloot.com)).

because of the establishment of ward committees<sup>95</sup>, he worked for a while as ward committee member to be again moved to a politically neutral position as Community Development Worker. He has collaborated with NGOs such as PLANACT<sup>96</sup>, worked for the courts and for government. He appears as community activist who works very close to and within formal structures of power. His name appeared in Hadebe's (a Wits Development Planning student) thesis as the person who helped her select the informal traders that she needed for her interviews and facilitated the first contact between them (Hadebe 2010). Sam's negotiating mediating skills have helped salvage the farming cooperative (when all the parties wanted to call it quits) and calm the community during the xenophobic attacks in 2008.

## Papi Sathekge in Diepsloot

The desktop search on Papi returns articles mostly related to the Diepsloot Art and Culture Network, the history of its creation and the role played by the Global Studio, a place-based action research programme where international academics and students worked in partnership with the Diepsloot community between 2007 and 2009. The search also returns articles about Sticky Situations, and Jenny Van der Bush, her website and role in helping to present Diepsloot to the world.

The contextual analysis of Diepsloot read together with the first interview shed more light on the things which drive him to be a community activist in the area: his desire to change the image of Diepsloot, both for its residents and to the external world, through arts and edutainment. The very high levels of unemployment explain the fact that he has to take any

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<sup>95</sup> Participatory bodies, chaired by the ward councillor, constituted of 10 elected members of civil society.

<sup>96</sup> A Planning NGO aimed at empowering low-income communities in shaping their environment.

opportunity that comes his way (tour guide, theatre productions, school teacher), and the confusion existing between the opportunities for his own art company and for the Diepsloot artists network that he chairs. In some instances for example, big businesses expressed their interest in investing in community facilities after Papi had taken them on tour in the area. The murky politics of Diepsloot, the in-fighting between civics and party branches, the politics of the Community Policing Forum<sup>97</sup>, paint a picture that is so complex than one ends up wondering if we really managed to grasp the influence and the networks that Papi has established within and outside Diepsloot.

## Kristin Kallesen in Kyalami

Kristin Kallesen resides in Kyalami, which, like Diepsloot, is in Region A of Johannesburg. She is active around issues of environmental justice. She is the chairperson of Just Environmental Action (JEA), an organization that aims to influence development, and in general, educate and encourage people to engage with the environment in sustainable ways that mitigate damage and degradation. The JEA is an association composed of professionals (lawyers, environmentalists etc), local (upper class) residents associations, but also social housing organisations such as SHIFT<sup>98</sup>, government officials, community members and people who share a general interest in the environment and who are willing to volunteer their skills and time.

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<sup>97</sup> A statutory body aimed at strengthening partnerships between the community and the police, to better fight crime.

<sup>98</sup> Shift, Social Housing Focus Trust is a consultancy and advocacy group of housing professionals and activists, aiming at creating sustainable communities through promoting the design of quality housing and humane settlements (<https://sites.google.com/site/shiftasmove>)

JEA promotes community involvement in development planning for the protection of the environment. To this end, one of its objectives is to “ensure good governance and responsibility from those who are entrusted with environmental decisions and those who impact on the environment.”<sup>99</sup> JEA’s interventions look into the sustainability of developments, the efficacy of policy and the implementation of policy in developments that were proposed and or on the verge to be initiated by either the private or public sectors.

Some of Kristin’s work under the auspices of JEA takes place in Kyalami, which is one of the crystallising area of mobilisation for the environment, due to the contradictions between the desire to protect a natural and low density area, and the increasing regional pressures for urbanisation. It is in this perspective that the Greater Kyalami Conservancy (GEKCO), one of JEA members, produced a survey document in 2012 to propose an alternative plan for the area, called the Green Neighbourhood Project. The project is designed around the principles of reducing waste, saving water, saving energy, increasing food security, promoting health and secure living, protecting open space and biodiversity, promoting non-motorised transport. It is also expressing its commitment in assisting marginalised communities to live healthier lives<sup>100</sup>. The proximity of Diepsloot also means that socio-economic aspects of greening come into play into the Green Neighbourhood Project. With Diepsloot battling for basic services, better accessibility by road and looking for land for housing development<sup>101</sup>, it may be worth analysing whether the greening agenda would better or hinder Diepsloot residents’ quality of life. JEA’s emerging engagement with Diepsloot communities, in particular through its

schools, might help develop innovative ideas and practices for integration in a very divided area.

## Olivier Lévêque in Northern Johannesburg, and beyond

Another type of environmental activist, committed to the promotion of a bicycle-friendly Johannesburg, Olivier Lévêque is not developing his strategy from a specific neighbourhood, but has a metropolitan vision for the transformation of Johannesburg. The founder of JUCA, Joburg Urban Cyclist Association, Olivier has started by developing a map of cycling routes in the whole of the Northern part of Johannesburg. Like Kristin, his action benefits from the recent shift in the City of Johannesburg strategic vision, which is making environmental concerns, as well as transportation concerns, one of its priorities. In this new context, JUCA’s vision seems fully in line with the city priorities – including in its attempt to change the dominant perception of cyclists in Johannesburg as restricted to those who cannot afford any other mode of transport.

The City’s commitment to transformation and racial integration has however challenged JUCA to go beyond its initial constituency, mostly constituted of white middle- and upper-class groups of the Northern suburbs of Johannesburg. Maybe more deeply than JEA, as it is crucial for JUCA to broaden its constituency to township cyclist residents, JUCA has started engaging with cycling groups and projects in Soweto and Ivory Park, quite successfully.

## Local & Metropolitan Activism

JEA and JUCA’s mobilisation and lobbying strategies talk to the nature of metropolitan-wide activism. Whilst a broader view of the city and strategic engagement with the municipality is required, the existence of locally-based individuals and groups remains necessary for the life and for the credibility of the organisations, to ground their vision but also to give

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<sup>99</sup> JEA website, [www.jea.org.za](http://www.jea.org.za), accessed June 2013.

<sup>100</sup> JEA & GEKCO, 2012, *Kyalami Green Neighbourhood Project*.

<sup>101</sup> It seems still a low-density, RDP houses model which is promoted to respond to Diepsloot resident’s housing needs, not a densification of land use.

content to their strategy and inputs into city policies and projects. It is not dissimilar, in this sense, to South African social movements, which function as federation of civics-cum-local-branches, and base part of their legitimacy on these branches (Ballard et al. 2006), in spite of possible political friction between the political agenda and strategic priorities between local and metropolitan leadership.

Both JEA and JUCA need to act on both metropolitan/provincial and on very localised fronts. Quest for local brokers or representatives in each part of the city; 'loose membership'; intervention through local projects in various sites; federation of organisation and individuals; both JEA and JUCA are attempting to find balance between these two scales of action. Unlike social movements, though, their modus operandi is principally of cooperation with the City, lobbying, influencing policy and partnering over projects. At time however, more antagonist strategies can be used-but it is not the main repertoire of action.

The two Diepsloot activists portrayed here, in contrast, are much more confined to the local scale. They are only timidly extending their networks beyond the settlement, mainly within state departments and agencies. But even then, they engage these state entities more as resource providers than as full partners. Cooperative engagement is here too the major mode of relationship to the City that is practiced by Papi and Sam. Perhaps this cautious cooperation is a response to the local history of violent confrontation that has had huge human costs while limited political efficiency, and, as highlighted by Papi, has had consequences on the stigmatisation and marginalisation of the area<sup>102</sup>. It is also certainly a

strategy to build and maintain linkages that is crucial for economic survival and urban development, at both individual and collective levels, in a context of increasing state intervention in the settlement.

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<sup>102</sup> However, violence might then be directed against residents themselves, and foreign residents in particular as the recurrent outbreaks of xenophobia show. It might be a direct expression of frustration; a call to the state (von Holdt et al 2011), in a way that is not directly critical or confrontational to its policies but nevertheless is an expression of discontent.

# Papi Sathekge

*Born: in Limpopo*

*Residence: Diepsloot*

*Occupation: Community Artist and Diepsloot tour guide*

*Activism: Chairperson of the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network, Deputy Chairperson of the Crime Prevention Youth Desk, Secretary of the Diepsloot Engagement Forum, ANC and ACNYL member.*

**Interviewers: Tshanda Mbuyi and Lentsoe Pagiwa**

## Background

I was born in Limpopo and that's where I grew up. When I came to Johannesburg, I went first to Soweto, where I studied performing arts, at Sowequa, Institute of Performing Arts in Soweto. Then I moved to Diepsloot, because that is where my brother and sister live. I moved in 2005 to look at opportunities I can get as a theatre practitioner. That's when I started to be involved in community groups. I was an actor at school, I liked acting a lot. I started to be involved in Diepsloot when I came to Diepsloot.

I had my group at home, they were my group there. I started to take that group into the next level; I created some actors from those people. When I was in High School I started acting at a primary level under someone... but you don't have a group that is consistent there. There is a group when there are events; for example when there is a community event they will say 'hey, we need you to come and act' and that's when you bring your group together and act and after that you are waiting for the next event and stuff.

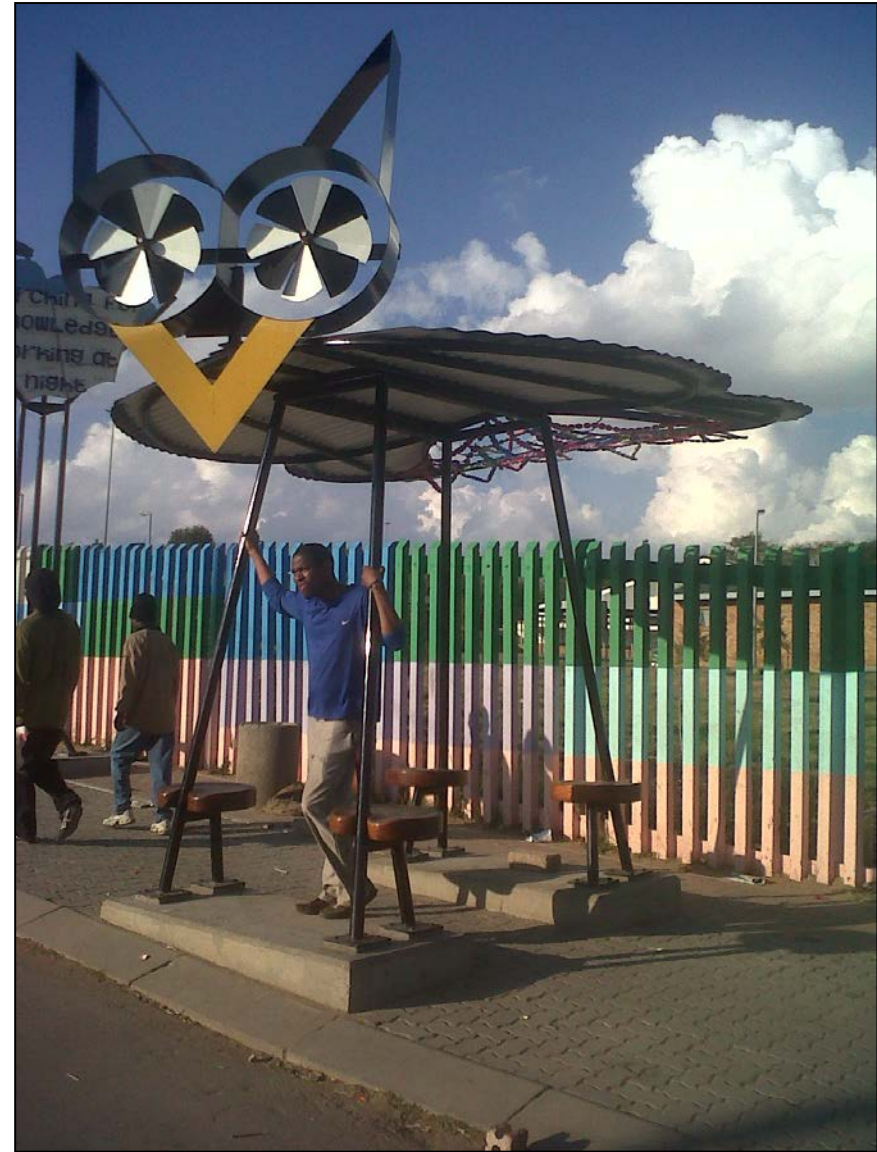


Figure 10 – Papi Sathekge in Diepsloot public space, ©Pagiwa 2013.

In my last year at school I was consistent because the school started to intervene in that group. They started to take us, when we go for school trips. I got to go to the school for performing arts through my high school actually. The Department of Health was having events. They called all the schools to make a production about the HIV AIDS stigma. At my school there were no teachers who were hands-on to do art and drama, so I had to come in. All of the productions were directed by school teachers... but only ours was directed by the students. They were giving awards for the top ten; our production was in the top three. They said we don't give school kids awards but we'll see what we can do. I was doing grade 11 by then. They said we'll come back to you. Then the following time was November; it was the 16 days of activism. The following year I was doing Matric. On the first of February they took a letter to my school to say we want that boy to go to school for performance arts. My teacher and my principle said that boy is doing Matric now, he can't go there. They called me, they called my parent, and when I arrived there my mum said I want him to go to the performing arts school because I cannot afford it; this is an opportunity... if we lose it... I wanted to go to Wits, honestly, but I couldn't because I had no matric. Then I had to go to the institute that could take me without matric. There was Funda Centre in Soweto, African theatre. So my teacher, the guy who was helping me during the production and the likes, said he would help me to get a school where I can do matric at the same place, and that's when I got Sowequa.

### **What is an activist, what is a leader?**

An activist is a person who gives out to their community. Not with money, but by empowering people, and changing the negative attitude of people. I'm in a tunnel to reach that goal. To be an activist in this community because that's my passion, I'm not yet there. I want to see myself saying I'm an activist. Be able to point to some of the artists that are playing for big productions like the Lion King and say 'that's my artist'. People that would say even though I'm no longer in Diepsloot, that is what Papi used to do, and we're going to take this to the next level. I want to create other

people like me in this community. That's when I can start calling myself an activist. The community does define me as an activist, but you know what the community see you as, it's not everything. I know that I'm not yet done with what I have to do. There is something that I have to tell myself... to say, 'I achieved this'. I want to leave a legacy; to say I found this boy, coming from the same rural area that I am come from, coming from nowhere, not having a vision but I managed to change this person, now he owns an art centre somewhere.

A leader is not someone who I can call a dictator. A leader to me is someone who sits down and identifies the challenge, and works on that challenge. For example, if I realise that the people in Diepsloot want to act, but there is no space for them to act, I go and sit with them, to understand, 'guys this is our challenge, and what can we do,' and get their ideas. Turn those ideas into positive thinking and practice them. That's what I say a leader is. I cannot just come into the community and say 'guys, no space, we are going to perform, we are going to rehearse in my backyard'. That's not leading. Because you will find that, people will say, because you said that, we call you our so-called leader, we are going to your backyard. You find that people have better solutions than that. That's leading people, get the best solution, and look at that and go and practice that. Now people will take ownership of that. Make people in the community take the onus, to be responsible for that.

Don't impose things in a community. That's why you'll find out when people are striking in the community, you know what they do? They burn community facilities; they burn robots because they don't take the ownership of that. They don't want a robot; they want a pedestrian crossing, so give them a pedestrian crossing! You will never see community members burning that because they said 'we want it'. People came in Diepsloot and made street names. Those street names don't have three years, but people are removing them, because it's not talking to them! They didn't go to that street and tell people to come together and say 'what can you name your street?'



To be a perfect leader, it is hard, very hard because as people we are created in a certain way. Every person believes that what he says is right, that's where it's hard. For example, I would believe that making RDP houses that side is a solution. And I want our people to understand that I'm right because I'm leading them, only to find out that people are looking for a yard that side because they want to build their own houses. So it's very hard, it's not a simple task. I tend to change people's mind to be positive. Even though I am not always right, when I say something to the community they'll always believe me and say 'it is OK' because they have been seeing me do lot of good stuff.

## **Investing in Diepsloot Youth**

The Diepsloot youth used to have a lot of strikes, mob squad things, so as the Youth Desk member I came to say we are going to do anti-mob justice campaigns. The Youth Desk is a Provincial initiative, a government initiative, but basically it is through the CPF<sup>103</sup>. The CPF and the police must sit through a meeting, on a monthly and quarterly basis. The monthly meetings are for the executive, and mass meetings happen quarterly. The Youth Desk is structured in this way. Each and every extension has eight members, and we have twelve extensions in Diepsloot, so that is eight by twelve. So every extension has an executive and we divided Diepsloot into four, which is sector 1, sector 2, sector 3, and sector 4. Every sector forms a sector forum. The people, who are representing these sectors, are coming from a mother body, an umbrella body; those are the people who represent Diepsloot as a structure, as executive members. Now when we say a mass meeting it is everyone who is in the Youth Desk from an extension level. I am the deputy chairperson of the executive. I joined last year, because it only started last year.

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<sup>103</sup> Community Policing Forum, a statutory body chaired by an elected member of civil society, working in partnership with the police to better fight crime locally, and keep the police accountable.

There are two committees within the CPF. So this is a committee that deals with youth issues only. And the other committee is the patrollers who make sure that the area is safe. Those are the two programs within the CPF, but there is no competition between the two, they both report to the mother body. If there is a yard where there are a number of families and they are not happy about a certain issue, for instance, the toilet is not working and they think that they must go and riot so that the councillor can hear us, we, the Youth Desk, will go and speak to them before they even strike. When we become aware of that, we come, the team and I, and sit with the family, ask what their problem is. So then we take one of them as a representative and we go and report the issue at the councillor's office. After reporting the issue, we tell them that the issues must be resolved within two days. Two days later we go and check. If the issue is not resolved in two days, we call the councillor to come and explain what the issue is. Every time when I want to meet the councillor, I just go to the councillor office. I can't remember a day when the councillor of Ward 95, when I knocked at his door and he sent me away. When someone robs someone else, like last night, the following day, we have threats of mob justice. So the people who will get on the scene on time will try and calm the crowd, then call the police to come and take the perpetrator to the police station. Or, if the crowd is a massive crowd that we cannot control, then we call the police and say: 'guys come with numbers, there are a lot of people wanting to do mob justice and they will come in numbers'. But we are still going to lead that, communicate with the community because we are the link between the police and the community.

The creation of the Youth Desk is definitely helping; it is also taking me to school now. There is the PAC, which is not the Pan African Congress<sup>104</sup>, it is the Personal Achievement Centre, and they are training people who

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<sup>104</sup> A minority party, inspired by the black consciousness movement.

can go train kids who do not understand at school. There is a module that we call 'learning how to learn', it means you are teaching the kids why they do not understand, because they do not follow things easily. So we started with five members last year, they went to training and now they are working at schools, so this year they decided to take me into the program. This is an initiative under the Youth Desk. The Youth Desk is the Diepsloot Crime Prevention Desk. To prevent crime you start with kids, and to tell the kids not to do drugs and not to hurt each other, it's all about educating the kids about the danger of drugs. You know, when I started to do acting at school where I was, I didn't see that as education. If someone had not come to me and said you can do production, just imagine where I would be now. So if we cannot build them at this stage, then we are going to have a problem in the future. For me to prevent this in the future, let me educate them now. I'm also helping in the crèche; I volunteered to be a board member in that crèche because I believe that to build this community I must start on the ground level which is the young people who are in crèche and the likes to build the community for tomorrow. If they can have that mentality at an early age, we will have a better Diepsloot in 18 years to come.

Honestly thinking from where I'm coming from, from a rural area, you don't know a lot of things. My career has given me a lot of opportunity to know a lot of things. And I started realising that when I go home, when I address issues with my peers, they will say 'why do you seem to know a lot of things?' I realise it is because of the workshops that I attend. You know if they say there is an HIV workshop, I go there. You can just imagine, HIV workshop and theatre, how is that related? I am a script writer. I must get all the information that I can. What if I come across a production that I need to write about HIV AIDs? I must write something that is relevant. I don't care if it is an agricultural workshop, if I can be invited or I get an opportunity to attend that workshop, I go there, I want to understand what is going on. So I'm a walking information centre in this community. You know you'd be surprised, I'm a theatre practitioner

but when I'm going in the community, you'll get a young person that I don't even know and they say 'Papi how are you', I say 'I'm fine' and they say 'I'm looking for a job'. You understand? And you get someone who says 'Papi I want to go to school', and I say how do those guys know me? How do you know those kinds of things? They realise that I made networks and everything is in one container, of which I know all those things. I never get across someone who says, I'm looking for a job and I didn't know where to refer this person. I can't remember a day someone was looking for something from me and I don't refer this person. However if I don't have it, I will refer it to say; okay you want to be a police? There is a youth desk in the police station, now go and volunteer, when they do the recruitment of the police, they will prioritise you. Then people come back and say "hey thank you, I didn't know where to go". I'm telling you I didn't even know how to use a phone. But now I access my email via my phones. I'm coming from the deep rural area. Even now from where I come from, there's no internet café. If you want an internet café you have to go to town and it is plus or minus 22 km to town. I tend to take what I think is good from the rural area, and I also take what I think is good, here. Combine that together, and become someone else. And again it tells me that it gives me the courage in terms of saying, I didn't know this and this and this, and within this short space of time I know a lot of things. Therefore I cannot stop, if I work harder than I did before I'll know everything that I want to know.

### **Public gains, Private Losses?**

At the moment I am just doing some community work. I'm involved in so many different organisations or community groups but for now it's dry season because there is no project that we are working on. So I'm looking for new projects. But because my other priority is not about my career only, but to develop other kids, I am directing them in their community

groups, and I'm volunteering myself in Diepsloot Engagement Forum. It's initiated by the PPC<sup>105</sup>. They just fund any project you want to do in your community. At the moment we are planning to do the park on the Diepsloot River. I have my own company also that is Umtonje Theatre Production, that's my main activity that I would say this is my company, that's where I call the shots. Then I'm the chairperson of the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network (DACN), which is my second priority because that's where my career is. It is a forum where a lot of groups are affiliated, we have dancers, we have theatre practitioners, and we have musical artists, all the kinds of artists that you can think of. We have affiliated, come together and formed a forum so that we can speak with one voice, because there is no funding without people coming together and trying to get something. I'm also, as I mentioned, the Deputy Chairperson of the Youth Desk which is the Social Crime Prevention Desk, so it's basically for youth, people under the age of 35.

What surprised me is that even our community leaders didn't see arts & culture as a career, and they didn't see that as an element of communicating with the community. But now it's changing; now they don't want to have an event without arts & culture activity. I was fighting with them first when I came here to Diepsloot. I found that when they hosted events they called our artists. By then we were not having a forum. They called our artists and they would tell artists to perform to pull a crowd because before their program started they wanted people to be enjoying themselves. They would give the artists T-shirts and food at that event. I changed that, I told my artists to say, no, we are not going to allow that any more. If they call you, they book you, and if they say we want you to perform for 30 minutes, you give your invoice, they must pay you. A T-shirt and food is an extra thing on the side. Actually you must tell them you don't even want that. You will take the money that you charge

them and go and buy your own uniform for your artists, and pay your artists, so that they can be able to go and afford something to eat. It's a business, we are business people here. We mean it and we are not going to back down on anyone. We are telling them, we took a lot of time in our rehearsal spaces rehearsing and now you're going to pay me with a t-shirt and food? What an insult to the Department of Arts & Culture.

I was called in a meeting with one of the community leaders to say you refuse for your artists to come and perform, I said, yes and I'm not going to deny it, and they're not going to perform, because you guys, if a Minister is coming or someone from the parliament or MMC is coming here, you will call one of the artists who's not coming from Diepsloot, and you will pay that particular artist R40 000 for performing two songs. But now if we have an event here you call our artists to say come and perform and when I say how much are you going to pay our artists you say you exposing them... To hell with exposure! We had a serious debate on that until they understood where I am coming from. Now they definitely understand. The Network was created only to be a voice for artists, so that they can to get opportunities outside for the Diepsloot artists. I don't care if you go as an individual because there's nothing that binds you to the Network. It's just a Memorandum of Agreement to say that you are under our database and do whatever you want to do in your own time. But please, don't expose yourself in some other ways; don't be used in some way. If you want to perform for t-shirt, go and do it, but this is what we say... People must aim to be professional and start to value their work.

## **Politics and Arts**

One of the challenges that I'm not going to run away from is politics. Politics within arts; there will be debate that we won't go and perform in that Arts & Culture Network event because they are thinking for themselves – Papi's doing this for his own profit. You know those kinds of things, and especially people who have never been in the Network

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<sup>105</sup> Cement Production Company.

because they don't understand the Network does not belong to the Chairperson. And this is not a cooperative, this is a forum, it's an NPO, we have been led by the constitution, the NPO South African constitution. And the constitution that was made to represent the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network was made by the artists. So if you are not happy about the way the people in the Network are running things you have the right to challenge them through the constitution. But, because they are not coming to our meetings, they don't understand. We don't do that and get paid in the Network to do anything. You only get paid if you have a business that pays; for example as a choreographer for the Carnival that we are hosting every member will be getting paid. Also, because I'm a Chairperson I can't say I'm automatically in, there should be criteria for that. You sit down, call members, call all the choreographers that are on our database and let them agree which criteria we are going to use. That is the constitution that we are going to use. Some people will form their own forums not focusing on development but focusing on the angle of how to make that forum fall; those are the negatives that are always there. But we don't see that as a problem we see that as challenges.

Last year I came with this criterion that says, okay because we have theatre practitioners, we have musical artists, we have dance groups, and they always say that theatre practitioners will get too much programs because Papi is a theatre practitioner. I said 'no, let's do a forum for theatre only, this is an umbrella forum, and let's do another forum that is a sub-forum that will deal with theatre, and let's do the dance' and these people, all of them, they are chairperson, they come and sit in the umbrella forum so that we can understand the challenges happening in theatre.

We are trying by all means not to interact with political parties but we interact with political leaders. For example in Diesploot there are two Wards, it's Ward 113 and 95. Both councillors are ANC members, but when you stay in the office you no longer an ANC member, you are a councillor who is a City of Johannesburg representative. So we talk to you

as a City of Johannesburg representative. We, the network do not entertain political parties.

I am an ANC member and I'm an ANC Youth member. If the ANC is hosting any kind of event, I don't want them to invite me as a Network member. They can invite me as Umtonje Theatre Productions, which is my company, I call the shots. Because in the Network lot of groups are affiliated and there are different political party members. We don't want to be seen as biased, or recruiting members for the ANC or whatever party. We just want to be in our own space, we'll work with the representative of the government.

Especially someone like me it's difficult to stay politically neutral. Let me just give you an example... Julius Malema<sup>106</sup> was here, I had to do poetry for the event. People don't see me as an Umtonje Theatre Production Member. They see me as the Chairperson of the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network. And they will say 'Julius Malema was here, you performed alone, you didn't invite us as the Network', and there was the Diep Movement also which was performing. Even the Diep Movement was performing, what about us!' I said 'I wasn't invited as a Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network; I was invited as Umtonje Theatre Production, as Papi'. Our constitution is talking to us about the political issues; we don't have to entertain that. You were supposed to know that Julius Malema was coming and you go and market your platform. We won't market a platform for you in a political party event, that won't happen.

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<sup>106</sup> Julius Malema, popular and populist president of the ANC Youth League, was Zuma's main contender for the presidency of the ANC. He was expelled from the party, for sowing divisions within the ANC.

## Public and Private Support Networks

There is some audition for Shashalaza Festival, which is a Provincial initiative, so they make auditions for groups to come and they select groups. Those are the types of festivals that I definitely target because we don't have funding that is coming in. But if the Province has something and if we get a deal then we go and perform in the main festival, and that's when we get to pay our artists. Sometimes an organisation like WASSUP<sup>107</sup> will come to me and say, we want to communicate with the Diepsloot community, we thought using your production would be the better way to go and communicate. And then I will go to them and say, what will you actually want to tell the community? Because they are doing sanitation they will say they want to address the issues of sanitation. So I go back and do my research and write a script that will talk to WASSUP. I do events, if there is an event around the community, they will call and say they want a play around women's rights because we have a women's rights celebration, and then I charge them to say I also need to pay my artists.

There are several organisations or groups that I made a relationship with so that is the only income that I get. Personally, I'm choreographing for the City of Johannesburg. They have a carnival on the 31st of December every year, in Joburg. They sometimes have a budget to run the school holiday program, and I am a service provider. I am also choreographing for the Provincial Department; they are having a carnival on September, every September. So those are the kind of productions through which I build the relationship with them, and definitely every year I get business from them. It is only in 2009 if not 2010, where we had someone donate

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<sup>107</sup> Water, Amenities, Sanitation Services Upgrading Programme, an NGO trying to maintain public facilities in Diepsloot Reception area, and to raise awareness about sanitation and health issues.

funding for Global Studio, from overseas, for Arts in Action<sup>108</sup> to continue. So we just told ourselves that with or without money we will run this event and we will make it happen. Our artists are helping on that: they don't expect to get paid after performing because they know the challenge. Some people donate their own music systems to us. Sometimes the City of Johannesburg Department of Arts & Culture will say 'we don't have money to give you but we can provide catering for your artists'. Basically every time when we have that event that's when our database grows. Because people start to say, 'hey, we are performing also, how can we take part', and we say 'okay you are welcome, this is the way to be part of that, and you don't pay anything to be part of the Network, to be part of the forum, you just go and register to say I'm staying in Diepsloot, and this is what I do, and our secretary will put you on the database'.

We had the JDA<sup>109</sup> giving us an opportunity to do the opening of the Diepsloot taxi rank. So now they say we are looking for people or musical artists who will perform for two songs during the process so that we can entertain the audience, and we take one of the artists in the database and say it's a chance for you to go and showcase your work, and they pay you and then we are done. So other events will come like that and we say to this person, you got the deal last time, now it's time for whatever production, whatever group is coming. That's the criteria that we are using.

We once had an opportunity to go and showcase at the University of Pretoria, they were having a show, and they were having an annual festival. We realise that we have a lot of groups that are doing theatre, so

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<sup>108</sup> An art festival organised every year by DACN, to celebrate Nelson Mandela's birthday.

<sup>109</sup> Johannesburg Development Agency, a municipal entity in charge of urban development.

we said no we are going to call all the group representatives to come down and we said group representatives you come with a script writer in this group, and then we get a director, we get a stage manager, from you guys. Then after that you call your group members to come and audition for characters, and the director will direct, the script writer will be working on the script, and the stage manager will be working on the stage, and we take the production for that to represent the entire Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network. It was great for our artists. It makes me happy from where I'm sitting because when I had a lot of artists who had a taste of theatre, and they never performed in a theatre they started to see things in a realistic way. You know they used to perform in the community halls and the like, they didn't understand what theatre is, and we took them even those who were not cast when we got transport – because we got someone to donate money for transport to go to Pretoria. We have to go and show them what a lighting board is, we show them what's back stage, what's the change room, what's a make-up artist, you know that kind of stuff and they started to learn. We don't have graduates in Diepsloot who are doing theatre, those who are coming from theatre, I only know myself and one other Director, Donald, and I don't know whether some other people are still hiding in their own corner.

The other project is the JDA project that we did in one of the schools here. The JDA were doing the development of the street and the pedestrian crossing. They said they wanted to do something that will talk to the community; represent the community; that will make the community take ownership.

They said Arts & Culture Network can you work with us on this, together with Jennifer from Sticky Situations<sup>110</sup>. That was the first time that we launched Arts in Action. We were fortunate she got to marry a South African and she had to stay. Now because of the relationship that we had, she started to have confidence in us that we can work together. So she started helping WASSUP the sanitation organisation and Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network to say “how can I assist?”. And we started working with her in terms of developing our constitution, registering the forum itself. Now because when I started I was not even a member of the network, my organisation was affiliated there, they had to co-opt me as an additional member of the Network. After I was a member I became the Deputy Chairperson. They started to have confidence in me and said can you be a chairperson. Now because I was there as a chairperson I started working hand in hand with Jennifer.

## **Gaining skills and training others**

I saw an opportunity in the community to do the tour guides, I'm also doing tour guide; so she started helping me to grow that idea and advertise my tour guides on a website because coming from a township, growing from the rural area, we are not familiar with the computer and the internet. She started teaching me how to do that, and there I'm advertising my tour on her website on the Sticky Situations site, also on the network thing. Also now she is willing to help me to get to the other phase, to open my own website for Umtonje Theatre Production. I'm using the Diepsloot Arts & Culture profile – because when I have tours, I'm also working with the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network artists. I managed to train them at GIBS<sup>111</sup>. I had someone come to me and say

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<sup>110</sup> Jennifer van der Bush was part of the Global Studio, organised in Diepsloot in 2008. She decided to continue to support and work with the Diepsloot community, and created a community support NGO, Sticky Situations.

<sup>111</sup> Gordon Institute of Business Science, a private business school.

you want to bring GIBS to Diepsloot... I was kind of trained but not professionally. I have a team that I made a tour with; my first tour with them was hosting the Global Studio. The guy from GIBS said can you do a tour for me and I said I think that my guys need to be trained, and he said 'no problem I'll organise a week to train your tour guides'. And then I took ten artists to go train to be tour guides; I cannot say professionally trained, but now they know what to do when they have a tour. He's running the tours in a lot of communities, Alexandra, Soweto, inner city Joburg, and now in Diepsloot. He organised those tours for GIBS in those townships. Last year we had a lot of people, but this year we had, three groups, two groups were coming from Wits, and the other was coming from GIBS. And I had two individuals who were coming from overseas.

We are using the skills that we have as individuals, we have Lucky who's my treasurer, he's not a professional financial manager, but he will do whatever when it comes to making sure he keeps the financial records right. Jennifer is always happy to say this is how we can deal with the money, and she always refers the auditor of her company to come and help, you see these kinds of things are voluntary... Bernard is our secretary; he was groomed by the political party that I cannot say... You know as a member of the Youth League of a certain political party, I started writing minutes, so when I came in during the Arts & Culture Network I said I can be able to organise the minutes. However I'm still open to get a learning scale, if there is someone that wants to train me please I'll welcome the training. I'm a performer... I'm an actor and director and a writer. I'm not an administrator, you understand? But I'm stuck in a critical position. I want to take positions on the stage to say act this part in this way, not this way because of the skills that I have because I was running, my own company, Umtonje Productions, and I know how to chair a meeting because I attend a lot of meetings. It's a preparation school of its own.

Luckily enough last year I applied to the Department of Arts & Culture Network, in the Department of Sports, Arts, Culture & Recreation in the

Provincial level, so I went to do Art Administration, I graduated for that but I didn't even go and take my certificate. I was absent in at graduation, because I was choreographing for the City, so I had to choose to go to my graduation or choreograph. I said okay, we are 20 in the class, as long as they told me I made it they have my certificate then I'll just go and take it the day I want it, it is fine.

We started partnering with an organisation from outside of Diepsloot. Those are the people that we inspired to make their own network. That's Malungu Arts & Culture Network; it's in Ivory Park<sup>112</sup>... We do advise them, they also advise us. It's not one way it's two way because there are things they know that we do not know. There are events that they know of first, and they will call us and tell us there is this event, so we tell ourselves that we are just working together, we are just one year older than them.

I know a lot of people, like the councillor of ward 95, we are building good connections and there's one successful businessman we've been helping a lot in the Network. Basically some other parents of the artists, always help where they can, even now we are trying to build a relationship with the cooperatives. There are people who are sewing somewhere here; there are people who are doing their own construction and the likes. It's not a matter that one must look for money from somewhere, sometimes you look for advice so this is the challenge that we have. Basically if we are funded and we want to do a production, and our artists design costumes, we go and give the sewing people the job we say this is how we want our costume to be, and they will give us a reasonable price because they know the impact we have through whatever we are doing. In our events we always try to market them. If I'm running the program I

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<sup>112</sup> A township east of Midrand, in the north of Johannesburg.

go to them and wear something that they did. We will always say the costume that is in this production was made by Mrs. Whoever.

## **Multiple positions, power and red tape**

Being involved in various organisations and structure does give me a lot of power. If I go to the councillor's office gives the time to listen to my points, and that gives me a platform to provide some direction. So when people come here they will say I want to meet Papi and once they understand what I am doing, some will say they want to invest, what kind of problem is there that we can invest in? It gives me the influence to say, I think you should invest in this youth structure that is doing things such as these; you should invest in sports because there are no sports facilities.

There are people who are suggesting that they want to invest in Diepsloot, but there is some red tape. The red tape could be that you can't do anything in a City area without the City being involved. You have to go back to the City and apply. So if I am coming to Diepsloot, I'm having money, living in Sandton, I'm owning my company, and I want to build a stadium for the community, they tell you that you must go and apply to there and there and there. It's a waste of my time, because I am a business man, I need to concentrate on my business. Red tape is holding Diepsloot back from development. I know that things must be formal; things must go through the right route. But going to door after door is an injustice, is an insult to me as a business man, because I have to concentrate on my business. So instead of saying how much do you want to do this and why do you want to do this, and the City bringing an ambassador to work on that and see how they can help with it, they will refer you to this office and this office. Last year I had a person who wanted to buy land, and build a shelter so in the afternoon kids could come and study there, also having a kitchen so that they may also eat because some people are not able to get something to eat. I went to the City, trying to find out what I could do, trying to get some land, and all the land was the City's land, and when you go to the Department of Housing,

they refer you to Johannesburg where they allocate the land. When you go there, they tell you that you should go and do this and that. You must apply, you must go to the councillor, you must get a reference, you must go and identify the land on the field, when you identify the land you find out the land is owned by this and this person, and you go and identify another person. You will end up identifying ten pieces of land that belong to people. If the City were to say, this is the way Diepsloot is, this land is not occupied, what if we place you here? Let me say, I'm not saying there is no assistance, I feel like there is no assistance, because I just want to clarify that I, as Papi Sathekge, feel like there is no assistance in terms of allocating the land.

I also go and teach kids, there is a private school that adopts kids so I am going there every Thursday. On Monday, and that particular Thursday, at two o'clock, because that time is allocated, those are my days to attend schools. I'm doing arts and culture programmes. In Diepsloot West I only go to the schools when there are programmes, like now they are working on 16 June<sup>113</sup> celebrations, so I will be working to polish their production. I don't help teachers, I help kids. The arts teachers know nothing about it. I come once to a school, and I show them what I can do, and I always leave an impact. Last month I was helping one of the schools to host Miss Diepsloot West. I also invite those school kids to the carnival that I am choreographing; I want to give them a taste of a carnival. Diepsloot is bringing a lot of kids, a lot of people into the carnival: since I started to be involved I am sending five busses to the carnival. The other communities come with one or two buses, but we are coming with a lot of busses because I go to different schools and say I am giving you one bus.

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<sup>113</sup> 16 June 1976 is commemorating the killing of the young Hector Petersen by the police, as the youth of Soweto was marching against the use of Afrikaans in their schools. It is now termed 'youth day' in post-apartheid South Africa.



I make sure that from the Diepsloot Engagement Forum, DACN, my company Umthonje and the kind of volunteer work that I do, go together. If you come to me, and you want my service, I will ask you what is it for, and I will be able to know which angle are you coming from business or volunteering. If you are looking for my service as Umthonje Theatre Productions, we are going to talk money and nothing else, everything that I do, I charge. If you are going to talk to me as Papi, like now, you are welcome. If you are going to talk to me as the DACN chairperson, then we are talking the constitution of the DACN, which is what I must do. Then if you come for the Youth Desk, we are talking about the community safety issues and the prevention of that, we are talking about the community engagement forum, but it must be in Diepsloot.

There is only one Arts and Culture Network in Diepsloot. Rival groups don't last long; some you will find that it is a private company, anytime they perform they must get money, like Umthonje is a private company, however as a person sometimes I think twice, especially when it is related to the community issues, I work with the community issues and I can perform for free, but you know with a private company you can't do that.

## **Changing Diepsloot, and perceptions of Diepsloot**

When Global Studio came to Diepsloot with the City of Johannesburg, they said what can we do in terms of talking to the artists and develop the artists? We started to say we want to make an event that will talk to us in Diepsloot. And we came up with Diepsloot Arts in Action in 2008 whereby we gave all our artists a platform to showcase their work. The dancers we said will dance and the theatre practitioners will do indoor activities. Then the music practitioners will go out-doors. We said we will have crafters that are doing an exhibition around, trying to call institutions like Wits to send their students to come and watch what we are doing and other institutions around so we can expose our talent. That was the first one that involved the City of Johannesburg, Global Studio,

the community members, and the Councillor. So we formed a good relationship and that's the event that inspired us to make the Diepsloot Arts & Culture Network. That's when the forum was born.

The first Arts in Action and the second and the third, were happening at the Youth Centre. And there is a soccer ground here; however it's not a formal facility area, so we made the outdoors on that special ground and the indoor was in the hall. We had a parade from the hall to the next venue so we can give our community members a taste of the carnival because some of them are not familiar with the carnival, so we said okay let's introduce the carnival style in our own community – that's when we came with that. The community supported it, we had a massive support. On this other side of Diepsloot we realised that we inspired a lot of the artists, that's why we had to change the venue of the Arts in Action. Last year we took it to the other side of Diepsloot so that we can cover it as well. People couldn't reach this other side so now we are doing it in a multipurpose centre in extension seven. There is a taxi rank in extension four which helps for accessibility. We are willing to move it around the community because we have only three community centres in Diepsloot. Hopefully this year, we may agree to see if we can take it to extension one, and move it to the taxi rank of extension one so that we can cover the other side of Diepsloot. But we are running the event without any budget.

I realise that since the Network has been here, people tend to look at art as a career, not an extra mural activity. When I came here I would say, I'm going to the community hall to act, and people would say 'you can't stop playing', that kind of thing, they said 'you are an adult, you must get a proper job and work'. And I started to ask myself are these people saying acting is not a proper job I realised that people are just looking at artists as people who have a lot of time to play. But now, it's the other way round. Even some of the people who were saying that I am playing now want to be involved because they realise we have talent but they didn't see that as a career. Some will say 'I didn't know that you go to school to

act,' they didn't know that! But now they know that everything to do with art is a career. It's not an extra mural activity. And there's this guy, his name is Jake Scott. He got funding from Old Mutual. He employed four artists in Diepsloot to run classes. One is a theatre practitioner, and he is going to run theatre stuff. And the other one, who is a dancer, is going to choreograph for kids. And then the other has to mentor and tutor those kids about how to make a film. And the other one is running a studio, he'll be in a studio to show people how to record and make music. These four artists, to me, are a blessing to my community.

We had a workshop here because we wanted to do a project next to the school, so we said let's involve the school kids. We came with ideas; surprisingly it's a primary school where they came with a letter idea under the leadership of one of the artists. Her name is Thandiwe, she's did the drawing and the likes. They wrote a letter to say 'Dear Diepsloot, this is my feeling about you, I love you on Monday to Wednesday because I am able to enjoy my school work, but on Thursday to Sunday my feelings change about you because you make too much noise, you party too much, you forget that I need to study'. On weekends... you know how life in the townships works. So they started to take those things seriously because it's coming from the school kids... We thought what are these kids trying to tell our community? So we said let's work on this letter. We changed it into a poem, we used artistic language, artistic elements to do that. We said 'Dear Diepsloot, I love you from Monday to Wednesday like a cat drinking milk, like a butterfly coming out of its cocoon, but on Thursday my feelings change about you, you make me angry like a chicken whose chicks have been taken away. You make too much noise like angry dogs chasing after baboons. You forgot that I have to hunt like an owl at night'. You know those kinds of stuff; those kinds of artistic elements were used. Someone from the City of Johannesburg said we were going to offend people with the Diepsloot poem. The first person who came with this was someone from the City. He said don't put the word baboon on. But I got the element again from someone from one of

the community members who said: why did you write the word baboon? As an artist, I have an artistic right to compare things. And I am not comparing the person with a baboon. I am comparing the behaviour of a person with the behaviour of a baboon under some circumstances. He definitely understood. And he definitely wanted to, because he is a poet, he is a writer; he wanted to understand how we could write those kind of words. What is said is that people who are not in Diepsloot see Diepsloot in another way. Now I am talking about people who live in Diepsloot, who know Diepsloot, who know all the dynamics of Diepsloot. They understand everything. They were just concerned about that, but not only for Diepsloot. Globally, they said how can you compare this kind of behaviour to the baboon behaviour?



Figure 11 – Urban furniture installed by JDA in Diepsloot streets, building on DACN community art activities, © Pagiwa 2013.

When I talk about Diepsloot with people like you, you only know what is happening in Diepsloot through the media. But if you have never been in Diepsloot to understand how people live, then to me, you don't know Diepsloot. You will only know Diepsloot if you go inside and engage with the people, sit with them, do what they do and understand why they are doing what they do. Then you will start to know Diepsloot. Anton Harber<sup>114</sup> and Phillip Makwe<sup>115</sup> from Diepsloot.com once said that it is high time for us as 'Diepslootians' to tell their own stories. So my point was that I don't agree with everything that 'Diepslootians' are doing.

We started with the carnival from Social Services in the school, with live performances, poets, dancers, and choir, within that. And after that we said we are going to the next phase of it. There are structures that we did on site. Those are the kinds of events that we did that make me excited because kids took ownership; they got a platform to tell the community what they are feeling. As young kids from primary, at the age of 11, you don't have a chance to voice out. But through the art element they had a platform to communicate. We launched in November last year. But even if you can go on site today, you'll be able to know what the kids are trying to tell that community because that poem is on those structures, the live performance. It's always speaking in the community. We came up with a play to talk about those things. We wanted to perform the play at different schools, but it's unfortunate because we did not have the budget. We cannot do that until we get something to pay our artists with

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<sup>114</sup> A Wits professor in journalism who wrote a book about Diepsloot (Harber 2011).

<sup>115</sup> Philip Makwela defines himself as a 'Political activist/ Serial social entrepreneur' and drives a website called Diepsloot.com, where he tells stories about the area.

to go and perform in different schools and spread the message about the story the kids are trying to tell as young people from that school.

I started to search Diepsloot, started to look at Diepsloot in a different way. I didn't care who first came to Diepsloot, but now I started to say what created Diepsloot? Why do we have a lot of people now in Diepsloot? Why are people interested in coming from Limpopo to Diepsloot? The majority of people here are coming from Limpopo and other neighbouring cultures. Why is it so important? Why are we not having a lot of people from Western Cape? Why are specifically people from Limpopo coming to Diepsloot? I started to recite those kinds of stories and that's why my tour is interesting.

Let me be honest with you, with most of the tours that I host, some think they need security when they come here. But when they go out they realise that security was unnecessary. I once hosted the Steyn City<sup>116</sup> last year. I once hosted all the CEOs of their companies. They were looking for this massive security. They even told us to go to the police station and register for them to come. Within two hours they didn't want to leave Diepsloot - and they had said they were not going to spend more than one hour in Diepsloot. We were in one of the taverns that I'm hosting people inside. People were dancing and having the time of their lives, forgetting that they have to go back to their work. When they arrived in Diepsloot in the morning I made one of the police Captains greet them to say welcome to Diepsloot, you are safe and if anything happens this is my number, call me from my number, there will be a van that will definitely be on standby for you. I did that and it was not necessary, this is like any township. I make the people of Diepsloot interact with their visitors; I make them to feel them, to welcome them in a positive manner.

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<sup>116</sup> Douw Steyn is a wealthy private developer who is hoping to build a huge and luxurious housing complex, nicknamed Steyn City, between Diepsloot and Dainfern.

## Service Delivery Protests, Perceptions and Politics

We were hosting campaigns on the street telling people that mob squads are not a good solution for the people. And from then the cases of the mob squads dropped a lot. I once went to the Councillors meetings, and I said I have a submission, a special request to say, 'this Councillors' term, we must not have a strike, a protest against the Councillor'. We must start doing things in a proper way. If we are not happy about any issue, let us come and sit down and solve the issue, and get the solution. If we don't get that, the reason cannot be a riot. We take a memorandum to the relevant people, we march. Marching and striking is not the same thing. In a march you just go there and drop the memorandum that said within this particular time, we need the answers, and people will send people to give you the relevant answers. From then, believe you me, we never had a strike. This time in Diepsloot we never had a strike. So those are the kinds of things that I'm submitting to the community, to say let's change this negative mentality.

I even told them that it's affecting us, it's affecting our own people at the end of the day, because you go to Montecasino<sup>117</sup>, it's just next to Diepsloot, it's not far from Diepsloot. You'll find the majority of people working in Monte casino are coming from Soweto... Why? Because in your CV is written a Diepsloot address, they throw it aside because they know you may take five days without coming to work because there is a strike. It's a business risk if they hire you, there will be a strike in Diepsloot, and it's a disadvantage. This guy cannot come to work at six o'clock in the morning because he won't wake up at four o'clock. People think there are a lot of criminals in Diepsloot, it's a risk to us. Those are

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<sup>117</sup> A major mall and entertainment center close to Diepsloot – one of the few places of job opportunities in the area.

the kinds of things that they didn't see when they were doing those things. They look at things to say, 'once we do this, the government will give us attention to solve the problem', but forgetting that people who are going to give you jobs, are going to look at you differently.

A perception of Diepsloot residents is affecting their lives outside Diepsloot. Luckily, I am empowered to deal with any situation. Imagine how it is for someone who is not empowered like me to go to a school like Wits, who has to concentrate on his studies. When he knows that those things are just lies; it is not every day that bad things happen in Diepsloot. They did affect me once these negative perceptions but I had to deal with it. When my fellow students thought about a negative thing, the example was always Diepsloot. And I was the only person coming from Diepsloot. When they thought about strikes, when someone was saying: 'let's do a scene where there is a toyi toyi dance', they thought that Papi was the best person to do it because Papi knows all the toyi toyi, the burning of tyres, he knows about the riots. So it did affect me. But I decided to use it to my advantage. So I thought, why can't I change that through my choreography? Why don't I put a positive element in the performance? I did manage to change people's perceptions of Diepsloot; believe you me; two of the students came to sleep over in Diepsloot. And another one is coming to record an album in Diepsloot, he is a musician.

Personally, I believe that people who riot are attacking the councillor. I think that a lot of people start riots because they are trying to be councillors. That is my personal research. Most of the people started the fights when they were campaigning to be councillors or they were losing confidence in the councillor and they fail in their political meetings. So they come into the community to mobilize. And they don't want to reveal themselves. They don't want to push that to the forefront. I was in a meeting that caused a riot some time ago. The first meeting was held by a person who wants to influence the councillor's office. The aim of that individual was to take the councillor out. He said lets go and discuss housing. You know, always in Diepsloot, the problem is housing. If I want

to get the masses here, I can take a loud hailer and say: “Guys, I want to discuss with you about the housing issue”. I will get a crowd here and say: “the councillor sold that land to the people from the DBSA<sup>118</sup>. They want to build a stadium where you are supposed to get your RDP houses”. That is going to cause a conflict because people in Diepsloot want to go to their houses. And that is how some of the leaders take advantage of the people. And I refuse that! People are taking advantage of our people. It is from other parties and from within the same party. The other parties that are contesting, the DA, Cope, there aren’t a lot of PAC members here. I don’t want to touch on things that I am not sure of. I do not have a role in the ANC. Let me just say that I am just an ordinary member supporting. I am wearing a t-shirt with an ANC emblem today - it is my mother’s T-shirt, and that is what connects me and my mum. You see, my mother was a politician, so this has nothing to do with my party.

You know, some people cannot be happy. It even went further after voicing my opinion at a meeting with a councillor on stopping riots in Diepsloot; one person posted issues on Facebook... He said a lot of things about me. The councillor of Ward 113 felt offended about what I said. Maybe because of the way I said it. Because when I started speaking, I first said: ‘maybe I must go back to Diepsloot and workshop people or take people to adult school, so that we can all have a clear understanding of the issues and be able to lead. That is what offended him, adult school... During the apartheid era, a lot of people didn’t have the opportunity to go to school. Then they came up with Adult School where adults go to school in the afternoon.

So the councillor was offended. Most of the people present in the meeting were leadership. There were two councillors, two Ward committee members, the 113 and 95 ward committee members, and

there were also people from different structures, including myself. People jump to conclusions without understanding the issues.

## **Drive and Challenges**

It’s very hard; I am spending a lot of time in an organisation that is not paying me. Then someone will come and impose something difficult. There was a time when I called a meeting and one of the members stood up and said I must resign, I must step down. Honestly speaking I wanted to step down immediately, because since I joined the Network honestly my company is suffering, Umtonje, because I’m taking a lot of time marketing for the Network. I even take my connections to the Network. The Network is always performing in the Provincial Department, that’s my connection. I perform in the City it’s my connection. You understand? But I took the Network instead of my brand. My actors will always say, ‘you are no longer focusing on us, your focus tends to be on this Network of yours and we are suffering. We are no longer getting performances. My company was always acting and performing in Sibiqua art centre, in Benoni, but they are no longer doing that. I used to have performance from Mpumalanga, Limpopo Province, for schools. I am no longer doing that... No Time! No time.

What keeps me going? The majority of the members always come to me and say, ‘Papi we understand what we are doing, and people don’t understand what you are doing. People are not here to push the agenda of the Network; they are pushing their own political strategies. But without you I don’t think we are going to survive’, and I care about my people. I meet friends in art in Diepsloot. So, you know two people will criticise you, and five members will defend you, you start to look at the balance. You start to go and sit down alone and say, is what they are saying true or not? If not, why are you resigning, because you must always go and prove to them that this is wrong and how are you going to prove that if you are distant? I must always be here so I can prove to them and say ‘guys you got it wrong, this is hard work’. If you change five

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<sup>118</sup> Development Bank of South Africa.

people, you change two people again to have a different observation about it. Politics will always be everywhere. Even in my company there are politics. The company that we have created you find out it's not everyone who is agreeing with you, so you cannot run, you need to face it.

I'm single, and I think I'm going to be single for five years. I'm not lucky when it comes to women. I once sat down and tried to check what is happening. I started to realise I can't get the person that will connect with me because of the kind of things that I'm doing. Once I had a girlfriend that I thought she was going to be my wife, she was a nurse. You know as an artist sometimes you go for camp... it's a different story to her. You say you're going to sleep in a Carnival camp for a week; she'll think you went out with ladies. I had another one, recently that just left, I didn't want to do the very same mistake that I did with that one, so when I go to my performance I always say 'let's go'. She's not interested to know what I am doing and I wanted to build that connection, she doesn't care, as long as I go and come back whenever she's okay. So there is not that, va va voom.

I don't have any office, except this one: this is a Community Development Worker's office, that's Dorah's office. She's working with Sikhosana<sup>119</sup>... We don't have any office. However someone donated R8000 for us to buy a container...we are just looking for the best container that we can use for now. So the reason why I manage to use this office is because I am the secretary of the Diepsloot Arts Engagement Forum. We made a quotation for the office equipment to PPC, and they bought us this computer, and we asked Dorah to say can we share the office, and because she's welcoming and helping the community she said, no problem.

Arts and culture to the children simply helps with changing lives and understanding life. Changing lives in that some tend to become business people within the arts, being able to charge a person, getting a production in place because they understand. Understanding means understanding an issue around you, for instance, if I were to write a script about xenophobia, you go and you research Xenophobia, so that you can be relevant to the society. After the production is done you can relate to that information. The productions I do are not entertainment, they are edutainment, I educate and I entertain you at the same time, there is a difference. With entertainment; I can come here and do comedy and you will be fine, but what have you grabbed when you go back home. I deal with the issues that affect the society; I deal with the issues that affect the environment that I am living in.

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<sup>119</sup> See next interview in this book.

# Sam Blessing Sikhosana

*Born: 1965 in Muldersdrift*

*Residence: Diepsloot*

*Occupation and Activism: Community Development Worker, Diepsloot*



**Figure 12 - Sam Sikhosana in his Diepsloot office, © Molopi 2013.**

**Interviewers: Tshanda Mbuyi and Edward Molopi**

## Backdrop

I stay in Diepsloot and I started this community facilitation work in 1995. I was a community leader before the inception of Diepsloot; I have been staying in Zevenfontein, an informal settlement near Fourways. While in that settlement I acted as one of the leadership who were fighting for the landless people, until we found this Diepsloot area in 1995. When it stated in 1995 I was part of the project facilitation for the relocation of people to Diepsloot, and actually I was employed by the Northern Metropolitan Local Council<sup>120</sup> as a project facilitator. My work was mainly taking people from evicted areas, for example I could identify Kya Sands, Farmhall, Olievedale, Alexandra - where we had to relocate the people in Diepsloot.

I was born in Muldersdrift in 1965, and then we went to Zevenfontein around 1992. We invaded that place, as a family, we stayed there and we were under guard that we must not expand. The area started small, but it grew and grew, as time went on we negotiated with the TPA<sup>121</sup> to open another parcel of land. There was a conflict between two main political parties which were known there, IFP and ANC. We didn't like to be labelled to a specific people; we call ourselves neutral people as *Mphakathi*, "The Community". We allocated our own site, where it was these people who were non-affiliates to any organisation. There were people who were profiled, this is IFP area, and this is ANC area so people

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<sup>120</sup> In this transitional period between apartheid local government and the current one, Johannesburg was divided into 4 metropolitan local councils (Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western). This level of government was suppressed in 2000 to the benefit of a single metropolitan authority ('Unicity').

<sup>121</sup> Transvaal Provincial Administration. Under apartheid the north of the Johannesburg metropolitan area, in the process of urbanising, was governed by the province, called Transvaal at the time.

were comfortable to come in our area where people did not fall into any organisation.

When Diepsloot was incepted in 1995, Diepsloot was a farm holding. In Diepsloot there was only one site which was developed. The Transvaal Administration adopted Diepsloot as a housing project area. The first settlers were people from Zevenfontein. There were few people, and also about 200 people who were evicted from Honeydew. And then Rhema Church had acquired a piece of land where they had put a camp for the Honeydew people. The main focus point was Diepsloot West, which we call extension 2. That was well developed in terms of infrastructure, toilet water system and so forth. Extension 1 was called Reception Area. That was developed specifically for the people of Zevenfontein, where I come from. It was called Reception Area because it was a transit camp; it was allocated to people who were waiting to be allocated to a specific designated stand, depending on their qualification criteria. People were then taken from the Reception Area to the newly built RDP houses in Diepsloot West, extension 2.

### **From Founder of the Community Development Forum to Becoming a Ward Committee Member in Charge of CBOs**

As an activist in Diepsloot community I served in the committee of the Community Development Forum (CDF) from 1996 to 1999, and at the same time working for the Northern Metropolitan Council as coordinator. My main role was to see that all projects are being facilitated according to the agreement of the committee, how the Local Metropolitan Council would assign us stands and houses. We used to have monthly meetings with the Local Council and come up with the layout and there was a specific steering committee which was earmarked for the development of Diepsloot.

I'm the founder of Community Development Forum. I had to identify structures, the faith based organisations, political organisations, and other people who had to form their own organisation, I put them together, then we formulated what we called Community Development Forum. To do that we were assisted by PLANACT<sup>122</sup>. PLANACT assisted us to formalise the structure and to strategise how to work, and the leadership was workshopped, and positions were allocated to people, how people are going to be working according to their positions. They helped build the community as an entity, so that whoever comes in Diepsloot will not just do anything they want, but there must be a formal structure which is known and that newcomers will integrate, that is the Community Development Forum. That Development Forum was the driving force of the development. It is the one which assisted mostly in terms of building all these other RDP houses that you see. So in my work as a project coordinator, I was foreseeing that every each structure was well functioning, was undertaking their own duties. We used to sit in meetings and have some reporting for every each structure to report. We were having different structures within the CDF, such as the labour desk which looked at the socio-economic factors; the housing steering committee, looking specifically at housing projects; the NGOs-CBOs<sup>123</sup> committee, with somebody who was specifically looking for NGO and CBO. Mind you there were lot of CBOs and NGOs who wanted to come and assist the community, so we had to form up a structure to extend a welcome to come and assist the community. All these committees were under the umbrella of the Community Development Forum. The Community Development Forum became dysfunctional when there was

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<sup>122</sup> A planning NGO aimed at empowering low-income communities in shaping their environment.

<sup>123</sup> Non Governmental Organisations ; Community Based Organisations.



an Act within the Council establishing ward committees<sup>124</sup>. The Ward Committee members had to advocate all that has been done by the Community Development Forum and it was not possible to have two masters in one kraal.

I was elected in the ward committee. The portfolio I undertook was a community and NGO coordinator. All organisations, CBOs, NGOs would be under me. My work was to facilitate that the services within the communities do not duplicate, we don't duplicate services.

We also improvised what we call the Service Providers Forum within the ward committee, where we had to quote all the service providers. People who are servicing the community could be from the Department sectors, maybe SASSA for instance, Department of Home Affairs, could be for home based care and other organisations; all these people come to monthly meetings every month. Every forum could stand up and say what they have done in the community, the challenges in the community which they have come across. They report what have been their achievements, and other things that hinder them to do their work. Then we look at those loopholes, we sit down and say 'ok we have these problems, how do you go about, ok we have a challenge in the Department of Education. In the Ward Committee we've got this sectoral committee, can you deal with this issue?' That's how we've been operating.

## **Competing for tenders**

Challenges you could find are that people fight for projects when there is work. The City of Johannesburg came up with a model that said when there is a project in the community for any job which comes in if there

are any posts that are advertised they will drive the process. But without political dynamics, there are those who think that the process is unfair, they would like to appoint their own people. That's where I interject and say "no way everybody who lives here in the community has a right to contest and be interviewed for the position as long as he qualifies". If he qualifies, then he works in that position. People they may think that there is money coming in but there is nothing, it's like being a Councillor, they would say the Counsellor ate the money that they don't know about, so those are the challenges that we come up with from the community. A position that has been appointed in favour of a certain dynamic can cause tension in the community. Those are the problems that you could find, there was the [unclear word] riots and so forth, because they say 'so and so has been appointed' we want an open process.

Secondly, with projects when they come here, we've got a problem of contractors. They want to dictate to the main contractor that we want so much. Instead of listening to that contractor - because that contractor might have won a tender and that tender is worth so much, he makes his budget, and he works according to the criteria of the government which says the labour pays so much. That is the problem we encounter because one might be having a notion to share half-half, but how can you say share half-half when I'm the one that won the tender? How can that be? Who is going to report to the main owner of the contract? The main one that is reporting is the main owner, not the sub-contractor. People should be taught how the main tenders are won and also maybe the scales of the payment of the sub-contractors, and about differentiation of what type of job they are doing. It is all up to the contractor to go beyond the scope of the government's statutory plan but if he wants to stick to the government structure it is up to him.

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<sup>124</sup> From 2000, in Johannesburg, each ward councillor has to form a ward committee, elected by residents, consisting in ten ward committee members, each having a specific portfolio, very similar to the CDF committees.

There are many projects that have come to a standstill because people are fighting about contractors. As I'm talking now there's a project of housing. The government has to revamp these RDP houses where there are cracks. They are supposed to appoint the CLO<sup>125</sup>'s, so now there's also the so called leadership which claims that they've got specific people that they know can be part of the project. It was supposed to have started the housing renovation project, but I haven't got any report.

Of course some of the things are genuine, but there must be diplomacy of how you run these processes. The panellist should involve the local leadership, they should elect part of the local leadership to be independent, and so when they interview those CLO's, the questions that they ask should not oppose other people. When the interviews are only run by external people they may not know much because they are insisting that you also include the internal leadership. If you say you are a CLO, do you know extension one? You can come from elsewhere, you come here today you excel in the interview only to find you don't know the area. Some of the things are genuine, but we must be very objective and very professional in doing it. It must not be 'we are going to appoint our own people' because there a lot of people who want to be appointed, we have got the ability to run it, the process will be unfolded soon.

## **Becoming a Community Development Worker**

We were the first group to be trained as Community Development Workers. We were trained by UNISA. The component of Community Development Workers was introduced by the then President Thabo Mbeki when he said 'there is a gap between the community and the government'. The pool of Community Development Workers must be a link between the government and the community; work directly with the people. Our job is to get in touch with what is happening that the

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<sup>125</sup> Community Liaison Officer.

government might not be aware of. Our main work is to link people to government services. We disseminate information to the people because most people that stay in the community don't know what's happening. It's like the government is a sort of an elephant which is somewhere and unknown, but we become the liaison between the community and the government so it becomes easier. We identify most people who are impoverished, especially target people who cannot access opportunities like employment or any other opportunities. We also identify the gaps of service delivery within the community and liaise with the government to say these are the problems. We also interact with the local structures so that they become aware of the system of the government form some forums. These forums work in conjunction to assist the strategies of government in terms of building sustainable communities. The ward I am in is Ward 113. The Departments appointed me to supervise some of my colleagues. I am working with people from Ivory Park, Diepsloot, Alexandra, and Kya Sand; they have to report to me and I have to compile one report.

I see my position as different from a ward councillor's. A councillor is a politically elected position, whereas my position is a public representative position, where I don't link directly, I don't favour any political party. A councillor even though he is the elected representative of a specific organisation serves all people.

We assist councillors on a number of issues. We say, 'councillors these are the issues that we foresee are a problem' then we will work together in terms of how we go about assisting the community. We work with projects like forming cooperatives, the SMME<sup>126</sup>'s, how to link them with other spheres of the government which have got resources, the Department of Trade and Industry, and other NGOs, which can bring on

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<sup>126</sup> Small and Medium Enterprises.

services. The councillor being the head of the ward oversees any challenges that are coming within the ward. Sometimes he or she refers some of the issues to us because we are working directly with the community, to make the community more sustainable.

## A broker between civil society and the state

We are like a coordinative body which interacts with all spheres of government, goes deep in the community, checks service delivery and check if community problems are dealt with when they are reported, whether there has been feedback.

When things seem to be blocked, first of all we deal with the person holding the case. Should we fail, we find another avenue. For example – this has happened to two families. The City of Joburg introduced the ‘social burial package’. It covers people who are unemployed, who do not work, should it happen that your loved one passes away. You go there to the officials, ‘my sister has passed away, my daughter has passed away’, and they will tell you ‘we don’t have money, go to the street committee and ask for donations’. People, because of their lack of knowledge, stay in their home and the child stays for almost three to four months without being buried. I’m talking about something real...three months that someone is staying at the mortuary because he doesn’t have money.

So, first of all I tried the avenue of talking to the undertaker. “Undertaker please the person doesn’t have money to bury”. The undertaker said “at least pay so much”, but they know these people don’t have money. Ok, “hold on undertaker”... I went and talked to the department of human development, social development in the City; they still said to me “we don’t have money”. When they say to me they don’t have money, I believe that they don’t have money because they are telling me that. But still should I just sit down? ... So I read their Systems Act and I know there is a clause which says there is a burial package, I go to their system and check. I find out that the City pays an undertaker to bury such people. I

talked to those people and they said ok... they heard that I wanted to expose the matter to the speaker’s office and they came running to help us. That’s when they say “no these people did not present their problem in the right way” ...but “did you go and check at their household, how they stay?” Finally that’s how the burial was arranged.

I have no problem now, so it’s one of my achievements, to unblock where they think they want to save the government’s money, but they are killing the morale of other people instead of doing their work.

## Conflict Resolution and Community Cohesion

Another of my roles is to mediate conflict and work for community cohesion.

In 1996 there was a big conflict between ANC and IFP. SANCO<sup>127</sup> wasn’t established by then, it was established later. The main issues were that each party want to be dominant over the other. Then came a time for establishment of Diepsloot extension 2, the IFP wanted to call that area Mangosuthu Village<sup>128</sup>, they even designed a board and put posters at the entrance and wrote Mangosuthu village. The ANC would go and light it off. In some instances the fighting was physical, and it came to a point where we said: no we cannot go to this extent. I became a facilitator between two parties. I was chairing the meeting of the executive of both parties, trying to iron up the differences, trying to mediate. I wanted to make sure that both parties come together, because I foresaw that the fight was going to result in bloodshed. There were petty things which just emanated because I am an ANC you are an IFP, that hatred, but as time

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<sup>127</sup> The South African National Civic Organisation is a federation of civics (community organisations in townships), allied to the ANC.

<sup>128</sup> After Mangosuthu Buthelezi, traditional Zulu chief and leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

went on as we had a community structure, then the fights were resolved. We gathered amongst ourselves and we made a committee where the leadership of all parties merged together. We had to elect members to become a committee that did not favour any party but became a neutral body, and I was part of that committee.

The other intervention as a facilitator was between SANCO and the Community Development Forum. It was in 1997-1998. I was part of the Community Development Forum (CDF) but both parties elected me to be the facilitator. SANCO was mobilising people to fight against the members of the CDF. They even went to the extent of talking to the media to say that the CDF wasn't a legitimate structure, that they were the only recognised leaders in Diepsloot. The main issue was that SANCO wanted government department and other stakeholders who came in to develop to go through them. They didn't want development to be driven by the CDF. But they were not recognised by government entities, only the CDF was recognised.

As a facilitator, I had to call the parties, sit down and discuss: 'SANCO, I understand the constitution of SANCO says this, and the constitution of the CDF says that, what is the problem, can't you calm down and resolve the problem?'

In the end, what we said to SANCO was that 'Guys there is no problem, we can take some of your members to be part of Community Development Forum, because the CDF is about community development and SANCO is part of the community. We had no problem for you to run your own activities but also you should support the development as we would also support what you are doing, it's not all about fighting but it's all about building the community. But SANCO is also politically influential, and it is not neutral: if you go to IFP members, they will say that SANCO a part of the tripartite alliance with the ANC, so they will not want to engage with them. While the CDF is neutral, anyone can come in, regardless of from which party they come from'. And with time, things

stabilised and everything was fine, the Community Development Forum was recognised even though SANCO existed.

## **Xenophobic Attacks**

Remember xenophobia did not start in Diepsloot: there were people who ran away from other areas such Honeydew, from Olivedale, etc. and came to Diepsloot. When people from Diepsloot saw that, they started to revolt. Some people who were thugs went looting shops of the Somalians. As a community developer, I had to look at how to safeguard those people who are victims. We spoke with the Methodist Church, where we had to put some of the people to stay there. We formed a joint committee, with the City of Johannesburg's department of human development, the disaster management emergency services, and the Red-Cross came in, Home Affairs was part of the programme and myself as the Community Development Worker. We used to hold a meeting every week, but in Diepsloot the xenophobic attack was not that big. If you look at the registration at the police station, the number of people from Diepsloot was very low, most foreigners went back to where they had relocated from. We had to speak to people. We organised Faith organisations, the police, we organised an event to call the community and speak about xenophobia and the human settlement. How people must welcome their brothers and sisters unless that person is a thug, then in this case reporting them to the police, not taking the law into your own hands. The grievances were, they are taking our jobs, they are taking our wives, and they are stealing, and the houses, and they open spazas<sup>129</sup> all over and do not give local people chances of operating business. The local business people were fuelling that, they wanted them to be chased out. There was a time when I and some volunteers went door to door to do a survey, to all these spazas including these Somalian shops to check

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<sup>129</sup> Informal convenience shop in residential areas.

the prices of their goods: they were actually more or less the same, the difference is slight in prices. It is mostly that Somalian shops operate like a Pick'n Pay supermarket<sup>130</sup> whereas the spazas when you don't get what you want. There was also the difference that our own locals do not want to hire people for security, so those are the things that we have identified.

## **Bringing an Entrepreneurial spirit into Community Work**

While I was at Zevenfontein I was not working, but I used to go around, to the flea market, checking what other people were doing. I often went to Bruma market. I remember this time I was talking to one guy that was selling bags, I was very interested in what he was selling. It's a white guy, he gave me two bags. There's one guy who was doing art next to where I was staying, I joined him, and he taught me how to do art. I had to teach myself lot of things.

Then I worked for the Northern MLC until 1998, 1999, and then I resigned from the Local Government position and I got an opportunity to start my own business as an entrepreneur. I started my own security company that I ran from 1999 until 2005. Actually, it was not only a security company, it was home design and a security company. While I was working under the local council, I had visited some of the flea markets, going around to check what is happening. I adopted one of the people who were doing some of the businesses, they would cut sort of a column, they put glasses, they put a TV, a hi-fi, then on the two small stands they put speakers. So I interviewed that person, how do you do? Then I found that to do that for a start we can start with only R1, 000. Then I bought two columns, and I said to him 'can you show me where you buy glasses?'

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<sup>130</sup> One of the main supermarket franchise in South Africa.

Then he showed me where I could buy glasses. Then while I was doing it I asked him how do you do the painting of these things, he taught me the technique of painting these things. So I practiced, I became more successful doing those things at small scale. Then I went to Kya Sands, there was a carpentry, I said I wanted to draw the design, I gave them my column, I said I want to change this design, I wanted to do more than that, more than him. I produced, I sent, I hired people, I had to put people along William Nichol, and along the main roads. I went to the management of Makro<sup>131</sup> I spoke with them, they said I must bring my product to them. They valued my product; said I could bring my product in bulk. They sold my products, at the end of the month they just transferred my money, and they took whatever they did. When that Makro burnt down the new management did not allow me to work there. At the same time I was running a security company. How I started a security company? There was an opportunity around RDP houses, as people were vandalising them. I spoke with the developer, and he adopted me. I was protecting the houses here, I moved somewhere to East Rand Germiston.

When the position of Community Development Worker<sup>132</sup> came in 2005, I got interested because my passion is in the community. The Department of Local Government and Housing employed me, but they said you cannot serve two masters; either you kill the one master. There was somebody whom I gave my business to. I said "I'll get so much percentage. I'll give you all my posts, you run them but I need so much at a certain point you take over". That's how I left the security company, and then I worked for the government as a Community Development Worker.

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<sup>131</sup> A chain of warehouse clubs, also called cash and carries, opened to professionals and known for its cheap prices and promotional offers.

<sup>132</sup> A Community Development Worker (CDW) is a Provincial employee, whose role is to facilitate community participation. Unlike ward councillors, CDWs are not elected representatives.

## Removing Ignorance

Something I believe is important is to give information to the community, to give them insight that I feel community needs. For example, I call an organisation, I go with them to the community and give them information about the National Credit Regulations. People don't know what's happening, they fall into debt; they don't know how to go about it. We have got the cooperative, we are encouraging people to read. I volunteered to join an educational literacy campaign. I signed myself to volunteer my part time. Outside of my work, I recruit people in the community; identify people who have never been at school at all who'll learn how to read and write. They think they are hopeless they cannot go to school, but others could teach them how to read and write, it's a six month course. We identify the matric students to teach them. The Department pay them a stipend. I monitor and check what they do. At the end of the day for example I've got some certificates from the Department what they provide. I do it in my own time, but I take it as a community project. I report it as well that this is what I am doing. But I do more than that... I have linked to another organisation, it is called Anashi Group. It is an institution that transfers life skills and computer training in Centurion. Every Saturday there's transport that takes them to Centurion, they train them with life skills and computer for a period of six months or one year, and after that they give them certificates. I recruit those people, I started this thing, and it is now four years. After they have exited I recruit other people, I coordinate all of that. Some of them find jobs, they are not even here they are working somewhere else.

## Farm Cooperative

The main project which still exists even now, apart from building RDP houses, was a government initiated project. I'm talking of the project that we initiated as a community.

The farming project was initiated by IKamva Labantu (IL), a charitable trust, looking for the best ways to uplift people. They identified Diepsloot as one of the priority areas where they could link with other stakeholders. IL brought the concept and said we think we can do farming. Primedia<sup>133</sup> came on board and provided funding. The Israel Embassy also came on board to bring in the agricultural knowledge which they had already applied in other parts of South Africa. I had to discuss with the City of Joburg to acquire land. Joburg Water gave the land; it's a Northern Farm that had been identified where people could do farming. At the time I was a member of the ward committee in Diepsloot, I was in charge of NGOs and CBOs.

The candidates for the project were selected in every extension in Diepsloot. We selected people who were not working, had no means of survival and people with passion in farming. We wanted young people to be equally involved, but they had no interest in coming to the agricultural farming, so we had more aged people involved. Even though aged people they believed that they start it today and tomorrow they will eat forgetting that it is a project, it's a process that will take time and people were impatient, the number reduced from 100 to around 40 people.

Since those people left, they were patches of unused land, so I thought that we should organise a cooperative, one body where people would work collectively. Because as people were living some of the land was left with no use. The farm cooperative was established in 2005. I was already a Community Development Worker then. I did the documentation for them. To form a cooperative, the beneficiaries register the company at the SABRO company registration and they pay something like R215 to register the company. So when you register a company you have to what is a cooperative you have to clarify what a cooperative entails, then

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<sup>133</sup> A leading South African media group.

register, when they register they elect a board of directors (an executive) then the members of the cooperative, so that is how we registered a cooperative.

But there were still challenges. People thought it was taking too long between when they start to prepare the land and time taken before they get resources. They had to wait for resources to come in, the pipes, the tanks; it took time. So they started fighting with this Primedia guy. They even had a conflict with this guy from Israel Embassy and the project nearly collapsed. So I took my own initiative to save this project because most people from the steering committee were no longer in the forefront of driving the process, not that they gave up per se but they had their other commitments, the running of this process was no longer their priority and this guy from Israel Embassy wanted to leave.

So I called the guy from Israel Embassy and the guy from Joburg Water who was also assisting us in getting resources like the tractors to do land preparation and the members of the cooperative. We sat down to identify the problems. The members pointed to the problems and the coordinator from Israel Embassy said he was tired of working with these people because they did not listen to him and they demand things even when he explains when the resources will arrive and that it is beyond his control when they arrive. He explained that he had to contact the suppliers and all those things, some of the delays were due to the suppliers. Even though Primedia had so much money to donate to the project, the delivery of the resources to put the project on place was very slow. We tried to iron all those issues until such time we had to persuade him to stay on board. I called the City's department of economic development, as one of the priorities of the city was also to look at the socio-economic empowerment to the community. So as we were working in one community we partnered looking at how to sustain these cooperatives. I brought him in to assist me on the project to say let's take this project forward, let's maintain it and make a monthly meeting to change the progress of the project. The main thing is that

when you start a project, you monitor it; you need be hands on as those people may not perform. That is how we came about to save the project.



**Figure 13 - Sam Sikhosana and two farmers in the Diepsloot farm cooperative, © Molopi 2013.**

Then when it was back on track, some of the people who had already left had no interest of coming back. The numbers reduced continually from about 40 to 15, 13 and 9 as I am speaking now. And these remaining 9 members are unable to sustain the project due to their age. Even though we took them to workshops on farming management and running a cooperative but still it isn't sustainable. Career skills came and surveyed the project and found that lack of human resource was the key hindrance to project progress because the people currently running the project were old. So I came up with an idea to train young people on agricultural

learner ship, I contacted the career skills based in Fourways, then we approached the Agri-SETA<sup>134</sup>, where I applied for learnerships. It is how I trained young people from the age of 22 to, the oldest is not supposed to be in the program but we put her in, she is 36. Otherwise the rest are below 30, ten young people, they started studying last year, and they trained for agriculture.

We decided to absorb the young people into the cooperative. I had a meeting with them last week. We agreed that they had to meet other members of the cooperative at the farm and discuss their addition as fully fledged members of the cooperative. There is a form, a contract agreement that they had to sign to bind themselves that they will work according to the criteria and the code of the conduct of the cooperative. And after they register we will dismantle the cooperative and restructure it to co-opt these young people to be part of the committee, re-electing another committee so that it's inclusive of the young people.

Now those people are standing on their own feet; the 9 remaining members. It's a fully-fledged cooperative. There is water, the project is buying the seeds for themselves from the producer; but it is not sustained provision to the market, it's sustained for their own consumption. We marketed the cooperative and there was a time when they were supplying fruits and vegetable to Pick'n Pay, but that went down when they were lots of challenges. People stole the electric cables so it took us some time to grow; now to catch up with the standard becomes difficult.

For now it's self-funding. Primedia already have handed over the project; they are no longer sustaining it. But I am assisting the members of the

cooperative to get funding from the Department of Trade and Industry. And now the City is providing them with resources. A unit was formed called Food Resilience Program, so there is an official there who is assisting the cooperative in terms of giving them that tractor so that they can plough. I like the program the City of Johannesburg has come up with of adopting all the farming cooperatives, to come up with a model. There is land which has been earmarked to identify people that have got farming practices elsewhere in Diepsloot and give them more support. And then come up with a marketing structure, and model them up and work hand in hand with the City, in particular the Johannesburg fresh produce market, in City Deep.

## **Motivation**

I am disabled, but I say disability does not mean immobility. As human beings, we tend to have that mind-set that because I am disabled I must depend on hand outs. When I left my private company to become CDW, I realised later that I had made a blunder; but now I must not say it's a blunder because it is not about me, it is about the community. My passion is to look at the impact on most people that I've assisted, that is my achievement. That is my pride. It's a blunder somewhere but at the same time I say no, it was God's choice. God created us and gave us wisdom to think and to look upon him as well.

What motivates me is that people should not be in a state of being dependant, they must think of doing things for themselves. They must not think of government to give everything to them. Government will only feature where it's possible, but people should stand up and also look to other ways of how they could assist the government. The government can only assist where there are gaps. In my own opinion, grants are there but they become a dependant syndrome to our community; yes there must be specific grants for specific purposes, but there are grants where people should know that I must not be only dependant on this, but I must stand up for myself.

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<sup>134</sup> The Agricultural Sector Education Training Authority. SETAs were set up by the South African National government in 1998, in response to the identified need of supporting skills development. In each professional sector, SETAs provide training opportunities, learnerships, apprenticeships, etc.



I have worked in the community for a long time. Even when I feel like resigning I say 'why can't I resign and do my own thing?' I believe in doing things on my own. I envy those people who are doing businesses because I can see that these people are doing something good for themselves. It is what the government is looking for; not people to be so dependent on the government.

I'm open to give any training to any community. Also when I look at where people are, I feel that even though I don't have anything that I can assist with them, but I can give them a hint. Just this morning I had at least about five ladies and one guy, they said they want work. I had to ask them one by one, as you are here at your age what are you surviving on, while talking to them I listened to their stories, but I did not pardon them, I called them into my office, I said "ok the first thing that you could do before we go any further is..." I gave them these forms. I just wanted to check their passion. I gave them an area in Diepsloot, and said, can you go and identify families who are not working, who are not benefitting from anything? Tomorrow I need these forms and bring them. Then from there we will take it further. I want to take that group and adopt them to be part of the voluntary system so that they may not stay at home and say they don't know of any job. If there are any opportunities arising I will just pull them into the program.

Serving people is my passion, regardless of me acquiring for my own benefit. But the little that I'm getting it's enough; I don't need a bucket of money. Of course I have got a lot of needs, but what I'm proud of is that at the end of the day I have got a goal. When the week ends I count, I've assisted one, two, three, four I have got a list of people I can count. I've got resolved and unresolved cases and I can count, I am proud.

I was getting phone calls instead of staying home when I was sick. I ended up coming here, I never rested. People keep phoning. I am enjoying my work, but there are bureaucracies.

There are a lot of things that I went through, I went through a lot of experiences, I know how hard and how one could prosper, perseverance. What I learnt in my life is to persevere. Don't look at your weaknesses, but work on your weaknesses. Focus on what you want to do and don't think of things that you cannot achieve. Don't think of big things that are impossible to you, start to grow a little bit, until you reach a stage and look at your profile and say, I came from this, this is what is happening, this is my strength



# Kristin Kallesen

*Born: 1974 in Columbus, Nebraska, USA*

*Residence: Kyalami*

*Occupation: Landscaper*

*Activism: Chairperson of Just Environment Action*

**Interviewers: Muneebah Kara and Ntandokabawo James**

## Backdrop: Early Life and Family History

I was born in the United States, in Nebraska. It was a small town about 25,000 people called Columbus, a farming and manufacturing town. We didn't have a picket fence, but it was one of those neat orderly neighbourhoods where everything was in its place.

My father is an electrical engineer, and my mother worked for a Methodist Church. My mother had done a lot of travelling around the globe - she grew up in the Air Force - so she had had a lot of exposure to the world, which in a small town is a good thing. My father being an electrical engineer meant that over the dinner table we often had interesting debates, because he was very much in support of nuclear energy, and I had always an opinion on these things.

My educational background is quite varied. When I started varsity, I knew that I wanted to save the planet but I wasn't sure how. I enrolled in environmental science, and my immediate impressions were that it was very linked to politics, and I wasn't interested in politics, so I backed off.



Figure 14 - Kristin Kallesen, © Kara 2013.

Then I studied engineering for a term, thinking I would become an environmental engineer, and then realised I was not an engineer. So I studied atmospheric science for another term, dealing with climate change, and then at the end of the day my desire to work outdoors won out, and I became a landscaper. I now run a business that is landscape design and construction, so really all of that is pulled together into what I am doing.

I've been in South Africa since 1995. At the time I was a student, and there was an exchange program from the Colorado State University where I was studying with the University of Stellenbosch. Again, in my many varied courses, trying to figure out what I wanted to do, I came out to study nature conservation for five months, and that brought me to South Africa. But then I just felt like I wanted to see a bit more of South Africa, and I found someone in Johannesburg that was teaching permaculture, so that's what brought me to Jo'burg, and I must say I fell in love with Jo'burg and that's why I am here.

## **Just Environmental Action gathering activists and professionals**

Just Environmental Action (JEA) is an organisation that formed as a result of conservancies and residents associations who were dealing with development applications responding to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)<sup>135</sup>, and often found that decisions that were made were not in the best interests of the environment. And as concerned environmentalists - which we all were - we were trying to find a way to influence development decisions in a positive way, and to really expose some of the problems that were happening. It's a coalition, an association

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<sup>135</sup> Since 2006 EIAs are compulsory for any new development in Gauteng, and in principle provide an opportunity for the public to understand and comment on the proposed development.

of like-minded individuals and organisations. The Committee members have specific roles that we play, but it's more of a sort of a guiding that we do as the Committee. So it's a very broad-based organisation; we've got town planners and other professionals that give input to the organisation and assist those people who are members. As far as members go, we haven't actually been very strict with our membership. We have got more loose members than we have registered and paid-up members. Our database has a couple of hundred people. We are individuals as members of JEA, and we're not a very formal structure, we don't have full-time paid staff at this stage.

The name, JEA... It is a pun intended, it's about environmental justice, but it's also about just getting it done. If I think about it the environment and politics and the amount of time in debate over what should or shouldn't be done, very little actually takes place. How can we apply our skills and information and how can we strategize that something does actually get done? That is our mission.

I see JEA as a vehicle for taking the ethics that I have and that the committee and the members share, and explaining it and taking it forward. So JEA is just a description of what it is we want to achieve, and almost a means of introducing ourselves, and to say, "This is who we are; this is what we do".

We have held workshops over the last two years where we brought together professionals on specific topics that would be of interest to our members. One such workshop was about the state of the water crisis in South Africa, what we are facing and what we can do about it. Another one was on how a community can come together and develop a 'green community'. We've also had talks on the EIA process, or the history of the environmental assessment process: how it used to be, problems with the current system, how to co-operate with municipalities and with developers and various stakeholders groups, and try and come up with creative solutions going forward. So these workshops often attract

professionals, town planners, landscape architects, people that are into green energy, and so it's often just a sharing of ideas; and a sort of bringing together of minds and getting creative juices flowing.

For instance, at the moment there is a concern with the Rietfontein Reserve, in Paulsof<sup>136</sup>. There is also a Wildlife rehabilitation centre there, Free Me, that rescues and rehabilitates wildlife displaced by urbanisation. There is currently a proposal for a provincial road that is going to cut out a portion of the reserve, and it is close to the rehab centre, and they are afraid they are going to have relocate. So they have approached us and asked us to highlight this. JEA is acting from an advisory position. We have also looked at an issue in Kyalami with the provincial roads and have other members coming forward with various provincial road issues. We would like to take all these issues collectively to the Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport to raise the environmental concerns. At this point in time, it's the beginning of the EIA phase for Rietfontein road, and many JEA members and associates have an experience in environmental responses to this EIA process. So it is all about assisting and advising how to respond to these impact assessments.

The fact the JEA is a provincial body allows people to cross borders and assist in areas that don't necessarily impact them directly. Aside from that where you have a road going through an EIA process, the stakeholders and neighbourhoods would get involved and then it becomes NIMBY<sup>137</sup>. But when people start to look at the bigger picture you move away from that NIMBY perspective and that is really what JEA is hoping to facilitate.

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<sup>136</sup> In Johannesburg, just beyond the N1 highway ring.

<sup>137</sup> NIMBY, not in my backyard. Parochial and conservative attitude of local communities refusing infrastructures in their area, as they are seen as a nuisance locally, even if they are beneficial to the broader urban community.

We started off just having a few meetings amongst ourselves. There are quite a few people and organisations that have been in the conservation field a long time: Rhenosterspruit Conservancy<sup>138</sup>, Klipkop Conservancy<sup>139</sup>, the GEKCO Conservancy<sup>140</sup>, and other environmental activists. We had informal meetings saying, "Look, we need to find a way forward". We needed to try something new, because just having conservancy status didn't mean that we had a say in what was happening in our areas. We had a couple of meetings and we decided that the only way to go forward was to form this association; and then it was launched in June 2011, when we applied for non-profit status. And the first initial few months of the organisation, we were looking at fighting developments and following the legal process, but we quickly realised that we were only a few people with no resources, so going to Court wasn't really an option. We decided that we had to look at this again and that we should rather try to find officials who wanted to work with us; try to find other stakeholders, developers, whoever it may be that shared the same vision that we had. So then we embarked on a process of introducing ourselves to the City municipal structures, development planning departments, and explaining what it is that we wanted to achieve.

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<sup>138</sup> Rhenosterspruit Conservancy is located between Johannesburg, Pretoria and Krugersdorp, next to Lanseria airport and Diepsloot Nature reserve.

<sup>139</sup> Klipkop is situated to the east of Pretoria, where a group of residents decided to remove their fences and declare the resulting area of 1500ha a Wildlife Reserve ([www.justenvironmental.co.za](http://www.justenvironmental.co.za))

<sup>140</sup> GEKCO, the Greater Kyalami Conservancy, is a federation of small and large agricultural holdings devoted to preserving nature and the equestrian industry. Founded in 2006, the conservancy encompasses the suburbs of Kyalami, Beaulieu, Sun Valley and Glenferness and has been fighting the development of the K56 road planned to cross the area.

## **Being JEA chairperson**

Being a chairperson of JEA is not something I aspired to or imagined. When we formed JEA, I just thought, “Do we really need an organisation to do this?” And we decided yes we did; and we decided we had to have a chairperson. And I didn’t want to be a chairperson but everybody else was already the chairperson of something else, like their residents’ associations or their Conservancy; so I ended up being the chairperson. Now as a chairperson, I’m responsible for calling meetings and making sure that our Committee gets together, and that we keep a vision going forward. So what we are is really a network, a coalition; and the intention was also to share information and experiences, and to assist each other in going through these processes, because we found that most people are not sure how to deal with an issue when it comes up. The Environmental Impact Assessment is quite a complicated process. They would register as public participants and, not knowing much about the process, find that at the end of the day they didn’t have much influence and a lot of people didn’t even know about the town planning processes that were in place.

The one thing about I think is very strong about JEA is that our basis is co-operation. However, we are very strong on the stance that we will not compromise the environment; so in some cases we say the unpopular things to these corporations, to these developers, because we do believe that the right thing can be done for the benefit of all – so there is a quite a strong stance in that regard. We have not had a lot of dealings with big corporations as yet, but I think our dealings with them are more looking at their sustainable policies and then looking at them in practice, and then going back to them and saying, “Your practice does not meet your sustainable criteria, you are actually promoting that you are this wonderful green organisation. However look at X, Y and Z and it does not actually stand up to that”.

One of our strengths is introspection and the fact that the Committee that formed JEA is made up of quite a mature bunch of people; people

who fought environmental battles through the years and have learned what worked and didn’t work. And we’re always asking ourselves, “Is what we’re doing correct? Is this what our objective is? Is this what we’re aiming to achieve or are we going off track?” And I find, for me, that that is the strength of the organisation; I may be the chairperson and in the front line, but I’m certainly not the only person, and it’s having that Committee of committed people behind me, and having somebody to discuss ideas with. That for me has always been the strength because anyone can go out there and start shouting and saying that they represent everybody, but I find that our human egos often get in the way. So it’s a very good idea to sit down with others and say, “Look, is this a correct way of approaching it?” And you have to be able to take criticism; you have to be open to suggestions somebody says, “No I wouldn’t do this” because often somebody’s got a better idea than what you have. So, for me being a part of this team is what the strength is. At the moment we are working on a project with the Kyalami Conservancy. At the end of the day, this is a community; and it’s the community that is your strength at the end of the day. So I couldn’t achieve anything if it’s just me on my own.

## **The Green Neighbourhood Project**

JEA was basically formed as an organisation following development processes and trying to protect the environment. We saw that development would go ahead, court cases might ensue, but people didn’t feel that they were really making any impact in stopping unplanned development. So the different areas got together and thought well we are following the proper process and not getting anywhere there must be something we can do. We identified that the communities are the ones who can do something: they can present an alternate view. I live in Kyalami and I was very aware of the pressures in our area, and the fact that developers were going to the City with only their plans. If the City is only hearing one side of the story, then that is what they going to go with. So, as the Kyalami community, we decided we wanted to present a

different view that protected the wetlands and the environmentally sensitive areas, so the city then has something it can actually choose between, they now have enough information to make those decisions. That is how the green neighbourhood project (GNP) was born. Additionally we found that while it was nice to have an alternative to present, unless your community was behind, it was useless. The Kyalami Conservancy ran a survey and it came back to state that quite a few people living in the area would like to see wetlands protected more because of the local wildlife and open space. The conservancy could say that the majority of the people in the area feel this way.

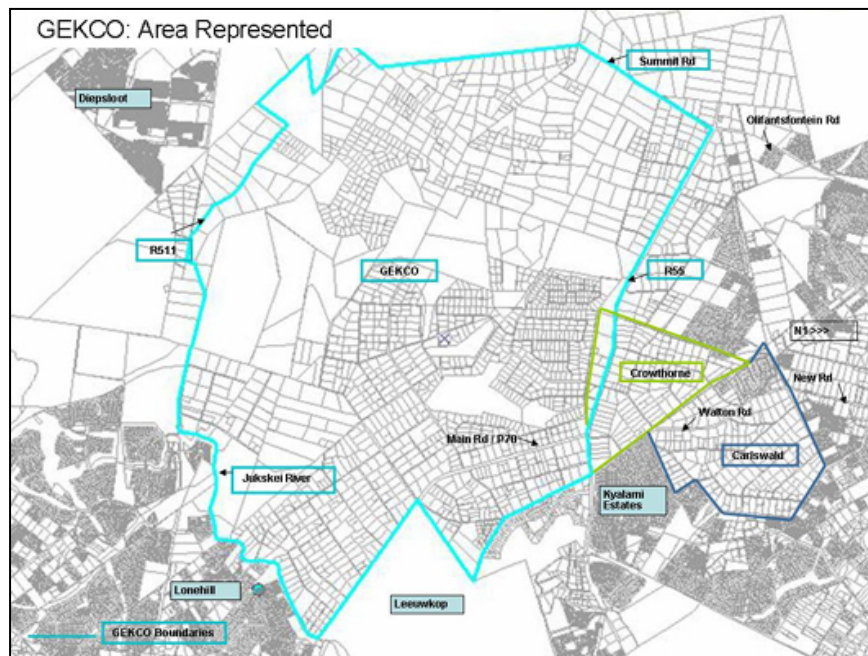


Figure 15 - Greater Kyalami Conservancy boundaries.

Source: <http://gekco.co.za/about-gekco>.

A Green Neighbourhood is an internationally recognised term for communities that want to promote sustainable principles to meet climate change objectives. These communities tend to promote public and non-motorised transport, preservation of open space, energy efficiency, water conservation, recycling, etc.

## Accomplishments

If I think about the achievements, there was actually one development that was calling itself 'the greenest development', and we disagreed with the development on the basis of the environmental approval. So we held a meeting with the developer and said, "We don't know on what grounds you're calling yourself the greenest development"; and we pointed out a few of the reasons behind our opposition. Now it was a quiet victory, because the developer did change their advertising campaign - no one else probably would have noticed it except for us - but they no longer claimed to be the greenest development. So it's small things like that. We've also been lobbying for cycles on William Nichol, and we've held meetings with the Gauteng Department of Roads and Transport (GDRA), and with JRA<sup>141</sup>, as well as with the developer who is funding a portion of the road. It sounds like they have decided to incorporate the cycle lanes and the private developer may be putting up additional funding for that, so that's one of our victories.

Another victory that comes to mind - actually, because it was yesterday - I was presenting this to one of the City officials, and we arrived at the meeting to present the Green Neighbourhood Project, and had thought that we were going to be meeting with a couple of officials. But when I got to the meeting they had invited ten extra people to the meeting; each person had been provided with an entire brief on what we were doing and had been asked to read it before the meeting. This specific city

<sup>141</sup> Johannesburg Roads Agency, a municipal entity.

official has the ability to bring in the different departments and to enact this within their area of mandate. The official was so excited to have heard the idea that we had brought forward that she told us she had the means to do it. She told us that they needed the vision, and if we could provide the vision, they would be happy to assist. So for me, for the City to actually say, “We want to implement these policies, please assist us” ... that for me is very exciting.

I find that because of the approach that we take, the support is immense; because we are finding support from City officials, from directors in some of the departments, from some of the MEC offices<sup>142</sup>. So what I find is that there are a lot of officials and politicians out there that really do want to do the right thing where the environment is concerned. But then there is this gap between policy and implementation; so as a community and as JEA we are actually trying to bridge that gap and create the communication structure between all of these different levels, national, provincial and municipal. And then in our communities we’ve got our city councillors. And in the Kyalami area specifically we’ve got an association, and then we’ve got different residents’ associations; and then we’ve got individual citizens. So you’ve created a structure where for a citizen to get heard by the top they’ve got to go to all these different levels, they’ve got to go through the residents’ associations, through the Councillor, and everything falls down here, you know there’s not a lot of communication going between the levels. So JEA is standing on the side-line, and trying to communicate with all these different levels so that we can actually bring the thoughts of the citizens to each level of government through the City Councillors, and try to enhance and create a conversation between everybody, because what you find is that often one government department doesn’t know what the other is doing, and you know, and

that’s the bureaucracy that we’ve created, and that’s why a lot of these things don’t actually work very well.

We are quite blessed to have some of our Committee members worked in the media industry in the past, so our press releases go through them. And as environmentalists, we have had and faced issues, so we have used the media on many occasions – not only to bring attention to the issue, but to also give hope to residents dealing with that issue. And we find that the media is very effective in giving people hope that they can actually have a voice because most people feel isolated, and people do not like confrontation, so they do not want to be the ones who stand up and say, “This is wrong and I have a problem with it”. So everyone waits for someone else to make that move but when they hear of it in the press and in the media, they realise that they are not the only ones who feel that way; it gives people hope that they can actually do something about an issue. We have had newspapers and radio shows highlighting our issues, so we use whatever strategy will give us our biggest impact.

## **Adversities**

We do have difficulties in JEA, specifically with the volunteer nature of the organisation at present. As the committee of JEA, we are ideas people, so we’ve got loads of ideas; and the amount of time it takes to implement those ideas, the resources, is the biggest stumbling block. All of us are doing this on a part-time basis; we run businesses or work full time, so trying to fit it in or trying to be consistent is difficult. Because often you will find that you are able to put a bit of attention for a few weeks, and then the next thing you are busy for the next two months and you fall behind. So I find that the consistency of volunteering is a challenge.

Some of our members have received hate mail when they have opposed specific developments. There was one case where a letter was sent out using a mysterious name, trying to divide the Kyalami community when

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<sup>142</sup> Member of the Executive Committee, Provincial Government.



they lodged an appeal against a development. I believe the letter was intended to incite divisions and to intimidate the community. And I know that when residents in a neighbouring township opposed a development, the developer attempted to mobilise the community in support of the development. These are tactics that are used, and that comes with the territory. My usual response is to just ignore it. We are certainly not going to resort to these tactics. And I feel that if what we are doing is in the public interest, and is for the good of all, then it will stand for itself, so I leave people to make up their own minds.

### Political Views: Political Aversion and Neutrality?

I do not have any political ambitions; the one thing I have is an aversion to politics, actually. You know when I registered to vote to the United States, I registered as an independent because I never wanted to be dictated to by a political party. I would rather just choose on the basis of the issues at hand. I think the environment has always been side-lined for political issues. It has been used for political gain, and politics has always sort of damaged the environment in the end. For me, it is vital that JEA stays out of that arena and remains this safe space, so that it transcends that. For me politics often clouds the issue, so if we were coming at this from a political angle, belonging to a political party, I don't think we would accomplish nearly as much as we have accomplished. Because already you are coming in with a specific identity, and you've already got specific people that will align to you, but you've got specific people that will be opposed to you, just on that basis. Leaving all of that behind allows you to engage more with the issues than the politics. We've got councillors from the DA who are members of JEA, but we have also got members of the ANC who are members of JEA; and I believe that is the strength. Yes you can have your political sway and identity, but that's not why JEA is there, and those should be left behind when discussing environmental issues. And you should be able to create a space where the people from these different parties can look to achieving the same goal at the end of the day.

### Relationship to the City

Our first encounter with the City as JEA was when we attended a workshop on cycle lanes and introduced ourselves to Rehanna Moosajee, the MMC<sup>143</sup> of Transport at the time - she has since resigned. She has a very strong vision of sustainability through integrated transport: cycle lanes, public transport and that type of thing so it was great meeting her, seeing her passion and sharing our vision with her.

We have also been working with the regional director in Region A<sup>144</sup>. We have met with Gautrans, and were introduced to the MEC of Transport<sup>145</sup>. Provincial and City governments both play a part in this, but so far it is the City that we are mainly gearing our time and energy in setting up meeting with, the different clusters in the City. Particularly transport, because development, for instance in the Kyalami area, is very affected by roads and proposed roads. So if the proposed provincial roads go ahead we will have an issue. The cycle lane initiatives have been promoted with the City Transport Department. We have also had a meeting with the Environment and Infrastructure Department in the City, and we are setting up meetings with people who deal specifically with water issues and effluent to specifically deal with waste management.

We have been dealing with rates and taxes too, because in 2007, for the agricultural holdings in Johannesburg (of which some are conservancies, like Kyalami), they changed the agricultural rates to residential rates. So everyone paid 300% more than they had on their previous rates bill. And agricultural areas tend to have dust roads, no street lights. They don't have the same infrastructure. In Kyalami, a lot of people live there

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<sup>143</sup> Member of the Mayoral Committee – the political head of transport.

<sup>144</sup> Johannesburg is divided in seven administrative regions, headed by directors whose role is mainly managerial.

<sup>145</sup> Gautrans: Gauteng Department of Transport (provincial level).

because they want to ride horses, they want open spaces, they want small-scale farming. So we have approached the Department of Rates and Taxes to say that they need to consider the fact that people are maintaining this green infrastructure for the City and should be receiving some sort of rebate or incentive to be able to do so. In that case, therefore, we approached the Department of Finance - which wouldn't always appear to be the first approach for an environmental action. What we find is that all the departments are interrelated: environmental, infrastructure, transport, rates and taxes are the ones we have had major dealings with.

The City's response has been very positive, and I believe it is because of our approach. We are not trying to impose our ideas onto the City but we are trying to help the city realise their own ideas. What we are presenting to the City is an opportunity. The Green Neighbourhoods Project that we propose is an opportunity for the community to partner with government and to realise the vision that was set out in the Growth and Development Strategy (GDS)<sup>146</sup>. If we look at the city policy that is set out in the GDS, it states that the environment should take priority and should drive development. What we would like to see is that policy being realised, so that at every stage of the planning process, the environment is taken into consideration. The vision we are proposing is very much in line with the City's, but it is the implementation of those policies we feel is where everything falls down. So we are trying to assist with the implementation.

When Mayor Parks Tau was elected the first thing he did was he initiated the GDS – as a mayoral statement of his vision for the city. So each of the City cluster and department has been briefed as to this vision and

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<sup>146</sup> The GDS is a strategic document setting the main directions for development that the City is driving. The first GDS was developed in 2006 under Mayor Masondo. Newly elected Mayor Parks Tau developed a 2011 GDS when starting his term.

strategy so they know that this is where they are supposed to be heading. And what we found is that often there are people in these departments who are equally frustrated by political interference, by the red tape and bureaucracy in the process. So we find that there are people out there in each of the areas of government who are excited about us, seeing us as enabling those people who really want to see the vision implemented.

## **Activist Environmentalist? JEA's Stance**

I think people from Diepsloot take me more as someone who is trying to help the community but I think some people might also take me as an activist. But I'm not going about it in the same way as most activists would, or the way that activists are traditionally seen because we think of activists and we think of someone that is shouting and picketing and fighting. That really is not the strength to me; the strength is that I'm sitting in the neutral zone, I'm trying not to take sides here. Yes my intention is to further the goals and to protect the environment, but I'm trying to do it in such a way that we bring together the different stakeholders, those from the Department, from the Finance Department that are looking at economic issues, those that are looking at social issues. Because at the moment the environment is entangled in all of these things - social issues, environment, economics - it's all sort of one and the same, so to try to remain independent and just encourage a safe place for people to be able to discuss these things is what I think the strength is.

We are not aggressive in terms of inciting violence or anything like that. For example, I am thinking of the Greater Kyalami Conservancy (GEKCO) last year, when we opposing a road coming through the area. They joined the 702 Walk the Talk, and they brought ponies with them, which was the first time that ponies had been included in Walk the Talk. They all got T-shirts and held signs that said, "Stop the K56 and join the 702 Walk the Talk". This raises awareness, but it is usually done in a positive fashion. The GEKCO conservancy also invited a developer who wanted to build a

shopping centre on a tour of the area; and the kids from an adjacent school put signs up and stood up to say “No, we don’t want a shopping centre here”. So to me it is more giving a voice to the community than it is actually picketing or protesting. I think protesting is a little bit of a strong word; it is more of just demonstrating that, “This is how we feel”.

Activism is important, but my particular way of doing things is more on a person-to-person basis. So I am more of a negotiator, so certainly when I am responding environmental applications. I’ll lay out all the reasons for why I think it’s flawed or what the issues are, but I don’t tend to do it in a confrontational way. I think some might take me as an activist, but I’m not going about it in the same way as most activists would, or the way that activists are traditionally seen, because we think of activists and we think of someone that is shouting and picketing and fighting.

## Linking to Diepsloot

We are encouraging neighbouring areas to link up with the Diepsloot community. My community is in Kyalami, that’s where I live. So I’ve been very involved with the residents’ associations and with the Kyalami Conservancy, trying to pull everybody together to share this vision for the Green Neighbourhood project. Because at the end of the day, I think that often city policies are fantastic, but unless they get adopted by the communities themselves, they can’t happen. So this is really community-driven.

We have also started working with the Diepsloot community, and trying to help develop a vision for a sustainable Diepsloot going forward. Although I have not had a lot of engaging with the community yet, we did launch the Green Neighbourhood project on Mandela Day last year. We brought the Kyalami community and others - we opened it up for anybody that wanted to join us- for the sixty-seven minutes of cleaning the streets of Diepsloot, where we went and collected rubbish. And the Deputy Minister of Economic Development joined us, and for me it was

very interesting because we had the idea to go in and walk with the residents of Diepsloot cleaning their own streets; and we eventually had meetings with the Councillors. You know I think there were about twelve or twenty people in the meetings at the end of it. So to engage with the community of Diepsloot, you have to engage and consult; there’s a consultative process, you can’t just arrive there. For me it was educational in how the community is structured; and the proper way of doing things is to introduce yourself to everybody so they know why you are there because certainly the question that does come up is, “Who are these people and what are they doing here?”



**Figure 16 – JEA in Diepsloot for Mandela Day, © JEA 2012.**

Dealing with Diepsloot is going well. Obviously it has its challenges, and it’s very different from dealing with the Kyalami community, but the meetings that we have been having with the school principals and other

local stakeholders are very positive. What we are trying to do is have those stakeholders guide us in approaching the community and how to get the community involved. I find that, for me it's just so strange that I actually live about three kilometres from Diepsloot, and yet it's a completely different world, and people don't cross these boundaries very easily. But I have never had any difficulties with it. Often I have visited Diepsloot with my employees; I run a landscaping business, and most of my employees live there. Everybody is welcoming, and happy to talk about what's going on, and curious as to why you are there; but I think they are more interested in somebody taking an interest in their lives and how they are living.

In Diepsloot, there is a general sense that communication is very poor: they see things happening, but often don't know why it is happening, they don't know where the funding is coming from, and they don't know what the plans for Diepsloot are. People are not sure who to ask those questions to. There is a lot of confusion and distrust. Rumours get spread easily. So people come in to us and say, yes we want to know what is going on and we want to be a part of it. So for us it is very much a step by step process. We have been working with one of the major stakeholders, the business chamber which represents businesses and informal traders throughout Diepsloot, and they are engaging the relevant stakeholders, helping us to understand the community and how it works.

We have now got a project called "Imagine Diepsloot" that we're starting to have initial meetings about. This is being done with another NGO, SHIFT, which focuses on sustainable housing. The idea is to engage with high school students, to bring them together into a workshop with various town planning professionals, and try to draw out of the kids what their vision would be for Diepsloot, so that we can start to develop a vision. Because I find that Diepsloot is a community that doesn't have a vision: it's a lot of people that come here to work, and it is a very diverse community, so it certainly has got its challenges. So the social issues in

Diepsloot need full attention, but I believe that there can be a way to develop in a fashion that doesn't damage the environment in the process.

The Diepsloot community is trying to form a vision themselves. My desire for Diepsloot is for transparency and engagement, where the Diepsloot community has the opportunity to put forward what they want to come up with; some sort of idea of how they want to see it developed and have influence on what happened there. So that's really my mission it's not for JEA to come and impose a vision, but its more to enable those who might not have the ability or knowledge to participation in the public participation process such as the RSDF<sup>147</sup> process successfully. It's to help to gather information and putting it forward in an appropriate manner.

At this point in time, the Green Neighbourhood Project is being piloted in Diepsloot and Kyalami. Our interest is to develop a model that can be used anywhere in the cit. What we have identified is that affluent neighbourhoods surrounding townships could potentially partner to find solutions, and that model could be used in Sandton and Alex for instance. So eventually we hope it will be rolled out to other areas.

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<sup>147</sup> Regional Spatial Development Framework, one of the municipal planning spatial tools.

# Olivier Lévêque

*Born: 1984 in Strasbourg (France)*

*Residence: Hyde Park*

*Occupation: Project Manager (Banking)*

*Activism: Chairperson of JUCA, Johannesburg Urban Cyclers Association.*

**Interviewers: Ntandokawabo James and Muneebah Kara**

## Background

I am from Strasbourg, which is a small town on the French-German border; I was born there, grew up there, and studied there. There were just two years that I was away; when I was five, I went to Chicago with my family and I spent a year in Berlin when I was studying.

I graduated from high school with a specialisation in mathematics, then I went on to study at the School of Political Science in Strasbourg. I focused more on Business and Finance which is how I ended up working here, specialising in finance and public law, more specifically regulatory law. I graduated when I was 23 from Strasbourg University. Then went to work in a bank in Paris, then I moved here to follow a job opportunity.

I have adjusted quite well, I found my wife here, I had my children here, started a family here.... For now we are very much building a life here.

## What drives Olivier

How did I end up being the chairperson of JUCA 10 000 km away from my home town? The one seminal reason is that I have been use to cycling the city since I was like eight years old.



**Figure 17 - Olivier Lévêque, © Kara 2013.**

Strasbourg, my hometown, is known in France as the most bicycle-friendly city. It's really advanced in terms of cycling infrastructure and it's been recognised at European level for its efforts in promoting it. It's still far from the Dutch, Danish, German standards but it's already ranking quite high in terms of bicycle friendliness. The shift of my hometown from car city design to a design for people using public transport and non-motorised transport, it really happened in the 1990's. I was born in 1984,

so it started when I began to become aware of my surroundings and being able to ride the bus. I was never really raised in a car-orientated city, so for me it was the most natural thing to go around on my bicycle. When I moved to Paris it was shortly after they introduced this hugely successful bike-sharing scheme. In a way it was a sign that the drive for cycling in the city was already present. So the first thing when I got was to buy a bicycle and figure out a safer route to get to work, so in a way I'm a bit obsessive about this!

When I first arrived in South Africa, I was very unhappy; it took me some time to settle. I wanted to go back because I felt trapped into driving. So after a year I relocated closer to my job and got a bicycle, which made it possible for me to start commuting. That is how I began to adjust to South Africa. So for me psychologically it is extremely important to have this freedom from the car and to be able to ride where I want.

How this led me to start JUCA was... because soon after I got a cycle to work, people were saying it is too dangerous, it is too far, all these misconceptions that I had never experienced because I came from a cycle friendly city. This was a strong incentive for me to start trying to change people's mind-sets. I felt people might be missing out on the benefits of cycling. There is this drive, as well as the private benefit if you want, for me as a cyclist to have a cycle friendly city. It is dangerous for me to ride on Jan Smuts, but there is nothing I can do about it for now.

There is a second motivation, also a personal one, which is that I am hoping for a career change. I would like to move into urban planning, specialising in transport issues, which is not at all a logical jump from a banking career. At the same time it is not easy for me to study in my circumstances. So getting involved in an NGO that deals with urban planning which is essentially what JUCA is, it is a way for me to get involved in urban planning to see that future career change realised.

I also have a long-standing interest in local politics. That is actually one of the reasons I went to study political studies. During my time in Paris it was election year and I had a chance to get involved in the elections campaign. I was on one of the lists supporting a candidate for mayor... This interest in politics is one of the structuring aspects of my personality. Not being South African however, it does not make much sense for me to get involved in local *politics*, but then it make sense for me to get involved in local *policies*. I have the motivation to change things for what I think is the best for the community, and I will keep doing that.

## Founding JUCA as the cyclists voice

I am the chairperson of JUCA, which means I must do all I can to advance and protect the interests of the organization. In practice, it's a lot about coordinating everyone's contributions by calling meetings to decide on actions to prioritize and representing JUCA in meetings with officials, partners, etc. JUCA at the time is quite small, and there is not much involved in overseeing the organisation. Instead, a lot of my time goes to preparing documents and attending meetings. Being at the early stages still, with the other members we need to think strategically so that the actions we do carry out are the most efficient in bringing us towards our goal, which is to have a bicycle friendly Johannesburg.

When I started cycling to work, I experienced; the challenges and thought I would join the local cycling advocacy group to improve the situation: that's when I realised it didn't exist. JUCA started when I created the first website in October-November 2011 to post a first, very basic version of the Joburg bicycle map. Then, progress was slow until April 2012, as I was making contact with other people who would be keen to start JUCA, mostly among people who were riding Critical Mass. Critical Mass is a monthly ride for fun: it is not organized by JUCA, but a lot of the participants have an interest in bike-commuting and using bicycles as a mode of transport, so it was going to be a good space to find like-minded people.

Then between April and August 2012 the core group was gathering and getting to know each other and start thinking about strategy. In August 2012 was the only general meeting we had, where we adopted the constitution and nominated people to the board. So that was the formal, legal birth of JUCA and that was August 2012. Since then we have been waiting to get an NPO registration.

I don't think that I am well known personally, but I think and hope that people do know about JUCA. I want JUCA to be seen as the voice, a voice for cyclists. I must be specific and say the voice of commuter cyclists, because commuters and recreational cyclists have very different needs in terms of urban design, and recreational cyclists are already fairly well organized in clubs to advocate their needs.

In South Africa commuters and recreational cyclists tend to be different groups: they overlap a little bit of course, but mostly, to be very schematic, commuter cyclists are low-income workers going from their area of living to where they work every day, while Recreational cyclists are usually middle class to top earners who go for long rides on the weekends. Both groups have completely different needs, they go at different speeds and have very different purposes and ride different routes. From outside you only see a community of cyclists, and indeed there is some degree of fraternity from just being on two wheels and loving the bicycle as an object, but the needs of the two are very different.

I would like JUCA to naturally be regarded widely as representative of commuter cyclists. In the parts of commuter cyclists who are by their personal circumstances able to access the internet, JUCA is well known, regarded as such an organisation. A piece of evidence is that we get a lot of subscribers for the JUCA newsletter, and a lot of questions from new people arriving in the city and wanting to cycle. We are quite central for people that have internet access, less so for the mass of commuter cyclists who are lower-income and don't have internet access. Increasing

membership and outreach is something we know is important and is soon going to become our next priority.

## **Strategising in the early stages**

These are the very early stages of JUCA. I started JUCA alone, it was just a work page, where I had arranged routes that were safe on a map. It was at the very beginning, and I sent it out to a couple of friends who I knew were cycling. From there I met another person who is now a friend and is now the vice chairmen of JUCA, Njogu Morgan, who was working in an environment consultancy business and is also a keen commuter cyclist. From there awareness on JUCA started growing through networking and Facebook groups, where people that were interested in the core idea of making Johannesburg cycle-friendly started aggregating to the project.

The first couple of months we were thinking about strategy. One of the problems we are facing is the lack of resources because this a purely volunteer-based organisation. It's not an easy thing to keep volunteers motivated for the long term. I find it is easier to mobilise volunteers for events than for long term lobbying strategy or projects. We are struggling here with lack of resources our active members of JUCA that dedicate several hours a week to the organisation are just 4 or 5 people. If you look at cycling advocacy groups worldwide, there are at the same time lobbying groups; they have technical expertise and contacts on local policies, and at the same time they are membership based organisations. They tend to be mass organisations. Yesterday I was looking at the London cycling campaign, which is the equivalent organisation in London: it has a membership of 11 000. This compared to our 4 active members... It is not going to be overnight.

So for now our strategy is to focus on the lobbying part which requires fairly less resources. With a few resources you can do quite a bit of thinking and lobbying.

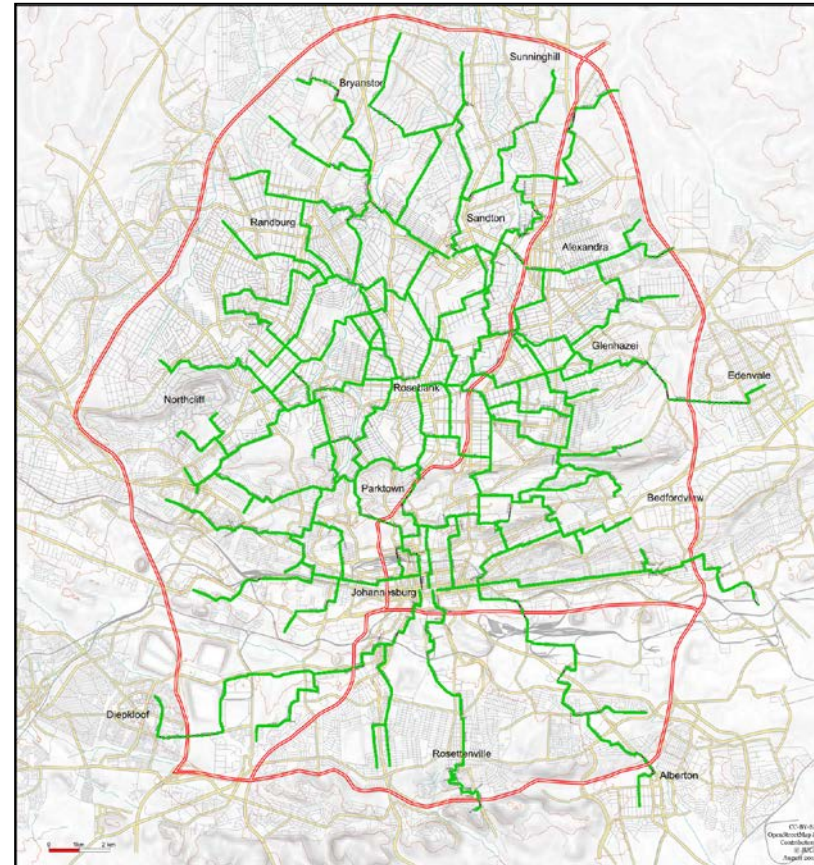
We at the same time need to increase JUCA's public profile so we need to get to a point where we get to consistent and efficient PR strategies. We have a website which has all the structure, it could potentially be very good and have all the resources and be a very central point for the cycling community, but we need resources to keep it updated, and that's one of the priorities currently - improving the profile.

Then we have our 2013 core project, which is to publish a new version of the printed cycling map in October. That is taking a lot of JUCA's people time. It is the mapping, but also trying to give a physical reality to the routes. Ideally, we would like that, if you get the map and see that, on paper, there is a way to go from Parkhurst to Sandton fairly safely, you can follow this route on the street with some signage or marking so that you don't have to look at your map all the time. That's important that the map be a practical, usable thing, otherwise it's just making a statement that it is possible, and not a tool that is actually making commuting easier. We have seen it with the last edition we did in 2012: we published the map online only, not in printed format. I don't know if anyone is using the routes because there is no materiality when you are on the street. The 2012 edition was just a statement that, yes, it is possible to cycle to work, consider those roads if you want to try it.

Another priority that we have identified is to build a network of people, of JUCA representatives. Because Joburg is so varied in population, and so sprawled, we feel we need to have local representatives everywhere that can on the one hand relate to JUCA the realities of cycling in their local areas, and on the other hand act as mediator for information coming from the City of Johannesburg, especially information that may be relevant to a specific community. We are trying to build a network of representatives that can act as mediators, and this we can see is going to be an important tool when we start dedicating some effort to increase the membership.

## A map of cycling routes

From JUCA's side, the map is really what we want to showcase. The map symbolises everything that we do. It is a snapshot of a city covered in bicycle lanes which is our long-term vision, where it will be very natural to cycle.



**Figure 18 - JUCA's map of cycling routes in Johannesburg, 2013.**

Source: [www.juca.org.za](http://www.juca.org.za).



So that is our commitment. To build a map you need a lot of time, and one needs to demonstrate in order to get sponsorship. Our distribution policy, making the map available for free in all parts of Joburg is also a statement about our target and the emphasis we put on being inclusive of all cyclists. So basically, the map for us is an important way for us to summarise and demonstrate the relevance of JUCA as an organisation.

In 2012 it was on the internet only with non-materialised routes on the map. In 2013 we are trying to do those two things, which is to have a physical reality of the routes and to have a wider distribution for it. In 2014 we will work to have better signage and markings. So the map is really our yearly measure of our progress, because as the city starts to build lanes, it will start going on the map. In 2013 there were no dedicated lanes and in 2014 they have got something planned. It is a recurring object we produce once a year. It's a summary of the annual report on JUCA, it's a snapshot of what we have achieved and what we are striving for.

One would think that the City would have data on bicycle users, but unfortunately it doesn't keep nor compile statistics. They do look at traffic patterns though, which is mostly motorised. Now they have these household surveys, so they have some data but their data is not that easy to obtain, and it's not specific to cycling. At the same time, being a small organisation, we have no resources to gather that data ourselves, we are tracing our routes based on our general knowledge, confirmed by research. For instance, Alexandra township is a place where cycling has a lot of potential, it has a high density and it is within cycling distance to other areas, this is according to my general knowledge and this I would confirm by researching what the density of Alex is, what the actual average income in Alex is, is that sufficient for people to buy bikes, are their other cycling groups we could build on, etc.

## **Making Johannesburg bike-friendly**

The core goal of JUCA is to make Jo'burg bike friendly, and this calls for defining what a bicycle-friendly city is, and that's basically a combination of two things: specific infrastructure, and a good image for cycling as transport. Giving cycling a good image means we need to change current perceptions that cycling is a lack of economic achievement and that cycling is dangerous – in short, cycling to work or to university needs to become the most normal thing to do. The first step is to get people to see that it is actually possible: the map JUCA publishes contributes to this, but there is a lot of action that needs to be taken by public bodies, for instance arranging events and programmes to promote access to bicycles. On the infrastructure side, this is obviously an area of intervention for the City and public authorities, as they are the ones who can legitimately intervene in the public space. Because action by local authorities is so crucial, at this stage our work is based a lot on lobbying the city. In this endeavour we are helped by the fact that cycling for transport has proven to have a lot of public benefits, which is what government is supposed to seek: from international experience, public health is biggest benefit, but widespread cycling also has advantages in terms of being environmentally friendly through traffic management and congestion problems being solved, economic and social integration, and improving the general happiness of the people. This makes it a potentially very “productive” area of intervention for the city.

So in theory our agenda to defend the cyclists is actually well aligned with the City's agenda of enhancing the public agendas of transport and the environment.

Look at the State of the City address that was made by the Mayor Parks Tau recently. A long portion of the speech was about non-motorised transport, and the space allocated to private cars that is disproportionate. It is very important for us that at the top level of the City, there are better transport solutions on the agenda. So we do have hope that those

“corridors of freedom”<sup>148</sup> will deliver all that they are saying. We have to be realistic about this: it is not the first time that politicians have very nice visions that we can only adhere to. And that is where we are going to be active now, following this State of the City address, pulling them back to this stated vision and how it is happening. If this project ends up being just a few kilometres of lanes here and there, then we are entitled to say that it is good that you are doing something but you are falling short of the vision. Now I see it as JUCA’s role to be a watchdog, and to make sure what the stated policies are actually implemented.

## Partnering with the City – Participation in Local Initiatives

The City does see us as partners - for instance they asked us to participate in their open street events; they appreciate getting our feedback on their projects. So there is positive interaction between ourselves and the city. So I guess that they don’t see us as only an organisation that is nagging them, that we are a pain to handle, they do see a positive side in our involvement.

There are many cases when the City of Johannesburg falls short of its ambitions. Bad planning resulting in lack of delivery is happening on small scale projects, but also on bigger ones like this project in Orlando<sup>149</sup> to build bike lanes. It was decided in 2009. It was hoped to be completed by 2010 for the World Cup, and it still hasn’t started construction... For every step in the decision and implementation process, there seems to have

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Corridors of freedom’ have been announced by the Mayor Parks Tau in his 2013 State of the City Address, as one key priority of the City to address the legacy of apartheid – massive transit oriented developments aimed at ‘stitching’ the city together. See also footnote 93.

<sup>149</sup> A famous township in Soweto, close to the FNB Stadium and developing cultural and historical tourism.

been a mishap that they overlooked and we discover too late, and this delayed the whole project. We find that projects take ages to be delivered because they don’t necessarily master the project management side of it, or some of the procedures. It is easy to say this from the external point of view. Maybe the processes are very complex ... but what we see is the end result: that’s our biggest problem. The vision as stated by officials is very nice, we adhere to it, but then what is lacking is an implementation that is of as high a standard as the vision stated. Hopefully as they gain expertise and as we keep basically looking over the shoulder and pointing at issues this will improve over time. That is the story of our relationship with the City of Johannesburg.



**Figure 19 - JUCA organises a bike-polo match in Vilakazi street, Soweto, for the ‘Open Street’ day, ©JUCA, 2011.**

We are partnering on a practical basis. In October 2012, the City had organised two events called 'Open Streets'. They would close streets in Vilakazi Street, Soweto, and in Westbury, for people to enjoy their street in a different way, for instance by cycling, running or skating, using a space which ultimately belongs to them. JUCA participated in organising some bicycle polo games. The City was providing the framework, and they were asking civil society to take ownership of the event and make it their own. In that sense they were asking us to do an activity in order to make the event a success. But in organisational terms, it was not that successful. The whole principle was to close streets, get organisations to participate and advertise so that people will come. But streets were not properly closed, advertising was limited... so very few people showed up and in terms of participation of organisation and events happening on the day, basically it was JUCA's bike polo and that was pretty much it!

In other cases, it may be us initiating a project and trying to get the City on board. For instance, our plan to have the bicycle routes actually materialized on the streets requires the involvement of the City, to put signs and markings, etc. In this case, the City has stated an interest in our idea, but we are not perfectly in sync as far as the practicalities are concerned, like which areas the network should cover, how the signage should be done. But in theory, they do support the project and in that sense, yes, we are a partner in shaping the city and delivering a cycle friendly city.

Another example is the City was trying to deliver some bicycles as part of the national Shova Kalula<sup>150</sup> project, to hand out bicycles to school kids in

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<sup>150</sup> *Shova Kalula* was an initiative launched by the City of Tshwane's Department of Transport and Roads, where the City was handing over bicycles to school children so that they could be used for short distances. This was to promote sustainable, healthy, clean and low-cost mobility (LeadSA, 2012).

Ivory Park<sup>151</sup> and they asked JUCA to provide training on safe cycling to the kids, which is something we would gladly do as our general mission to promote cycling. The bicycles were supposed to be handed over to kids, except the kids don't know how to cycle, in an urban environment which is totally unsafe, because there are strictly no bicycle facilities in Ivory Park.

The bright side to this is that, after that first attempt to hand out bicycles, the delivery of bicycles, which was supposed to happen again after one month, was put on hold following our trainers' recommendation. The City did listen to our feedback when we said it does not work to just give bicycles to kids, you will have accidents. We told them to just put the program on hold and rethink the strategy. Basically it needs to be a comprehensive strategy where you have bicycle facilities on the street, you need to have a training principle. You cannot ship trainers from the inner city or elsewhere, you need to train people locally so they can act as mentors. You need to formalise a strategy for delivery to actually be a success, so you can let the kids make the best of the bikes. So they listened and stopped the delivery of the bikes immediately. They are drafting a strategy, and we were told recently that they are building lanes in Ivory Park. I haven't seen them so I don't know how advanced they are or what the design is, but that's the situation. It's a bit of a trial and error process, and we are doing it together.

## Issue of representativeness and further mobilisation strategies

There was a day where we actually had an argument with the City. We were asking for them to look at the map and look at what we are asking for in terms of on-street materialization of the routes. . Our routes focus

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<sup>151</sup> A township in the north east part of Johannesburg, next to Midrand.

on getting people to their daily destination – that is, people from all socio-economic groups-, and we are asking them to build lanes from Sandhurst to Sandton, Sandton to the CBD, from Alex to Rosebank, and the City's response to this was that we are not representative. The obvious reason was that we are not working-class, we have more educated middle class people, while the majority of cyclists are in the lower-income workers in the city. We cannot say much to counter that. What I was saying to them was; do we need to be from Alex to speak on behalf of Alex or to defend projects that benefit cyclists and other residents from Alex?

It is something I keep wondering about, but it is really a difficult question. I think we are genuinely pursuing greater goals. If you look at the cycle routes we are putting in place, it's not only the higher-income areas, it's really very widespread. We have the vision of bringing the benefits of cycling to everyone, and a lot can be reaped by low-income workers that have a low access to cars. The lower-income groups have a lot to gain from a cycle-friendly city, and our goal is really truly serving the wider community. In my sense that makes us a community organisation despite not having the membership but then it's obviously a view that is challengeable and is being challenged by the City for instance when we go there.

Second, it's our intention to have a broader based membership, but it's not something you can come up with overnight, therefore does it mean that we shut up until we build a membership base start? It is not sustainable, as in some cases (for instance in Alexandra) it has proven difficult to find somebody who can act as a node for us to communicate through.

Solving our issue of representativeness is an important driver for exploring a new strategy of going into communities outside the highway ring. Indeed, as long as we focus on the inner ring we will always have this representation problem, with 40% of the population of Joburg living in

Soweto and a large part of the rest being also outside the highway ring. So, as long as we focus only on the inner ring we will always fail to be representative of cyclists for the whole metro. Also, the City obviously doesn't think in terms of highway ring, they see the metro as a whole, so it is crucial and high priority that we find ways to speak for cyclists in the whole metro, and that is what the move to include the organisations from Soweto is about.

More practically, we have actually started making contacts, not in Alex but in Soweto. When we participated in the Open Street Event of the City in Soweto, a number of cyclists from Soweto did come and see what it was about. That is when we made contact with our main partner there. Another source of contact in Soweto is indirectly related to JUCA - because of being part of JUCA I have been asked to help by a consultant who was in charge of surveying cyclists in Soweto, for the City of Johannesburg. So I spent many afternoons surveying cyclists, meeting them, and keeping contacts with them. Among the people I met, some would be potentially more involved in activism, so we potentially have a core network of motivated people from Soweto now. That is how our network from Soweto was born. We don't have the same in Alex because we had none of these opportunities so far. We haven't had a chance to go there and spend some time actively and physically looking for people who could act as our representative. All that we have is a contact of a person who is organising bicycle tours in Alex. We found his contacts details on the internet, but it has not worked. For Alex there will be no way of establishing a connection other than going there and talking to cyclists until we find a person who can act as a node: it is just a matter of time until this happens. It is just that other projects have taken priority – that's the problem when you have limited resources

I don't see JUCA as necessarily, or explicitly, bridging a gap between Blacks and Whites. With the cycling question, all cyclists have the same issues: issues -traffic, lack of parking, bike theft- regardless of where you live and what your colour is. We don't think of our projects and of our

ideal bicycle policy in terms of bridging a racial gap, we think of it more as an urban planning issue. Of course, by dealing with transport issues in a city like Johannesburg, we incidentally touch on other social matters like the racial divide. Perhaps then, the state will be more supportive of our cause.

In terms of keeping in touch with the cyclist community, and hopefully growing it, there are two ways we use. There is the JUCA newsletter that you can subscribe to on the JUCA website, and there is a Facebook group called Bicycle Lanes Joburg, where we actually post stuff more regularly and it is more interactive, because pretty much any member of the group can post, while the newsletter is done by JUCA members who decides what goes in or what has been important over the last couple of months.

What you find is there is a surge in the number of subscribers in the newsletter or the number of members of the Facebook group wherever there is a public event. Like when we published the first version of the Joburg Cycle map in august 2012 and all of a sudden there were 15 new subscribers to the newsletter. When Cycle Wits, a sister organization with pretty much the same agenda as JUCA but focusing on Wits University, was founded by one of our members beginning 2013, we had a number of new subscribers with addresses from Wits. The bias is though that it is purely internet-based so you are not reaching your population that is not connected. And a large part of the lower-income population has no access to the internet. Most of the cyclists I met in the street to register their name and take their number and talk to them about JUCA are low-income workers like gardeners and builders. For those cyclists it's still a challenge to figure out an efficient way to reach out to them. I see potential in the phone based social networks like Mxit<sup>152</sup>; but to be honest we are not up to speed with this. So, so far the communication is

mostly between JUCA and the connected cyclists unless there are specific events like for instance on Tuesday there was a meeting with the City about cycling, where I would ask our less-connected contacts to join when the topic being discussed is of relevance to their area or the goal of their organization.

## **Reflection on future identity of JUCA**

JUCA was not started as a reaction to city policy, it was started as really our desire to see the city to be more bicycle-friendly. Initially we didn't know what the City's position was, we didn't know who was cycling where, we started purely as long term vision and then we tried to figure out what is going to be the most productive action to get us where we want to be. In some cases it may be by protesting against a specific policy or lack of policy from the city; at some other points it may be by organising events privately independently from all city officials, or partnering with them; it may be lobbying other levels of governments. We are very pragmatic in that sense. We are prioritising based on how big a leap we think it will make us do towards our final objectives, so it is not a reaction and it's doesn't mean in JUCA will cease to exist once the city has implemented its full policy: JUCA will continue to exist and just adapt what it is its priority based on what will be needed at that time.

At the moment, and based on our outreach effort, what I have been trying to do this last month is to think how JUCA should be organised more as a federation of several bicycle-related organisations and individuals interested in bicycle issues. It seems more like a sustainable model for us. JUCA as a federation would mostly act as a tool for coordination of cycling events and initiatives; and as a resource to share technical expertise or contacts.

In this respect there is an organisation in the north of Joburg near Kyalami called Just Environmental Action (JEA). Their focus is on the environment, so they are generally in favour of more cycling lanes. They managed to

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<sup>152</sup> Social network and free mobile instant messenger.

pressurise private developers doing city development along William Nicol towards Diepsloot, to include bicycle lanes in the design of the road. Typically we would want JEA as a member organization of JUCA in the north, until someone who is more specifically bicycle focused can come in as a volunteer.

I feel acting as a federation of interested organizations should be one of JUCA's priorities now. We must complete our on-going projects first of course, but in the long term it will be very important to build our structures in such a way that we encompass organisations from everywhere.

## Context 4: Johannesburg South – Kapok, Lenasia, Noordgesig

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**Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Edward Molopi, Loyiso Tunce**

This section is perhaps less consistent than the previous, as ‘Johannesburg South’ is so vast that it possibly does not really make sense as a unified ‘context’ for activism. What does the informal settlement of Kapok, hardly located on any map, have in common with the quite established business and residential node of Lenasia? And what to say about the coloured township of Noordgesig, to the North of Soweto? And yet, bringing together these three areas, and the stories of the activists deploying their political action therein, does create echoes and stimulates the mind. Echoes of marginality taking different forms— a geographic marginality for Kapok, small informal settlement out of the Urban Development Boundaries and too small to attract much government attention, in spite of the violent conflicts that are still tearing it apart. Ethnic or racial marginality, for local Indian or Coloured activists whose stories (beyond the grand national narratives of their place in the apartheid struggle) are seldom told – and who situate themselves, albeit quite differently, in a non-racial vision for their society. Echoes in the fact that these forms of marginality, joined with year-long involvement in collective struggles, generate in the three cases a longing for some recognition, material but mostly symbolic, within a party apparatus.

### Looking for Kapok in the footsteps of Executive

Kapok is an informal settlement located south to Ennerdale township. Ennerdale is a predominantly Coloured area situated about 35 km south of Johannesburg and was designated as a Coloured area by the apartheid regime. There is however a growing population of Indians and Blacks in the area making it a racially and culturally diverse neighbourhood. Kapok finds itself situated within this background.

The difficulty with telling the history of many informal settlements is that there is hardly anything written down about it. Whilst academics in the 1990s have documented the development of informal settlements in what was called the Pretoria Vereeniging Witwatersrand region, with a special focus on the South of Johannesburg (Crankshaw 1993; Sapire 1992), these accounts remain of a general scale and little is known about specific settlements such as Kapok. As a result one has to rely on other sources of information. Much of the history of Kapok comes from oral knowledge passed down. By writing up this short history of Kapok we hope to make a contribution towards the written history of Kapok, howbeit minimal. Concerning the time of its existence as a community, there is no specific time when we can say the neighbourhood began. In the words of our activist, Executive Mukwevho “Kapok did not start, it grew”.

The land in which Ennerdale and Kapok is now situated was at first agricultural land with smallholdings owned by Whites (Lupton 1993: 40). Many of the farm workers are said to have occupied the land behind the hill near the farms. As the area was designated to be a Coloured area in 1974 by the Department of Planning and the Environment, white people began to gradually vacate the area and by 1980 the last of the white families had left Ennerdale (Lupton 1994: 150, 156). When the white farmers moved out of the area in which Kapok is situated, it is alleged that they leased the land to a Coloured man by the name Kapok, after whom the informal settlement was later named. Kapok farmed on the

land for a while until the inception of Ennerdale as a township (Mukwevho 2013). Kapok is said to have moved into this new township causing the workers to be stranded without a place to go. It is at this time that the workers moved from behind the hill and settled further up to the hilltop.

Finding themselves outside of the urban boundaries of Ennerdale, this small group of people were left there without any delivery of services or government support. They did not have access to basic necessities such as water and sanitation. The growth of Kapok is credited to the influx of residents coming out of existing townships and peri-urban farms, rather than directly from rural areas (Crankshaw 1993, Sapire 1992). The violence that developed in the townships and hostels in the 1990s also caused many to flee from the townships, and many of them headed to informal settlements such as Kapok. In his account, Executive also explains that the residents of Kapok would encourage more people to settle there in order to be more vocal when making demands for service delivery but also in order to gain political control. Executive's account adds another specific factor to Kapok's growth –political deployment to specific informal settlements, in order to both gain political control. In this respect, Sapire (1992) explains how political conflicts emerged within these new informal settlements in the late 1980s, partly based on the fragility and internal divisions of its local, newly formed informal leadership, and Kapok is no exception.

It is through these processes that Kapok grew into the settlement it is today. The growth of the settlement has contributed to the municipality's acknowledgement of the community, to which it tends to respond by relocation plans, as Kapok falls outside the 'Urban Development Boundary'<sup>153</sup>. The struggle for or against relocation is discussed by

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<sup>153</sup> City of Johannesburg, 2008, *Regional Spatial Development Framework Region G, 2007-2008*. The Urban Development Boundary is a line beyond which urban

Executive in his narrative. The fight for the development of Kapok is one that is fought to this day. As a community leader, Executive has found it useful belonging to certain organisations which help him in the fight for the betterment of his people's lives. These organisations include, among others, the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) – which he hardly mentions here- and later, the Informal Settlement Network (ISN). It is useful to give information on both structures, to better understand Executive's networks.

### **SANCO, 'little brother' of the ANC**

The South African National Civic Organisation was launched in 1992, offering a national platform for all the local civics that had developed since the late 1970s to oppose apartheid government from the streets, the yards, the blocks of non-white townships, and that had organised independently until then (Seekings 1997). A crucial part of the negotiations and restructuring of local government during the 1990s, SANCO eventually lost power and influence post 1994 as a national organisation, as it struggled to find a place in the new democratic dispensation. Decentralisation indeed gave ward councillors the role of channelling residents participation, and the alliance between the ANC and SANCO at national level made it difficult for SANCO to play a 'watchdog role' (Seekings 1997, Zuern 1994) – to the point some authors called it rather the ANC lapdog. However, in spite of SANCO's political weakness at national level, it is quite resilient at the local, neighbourhood level, often as 'the little brother of the ANC' (Piper and Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming). This 'little brother' is however able to make demands and put pressure on local ANC branches (Staniland 2008), as they are not responding to party lines, and the SANCO national structure is a fairly

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development is not encouraged – so as to combat urban sprawl, to foster principles of sustainability, accessibility and efficiency, densification, and manage growth. See p. 89-90 above.



loose structure which often struggles to keep SANCO branches accountable. Their relative autonomy allows them indeed to take up any issue that emerges on the ground, and bring it to a political platform (Zuern 2006) – for instance they often mobilise around access to housing, while ANC councillors cannot since housing is hardly a municipal responsibility. Their capacity for radical and structured opposition to the ANC government is limited; they rather have a power of pressure, blockage, and mobilisation that they use in an often clientelistic relationship to the ANC (Staniland 2008, Piper and Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming).

### The ISN, seen from the local

The Informal Settlement Network (ISN) is a South African network of informal settlement organisations which brings together poor communities, city-wide and nationally, to share concerns and develop solutions<sup>154</sup>. It is affiliated to a global organisation of slum-dwellers, Slum Dwellers International, and – although adapted to the South African context- shares most of its practices and vision.

ISN works at two levels. It formalises affiliates at the local level, i.e. in informal settlement, in alliance with local groups of residents, which become part of the network. And ISN puts its efforts into federating informal settlement movements to develop strategic partnerships at municipal and at national levels (Mitlin 2004, Huchzermeyer 2011). In South Africa for instance, ISN and its brother organisations (CORC, FEDUP, CUP<sup>155</sup>) have been able to partner with the National Government to drive

the People’s Housing Process, and get national housing funding for such projects. ISN has also partnered the municipality of Cape Town, and is directly involved in reshaping its policy towards informal settlements regularisation (Fieuw 2013). SDI international, likewise, is able to sit in global powerful institutions and influence the global discourse on informal settlements and policies (Roy 2009). At the local level, ISN drives initiatives within informal settlements, along a number of now classic practices (that some call ‘philosophies’, other ‘rituals’<sup>156</sup>). Mobilisation of informal settlement residents starts around ‘enumeration’ – self-administered census of the area, residents and infrastructure. This reinforces residents’ awareness of the collective nature of their challenges (mobilisation purpose), challenging the view that experts are necessarily outsiders (empowerment purpose) as well as it increases the residents’ ability to engage local government around their needs (negotiation purpose). A second classic practice is around saving groups, linked to a ‘do-it-yourself’ approach – where ISN supports residents external fundraising efforts when they have shown their capacity to collect own funding. A third usual practice, is a process of participatory redesign of informal settlements, that at least in South Africa, generally takes the form of ‘re-blocking’ (rebuilding shacks along a grid pattern and forming collective yards).

Whilst scholars recognise the political efficiency of ISN/SDI as a lobbyist of various scales of government, some contest the grassroots identity of the organisation (Huchzermeyer 2011), and question the truly participatory nature of an organisation applying the same principles (enumeration, savings, reblocking) no matter local contexts, as perhaps ways of creating constituencies rather than genuine reflection of popular claims. Other

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<sup>154</sup> As presented by its Chair, Patrick Magebhula, in Magebhula, P (2011) “Moving from Slum Survivor to Urban Planner”, *Mail and Guardian* 03 April.

<sup>155</sup> CORC Community Organisation Resource Centre; FEDUP Federation of the Urban Poor, CUP Coalition of the Urban Poor. The relationship between these organisations is complex, and blurred.

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<sup>156</sup> Personal Observation, SDN-FEDUP meeting with the City of Cape Town: 8 Feb 2013. See also <http://sasdialliance.org.za/partnering-with-the-city-of-cape-town-in-mtshini-wam-day-2-of-the-5-cities-seminar/>

highlight that in order to maintain politically efficient partnerships with governments and global institutions, the ISN/SDI has to avoid and reject any radical or critical take on these institutions and their policies – a second limit to their grassroots representativeness perhaps (Huchzermeyer 2011, Roy 2009).

## Shahida Kazie in Lenasia

Lenasia is an area located about 35 kilometres South West of Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD). It was the only residential area allocated for Indians in Johannesburg as per the Group Areas Act (Dinath 1972). Many of the Indian families that took residence in Lenasia were forcibly removed under the Group Areas Act from areas such as Pageview and Vrededorp which were non-racial areas close to the city centre.

Lenasia has developed over the years to become a fairly affluent “Indian” suburb with many well designed and expensive houses and a thriving CBD (Beavon 1992, 90). In addition to this, Lenasia has two shopping centres, namely, Signet Terrace and Trade Route Mall (Desai 2008, 63). These also include various car dealerships, banks and industrial factories which contribute to the economy of the area. These dynamic commercial and service functions make of Lenasia a major and unrivalled economic and transport node in the South of Johannesburg.

In addition to this, Lenasia is also rich with civil society organisations. Although the area remains largely Indian in its demographics, it now has a vast population from Black and Coloured population groups. It also attracts a number of international migrants, mostly from India and Pakistan (Desai 2008). Lenasia is divided in three wards, two of which are ANC controlled while third is DA. Shahida Kazie was an ANC Ward Councillor in Ward 9 from 2006 to 2011, and is currently director of the SANCA Nishtara Alcohol & Drug Rehabilitation Centre.

Ward Councillors are elected through municipal elections that take place once in five years in South Africa. They function as representatives of their constituency at the local government level. They are to see to the immediate needs of whom they represent and attend to them<sup>157</sup>. Through the introduction of the Ward Councillor it was envisioned that government will be closer to the people and better able to identify and attend to their needs. Nevertheless, councillors’ power is limited within the City Council: they have no specific budget, their ability to raise issues in the Council is limited; and their capacity to access resources for their community largely depends on their personal networks (Béni-Gbaffou 2008, 28).

Coming from a prior involvement in civil society, and originating from an ANC network milieu, Shahida explains that she has based her councillor’s job on dialogue, consultation, negotiations. She has used her broad ANC network to get some access to decision makers at crucial moments, in order to uplift the poorest and more marginalised: street kids, marginalised women, residents of informal settlements, alcohol and drug addicts. Shahida has conceived her job of ward councillor on her vision of the world, which is aimed at building communities – beyond race, religion, nationality, gender and age. She continues in the same direction, from her new job in SANCA NGO.

The South African National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence (SANCA) is a non-governmental organisation that seeks to deal with the problem of substance abuse and chemical dependency. SANCA has a network of subsidiary bodies that operate nation-wide. Their work includes the treatment for dependents and their families. This also

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<sup>157</sup> South African Local Government and Association (2011) *Councillor Induction: A Handbook for Municipal Councillors*.

includes prevention programmes that seek to bring greater awareness through education<sup>158</sup>.

SANCA Nishtara Alcohol & Drug Rehabilitation Centre was established in 1990. It is a private rehabilitation centre under the SANCA umbrella. Its work involves the fighting of substance abuse in Lenasia and surrounding areas. Due to the need that was identified in Orange Farm, a satellite office of the institution was opened there. It offers its services to the community there free of charge. Shahida's involvement with this institution allows her to explore her interests in social welfare and the general wellbeing of Lenasia and society as a whole.

### Basil Douglas and Johannesburg South

Like Shahida Kazie, Basil Douglas' urban activism is characterised by both a long involvement in civil society organisations, and an experience as local councillor, as he currently is PR councillor (Proportional Representative) for the DA. Unlike ward councillors however, PR councillors are not attached to any specific area (except in case of specific deployment), and Basil Douglas is now more focused on metropolitan policies, even if he maintains strong linkages with his 'home' area in Noordgesig.

Noordgesig is a formerly coloured township, neighbouring Soweto (Orlando East) to the North: it is only the Soweto highway that acts as a boundary between the two townships. To the north, Noordgesig is separated from Johannesburg inner city by the mining belt – surrounded by mine dumps. Basil emphasises the proximity to Soweto, the mix of people, languages and racial groups in his childhood's environment: a favourable condition to his upbringing as an 'Africanist', attracted to the

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<sup>158</sup> <http://www.sancanishtara.co.za/> accessed on 16 May 2013.

black consciousness movement since the 1970s and close to the Pan African Congress, to which he was affiliated until 1993<sup>159</sup>, then to the Inkatha Freedom Party, from 1997 to around 2000<sup>160</sup>.

The chairman of Noordgesig civic organisation, he created a broader social movement, South West Joint Civic Association (SOWEJOCA), in 1994, linking all the coloured areas in Johannesburg, as he claimed that the ANC-aligned civic organisations engaged in local government transition were not representative<sup>161</sup>.

On several fronts, SOWEJOCA is a quite controversial social movement, that remains relatively undocumented<sup>162</sup>. Its opposition to the ANC in 1994 led it to be dubbed 'popcorn civic'<sup>163</sup>, and suspected of driving or being driven by counter-revolutionary forces<sup>164</sup>.

SOWEJOCA's, or its leader's, shifting political alliances with the whole spectrum of political parties (from the PAC, to the IFP, to the ANC and finally the DP-DA), have attracted accusations of political opportunism and lack of a strong ideological vision. But SOWEJOCA's grievances and claims have been fairly consistent over the years, mixing pragmatic demands in favour of the poor and broader claims for inclusion into nationhood. In the late 1990s, SOWEJOCA kept raising issues around service delivery (arrears, cut-offs, etc.), particularly on behalf of Coloured

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<sup>159</sup> Staff Reporter, (1994), Strange Past of Man Behind Popcorn Civics, *Mail and Guardian*, 23.09.1994.

<sup>160</sup> Mothibeli, T., (2000), Sowejoca Supporters Could Soon Join DP, Predicts Party, *Business Day* 22 August 2000.

<sup>161</sup> Staff reporter (1994), *Mail and Guardian*, op. cit.

<sup>162</sup> SOWEJOCA is only given a few lines in Lodge's book on collective mobilisation in the late 1990s (2001).

<sup>163</sup> Staff reporter, (1994), *Mail and Guardian*, op. cit.

<sup>164</sup> Rogers, G., (1994), Local March, *SAPA Press briefing*, 16 September.

residents of Johannesburg, as it was perceived that the residents of black townships were benefiting from massive service arrears write-offs, and were offered a 'flat rate' (R45 in the late 1990s) for services<sup>165</sup>. These material claims encompassed a symbolic dimension: the recognition of the place and role of Coloured in the new South Africa – this claim oscillating between the desire for the recognition of a specific coloured identity<sup>166</sup>, and the affirmation of Coloured people's Africanness and the longing for a non-racial society.

The third element of controversy around SOWEJOCA, which possibly led to its members' disaffiliation, is the radical mobilisation strategies, based on the anti-apartheid struggle experience (stay ways, boycott, marches that at time turned violent, confrontation with police). These strategies were used in 1994 and in 1997 with dramatic consequences as several protesters were killed, including a seven years old child in 1997, and many injured. The violence of protests –whether organised or the result of uncontrolled criminal elements in the crowd- led the Gauteng Provincial Premier Tokyo Sexwale to open a commission of enquiry<sup>167</sup>, and remains a trauma in the collective memory of Eldorado Park's activists<sup>168</sup> (Bénit-Gbaffou 2008).

Finally, Basil Douglas' own ability to straddle between different personas, languages, repertoires of mobilisation, is for some a reason for suspicion, for other an element of his charisma, talent and appeal. Basil Douglas has

been a gang member, a teacher, an activist, a middleweight boxer and a politician, which iterates the sentiments and perceptions that people have of him being a strong leader and activist, at times confrontational and perhaps even dangerous. His interview tells us not only about shifts – from civil society to political party form of opposition- in one's political trajectory; but also helps us to reflect on how the activist street culture is reinvested in more formal city politics, and how important this sensitivity to the street is, to keep formal politicians connected to their constituencies.

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<sup>165</sup> Dixon N., (1997), South African police open fire on residents, *Green Left Weekly*, 19.02.1997.

<sup>166</sup> Staff reporter, (1997), Fight for the right to be coloured. *Mail and Guardian*, 14.02.1997.

<sup>167</sup> *ANC Daily News Briefing*, (1997), Commission to Investigate Sowejoca Riots, SAPA, Johannesburg, 8 Feb 1997.

<sup>168</sup> Eldorado Park is the main Coloured township in Johannesburg, where the 1997 march / riot (called the Eldorado massacre by some) was organized.

# Executive Mukwevho

*Born: 1963, Soweto*

*Residence: Kapok Informal Settlement, Ennerdale*

*Occupation: Community Organiser and Provincial Executive Committee member for Informal Settlement Network (ISN)*

*Activism: Community Activist in Kapok informal settlement, former trade unionist, member of the South African Communist Party, executive member of SANCO.*



Figure 20 – Executive Mukwevho in Kapok, © Molopi 2013.

**Interviewers: Edward Molopi and Lesego Tshuwa**

## Life and Upbringing

I was born in Tshiawelo, Soweto, in 1963. I started school in 1972.

We had friends here whose brothers and sisters fled to other countries because of the struggle of 1976<sup>169</sup>. We would be talking: “you know the Boers were at my home last night, they hit our parents”, etc. We knew that if you want to hear things, you must go to a certain house in the evening: guys get there and they talk. We’d go there just to listen as young boys to the Cyril Ramaphosas<sup>170</sup> of this world. We used to stay on the same street with Ramaphosa. They were students that time. Then we hear “They killed Biko<sup>171</sup>. Yeah, they caught him and they killed him.” That’s when the seed of hatred was planted. As we grew up, it never stopped especially from that ’76 story, despite the fact that people were being arrested and getting beaten. We began to target the municipal authorities because every night they would come to our homes to harass us for permits: “Wie’s jy?”<sup>172</sup> And you know if you were not listed in the permit<sup>173</sup>, even though you are your parents’ child... My father married three times. There were many of us and not everybody was actually registered in that permit when they’d come to visit from Venda during

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<sup>169</sup> Youth revolt against the apartheid system, epitomised by the June 16<sup>th</sup> March where young students were brutally repressed.

<sup>170</sup> A South African prominent politician and successful businessman, former trade union leader, and active participant in the 1990s negotiation to put a peaceful end to the apartheid regime. He was elected deputy president of the ANC at its national conference (Mangaung), December 2012.

<sup>171</sup> Steve Biko is the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. He died in custody in the hands of the apartheid police in 1977, and became one of the martyrs of the anti-apartheid struggle.

<sup>172</sup> (Afrikaans) ‘Who are you?’

<sup>173</sup> Pass system that controlled Black people’s movement in South Africa. Black people needed a permit to move and live in specific areas.

school holidays. Now the Black Jack<sup>174</sup> would come kick the door “Wie’s Jy? You are not here!” handcuff and throw you in the van. Now that hatred grew from watching them do this to my siblings in our own home, our place. So that’s how municipal authorities became our targets. In 1983 I was 20 years old. By that time I was living a hell of a life because I was known to be a trouble maker. I’d go to Tembisa<sup>175</sup> and stay there if something happened. You know we used to have things like “Azikhwelwa”<sup>176</sup> meaning that we were not going to work. The most memorable one was us not buying from OK<sup>177</sup> because people working there were on strike. So if you bought from OK we would wait for you at the station. Then we’d take your stuff and say “You love eggs from OK? Then drink.” Once that happened the Boers<sup>178</sup> would come looking for you then you’d have to run. I’d run to Tembisa and stay three months there. Those things made me not to go to school sometimes. I missed a lot of lessons because of that, but for what? I don’t know.

## Kapok: The background

Kapok did not start, it grew. Previously these were farming plots owned by white guys. They were called Grasmere, then it changed with time and then this portion became known as Hope Field. Since these were farming plots and the white guys usually had our people as servants, those people were staying behind the mountain there. Then when the changes came they started to move out. Then the land was leased to a certain guy, a Coloured guy called Kapok. When they leased the land to him, he farmed on the land until they started to build this township. Eventually Kapok

also moved out. That left the people who were living here stranded. They started to move from behind the mountain and came just up here. It was then said that the township is actually reserved for Coloureds. White people moved out and the coloured people started to move in from Westbury, Newclare<sup>179</sup> and all those areas. Now the residents of Kapok remained here and had problems: they didn’t have water. They had to go and fetch water from the formal residences nearby. Meanwhile the settlement was continuing to grow.

Then during the 90s fights started among the Black communities, especially in the hostels. They started to fight along cultural lines; the Xhosas versus the Zulus etc. So when they started to fight in the hostels they had to run away. Zulus were strong in the hostels, so the Xhosas had to move. Where do they go? Now the original people in Kapok [the servants of the former masters] were Sothos and Zulus. People in townships started to look for shelter among the squatters, so they started to fill this place, in the early 90s. Many people actually came, not the Xhosas alone. Immigration started, you know, because the fall of the homelands<sup>180</sup> brought in a lot of people into the urban areas so the squatters started to grow. The new government saw that there are people needing to be serviced so they brought in those basic services. The first one was water. A few pipes were laid.

In the late 1990s this township was so big that the government had to check and formulate a solution. Then talks started about relocating

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<sup>174</sup> Apartheid officials.

<sup>175</sup> Black township in the north of Johannesburg

<sup>176</sup> (Zulu) No mode of transport will be boarded to go to work (bus and rail boycott).

<sup>177</sup> A white owned franchise of supermarkets, target of mass boycotts.

<sup>178</sup> ‘The Boers’ (Afrikaaners) refers here to the apartheid police.

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<sup>179</sup> Former coloured areas, in the Western parts of Johannesburg.

<sup>180</sup> The ‘grand apartheid’ plan was to divide South Africa into a white South Africa and a series of black, ethnic, homelands who would eventually become separate countries.

people to developed townships that government was trying to do with RDPS<sup>181</sup>.



Figure 21 – Executive’s home and yard in Kapok, © Molopi 2013.

## The Story of Lawley and events leading to Kapok

Nearby, there is a place called Lawley. Now it’s divided by a road. One side is called Lawley One, which developed for bond houses. The other one (Lawley Two) was un-serviced plots where people were just left uncared for. In talks with the government to alert them to their plight,

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<sup>181</sup> RDP Housing (RDP stands for Reconstruction and Development Programme) is the post-apartheid mass housing delivery programme of the ANC.

the government did not fulfil its promises. So people started to think that the more of us there are, the better the chances of government understanding us better. They then started to call for other people to come and join them.

So in 1999 a lot of people came from Soweto and so forth. That’s because in the township we have a problem of space. We’re talking four rooms, now even the two rooms and garage systems that were being used to accommodate other people could not sustain the hordes of people that were coming. So that’s how people from townships also came to squatter areas.

In 1999 another guy called Patrick Kubheka there in Lawley Two said “we need to charge you people to come erect your shacks here.” So you could be sold a piece of land, 40m<sup>2</sup>, for R30. Then you must have your own shack which was cut for you then you go. The government was furious about that. They started to fight those people and some died. Now that was an embarrassment, you know these opportunistic political parties. Others started to say “Look at what is happening, look at what the ANC is doing!” The Democratic Party with Tony Leon came and shipped those people for electoral gain. It was on the news, the media; since the government could not do much they sent the Red Ants<sup>182</sup> and people were killed. When people die, the world looks on what is happening.

So they chose another plan; to infiltrate the stronghold of Kubheka and his friends by putting our own people<sup>183</sup> in who would try to change the mind-set of the people, the understanding in terms of the land issue etc. Fortunately or unfortunately I was one of those people sent to Lawley. I went there and erected a shack. The other issue which was burning is that Kubheka and his friends started to grow so big and they became

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<sup>182</sup> Private company that the post-apartheid government uses for evicting people.

<sup>183</sup> ANC activists.

untouchable. Once that happens, you have a problem. They would call meetings. As residents we would go there and oppose them in terms of what they were saying.

I was also of the opinion that instead of helping poor people, they were actually ripping the people off whatever little they had because every time there would be a collection of R20 each for every house. We started to count the shacks which were there and they amounted to 6000. When we'd calculate 2x6 per month, it was a lot of money. Then we started to question where this money was going to. We then became targets of Kubheka's group, they started to see us as opposition. Now there were a couple of comrades with me. We were working with the housing department – from Gauteng provincial government like Carien Engelbrecht<sup>184</sup>, as such we were always protected.

At the end of 1999 it was worse in Lawley, people were killed, and then we had to go to court. We were in the media day in and day out. We were going to court demanding to stay in Lawley until such time that our lives were not in danger. We began to get community backing when Kubheka and his friends joined the DA, then known as the Democratic Party. Originally Khubeka and his friends belonged to the ANC and he was called into order by the party for his actions. It was at this time that he decided to leave the ANC and join the DA. When that happened, he began to lose support because the ANC was still the favourite.

In 2000 on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March we were supposed to go to a rally in the morning with my friends, my colleagues, and then we saw a horde of people coming. They wanted to ambush us, so we ran. We scattered, some were caught by the mob. I managed to escape and went to the

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<sup>184</sup> Director of the Land Affairs Department (1995-1998), Chief Director of the Housing Department (1998-2002), in the Gauteng Provincial Government.

police station in Ennerdale<sup>185</sup> to seek help for my friends. Political parties were actually behind the whole thing, people were actually given armoury by them. Not even the SAPS could deal with those people, they were very strong. So we had to call in, what we call the POPs, Public Order Policing. So we went there diffused them and rescued our comrades. By then it was no longer safe for us to stay in that area so we negotiated. Because some of us were coming from Soweto, do we go back to Soweto? "No," were we told, "your task is not done; we still need you to work around the south of Joburg". We had to also take people with us, because as leaders we also have people who follow us, as they were also targets. So a lot of people had to move out of that area. We were scattered because we could not put all the people at the very same time because it could also cause havoc for them. So that's how I ended up here, in Kapok. That was in 2000 and I have lived here ever since.

But I never achieved anything because the people I was working with were also crooks, they never looked after us. After that we were subject to poverty. But as comrades we did not want to succumb to the circumstances because we still believe one day we will see our people being served correctly. If we run away to stay in Sandton we cannot see to it that the people are being served correctly. We need to stay with our own people right where things are happening. That is why I am here.

At some stage my shack was burned, you know, I lost everything right here, because of those politics. The burning was in 2008, I was contesting the election of the ANC branch chairpersonship of Ennerdale. I was in a meeting at the community hall. While we were there, we heard that "Executive's house is burning" and when we got there it was bad already. Those people got in and they lit from inside. There were gasses and stuff. By the time we saw that fire it was already gutted inside and coming out.

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<sup>185</sup> Former coloured township – the closest formal urban area to Kapok.



No one was arrested. So those are the things. But then it does not make one leave or turn back against their beliefs. So I went home- to Tshiawelo<sup>186</sup>- for a couple of months and came back. I recruited other people again to say “but do you think I deserve this kind of treatment?” and the people said, “no you don’t. Stay with us because we need you as much as you need us.” So, till today I am still here.

### **My work: Strategies and Co-operation**

I do political work, political work in such a way that I go out. I belong to community structures like the SANCO<sup>187</sup>. I am a member of a political party and a community leader. We go out and we confront the government to respond to the inhumane living conditions of the people. That is the type of work that we do. We also go out and talk with wealthy people to say we have people who are very poor in the community. We ask them to sponsor ploughs and things like that, just to see to it that the lives of our community are actually not too bad. But over and above we also give education to our people to arm them with knowledge in terms of how to fight for their rights which are enshrined in the country’s Constitution. People say there are rights but they don’t know how to use their rights because they are not told and nobody will.

We also interact with a lot of people because when we sit and do research we see through poverty in this township. A lot of people are infected with HIV through poverty. You find that they don’t have a clinic and there’s no way to deal with that kind of situation. So we went out and confronted the relevant people responsible as far as the lives of people are concerned because we believe everybody pays tax here in this country. Taxes are paid to give a better life to the people, not to buy

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<sup>186</sup> A township in Soweto.

<sup>187</sup> South African National Civic Organisation. See introduction to this part.

shares in mines for the sons of the Zumas of this world, and the Tokyo Sexwales<sup>188</sup>. But those are politics.

I am not individualistic. I am a leader in that if there is anything I will be much involved in what will take place here. In my absence there are my colleagues. People we work with are called community leaders. But we also belong to political parties and political structures. I am a member of the Communist Party. By virtue of being a member of the SACP<sup>189</sup> I automatically belong to the Tripartite Alliance which includes the African National Congress, SA Communist Party, the SANCO and COSATU<sup>190</sup>. Here in my area there is no other party that operates. Not because people do not have a choice or because I stand for the Communist Party you can’t work with me on community matters. Political parties and community things are different. You can belong to DA and I belong to ANC but we share a water tap. If that tap is broken, it’s not for the DA or the ANC, it’s for me and you to fix it. We can differ politically but we are always joined community wise.

### **Education through the trade unions**

Teachers, they would teach us history and say Jan van Riebeeck<sup>191</sup> arrived in... then we would ask, “before Jan van Riebeeck came here weren’t there people?” Then they’d say, “yes there were people but we can’t talk

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<sup>188</sup> Tokyo Sexwale is an anti-apartheid activist, politician and successful businessman. He became Premier of the Gauteng Province (1994-1998), went into the corporate sector and came back to government when he was appointed Minister of Human Settlements in 2009.

<sup>189</sup> South African Communist Party.

<sup>190</sup> Congress of South African Trade Unions – federation gathering most trade unions in South Africa.

<sup>191</sup> Dutch colonial administrator, founder of Cape Town in 1652. Often presented in apartheid history books as the founder of the South African nation.

about it. If you want to hear about it you must come to such and such a place and you will be told.” So I grew up within that environment where things were told at these meetings. As I grew up I started to be very much involved in politics.

We began to ask how come the apartheid government was so powerful? Then it was explained to us that you must fight to be masters of the economy because they control the economy. So what do we do to seize control? They said we should form unions. At that time a Black person was not permitted to be represented by a union or to form a union. This was until the resolutions of the Wiehahn Commission<sup>192</sup>. I got involved in trade unions and became a shop-steward. In 1985, I was working for a panel beater in Kempton Park. We then heard that they’re going to form a very big union federation in Durban. Following that they said every worker must be a union member. We had to go out and recruit but what was more important was to give education to workers. What kind of education were we talking about? Political education! We had to fight illiteracy because if you are illiterate... I don’t like to use that word because most of us, of my people, are classified as illiterate because we never achieved anything that is prescribed by those who make social classes. I learned a lot of these things in the trade union as a shop-steward.

In terms of the formation of COSATU, we said each industry should have a very strong union so that workers can fight the employers together. Cadres were needed to actually achieve this goal: going out to take all smaller unions and merge them under a bigger one. That’s how the

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<sup>192</sup> Set up by the government after the Durban strikes of 1973 and the Soweto uprisings of 1976, to look at industrial relations system in South Africa, the commission recommended in 1981 that the Labour Relations Act be amended to grant Black trade unions legal recognition.

NUMSAs<sup>193</sup> of this world were born, the NUMs<sup>194</sup>, Chemical Workers etc. Then we saw the birth of the textile union, the FAU<sup>195</sup> and so on. I became very active in this area as I liked it.

In 1984 I was arrested in Tembisa with other 17 guys. I had messed up in Soweto and ran to Tembisa. We were at some house in the evening. The police came and caught us all. That house was used to store armoury, study material and discussion documents coming from the leaders giving direction as to what must be done. As you know the ANC was operating from outside the country. So those documents needed to be safeguarded. You needed people around to actually give information. So one day, I think one of us was caught in the street and they beat him, asked him where his friends were. Feeling the heat he broke and told them so we were arrested. That case was called *Executive and the big 17*. Fortunately I survived but my friends were sentenced 25 years. Some were beaten to death. That made me even more vengeful against the apartheid regime.

In 1986 I was still a shop-steward for NUMSA in Germiston. This political education drive was in full steam. You had all these people, the likes of Jeremy Cronin<sup>196</sup> and Enoch Godongwana<sup>197</sup>. I was still working in panel beating. So one day we’re working there, here comes this young man, whose father is a foreman in the workshop. He had been to the army. When he came back he had attitude. So there I was, eating a toasted

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<sup>193</sup> National Union of Metalworkers in South Africa.

<sup>194</sup> National Union of Mineworkers.

<sup>195</sup> Food and Allied Union

<sup>196</sup> Anti apartheid activist and prominent member of the South African Communist Party, he was appointed Deputy Minister of Transport in 2009, then of Public Works.

<sup>197</sup> Prominent trade unionist (he held executive positions in NUMSA and COSATU), and politician, as member of Parliament and several times minister since 1998.

bacon and egg and cheese burger. He came and said, “*ah, jy kaffir, jy eet lekker jy dink jy’s ’n wit man*”<sup>198</sup>. Now that made me angry and I replied, “*Wit man se gat*”<sup>199</sup>. We had quite a heated exchange after that. Finally he said “*jerrr jy f\*\*kin’ kaffir jy kan nie met my so praat nie*”<sup>200</sup>. He then kicked me with his boots at which point I stood up. By that time I was furious. I was not coping at work because of such things and not knowing anymore what to do. When I asked my organisation to send me overseas they refused: “You must stay here, we want people to fight within. We need cadres here.” But when I looked at the life I was living, it did not suit me at all. I felt like I belonged nowhere because I was living on the run. Then we got physical with each other, with that Boer. I kicked him I dropped him to the ground. I showed him that, even with your army training you can’t do a thing. You are a f\*\*k up. What did they teach you? They taught you how to kill a Black man with a gun but here, I will f\*\*k you up my friend. Then I went to the boss, the manager to explain what had happened. The manager knew that this White guy was wrong, but because he was White, he was always protected especially because his father was a foreman in the plant. The manager made me sick when he said, “you are all workers you know. Executive you’re a good worker; you [the white guy] are also a good worker. I thought “this one, a good worker!?””, but they left it at that.

I was not impressed. I thought to myself if I kill this Boer and run away then maybe the comrades will see to it that I go overseas. I couldn’t live here with the death of a Boer on my hands. I went to a shop and bought an okapi<sup>201</sup> and went back to work. That Boer was inside checking an engine. I tapped him on the back and when he turned around I stabbed

him. Blood gushed out. He tried escaping to the office but I ran after him and he fell. Then our colleagues intervened. The Boer lying on the floor and my desire was that he would die but I could see that he was not dying. I was then asked to hand over the knife but I refused. There were three bosses that owned that company. Two were English. The other one was a mess because he was born from a Boer and an American. So now this man, the plant manager, is English, but because they were crooks he wanted me to hand over the knife and go home. I said, “don’t tell me. You want me to go home so you can send the police to kill me there? You must call the police and tell them to come here. You must explain to them what happened. Because you see this White man, they will kill me; they will hang me for this White man. You must tell them that this man started it, not me. I was protecting myself and you are the only one who can tell them that.”

The police were then called. They handled me roughly, the comrades started protesting. They then asked what the problem was. The manager explained that I was a very good young man and told what happened. The police then said if that was the case we would explain to the magistrate. I was arrested and incarcerated. We went to court and I was released on bail. The Boer fortunately survived. I was sentenced and served half my sentence. After my release I was told not to go back to the company. I took my belongings. I was an outcast. I eventually found work somewhere else.

I was the shop steward even there. This time I was hired to be an official in the union. That union was called FEDCRAW, which is the Federal Council of Retail and Allied Workers Union. I had no position there. The aim was actually have me around to learn because they thought I was a warrior. They thought I liked to fight. Their thinking was that you don’t fight without knowledge. So they brought me closer to them and they would always teach me.

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<sup>198</sup> (In Afrikaans), “Ah, Kaffir, you’re eating well. You think you’re a white man?”

<sup>199</sup> “White man, my ass”

<sup>200</sup> “F\*\*king kaffir, you can’t speak to me like that!”

<sup>201</sup> Fold-up pocket knife.

We had this “*siyalala*”<sup>202</sup> system. We would sleep during the day. In the evening we would pretend to be asleep while in fact reading. That’s where the lecturers would come unseen and give us this political education. Because we had this task of organising as many companies as possible we needed cadres. Now you would find that in a certain company there is a mixture of people; there are Zulus, there are Xhosas... Instead of organising to be united, they were fighting their own tribal factions. That hindered us uniting them against the real enemy, the employer. So you need a neutral person to deal with that. I’m Venda, so we would talk with the people who had access to the hiring processes and get employment. So I’d infiltrate, work there, make friendship.

To show employees how important it was to be united, I’d sell one of them out somehow: create things that would make them look bad to the manager, this person from that tribal group. Then I’d come in and represent them. When we go to the hearing, I would be mature in terms of negotiating. The White guys, the Boers, were given managerial positions without knowledge of how to deal with employee-employer relationships. So I had the upper hand on information and I had talent. I would go to the table, represent that person and win the case. When I won the case I would say to everyone “you see now? The man is back. Don’t do that again. Don’t fight among each other. You can fight all you want outside but here we must be together.” That was the gospel I was preaching. That was my purpose. It was very exciting.

Then I started to be elected into bigger positions. My biggest position, when I was elected to a senior position, was when I was working for another company that falls under chemical industry so I became a shop-steward of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). As a very strong shop-steward I was elected to the education section of the union.

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<sup>202</sup> ‘We are sleeping’, in Zulu.

Then from that position I began to attend meetings of higher structures. Then I became a member of the Nation Executive Committee of CWIU where I worked with people like Chris Dlamini<sup>203</sup> and Rod Crompton<sup>204</sup>. I started to also meet with people like Jay Naidoo<sup>205</sup>, Cyril Ramaphosa<sup>206</sup>, whom I’d met at a very young age while we were still in the township. Now we were meeting again and he is a big shot - general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers. I started to become a full time politician. Not paid, but living within the context of politics. During that period I was actually elected to become COSATU local secretary for Johannesburg. At the time, Sam Shilowa was the chairperson of Johannesburg COSATU local.

In 1990 -Mandela was released in 1991- CODESA<sup>207</sup> 1 started then it collapsed. In 1992, then CODESA 2, I was in the ANC National Executive Committee so I would attend these national meetings. The negotiations were taking place in Kempton Park. The cream of the crop were selected

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<sup>203</sup> A trade unionist since the 1970s, community activist in the East Rand, and member of the SACP. He played a crucial role in the formation of COSATU in 1985, and became its first deputy president until 1994 (<http://www.fawu.org.za>).

<sup>204</sup> Former general secretary of the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), now Director of the Petroleum and Gas Corporation of South Africa.

<sup>205</sup> Anti apartheid activist, trade unionist, Jay Naidoo was the General Secretary of COSATU (1985-1993), then Minister of Reconstruction and Development (1994-96). He was also the Chairperson of the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), 2001-2010.

<sup>206</sup> A trade unionist, politician, and businessman. He founded the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), became its General Secretary in 1982 until 1991 where he became General Secretary of the ANC. He was key in the CODESA negotiations. He moved into business in 1994, until he was elected ANC Deputy President in 2012.

<sup>207</sup> Convention for a Democratic South Africa- negotiation between the ANC, the National Party, and various parts of South African civil society, to put an end to the apartheid regime though a ‘negotiated settlement’.

and I was one of them. They would go to negotiate during the day and they would come back in the evening to have a discussion around the negotiations. So we were full time. Many of us were taken from work to go stay in that place. We would always be outside the negotiating area moving around just to show that there are activities; that people want this and that. There was a huge media presence and we would speak to them. In 1993 the agreement was reached then we started preparing for the first democratic elections. So we would go from one workshop to another. Then I, by virtue of being secretary for COSATU Joburg local, was given 21 people to work with, to prepare to be election educators. We went to be educated on how to educate others, how to cast votes and all those things.

## **Before Lawley – community work**

I do community projects. I committed myself to working with the soil and people. So then I started to learn about agriculture. We had a project in Pimville<sup>208</sup>, the Klipspruit Environmental Centre. There was a place where the municipality's sewage system was located but they left and left the place like that. Trevor Ngwane<sup>209</sup> was a councillor in that area so it was easier for me to get to work there. But when I got there I found problems. When the White people were moved from that area they formed a trust. The trust stated that this area was an environmental area. They made money requests from World Wild Life, Standard Bank.

When I arrived there, there were three structures that had been vandalised. Also there were a lot of papers. I didn't know anything about these things, I was venturing into this area. But because of my love for

reading, I read these letters. I then came across a deed of trust. I'd never heard of a deed of trust. I went through that document. It told me a lot of things. I searched further and found that there was a lot of money being made but I wasn't sure how. I then realised every September the community would be called over. I was living in Pimville at the time. They would call us over to go clean so that it can look full; only to find that that was when they'd report and call the donors over. The donors themselves were corrupt because they were not giving a report back to their bosses. Money was being misappropriated there. Nothing was being done. Have the community cleaning for one day and then the rest of the year the money is being misused. They claimed they had a manager who worked there and he was paid a hundred and forty something thousand rand annually. When I discovered these things I then decided to challenge them and take them to court. But that was a problem, fights arose.

I call that place a cultural space within environmental auspices: we do music, ploughing, rearing cows etc. We had two cows to manufacture milk. We would take the milk to the impoverished crèches nearby. We would plough and call the grannies to assist. It would full and people would get excited about it. We would rear pigs and all that stuff.

There was a dam that was used for the sledge before. We wanted to clear that dam to create some sort of resort. We were told that maybe we could rehabilitate that water. So I took a sample of the soil to Pretoria for testing and to determine if it could be rehabilitated. The results came back, and said there is something very nasty there. We were told there is cyanide. We were wondering who put cyanide there. At that time the sponsors were coming in. The problem was going to grow very big as we had an agreement with the Germans to build structures to rear pigs. They make a lot of money - you have them for three months and then sell. We could also have fish; the Japanese came with this and told us they could teach us how to farm fish. We then approached the Jews at a place in Doornfontein - they took us and flew us to Israel and that is where I learned to plough. They are the ones that taught me how to feed the

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<sup>208</sup> A township at the core of Soweto.

<sup>209</sup> A former ANC councillor in Pimville. He left the ANC as he was opposing the ANC commodification of water policy. He then formed a social movement, the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF).

vegetation on my yard right now. Now this cyanide... you see there a huge structure, a shack made of corrugated iron. This structure was not on our site and it was being guarded but we were not aware of that and the reason why. It even had a razor fence around it.

Remember at that time I was fighting a very nasty war. They were happy at our arrival because we fixed things. But when I saw that they were crooks we became enemies. I had become an enemy to many people in charge of the Southern Metropolitan Local Council<sup>210</sup>. The office from which they ran the trust was located somewhere near Southdale. We later discovered that the very same people involved with that structure operated a company by the name of AEIC (African Explosive Industries), which manufactured dynamite and all that stuff, situated in Modderfontein<sup>211</sup>. That company is an old company dating back to the apartheid era. They could not do their testing in Modderfontein because it's in the radius of white areas. So the tests were conducted in the township, where the pigs stayed! So then I had to go and investigate if there were no fatalities from cyanide in that area within that period and how they died, what was stated as the cause of death. It was a big job. They did not want to hear about that and they began to target me. I was now living on the run, I was prey. The people I worked with were getting shot until we ran away and left that project. I even ran away from Pimville. I returned home to Tshiawelo, but it was also not safe there. So I went and stayed in Protea Glen. It was at this time that I realised that I was done, for everything I attempted had failed. And these people who were doing this, the ones who were killing me, are the new government, the very people I fought with.

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<sup>210</sup> Transitional local government in Johannesburg, from 1995 to 2000.

<sup>211</sup> An industrial area, formerly serving as buffer zone between Alexandra township and former white residential areas in the East Rand.

Then arose this thing of Lawley, they called me and said, "Comrade, please come and help us we want you to go back there. You have the experience of working within and diffusing. Forget about those old things." Because of my stupidity I went. So I started that story in Lawley. And when we were chased away from there, that's how I ended up at Kapok.

## Educating people

One of the institutions that we interact with is PLANACT<sup>212</sup>. We go to them because PLANACT knows about the Constitution. It is a private institution where there is no problem in terms of them sharing information. So we go there and present issues arising in our area and request related information.

If PLANACT gives us an education in terms of how to read the Constitution and we understand it, then we come back and sit with leaders at community level and share with them whatever we find. Then they will take it to the community in meetings. If we feel that we don't have much information we go out we seek more from private institutions. We don't expect that everybody will understand everything; in each group there will be a leader. The responsibility of that leader will be to see to it that whatever information was gathered regarding the Constitution actually bears fruit within his area of leadership. That is how we do things. We go out, meet with people, ask questions and ask to be taught. We interact with people who do not need money from us as we are poor and cannot afford any structural education as such.

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<sup>212</sup> A Planning NGO that used to be prominent and influential in the transition period. It is now supporting community participation in planning their own environment.

ISN stands for Informal Settlement Network. It became necessary in the new era. There are a lot of informal settlements now that the Group Areas Act<sup>213</sup> and urban restrictions are gone. People are allowed to be anywhere. Before, if you were Xhosa you were restricted to a specific homeland. To come to the city you had to have a passport, *Iphepha loku ndwendwela*. For Bophuthatswana you needed to have *Lengolo la go yeta*. Venda also had its own and so forth. This new era has actually ushered in problems for Johannesburg in particular because everybody is coming now. No one will ask for a passport and all those things. That's how informal settlements began to mushroom. The government cannot cope with the immigration flows because it is not only people from the South African homelands coming, but even the neighbouring countries. Zimbabwe is fighting, there's poverty in Mozambique, the Nigerian intellectuals also want to come... The government cannot provide any services. Now people get fed up: they voted and now government says it can't do this and that.

The issue became how to deal with that - how can we fight government? Because if you go to them and inform them about Kapok, they will tell you to wait because they are still serving people from Driezik<sup>214</sup>. When you go to Driezik you discover that they are not doing anything there. So we thought it was better if we came together with Driezik, Maputo and all these informal settlements and confront them as a collective to see where they will end up with their lies. They cannot say they are busy with Driezik when we are there with the people from Driezik. That is how the concept of forming the ISN came about; that as informal settlements we should fight together. We should know what is happening in each

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<sup>213</sup> Apartheid legislation passed in 1950, attributing each racial group a specific space where they could legally reside (and forbidding them to live and travel to other spaces).

<sup>214</sup> A part of Orange Farm, an informal settlement / sites and services/ township in the extreme southern part of Johannesburg (see map).

settlement so that we can target needs immediately rather than having each settlement serviced while others wait indefinitely.

I arrived in the ISN in 2011. I got into it through my activism and my community, as a leader in this community and representative of a community organisation like SANCO. Then I was invited to their meetings and then later I was asked to remain involved. Yesterday we were in a meeting outlining our work as the ISN at the provincial level. ISN also has structures but there is no membership, unlike SANCO. At ISN as long as you are a member of a community and you have got programmes in your own community we, as people who are well informed in terms of where to go when you have problems, advise and link you with the relevant people. I belong to the provincial executive committee of the ISN. My role is to see to it that the ISN lives. It must have programmes; it must have a life and achieve goals through the programmes.

The ISN's role in Kapok has mainly been advisory. They give us information and advice. We used their services in the last enumeration. They made us aware of the importance of enumeration. When an informal settlement is sitting like this we will do an enumeration this year and if the authorities do not do anything for five years in the area, other people will be coming in. When you go there they will say our records show that there are 300 shacks there and we budgeted on that. But when we went there today there were 500 shacks so we need to go back to the drawing board. So to deal with that we do the enumerations with them or we do our own enumeration and give it to them to say here is the data. That is how the ISN helped us, but we did the enumeration ourselves.

## ISN Projects

There are so many. We do enumeration. We found a place, a squatter camp like Kapok and there was no information on it. Nobody cares about the people who are staying there. I am talking about the authorities, they just ignore those people. And if nobody knows about them they will stay

like that and then they will be given a water tanker, which means they will be given water from vehicles forever. That water is not so safe. We are not sure where it comes from. They usually put the water tanker in the streets and then the truck will pour the water. That tank is not enclosed; things can fall in there and die. At some stage we found condoms in there and dead rats. People drink and at some stage people get sick. A person becomes infected with a virus whereas this person is well-behaved so it must be the water. The government is held responsible because they are irresponsible in not providing their people with fresh water.

So as ISN we enumerate and inform government to install water taps for people. They normally list a host of reasons why they cannot provide services: "There are too many people. We will relocate them. We can't build here - it's private land. We can't buy this land, it is dolomitic. We can't rehabilitate the land..." So we keep negotiating and rebutting what they are presenting. We did a project in Kyalami, in Ruimsig<sup>215</sup>. We lobbied the government to provide services. Our people are very poor so we also go out to look for funding from companies to donate corrugated iron and so forth. That was done and each person received their structure for free.

## **Kapok struggles - toilets and human dignity**

The challenges we face... let me speak about us here without involving the ISN. We have a very serious problem. The people are angry. Sometimes I even lose dignity because at the government level you have these uncooperative people who are full of lies and can get you in trouble with the community.

When I first arrived here this place smelt really bad, it was a health hazard. Government would place those removable toilets with a small bucket. There were maybe 6 of them. They were cleaned perhaps twice a week. They would put it on Friday they come and then change it. But you put it there at 4 o'clock and by 6 o'clock in the evening it is full. It is even unusable. The stench would drift into the houses. You find that people no longer went there, so they go outside as an alternative. So the state of the environment was my first serious problem.

I came in and negotiated for us to have flushing toilets and government said it is impossible because this place is not even promulgated or in their plans to develop. I then suggested we dig a hole and create communal toilets. We would find a central place, build a structure and put toilets in there and washing facilities on the outside. The water and the waste would go down and join the sewage systems underground. When they raised the issue of who would pay I said we would cover the expenses. Theirs was to connect us - we would build and all. They were cornered now, but still objected on the grounds that the volume of people is not budgeted for as well as the joining of all those pipes. Then we compelled them to come up with something because we can't live like this. They realised we were serious. I was very serious because I was no longer even staying in Kapok - I was back in the township because of the stench. So we spoke and they told us of a company that does VIP toilets to approach. If they agreed we could then go back to the authorities and speak further. I went to that meeting with the Councillor. When we got there they explained that they would build pit toilets. This was in 2001.

They would be built from the bottom up using brick. We were told they are very good because when they get full they are serviceable. They would be built a couple of meters from the street so that the truck could draw out all the waste until it's empty, then they can put in chemicals and close it. The measurements we made showed that that could be done for five years. The authorities found a contractor to do this so we were asked to pay R100 each. We objected because initially they'd said they'd do it.

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<sup>215</sup> An informal settlement on the western periphery of Johannesburg.



They then said they had agreed to water not toilets. Finally we came to an agreement for them to hire a contractor but not people. We wanted labour to be local. So we dug the holes ourselves and our people worked. I think that toilet project lasted for about 18 months.

When we were done with that we realised the challenge of not having an address. We technically did not belong anywhere. So we had to go back to the housing department. To demand addresses. As we are not animals, we had to have something that shows where we belong. Now that was a battle. They said to give house numbers is tacitly allowing for people to stay there. We clarified that they are not allowing for people to stay, but that people are already staying there. We then came up with the numbers and put them in yellow. That was an achievement.

## The right water pipes

But now our biggest goal was development. In terms of water, we had some pipes but you would find that if you arrived there on a weekend there would be a long line. So we decided to buy more pipes and dig ourselves. Before we bought the pipes I found a company in Lanseria and spoke with them to give us pipes. They had no problem but they wanted to know what size of pipe to give us. We didn't know the difference. So they explained about the volume of the water where we were going to connect so that they could give us pipes that would sustain the water flow. We were stuck now because the department would not give us information. Then we called a meeting to agree on the digging and started digging. We were told how to identify it. We took down the numbers and went back to the company. They gave us the pipes and I placed them here in my shack with the taps. While we were busy measuring and figuring out where to start, people arrived from Johannesburg Water. They said they would do it for us because we wouldn't even know how it is done. But even women had dug the holes themselves. Because when people are determined to do something they will do it. Joburg Water insisted. But because I'm always busy as a leader I

was there when we started but left for a meeting. When I got back I heard that they were gone and would return the following Tuesday. They did not return. By that time people's spirits had dampened, they would not go back to dig again. So the pipes stayed in my house until it got burned down and they burned as well. So we could not achieve that goal.

That frustrated me a lot, so I challenged the department again. This time I wanted water, real water, not to play around. They said they'd give me taps to take with me. I refused and demanded they go with me there and then. We went and installed six taps which was still too little. Through the ISN we met with other comrades from another informal settlement called Mountain View and others. We *toyitoyied* on the Golden Highway<sup>216</sup> and burnt tires there. One of our demands was water in Kapok. Within a couple of months they came and installed pipes and we got water taps closer to our houses, so that is an achievement.

## Relocation

But the biggest is the issue of development. When we talk development we're not talking RDP's<sup>217</sup>. That is where the problem is. Development includes a lot of things; we want schools for our children, we want health centres, we want sports grounds, we want water and a very good environment and toilets that will move waste properly. We want roads so that services may access the place.

When we speak of development they talk of relocation. That they will relocate people from here to Lehae - there is a project called Lehae<sup>218</sup>. For years we've been talking relocation but no movement. If we were to

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<sup>216</sup> Highway between Johannesburg and Soweto, also only way from Johannesburg to the South.

<sup>217</sup> RDP houses – the government mass public housing delivery programme.

<sup>218</sup> An area built with RDP houses, next to Lenasia.

go there now furious, if I were to call a meeting and say they are crazy, we are burning a tyre; they will come here and promise that within three months we are moving: “We are just finishing off with people from Soweto because we want an integrated project.”

We don't have a problem with relocation but only as a last resort. Preferably we would want to be developed where we are. But if we cannot achieve that then relocation is better than staying in a shack forever where there is no fridge. Hence the question of land comes in. Government will tell you this is not their land, it belongs to someone else and how they have to pay that someone else for that land. That is a serious stagnation in terms of developing our communities. If they can spend a million rand on a water project but continue to speak about relocation, it's a question for the community. As a leader you have to answer that, but how do you get the answer to that from such corrupt people? They will give you this today and tomorrow it has changed. The community will burn your house because they think you are a sell-out, you're just as corrupt as those officials. That is the other problem, there is no transparency. We once had a big fight here because of this relocation story. Our people did not want to hear about it. But then when people started to die and you realise that the enemy is more powerful than you sometimes you are forced to surrender. We didn't want relocation here but as we went we realised that our children could die here.

Perhaps that relocation is better. Maybe at some stage something will come up so let us just leave. It is not willingly. It is because of these circumstances. On the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, 52 households were moved to Lehae and received RDP houses there. So we can also say that through our efforts 52 families are living in houses now with at least 17 more planned for the 11<sup>th</sup> of June.

## **The failed illegal electricity connection**

We cannot buy things like meat. We cannot budget in terms of our own things. You buy food everyday because if you buy loads of it in one day, it will spoil. There is no electricity. The electricity is on those four apollo<sup>219</sup>. At some stage we took that electricity and put it in the homes. I was frustrated and decided we are installing electricity. Unfortunately that box that supplies us is small. It could not bear the load and burnt out. At that time I was sick, so I'd gone back home to Tshiawelo. The people remained here and fought among themselves. So there was a lot of trouble. The electricity was cut off. We stayed for a year without street lights but I was not around. When I returned we negotiated again for them to put them back on because crime had increased because the place was dark. We realised that much as we wanted electricity, we needed something sustainable. But to buy those things was very expensive. People here are without work, they are poor. We had to put life before luxury. We decided to leave the lights on because they help us to see for safety's sake. We would then reconsider lights for homes at a later stage.

So we've failed to get electricity that is efficient. In the evening you cannot cook because the electricity goes on and off, it becomes heavy when people start cooking. You know the black man, when we spoke as a community we agreed we were only buying two-plate stoves but when the Coloureds offer him a four-plate stove he comes with it. It eats a lot of electricity. So those are the failures.

## **Threatening a vote boycott**

But we were going to elections all these years and changing Councillors. When the last one came around we decided we were not going to vote.

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<sup>219</sup> Mass street lights.

Why vote because the government is not helping us with anything? It was just a threat because we understand our vote is very important. If we do not vote the vampires will take over the government. What we see now will pale in comparison - the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. But the threat was a good thing so we spoke and agreed with all the squatter camps around that we are not going to vote. Indeed they came speedily and said they would deliver services. We then asked them how many people reside in Kapok. They had no idea. We dragged them over here to do enumerations again. But this also comes with responsibilities because when we do them we want to find out how many people are here so that we negotiate on a certain number. We had to make sure that no shacks are erected for the agreed period. But we threatened that if they did not come, we would put more people in. We got the numbers and even involved the ISN.

Shacks or informal settlements are graded. There are others in Grade A, grade B, grade C and grade D. They are categorised in terms of what they have. We want to know these things especially with the ISN because we want to make targets. You will find that government come and install water like they did in Kapok. The project cost over a million rand but at the same time they were talking of relocating people. Why would they spend so much money only to relocate people? Why didn't they use that money to speed up the process of relocation? Those are the things that trouble us. They are never honest with us. They are stupid somehow because they say something and if you go and ask them tomorrow they respond like Malema and become vulgar when you have actually caught them out.

## **Involvement with APF and protests in Kapok**

We used to be very active with the Anti-Privatisation Forum with many of our comrades here. It was through Trevor Ngwane that I got involved with the Anti-Privatisation Forum. When began speaking about anti-privatisation in the late '90s but such a forum did not exist at the time; it

was just discussion among comrades. In the new era there were talks that various state institutions such as Eskom<sup>220</sup> would be privatised. During apartheid, all these institutions were under state control. When they realised that there would be a change of governance they thought to use privatisation as a means to hold on to the means of production – to control the economy. When you privatise it is only the people who have money who can buy into these institutions. So that is why we said no to privatisation. I was not really part of the formation of the APF I was just an activist within.

The APF helped us a lot in our first strike here in Kapok. They are the ones who helped us with bail and travelling money so that people can continue with what they believe in. We were striking for development. It had been some years since we have been leaving in this area. We were development on one day and the next day we are talking relocation. So which is which? When people get frustrated they strike. At first we want to sit in the housing department in Ennerdale until they gave us an answer but then they chased us away. When we got here we started to burn tyres. But we never provoked anyone; we were only raising our anger. The police provoked us to fight and as you know in this country they are always right. You can see what happened in Marikana<sup>221</sup> – they said people had pangas<sup>222</sup>. But the people never hurt anyone they were singing and having their pangas, what was wrong with that?

About eight of our comrades were arrested. Before we even went on strike we had links with the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF). Our comrades used to attend APF functions and programmes so we had a good

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<sup>220</sup> South African National Electricity Company.

<sup>221</sup> Marikana refers to the brutal repression by the police of a miners' strike in the West Rand (near Rustenburg), that led to the death of more than 40 miners, on 16 August 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Machette.

relationship with people who were in the front of APF. They knew about the strike even before we engaged in it. We informed them about the progress.

## ANC missions

Because we were preparing for the elections of 1994, in 1993 I was deployed from COSATU side to Northern Province because of language - I speak Venda, Pedi, Shangaan. But it was not a deployment as such; it was a task. It was all done during the festive season of 1993. We went there and we were given materials to work. We worked and came back in January then started to work from my office on Eloff Street in Johannesburg CBD. Then one day I'm there in the ANC Regional Office in Germiston. Then came a phone call saying we needed to go to the ANC head office. It was at Shell House at that time. When we got there, it was terrible. The Zulus<sup>223</sup> were crowded there. There were gun shots and everything. We could not find an entrance; we went all around until it quietened down a bit and went in.

When we entered, we found Cyril Ramaphosa – he was the General Secretary of the ANC at that time, no longer NUM- Jay Naidoo, Tata Mandela, Walter Sisulu<sup>224</sup>, and who else again? I can't remember. But it was those big guys there. Now that was my first time meeting those people sitting round like that, you understand the big shots. You know you can have Mandela in one area, its fine. But have them all together in one? I was scared, what have I done? "Is this the young man?" Naidoo

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<sup>223</sup> This is a reference to the Shell House Massacre, 28 March 1994, where about 20,000 IFP supporters marched to the ANC headquarters to protest against the 1994 elections that the IFP was intending to boycott. ANC security guards opened fire, killing 19 people.

<sup>224</sup> Anti apartheid activist, who served as Secretary-General and Deputy President of the ANC.

asked. They said, "ya this is the guy." He said, "yes comrade we have a request here. We understand comrade you are very active and we have a problem, a little problem we want you to solve for us in Northern Province. There are problems so far as the election campaign is concerned, so we want you to go there and make a research, and come here and quickly tell us what you think. You are familiar with research. Just think about what we are saying and tell us what you want and you will be provided with whatever you want."

I had no problem. I asked for two guys, a car and money etc. Then we went to this guy, Ngoako Ramathlodi<sup>225</sup>, he was a big shot in Northern Province. It was still called Northern Province, not Limpopo. He was boss of the ANC that side. So we went there, it's him and this lady, Joyce Mabudafhasi<sup>226</sup>, We get there, we find these guys are relaxing, they are sitting there and doing nothing. So you see that province is divided along three different languages and cultures: Vendas, Shangaans, Pedis, you see. The Pedis seemed dominant within that area - the elite, and in numbers, and also dominant in urban areas. An urban man and a rural man will never be the same, it's true. An urban man is well informed in terms of a lot of things. You check, Ramathlodi is a Pedi, he belongs that side. Now they ignore these other areas: they will take an election poster, written in Pedi and put it in a Venda area there. The Venda person does not know how to read that. So I came back and then we did the posters in local languages. I was working there until after the elections. In the first elections of '94, Northern Province was top: it was 96% in favour of the ANC so my contribution was so powerful. I came back and we started in the new era.

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<sup>225</sup> Struggle activist, he became Premier of the Limpopo Province (1994-2004).

<sup>226</sup> Struggle activist, trade unionist, she became Member of Parliament in 1994 and Deputy Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs.

## Disappointments

I wasted my time doing all those things because my people are still suffering even today. We were attending those workshops to workshop others: how to handle a ballot all that stuff. We were working full time in that, campaign. There was a lot to be done. I was a big shot there because as the General Secretary, people were working under me. I was working COSATU side but we worked with all the other alliance partners. We were then tasked with organising the teachers - SADTU<sup>227</sup> had to join COSATU. That was an achievement - I was also there, as part and parcel of the teachers coming on board.

Then I started to hear about the Sunset Clause<sup>228</sup>. I had heard Joe Slovo saying it meant compromising a little bit, in his report back in Kempton Park. Now it surfaces again at the show and it made us weak on our side. So I started to follow this Sunset Clause, I wanted to know more. I found guys, neutral guys. They said it was the selling out clause. Sold us out, how? Then they explained it's a compromise for us because the old guys were tired of fighting and they were getting old so they came up with these kinds of arguments. It gave them a space to live, but after some time we would see and feel the effects of the Sunset Clause. Those clauses will create havoc one of these good days. Then I start to look at these leaders, asking, why? We fought so much. I've got a bullet wound on my leg. When I was running I was hit by a bullet. It was not good for me to compromise. I had friends who died for the cause, just for somebody to come and compromise us because he is getting old. And

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<sup>227</sup> South African Democratic Teachers Union.

<sup>228</sup> Compromise proposed by Joe Slovo, leader of the South African Communist Party, to response to the collapse of CODESA 2 (see above, footnote xx). The 'sunset clause' organised a coalition government for the five years following a democratic election, including guarantees and concessions to both political sides (ANC and National Party).

when you look at it, it's true the person is tired of fighting. He has been away from home for a very long time. Now he does not want to fight any longer because it seems like the Boers, they are not budging.

But now the Sunset Clauses were troubling me because within them I understood that we were going to be preparing a new Constitution but that that new Constitution would be based on 36 principles. Now when you look at these principles they do not allow for us South Africans, even if we are in the majority, to touch it and take everything. We will always be reminded of the 36 principles; that we cannot go over and above this. We cannot change the Constitution here and here. So when I looked at who caused this, I realised it was our leadership. So I began to hate it. I became less active and went on to resign from the trade union movement. I began to think to myself to go and work with the communities on the ground. We had some people. I had a lecturer from University, who became so involved with the ANC that he left teaching. His name is Trevor Ngwane<sup>229</sup>. Then those are the guys who had truth who would come outright and tell us.

## What keeps him motivated

I committed myself to a certain goal and that goal is to see to it that the lives of our people improve. But most importantly it is to restore the dignity of the Black man. A Black man is treated as insignificant. Every bad thing is attributed to him. If we live in a flat together with White people if something goes missing the first suspect is a Black man. They will tell you of a petty thief and white collar criminals. But if you look closely, which of the two is greater than the other; the petty thief or the white collar criminal? You will find that this other one is so big and yet nobody talks about him. Meaning they are right when they steal and do these things because they steal in great quantities.

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<sup>229</sup> Who left the ANC in 2000 and founded the Anti Privatisation Forum (APF).

When I steal a tomato I get shot for just one tomato out of a thousand but when they steal the whole land it is fine, it is justifiable. So what keeps me strong is the more I see the suffering of my people, the more I look at history even though I'm uneducated. But as I read and find out how the Black man was stripped of his land I get angry. I'm not talking about the era of Jan van Riebeeck or the 1913 Land Act<sup>230</sup>. I'm talking a long way back. Civilisation started here in Africa and the East but today we are like lambs we know nothing from something we know because somebody came, conquered us and took it. They stole our knowledge before they took anything else and that keeps me going. One day I will maybe see our grandchildren being educated; not for a degree that will get them in a certain class but for the development of nature and of mankind.

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<sup>230</sup> The 1913 Land act decreed that only certain areas of the country could be owned by 'Natives', amounting to only 13% of the entire land mass of the Union of South Africa.

# Shahida Kazie

*Born: 1958 in Springs, East Rand*

*Residence: Lenasia*

*Occupation and Activism: Chairperson of Women for Peace-Lenasia; Former ANC Councillor in Lenasia Ward 9 (2005-2011), Director of SANCA Nishtara Alcohol & Drug Rehabilitation Centre.*



**Figure 22 – Shahida Kazie, © Molopi 2013.**

**Interviewers: Edward Molopi and Thembani Mkhize**

## Background

I was born in Springs, and have been alive now for 55 years. My family moved to Kliptown while I was a baby. I started schooling in Lenasia while we were still living in Kliptown, we used to commute by train. We were forced to move to Lenasia when I was 8 years old. In Kliptown, we lived in a mixed environment, then we were separated by force and thrown into this Indian-only community.

What I do remember from the Kliptown days, is the very long walk to the station - walking all the way to school and back – everything was very far. And the same in Lenasia too: long walks to school and back. There was no proper infrastructure and hardly any resources. Lenasia was never a planned development. The apartheid government just decided to take all the Indian people and move them out here, put the Blacks in Soweto, the Coloureds in Eldorado Park etc. So it was very inconvenient growing up in Lenasia but we did have fun too.

Having lived here, that's what made one aware of social differences. It wasn't really clear cut that there was poverty because the type of environment we grew up in was very communal – every child and every family is my child or my family – we grew up together. You'd be sent to go borrow a tomato from a neighbour and any neighbour could send you on an errand. Poverty wasn't so obvious then because you would never go hungry, we all looked out for each other. But I think within the confines of one family then you would notice. We grew up very poor because my father was the only breadwinner until my brother matriculated. He couldn't of course continue to study. I think that's when we started realising that we were poor and that there are social differences in this life, it's not like everything is rosy.

And then there was school, of course. At that time you started becoming politically aware and what stands out for me is when we would go to town. I remember my dad sometimes taking us on a weekend to the

Johannesburg city centre. And then you would see: you can't sit on this section of the train, you must sit on that side, and you can't sit on this bench. All these signs were there and you had to be careful where you walk and where you sit. All these things made you aware what sort of life you lived in.

And I think my father was very politically aware too. He was also a friend of the late Dr Yusuf Dadoo<sup>231</sup> a great political activist who went into exile. So the family had all those political overtures but maybe not very active.

I think I really started becoming more politically active when Mr Ahmed Kathrada<sup>232</sup> was released. I moved out of Lenz so I missed a lot of the political activities that were going on, especially with the youth and people of my age at that time. I kept abreast of what was going on, you know, my friends that had to go underground. I did a lot of reading - a lot of banned books. I think it was after freedom in 1994, that I moved back to Lenz, joined the local ANC branch and became very active.

## Engaging in community work

Not long after we moved back to Lenasia, my first project was working with street kids. I would see these kids hanging around the station and at the tuck shops with nothing. I got involved through the local ANC office and we started working with street kids. From there I just got involved in whatever was happening within my community. There were the bus strikes, the transport problems, the crime and the CPFs<sup>233</sup>. I was just sort

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<sup>231</sup> Muslim Indian South African communist and anti-apartheid activist, he was chair of both the South African Indian Congress and the South African Communist Party.

<sup>232</sup> Anti apartheid activist, political prisoner, Ahmed Kathrada (nicknamed 'Kathy') became a Member of Parliament (1994-1999) and advisor to the president Nelson Mandela.

<sup>233</sup> Community Policing Forums, see note 98.

of thrown into things, taking in whatever was coming in. Somehow you get identified in the community and people know to call you if there's a problem. You can't say no, so you just get involved in everything.

I was employed by a welfare institution which at one stage was looking at closing down its *madrassa*<sup>234</sup> because of lack of funding. I took that on as a project, undertook a few fundraisers for the place, and today it is still thriving. I've moved on but they're still there and they've reached great success.

Working with the street kids I got involved in their family life and social life. We started the feeding schemes from there as well as buying clothing for them when it's necessary. One kid that stands out to me is Mandla, who was a little street child when we started working with him. Today he is working at the HR department at Absa in Sandton. It speaks to the difference you can make in someone's life.

But before that, we moved around different areas with my family, starting feeding schemes in the areas that really needed them. One was at the Precast informal settlement, in Lenasia extension 11B. The other one was at Extension 2 in Lenasia. So the feeding schemes were carrying on and I was just busy. Somehow through the will of God, I managed to raise my kids, do community work and earn an income.

Following this community work, I engaged as a local councillor with some of the people of the Lawley Station Informal Settlement. People have been living in that settlement for long and making headway with government to at least get the area formalised. They don't have electricity as yet but they have received water and sanitation. Government couldn't put in electricity because the settlement is on private property. In my tenure I worked very hard to get government to

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<sup>234</sup> Muslim religious school.



recognise the informal settlement and put it on a map for relocation. We were able to make inroads with government to at least locate it on a map. I think of that as an achievement for me because they have really been battling for the last 23 or so years that they have been there.

In fact I had engaged with Lawley Station settlement before I became councillor, through Women for Peace. Women for Peace is an organisation that is now 37 years in effect. It started after the 1976 Soweto riots, the June 16 riots. Its main objective was to foster peace and get people from different communities to support each other especially after the aftermath of the riots. It was more of a peacekeeping organisation and people doing work in each other's communities. About 7 years ago, all these members that were there had aged and retired. There was one lady left, Aunt Farida, who said everyone had resigned and she didn't want to close down the organisation as it was very close to her heart. And this was just before I became councillor.

I wanted to see if we could inject new life into it, so we called up a meeting with some ladies in the community and got people to note if they were interested in this organisation. We started off with about 7 people, although a lot of people came to the meeting and put down their names. We first started with the people of Lawley Station doing a cooking and baking project. I know of two people still in Lawley Station. One is running a spaza shop<sup>235</sup> and she's still making the cupcakes that we taught her to make. The other one is still sending stuff with her husband to work to go sell. So I know that those people are still sustaining themselves with the skills that they learned at that time. It was 20 women we trained at the time the idea grew. Then we just carried on doing all these social events: there was a film, there was a Mother's Day celebration and there was a Father's Day celebration. I used to call it *The*

*Biryani Brigade*- it was like we were always catering. We needed to change mind-sets, create some skills and empower people to start doing things for themselves. I thought to give others a learning opportunity so we took some of the other women and made one chairperson, the other vice-chair, another secretary and so forth. I also got somebody to come and run a workshop with them to show them how organisations work. Today I think we have about 24 to 26 members from mixed communities. It is a mixed group of people and we're busy with different projects.

From then it just carried on until I moved on in politics when I was elected local ward councillor. Although I was a member of the ANC and I was an activist on the ground, I never really thought I would make politics a career until 2005 when the branch nominated me to stand as local councillor.

## Public Space- the upgrading of Rose Park

Rose Park is a project I am proud of as a councillor. There was this big open space with long grass, broken grass, dumping and everything else. The grass would grow very long and people would complain about the crime and the criminals that would hide in there. What stood out for me were the kids waiting there for their transport. It was mostly the primary school children that touched my heart because 90% of them came from outside. They would come in early in the morning by taxi; too early for school so some of them would loiter around the 'park'. In the afternoon some of the kids would be there until 3 or 4 o'clock, waiting for their transport to go back home. I used to look at these kids and think they'd have somewhere safer to play if we could just grass out the area.

So when I approached City Parks to ask if something could be done I learned of a project that they had identified years prior when the community had asked for a park. It was put on hold because they didn't have money. There was a small committee that was set up, I think by the community residents. They thought they could get the park running but it

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<sup>235</sup> Informal convenience store, run in residential areas.

just fell by the wayside because nobody took it through. I think funding was a big problem. After many engagements with officials from City Parks I brought them on board. I then found out, through the finance department, that there was actually a budget of a million rand that was given but it wasn't enough for the project that they had in mind. So after pushing a lot I got in touch with the mayor, and the MMC for Environment<sup>236</sup>. Fortunately for me, at that time, the MMC was a comrade of mine from the branch so maybe I had that advantage.

We managed to find that there is an amount of R1,3 million available but they still felt it wasn't going to do much. They preferred to wait. I pushed as my concern was that if we waited for another five years R1, 3 million would not be worth anything. We had to push that through lots of lobbying with the leadership and of course with the MMC but they finally agreed that we at least see what we can do with R1.3 million. Rose Park was planned to be built over three phases. We've managed only the first phase. There are still developments planned for the next two phases. I'm not sure if the current councillor is pushing that forward or not. But at least for that first phase we managed to get quite a bit.

It is good to see these kids playing in a safe environment now. They are free from getting hurt because on that *veld* there was broken glass, rocks and stones. The kids were all unsupervised so at least now, although they're still not supervised, I know that at least they have a safer environment to wait in. And there are security officers at the park so it is not so bad anymore. And it has enhanced the place as well - the area looks very nice and it is busy. On a weekend when you look at it; the amount of people, the cars, there so many. Together with them we engaged leadership.

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<sup>236</sup> Member of the Mayoral Committee, part of the City of Johannesburg executive, working close to the Mayor.



Figure 23 - Rehabilitated Rose Park, Lenasia, © Molopi 2013.

What I also achieved during my tenure was getting the Department of Public Works to put up public toilets. I'm not sure if you've seen them but they're just behind the mosque near the Standard Bank area. They're very upmarket toilets. The mosque was complaining of people urinating against the wall and it was a real mess.

### Brokering between taxi associations and the municipal Department of Transport

I was negotiating with the taxi people that bring scholars - I had a very good relationship with them coming in from Soweto. Changing the mind-set of people to these taxis coming in became key, because taxis were a real bone of contention within this community. Although apartheid is

supposedly over, the racism within us is not and that is on both sides. It takes very long to change people's mind-set. So the development of that taxi rank was a project that I got involved in as the councillor. We got people to look at the taxis coming in with scholars in a positive way.

We managed also to engage with the Department of Transport. The Department of Public Works had to be lobbied - we brought them on board through the MMC's office again. I think you just have to follow all the right processes. I know it takes long and sometimes the community doesn't understand that government processes take very long. But unfortunately protocol is there and you have to follow that. But also, engaging with people in a friendly and respectful manner helps a lot. Much as you are a councillor and you may be regarded as authority, you can't talk down to people. Bringing people on board in an amicable and friendly manner, respecting people, gets a lot done.

With the taxi rank we engaged first with the taxi people because there was a big war going on. There are 6 taxi associations in Lenz and they were all fighting for space, so consultative processes were very important. People appreciate it and you make progress when you bring people on board. Once you dictate to people as a councillor, expecting everyone do what you're saying: this association must stand here, that one there and that one there... You have this idea in mind but lots of engagements took pace, lots of meetings, some of them ended up... I think everyone knows the temperament of taxi people, you know, "it's my way or no way". So changing that mind-set to bring them to engage with rival associations, getting everybody to see the picture, was a real process that was very challenging. There were many meetings, records in the office can show the number of meetings that we had. We had to engage them and make them visualise the taxi rank, to allow some space for informal traders to be part of it.

So with lots of engagement and consulting you make it seem as if it's their idea. You just work with them on it although you already have pre-

empted ideas. Pushing it as if it's coming from them, I think, gets their acceptance. So today I know we've managed to unite the 6 taxi associations. They've all got their own little space to work and they respect each other. The informal traders have been given their space as well although I must say that the Department of Economic Development weren't really on par as far as their services were concerned. The informal traders have had a very hard time in this taxi rank and in Lenasia because you would get some of these mamas coming from maybe as far as Poortjie<sup>237</sup>. Sometimes they travel all the way only to make R20 a day standing in the rain and cold. They are still battling with that – it hasn't been resolved. What the Department of Transport need to realise is that this taxi rank is still too small for six associations. And if you look at Lenasia it's the hub of the deep south – everything happens from Lenasia or in Lenasia. That is a challenge but that is also an achievement. Another one that comes to mind is the problem of the taxi drivers parking all over the place. For instance, the Standard Bank parking area was regularly flooded with scholar taxis. This was another avenue that we had to engage with: getting them to clear up and demarcate the area for scholar transport to utilise, all through consultative process, was very important.

## **Promoting racial, religious and social integration in civil society**

As councillor what came to mind is that Lenasia is a very diverse community. You get people from all race groups now - different faiths and cultures - living here. What was coming through, maybe not with the older people, but with the younger generation, was less tolerance as far as race and religion. That was quite an issue of concern, not on my own but with my ANC branch.

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<sup>237</sup> Informal settlement at the southern fringe of Johannesburg boundary.

But then one looks again at this community and thinks our kids don't know apartheid but are we growing together as a community? I don't think so, because within ourselves we foster that racism, in our children. I will tell you a sore point for me is these separate schools: the private schools that we've put up and then you have these secular schools and Muslims go to this school, Hindus, Christians go to that school... What sort of nation are we building with the youth because when these kids go out of that school, University is the same? So although you've kept your child apart from everybody for this time, how does your child deal with people when he mixes there? I think that is where we fail them. When these youth have gone to the Muslim schools, the private schools in this community, when they go out there they don't know how to deal with it. They sort of adopt this holier-than-thou attitude or look down on people because they think of themselves as special people. It's not being done in an illegal manner but I think parents might be fostering that negativity within their children.

Maybe this is due to my upbringing but we were never raised to look people differently. My mother's house was an open house and I think I have that policy at my home also. I don't scrutinise my children's friends on the basis of colour or religion and I've never really understood why they would say a Black person is different from an Indian or an Indian is different from a White. I'm Muslim but I think my faith is my personal thing between myself and God. I don't have to flaunt it and tell people. I can't say I am 100% non-conformist because I do obey rules. I just feel it's not how you look but it's who you are really that matters; one's inner being. But when you look at the community have we changed? I feel racism is still very much alive in our communities. You don't pick and choose who you work with or who you associate with.

Government always speaks of integrated communities. You normally hear of Black people moving into an Indian community or hear of Coloured people and Black people living together but very rarely do you hear of Indian people moving to a Black community. I think for me it was an

achievement when I managed to get Provincial Government to agree to to move 33 families to Lehae<sup>238</sup>. These were Indian families from a very poor community that were on a housing waiting list for many years. That was a step for integrated communities. Whereas government talks of integrated communities, this is an example of where it actually happened. It was quite a big thing with the Sunday Times and other Sunday papers covering it. It was in 2009 or 10, I think.

We also managed to set up this faith-based organisation with people from different organisations. That was when I was ward councillor. Now in my current position I've been part of setting up an NPO<sup>239</sup> forum. This was started because Lenasia is very rich in civic organisations. You have the Organisation for the Blind, you've one for the disabled, one for the deaf and so on. Lenasia's wealth is NGOs but their work was very fragmented and there was duplication of services.

Just a scenario: if you get someone who is addicted to substances that comes in here, in SANCA Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Center, it is not only the addict that you have to focus on. You have to look at a holistic picture of how you are going to treat this person. Then come the other extensions - family problems, dysfunctional family issues, spousal or marital problems. Now as someone doing rehabilitation of substance abuse it's difficult to focus on these issues alone. I felt the need for us to have a network of organisations that do this so we could do referrals. That is where this idea came up of setting up this NPO forum. We started in October 2012, it has taken off. One of the forum's objectives is to meet with the MMC for Social Development and create a relationship with the people that matter high up there. So that is one of the networks that we have created as well.

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<sup>238</sup> An RDP (public) housing programme, South east of Lenasia.

<sup>239</sup> Non Profit Organisation

## **Reflections on the Ward Councillorship Experience**

While I was busy with community projects, the branch nominated me to stand for the local ward councillor. It was a real learning curve. At first, there is this big hype about elections, you are surrounded by everybody, and then you win the elections... And after the euphoria is down, suddenly you're in this thing and you don't know a thing about it. You don't know how government processes work. Granted, as an activist you know a little but it's not like when you're just thrown in there and you've got this big community to serve and people have expectations. It was a major challenge but I think my advantage was that I had a passion for working with people and my intentions were really sincere. That maybe helped me along and made it easy.

Even communicating with officials was very daunting at first. What couldn't sink into my head was that apparently as councillor you are actually the boss. It took me very long to realise that I could give instructions. I was always asking people to do something nicely and treating people with respect.

One has to abide by the processes that are and one has to respect the three spheres of government. It is good to know people in power on a personal basis where all one has to do is up the phone. Being an ANC Councillor and having the ANC in government gave me some leverage because if you look at the councillor today, the DA ruling this place, one can clearly see there are challenges. I think it's very important that I sustain relationships that I've built, especially with Council officials like City Parks, Joburg Property or City Power. I can still phone people from City Power at night.

But one has to look at the bigger picture and the future. Respect the processes and follow the protocol. Even when you know certain things are possible it all boils down to the government that is in place. That is

really important if you really want to get things done. I think it is important also that one doesn't compromise their principles. If you say you're fighting corruption and you have the power it is important that you don't abuse that power. But also, if you look at it from government point of view, things are not always so flexible. Somewhere along the line one has to make them see that if you want to achieve something, especially if you take the issue of taxis which is a very contentious and volatile situation, it needs give and take. Even if sometimes it goes against protocol you have to bend the rules to accommodate people.

What was very hard during my term was the expectation that this community had - it was like because they voted for me and put me there I had to see to everything. If they called at 2 O'clock in the morning or at midnight I was supposed to be there for them. My phone couldn't be off at all. And if anything went wrong they would become abusive, swear and do whatever they wanted to. For me that was the negative part. But somehow when you are doing community work you develop a thick skin. Family gets affected by it especially the kids because they didn't like the way people would treat me. But I suppose in every community you have that handful of people - you can never satisfy everybody.

There came the very sad moment when we lost the elections in this community in 2011. But I think I can confidently say it wasn't me per se that lost it. It was the perception that the community had of government. The people up there were not performing and it's an ANC government. Many people somehow don't understand the three spheres of government and they think everything that happens here is just about us not performing.

What frustrates me, what I did not manage to achieve during my term, was the project on Lawley Station informal settlement. As much as I managed to get it put on a map, my heart is very sore still. I take it as a failure that I didn't manage to get those people relocated before my term was over. Although one could say it wasn't through any fault on my side

because processes government take forever. You have the three spheres of government passing the buck to the other in terms of responsibility. There is another informal settlement too, that is the Precast informal settlement. That is also private property. I had a personal meeting with the mayor, where I tried to lobby for him to buy the small piece and see how we can develop it. I was even prepared to engage local businesses and corporate. I told the mayor that we could try, as a community, to see if we can assist with putting decent housing and proper sanitation up. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. The mayor did not agree, saying that the City could not go around buying out every piece of land that people decide to squat on. If they bought this one, the following day ten other informal settlements would have mushroomed.

So we lost the elections but perhaps it was for the better. God knows and there's a reason for everything that happens. Maybe I was needed where I am now. I think the elections were in May - it's not even a month that I was without anything to do - then this opportunity came to work in SANCA Nisthara Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Center.

I was on the board of the organisation and I came in just to assist because the person that was managing resigned very suddenly. I've been here now for 2 years. It's a different field, a big challenge, substance abuse. People don't want to associate with substance abusers. There's big stigma.

## Working at SANCA on substance abuse in communities

When I came in SANCA I knew absolutely nothing about substance abuse. So I'm proud to say we've restructured this whole clinic. It was like starting it from scratch and getting the right people in. The Department of Social Services are on board and providing small subsidies so we can assist people who can't afford it. I think my services are much needed here and I am giving it my all.

I remember somebody saying, "wherever you go, you want to do charity; this is supposed to be a private clinic." But I said, "there are people out there who need the help but can't afford it. Can we deny them a service?" We can say proudly that annually we assist at least 120 people at no cost. That is a major achievement.

A major achievement in this job is the opening of the out-patient clinic in Orange Farm, an area that is riddled with poverty and unemployment and where the problem of substance abuse is rife. The clinic is open from 8 to 5 every day. People can walk in and the service is absolutely free. There everything is free from the drug testing to the counselling sessions. We have a full staff including two Social Workers, a Nurse, a Doctor that consults and two auxiliary workers that go out and do school campaigns with volunteers. They do education in schools on a daily basis. We also opened a satellite office in Orange. That came about when we realised the rise in abuse of nyaope<sup>240</sup> because of high unemployment and poverty in that community.

The major challenges are changing people's perceptions about drug abuse and drug addicts. Getting that mind-set to shift to say not all drug addicts are bad people, is important. The bottom line is all people are victims of circumstances because nobody wakes up in the morning and decides to be a drug addict. Getting people to understand that is a big challenge, especially in this community which is very conservative and not open to the different lifestyles that are out there. Also this community has that tendency of hiding things or pushing things under the carpet. They are not open to sharing things.

What I find challenging with the so-called Indian communities is that people don't believe in therapy. It's like if you've lost a loved one you're

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<sup>240</sup> A street drug that has started spreading in South African townships in the 2010s. Also called wunga.

almost expected to mourn for a short period, finish and get on with your life because it was God's will and that's it. There's no healing process that one has to go through. That's maybe looked down upon; as though it's for the weak or people whose faith needs to be so stronger to accept what God meant to happen. But one has to learn how to deal with it also and heal along the way.

Another failure is a failure from the Department of Justice to really prosecute drug dealers. People are openly dealing. You can report as much as you want to but it seems that nothing happens to these people. It has become such a brazen act now because they give it to kids to sell in schools. Youth, children are dealing in schools; that is how brazen it has become. It's a whole community held to ransom by a handful of people. That is challenging and also a dangerous as you must fight people that have powers. But unfortunately it has to be done. Somebody has got to do it, we can't all be scared and hide away.

We are situated right next door to the flats and drugs are rife in these flats. One just looks at the little kids there and wonders where they're going to end up if they're growing up in that environment. So I do report and pass whatever tip offs I get. Unfortunately the problem with the local police is that they all seem to protect each other very well. You don't get much choice so having contacts that I've built up over the years we do refer to outside police as well. It is very worrying.

We've started this small club on Friday afternoons called The Youth Club. We bring 10 to 12 year olds to spend two hours with one of the youth workers doing drug education but in a fun way. We do it as a preventative measure because we know it's going to be a challenge for them growing up with this all around them.

## My Future in Community Activism

I still have Women for Peace running. Last year we had 43 women graduating – they were taught jewellery making, beadwork, blanket making, curtaining, flower arranging. Most of them have already started running small businesses of their own. If it's sewing that they have learnt, then we give them a machine and mentor them for another three to six months to help them set up, work out how to budget, how to buy, how to work out costing and so forth. We engage other institutions that have knowledge as well. We recently held a workshop with Blacksash<sup>241</sup> where they taught people about consumer rights and how to access services. It is on-going and I think people have to be educated all the time.

The other goal I have in mind, something I have to grow, is in this field with substance abuse. I've set up a clinic in Orange farm but I want to do one in Ennerdale and Vlaakfontein. But Ennerdale is the main target. In terms of the women's group, I am looking at setting up a co-op and getting people who can run with it.

I definitely would love to work in Government again, because you get to operate from that angle where you can get things done faster because you hold a title, you hold office. It may be easier because now I have the know-how. Before my experience in government, I didn't know how all these structures worked and the processes that are in place. It would be much easier now because I have all this information and I know how to access the relevant spaces.

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<sup>241</sup> A human rights organisation founded in 1955 by middle class white women, in reaction to a reform that aimed at removing 'coloured' women from the voters' roll. The organisation fought against "the erosion of civil liberties, racial segregation and the damage inflicted by the policy of migrant labour" during apartheid, and continue their advocacy work for social justice in the post-apartheid period ([www.blacksash.org.za](http://www.blacksash.org.za)).





# Basil Douglas

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*Born: 1960 in Noordgesig, Johannesburg*

*Activism: Former Chair of the Noordgesig Civic Association, Founder of Sovejoca, South Western Joint Civic Association.*

*Current occupation: DA Proportional Representative (PR) Councillor in the City of Johannesburg*



Figure 24 - Basil Douglas in his office at the City of Johannesburg, © Pagiwa 2013.

**Interviewers: Lentsoe Pagiwa and Loyiso Tunce**

## Background

I'm a councillor in the Democratic Alliance in the City of Johannesburg Local Municipality. I was born in Noordgesig. That is in Soweto, Orlando East, which is one of the oldest townships. I was raised in Soweto; of course in a different era.

I am a teacher by profession – I have even taught two of the Councillors that are currently with me in Council. They are sitting with me and they argue with me, I say “shut up, when you were at school, you were a little slow, and you remember, Nhlanhla, when you came late, you were afraid of getting a hiding”. I brought up these two, and I am proud of that. I have taught Geography, up to Matric, at Noordgesig High School. I've also taught at Kliptown High School, and at Model C schools<sup>242</sup> after my tenure in Parliament – that was from 1999 until 2004.

I was also involved in civics, with the Noordgesig Civic Association. It started during the time when exiles were returning. There were ideological differences. That's when we formed SOWEJOCA as well. That stands for South Western Joint Civics Association. I led it from 1994 for about 12 to 15 years. It was one hell of a fight. So that means we were involved in fighting the old apartheid government, very much involved also as we were fighting the new, what you call our liberators. We fought them as well.

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<sup>242</sup> Former public schools reserved for White pupils during apartheid. They still have a reputation of better quality public schools today.

## Growing up: Family, Violence and Fear

Around the time of the '76 uprisings<sup>243</sup>, people held apartheid mentalities – living in cocoons and compartments. You couldn't go against the state because then you'd go to Robben Island<sup>244</sup>. There was always that fear. The adults were always trying to get us to stop. I started being active when I was about 12. You would get flack but my family was supportive. They wouldn't come out and say things like, "stop this, I don't want police in front of my house!" Instead you'd be told how difficult it was because you were confronting a monstrous state; one that could wipe out your whole family. Your whole family could become casualties because of you. The police wouldn't come and arrest you, they would arrest everybody. They would kick things around, kick your mother out of bed when they're searching.

It was inconvenient but, ultimately, different families had different perspectives. Fortunately my family were always very supportive. They were proud. That time when we were growing up, people in my family would say, "You know the Council can kick us out of our house and put us in that space called Zombietown?" That was a name given to an extension of Riverlea, which is extremely poor. That's because if you got into politics and opposed the Municipality, said things or created a boycott, they'd put you there, on this dumping ground. All those things put pressure on the family. Even for small things like your dog barking and chasing people in the street, you could be put out. It was very difficult.

I remember, there was a time in Soweto, just across the street in Orlando East, Meadowlands, up until Mofolo and Ikwezi, when we were very

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<sup>243</sup> Youth revolt against the apartheid system, epitomised by the June 16<sup>th</sup> march against the use of Afrikaans in black schools. The march was brutally repressed and signalled the start of more unrest and the rise of international outrage.

<sup>244</sup> Political prison, where notably Nelson Mandela was jailed.

much involved. You say people mustn't pay the rent, hoo, God, we're going to lose our house, yes. When people didn't move out of their houses, the Councillors wanted to kick them out. Your parents would tell you if the officials came. They were called the Black Jacks, the Western Administration Board, I can't forget that name. They took off all the doors on the houses. In the middle of winter, they would say if you don't want to pay we will take the doors off. So then the people put curtains on the doors as a form of resistance. But can you imagine; they take off a door, you put in a curtain?

## Political Mentorship

My political education started in 1973-74, when I was young at about 11-12 years of age. There was this gentleman called Ottie Beck. He and others were expelled from Botswana. There was a relationship between the government in Botswana and the apartheid government regarding exiles and liberation movements. The apartheid government said to Botswana that Beck is going to pit them against South Africa because he was engaged in recruiting for the ANC and the PAC<sup>245</sup>. When he came back he was very much tortured. He spoke very loudly because he couldn't hear himself – he was kicked badly while being held at John Vorster Square<sup>246</sup>).

His sons were very much informed about black consciousness because they had been out of the country. We didn't really know much. That was the time Don Mattera<sup>247</sup> also came into the scene. I never really knew

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<sup>245</sup> Pan Africanist Congress, political party committed to the anti apartheid struggle, which was formed in 1959 out of a disagreement with the ANC on the Freedom Charter, in the name of an Africanist ideology.

<sup>246</sup> Referring to the now renamed Johannesburg Central Police Station.

<sup>247</sup> A famous South African poet, musician and community activist, who became involved in the black consciousness movement in the 1970s.

these things, even though I grew up in Soweto – with all the burning and our parents being so scared that they didn't us want to venture out – we weren't even allowed to discuss it in our houses. That's when I started growing my Afro<sup>248</sup> and we had access to books like Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panthers, George Jackson, you name them. They called them the *Black Powers*, the people with the Afro's. Many of them, together with Don Matera and Ottie Beck, would come and engage and talk. It had a great impact on me because one didn't really know about the history of the banning of the PAC, the banning of the ANC. We could only listen to the news. I remember at that point the news was at a time when BJ Vorster was the Prime Minister of the country. We were fed with propaganda of the apartheid system to the extent that we couldn't think outside the box. And here these guys come and open up this box and give us another angle and dimension to what it is you don't know.

That is, what you should know, how you should really react, how you are oppressed, why we have separate institutions of education, why you have coloured schools, why you have black schools, why do they wear black uniforms, why do you wear brown uniforms, that you are human beings and why you should not be compartmentalised into thinking in terms of black and brown as the apartheid government wanted us to think.

We also learned why you should question the history that we were taught at school. We were becoming politicians because as you can imagine, we were coming from these discussions and going to school where we would take on teachers who were teaching us history. Those were the areas that were used to indoctrinate you but then again you would become 'un-indoctrinated' by these very same people I'm mentioning. We knew that these teachers would say Ottie Beck is just against the government, the

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<sup>248</sup> Hair style that became the political symbol, amongst African-Americans in the United states in the 1970s and more broadly around the world, of black pride and identity.

government gives us pensions, and these people are causing trouble and they are just agitators and trouble makers. So it was very important that you hear the truth from the source, and these people were the sources.

Besides the books, we would listen to Radio Freedom. We would tune into overseas radio to listen to new things, because I was only exposed to Springbok Radio and Radio Highveld – those were the things that we were growing up with. But we found out that there were other things – who the hell is Martin Luther King, or George Jackson and the Black Panthers? Why did they go shoot up the court to get their brother out of the court where he was appearing for all these injustices? We would then have discussions and debates about what is it that this apartheid government is doing wrong and why is it that we are separated? What is the homeland system and why were homelands created? It was an educational spirit that we did not get at school. We became immediately radicalised because you didn't want to just know, you wanted to do something about it. So that's where this new thing came from. Unfortunately just the following year, believe it or not, Ottie Beck had to apply for an exit permit and had to get out of the country again. It basically meant that you were giving the government a headache. If you wanted to leave you could leave, but you could never come back again. Ottie died in Denmark.

This was where one was still involved with the gangs, and people like Don Mattera would come and stop the fights and he would do poetry and go to schools. I remember the poem he came and did at this school and the poem was called *The Three Nails*. I became so much impressed with him. I remember there were these other guys with Ottie Beck, they formed an organisation, I don't even know if they really had a name for it, but they came from various areas in the country, they all assembled in our area. There were university students, others were artists, and they would all

come and make inputs and really de-brainwash us. So we heard from the best. And I must say that all of them, after Oattie Beck left, went separate ways. Some went to Umkhonto we Sizwe<sup>249</sup>, others went to Azania Peoples Liberation Army<sup>250</sup>, left to study in Russia, Scotland, Ireland. Others became Trotskyites. And that was the beginning of one's political education and political direction, how one became politicised in a nutshell.

I was fortunate that one of my greatest mentors had been on Robben Island. He was a leader of PAC, Zephania Mothopeng, and what a wonderful person he was. At some point he was wanted as a PAC leader – the state said PAC organised the 1976 student uprising. He had been tortured when he came out. He went out on a bad trial, that's a secret trial, we didn't see him for years. The 1976 uprising wasn't organised by any organisation, it was organised by students, mostly Black Consciousness people. So they put him in jail for ten years for something he didn't do. Another mentor, he's still alive and we still talk; he calls me 'my *laaitie*'<sup>251</sup>, Don Mattera. As I mentioned, Dr. Don Mattera was instrumental when we started the Black Consciousness Movement. Bra Don today will call me and say, "you must come to see me *my laaitie*, you must come to see me," you know? And I'll say, "I'm not your *laaitie* man", but it's ok, let me listen to this guy. There was another lady Ma Sisulu<sup>252</sup>. She was detained at Number Four<sup>253</sup>. She always came to help

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<sup>249</sup> MK - armed wing of the ANC.

<sup>250</sup> APLA – armed wing of the PAC.

<sup>251</sup> '*Laaitie*' (Afrikaans) is a South African colloquialism referring to someone younger than oneself or a young person. It may be used positively, as a term of endearment, or as a way of dismissing someone as inferior to oneself.

<sup>252</sup> Albertina Sisulu, an antiapartheid activist, wife of fellow activist Walter Sisulu, was also dedicated to community development in the greater Soweto.

us. At the time it didn't matter – we didn't worry who was ANC, who was not – so many people made an impression on one. Those people really made me engage with the authorities of the time.

## A councillor with a street background

I'd say today, as a Councillor, we are fighting from an institutionalised platform, using conventional methods. When you occupy public office you have access to speak directly to power because you are part of the system. But because I am in the opposition, in the DA, it means we have a certain role to play. When there is a problem in the township, for instance of sewage, I address it immediately. I can pick up the phone and inform the relevant person.

Back then you could march, barricade the streets, fight with the police, throw rocks and so on: the unconventional or unorthodox methods. If you are on the ground, an activist, a street politician, you have to use streetwise ways of addressing issues. It becomes part of you, part of your personality structure, you know? You integrate, and incorporate whatever you have learned on the ground and apply it. Now I know more. When a person has a problem in the township, I know how to deal with them because I have been a part of the street battles. The street background gives you more preparation for the kinds of battles that we have now, because you can relate. When somebody comes to you with a problem, you can tell if they're lying to you or saying the incorrect thing because of the knowledge you've gained. Activism is actually a great help. It helps you interact more easily with people because you do understand. I would say it is like your practical reference. You do your varsity things, but when you go down there you do your practicals; and that is where

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<sup>253</sup> Number Four, as it was known then, is one of the places where female agitators against the Apartheid state were detained. It is situated in what is presently known as Constitution Hill

you learn the real issues. But we started with practicals, and then did theory. It's a different way of doing things.

The institutional way is much more organised. It is not reactive, but proactive in a way. You have, as I said, more access. You also get to know the intricacies of local governance; how it operates. Back then you just wanted delivery here, now. You didn't really know about budgets, budget allocations, Integrated Development Plans and so forth. People do not understand even sometimes what the councillor can do and can't do. Sometimes they think the official is the boss of the councillor, not the reverse. No I didn't speak to you, I went to Mr. Handley, I say, but I am the councillor of the ward, I tell Handley what to do. No, Handley says he will... And people don't understand. There is a lot of civic education to be done, it should be done in schools, a compulsory subject dealing with civic education. How government works, what the role of a president is, how are laws being made, and how do you apply them, what is an assent, how does the president sign, how does the lower house work. I remember that, one day, many years ago, people from the Inkatha Freedom Party were having a problem: their names weren't on the lists for elections. They came in there and they saw the people on their computer, and one of them said 'oh, you are watching TV, that's why you don't do your work!', and suddenly they were hitting all the screens, because of perceptions.

Where one is now, you are not dealing with perceptions, but with realities. Now you really understand how a city, a municipality, operates. You know exactly what's going on, you know the Mayor and also you have more access to the MMC<sup>254</sup>, people who are in charge of delivery of vehicles and so on. So the difference now is that I can go directly. For example, whereas I was on the ground giving Parks Tau<sup>255</sup> hell, now I'm

sitting next to him and it makes it easier to talk to him. I'm not going to the street again, rather let's talk about it. So being in this institution now, you have better access to resources, information, and delivery mechanisms. That is the difference.

Now that one is in Council, you bring along a lot of experience of governance. Already as a Member of Parliament we've brought laws, for example, the Rental Housing Act and the Rental Housing Amendment Act. I was in the education portfolio with Dr. Kader Asmal<sup>256</sup>. We would make inputs into the Higher Education Bill, so we knew how to make laws.

And then coming down to Council level, with such a lot of experience, it is the first time resting. Someone asked the other day if I'm a new Councillor. I thought to be careful because "new" is a relative term. I have a lot of experience, so I don't feel new. Local government is actually the most feared at Council level because that is where you are dealing directly with issues. When I was in Parliament, I couldn't address issues. We were dealing with national issues so how could I come and tell people about the laws we made? When people have a problem with water, the new water meters or they've lost their job; you're dealing with issues at the level of delivery. So being in council is a lot of hard work. But when you've been in the street, doing the spade work, it's much easier.

Maybe those Councillors who have never been involved are having a problem. Those who have never been involved in politics, who just came in and applied for a job; they are in big trouble because they don't know what they're doing. They have a lot to learn. They think they know a lot because they studied a lot. You can study public administration and become an official. That's for officials to know. As a politician, you should come with background that's steeped within the people. All these things

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<sup>254</sup> Members of the Mayoral Committee.

<sup>255</sup> Current Mayor of Johannesburg.

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<sup>256</sup> A lawyer, anti-apartheid activist, Professor and member of the ANC. He became Minister of Water Affairs and later of Education (1994-2004).

make it much easier as a Councillor. Those who haven't interacted with people sit there in their little room and have their big packet of chips then say they are a Councillor. They're going to be in trouble – it's going to be difficult for them because they won't even understand what people are talking about. Also, if you've never had a cross-cultural experience, how the hell do you manage? You get some people, white people, who don't know what Soweto is all about. You have to understand why a person talks the way he talks. And you must respect why he thinks the way he thinks. There are some cultural things you don't do. Don't stand when you're talking, don't speak down to people because a Black person doesn't like this; don't talk about us and them - he finds it uncultured. Those little things count. If you don't know them, you just come and make sweeping statements, you'll be a victim quickly. You'll fall on your sword. So I'm happy to have grown up in Soweto. I know culture, I know tradition. You name it, I know it.

## Driving change –councillors need pressure from activists

Civics and councillors, the two works together. You need pressure as a councillor to keep you on your toes. From a councillor's side, you have more access to resources, but I think you need pressure groups, if there's no pressure groups, people will have a laissez faire attitude. I mean, there's a human factor, councillors are not machines, and not everybody is the same.

But there's one problem with councillors. Being a councillor, it's not a permanent job. The mayor is being regarded as permanent, so are the members of the mayoral committee, and chairpersons of committees are regarded as permanent. And there could be about R30.000 wage gap. Now you expect the councillor to do all the work, and he's actually part-time. Members of parliament are permanent, members of the legislature are permanent, but councillors who do the real job, are not permanent.

So it is really creating problems, because people want everything from you as a councillor, and really you don't have the money, your car breaks down and there are so many things they expect from you. While the other side, *mina*<sup>257</sup>, I was in Parliament and, come on, what did you do in parliament? Going on visits, and sitting down, go and drink during Parliament, they would say they're going to meet somebody in the dining rooms, and they come back drunk and they disappear. Now, here? You work like hell, I have to give the DA credence for that... You work like hell eh, you work like hell here.

We have a system called a PDMS system, the Performance Management Development Evaluation something, it's a monitoring system where you get evaluated every year. Now imagine you work, you are being evaluated like a permanent person, but you don't get the money and the resources for it. It's difficult, whilst the intention is noble, we really have to be conscientious, you have to be committed because the people outside, they don't know about yourself not being permanent, they just know you're the councillor, you're the person, please do it; some even think you get a lot of money.

## Street battles

Street battles: these are realistic battles that take place in the street. Street battles encompass organisation, mobilisation, propaganda and all the other relevant factors. It's actually political warfare that you are doing on the street. It entails organising, organising people in blocks, streets, so that they become the owners of that area and they will protect that area. And when there is a fight with the authorities those people will cordon off the streets, create road blocks, dig trenches and do everything to immobilise the institutionalised oppressors, if you want to call them that.

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<sup>257</sup> Zulu for 'me, myself'.

It entailed a lot of understanding also of the psyche of the people, it entails an understanding of the problem itself, and it also entails your organisational capacity. The people must want you to lead, which means you must be democratically elected by the people. Leaders lead and others follow so you don't send followers to fight and you are not in the front. As a leader you should always be in the front.

Street battles were real battles, it came down to rubber bullets, it come down to shooting people, people were shot dead. We lost people – people were buried and that's what street battles are all about. A battle means it is not the end of the war. There's a battle on different fronts – there's a physical battle, a psychological and so on. You just do things at liberty to get the attention of the world; the media comes in and the government gets pressurised because they don't like to be embarrassed. There's a battle where you go into houses that are standing empty for two years – we invade the houses, take over and say, "listen government, why are houses empty while people don't have houses?" So that's why I say street battles entail many different avenues and areas in this theatre called war. There are different ways of waging street battles.

It depends on the type of war that you are waging; without the conventional weapons of war, without the uniforms, but we have the structure. In the structure you will have branch leaders, you will have what we call 'the guys' who get separate instructions. There's the meeting where we tell the people that, for instance, tomorrow is a stay-away<sup>258</sup>. When the meeting is over, there'd another meeting that nobody knows about: that meeting is where we would talk. We'd talk to the 'generals', and tell them where they should block off, where they will get their tyres from, where to store their tyres and where they will find the

equipment to dig trenches. They will even pile up stones. People know those things, it is like that.

Haven't you noticed when you turn the radio on in the morning and hear the news reporter say, "there is some activity taking place in Lenasia". You ask yourself, when did this take place and how – the road is blocked, cars can't come through? It means it was organised. It means somehow there was a meeting, and somehow there could have been smaller meetings in cells and in pockets. Somehow there was dissemination of information for different ears, for different reasons and for different things. So it means that besides being eloquent and articulate, having oratory skills and the ability to draw an audience, as a leader you must be ready for the fact that the response from the authorities is not going to be negotiation. They will come out with force to suppress – action leads to reaction. So we would get ready for a reaction because we knew to expect that we were going to fight.

You must also understand the mood of the people. You must gauge the temperature, because all those elements make up whether you can be victorious or not. And by victorious I don't mean killing the police- we act just to get their attention. What happens is that sometimes the Council ignore you. You send letters and petitions, and never know where it goes. So then you march and protest. You won't believe me but it works. I do not know why the authorities are like that or were like that in those days. People had to use those types of messages.

Sometimes I wonder why we had to do that. Why couldn't authorities just have opened the door and let us talk and solve the problem. Sometimes there was a lackadaisical fear attitude from authorities. Sometimes I felt like they were downright racist, they would say "you Coloureds, you are betraying those days", then we would say, "sorry but you do not know what a Coloured is. You do not know where we grew up. You do not know that you are offending my family if you call me certain names because you do not know our history." Some of them, because they were

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<sup>258</sup> When the whole community stays away from work and school.

schooled or became ideological captives, would think that they can address a problem along racial lines. I remember a time when Tokyo Sexwale<sup>259</sup> said that Coloured protestors make him vomit. It was bad because people understood it differently; they said Tokyo Sexwale said Coloureds make him vomit. Something was left out. But Tokyo had to apologise.

So when you use certain methodologies and didactics, we will respond and use the same didactics. Remember, we come from apartheid. We learnt these ways of battling from the very same people in power today. You taught the dog all his tricks and now that he knows all the tricks, he bites you. You can't turn around and ask what's wrong with the dog. The current government must also understand that they used all these tactics and techniques to get into power. The people on the ground have not forgotten them either. That's why you see these uprisings all over – people haven't forgotten what they were taught. Now suddenly they are in a position of power and say "you must not behave like that. You must not create the material conditions for revolution or war." Government is responsible for creating those conditions. When people are rising up against you; it is you who causes the uprising. People don't just rise up, there must be issues. If you deliver water, electricity, if you are not corrupt – keeping people on housing waiting list for years while houses have been given to friends and family – there will be no street battles.

## Indigent Policy in Johannesburg

We succeeded in one thing, myself and a few others. We designed, devised, drew up a document for the indigent and presented it to Council.

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<sup>259</sup> Tokyo Sexwale is an anti-apartheid activist, politician and successful businessman. He became Premier of the Gauteng Province (1994-1998), went into the corporate sector and came back to government when he was appointed Minister of Human Settlements in 2009.

They still have it – they've changed it, I think. They now call it *Ziyarana* or something<sup>260</sup>. It allows for those who don't have income to apply for assistance so they can be cross-subsidised for a certain amount of water and so on. It's a programme that we designed. I don't want to sound arrogant, but I was the author of that document. Today it remains a living document that is used not only by this Council but by others as well in various forms. Intellectuals made some key appendages and changes.

I think that was a great thing because it helped, not necessarily with housing, but with people who are unable to pay, pensioners and so on. We designed an indigent policy, and today it is still there. I remember I was typing with one finger, on a little machine and we put together this indigent policy. Up until today you can see elements of it; sometimes just paragraphs, plagiaristically taken from our policy and applied.

Other cities use it to look after the poor, the unemployed, the pensioners and all those people that I mentioned earlier. So up to today it plays a major role. The new City Council have renamed it, as I said. People register every six months to show that they either don't have income or the income that they have falls within certain categories and so forth. That was a great achievement, and it would be very encouraging if the municipalities could go out and ask people to develop policy instead of them devolving policy.

They should develop policy together with the people. Because if you come preoccupied with a set of policies thinking of what the people would want, that is not listening to the people. Even some of the laws that we are making have not evolved. Somebody thought up something and went to see a group of lawyers about something to do with business licences. The lawyers draw up something and the next thing you see people marching against it. So if you consult you get the right policy.

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<sup>260</sup> He refers to *Sizanani*, 'helping one another', otherwise called indigent policy.



So yes, the indigent policy is the greatest one in that sense. If I go and look at other things, not necessarily policy, but our unorthodox ways, the marches and the stay-aways we called, we really pressurised the government into altering its ways of thinking. Everybody has a faculty between their ears. You can't start thinking for the people as they are not zombie robots. You must consult and you will be amazed what they can tell you. Let's say you have a thousand people and out of the thousand maybe two hundred talk to you, you become so educated. I hope that the little policy we gave birth to becomes contagious in going about other problems and policies.

### From Noordgesig civic to SOWEJOCA and politics

In 1994 we realised that we had suddenly become 'Coloureds' again. While families across the street, across Soweto Highways, which was called Africa Street (it wasn't a highway when I was small), families across the street were made to pay a flat rate of R45, and we were asked for R300 for the same services. Because they said we were coloureds! Noordgesig was not a coloured area, we always lived mixed, it was just that we speak different languages, but we grew up as black. And I said why do you give the people across the street a flat rate, and this side, same houses, same rubbish, same apartheid, why are you practicing a new type of apartheid, you are racialising delivery now. I always thought that I am an African, and now I am a coloured again, there we go again, and it was hurtful. I mean if you go to Noordgesig, go and see who is there, one lady she is there, she speaks Sotho, and the other one is mixed, and now suddenly, you decide no, you are not black enough, and it was an insult. This poverty, it wasn't a matter of black poverty, white poverty: poverty, if a person is poor, she is poor, and that is where I really got involved, even before we created the South Western Civic Association, I was the leader of Noordgesig Civic Association, being driven by the issues.

Then we started with SOWEJOCA when we brought all affected civics that were unhappy about collectives such as SANCO<sup>261</sup>. I fought, I was part of PAC, but when it came to civic politics, why should civics be co-opt or coerced into a certain ideological direction? When I was a teacher I also had the same problem: I was an activist in the teaching, we agitated for unions and for teachers. So it was a triple role, but it all had its political connotations and overtures. So I formed a civic organisation that was called popcorn, it was called reactionary, it was called counter-revolutionary, because it was formed after '94 came into being, just after '94, I think by the second half of '94 I said no, I can't be part. We felt that the ANC wanted to make a civic organisation that belongs to them, just like COSATU, so that they can control them: you give them a job or two, and in the end you see they become toothless, lapdogs. So we said it can't happen that civics become lapdogs. In the townships when they have unemployment, when they have poverty, it doesn't have an ideological cover. It doesn't have red, black, green and gold or a star in the middle<sup>262</sup>. Poverty is poverty. SOWEJOCA was formed precisely with that in mind.

So the people went to court, and I went to court with the people. So that was really the reason for starting SOWEJOCA. We also felt that we should be stronger by opening ourselves up and getting more civics to join. So we had SOWEJOCA all over Gauteng and there was even a chapter of SOWEJOCA in the Northern Cape which was called KIMJOCA in Kimberley. We really opened it up. Some of our guys are former MK<sup>263</sup>, others are from PAC. They're people who quite know the ground and how to do battle. Even the propaganda side, we could do that too as some of the

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<sup>261</sup> South African National Civics Organisation. See Context 4 above.

<sup>262</sup> Description of the ANC colours and flag.

<sup>263</sup> Umkhonto we Sizwe, former armed branch of the ANC.

guys were schooled in the art of propaganda, and counter-propaganda. That was why we formed.

I was the leader of SOWEJOCA and this demanded a lot of leadership. When we had public meetings we would address thousands of people, and it was difficult, but you learned there, because all meetings were arenas, platforms of education, of civic education.

I remember, one day we as SOWEJOCA were invading houses in Lenasia. The houses had been standing empty for two years. And we said, but why? Nobody is allocating these houses... Daniel Mofokeng was the MEC for Housing then. So we went in there and we said let's take over these houses. Then the next best thing they say was instead of addressing and coming to speak to us, they were ready sending the police to shoot us, they arrested people there for invading the houses, instead of addressing the problem. Then there was a time which it was very tense for me.

Of all people, the IFP saved us... I was first told, there's a MK guy who is coming to assassinate you. And then the next days, Themba calls, from the IFP. He came and he says, you don't know me, I know ideologically where you come from, they are going to kill you, and I'm not going to take this one. So the IFP came and paid for the people for bail and for got them all out. It wasn't an affiliation as such, it was a relationship because it was a matter of survival then. But I learned so much from the IFP, about respect, real culture. It was quite an ideological battle to talk to the IFP, because some people perceived you as a sell-out, 'yeah you're going with those who were in the apartheid fold of things'<sup>264</sup>. And I said, that's strange, the ANC says those things, but they are aligned to the National Party, the National Party became part of the ANC, but those were the people who invented apartheid.

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<sup>264</sup> The IFP collaborated with the apartheid regime in some instances, e.g. around the idea of an autonomous Zulu homeland.

Finally affiliation with political parties was good, you learnt a lot, and also they helped us with resources. It also helped a lot to understand the normal political environment of how politics functions, how they set up one another, how things are being done in politics, and not to be naïve and gullible and just think everything is gold. A person I remember in the IFP was Joe Matthews. His father was Professor Z. K. Matthew, a great ANC leader. Joe was in the IFP, he became a deputy minister of safety and security, and he was such a brilliant person. Naledi Pandor<sup>265</sup> is his daughter, and his father is one of the great professors who came to speak of the ANC. So can you imagine, one was exposed to many people, PAC, IFP, ANC, DA... It's a funny thing, on this political journey I met a lot of people.

### Police repression and the end of SOWEJOCA?

There was a time that we even had to go stand before a formal commission, a commission that investigated why the police had shot people during an uprising, where people were killed, and... So when it comes to this police brutality, post-apartheid police brutality, we were the first recipients of it<sup>266</sup>, and we were not celebrating to say oh now you see, we predicted you're shooting, you're doing the same things than the previous government. And we were called all types of counterrevolutionaries, and I remember I said to them, no, the only counterrevolutionaries are you, because you are the counters of epicurean centres, you are the counters of the hotels, of the banks, of the tender committees, that's where the counters are, where you are. So, we are not counterrevolutionaries, and I gave a new meaning, a new

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<sup>265</sup> Anti-apartheid activist, member of the ANC National Executive Committee, and several times minister.

<sup>266</sup> The interview was done where the Marikana massacre was still fresh in all memories. Marikana was often labelled as the first instance of police mass repression in post-apartheid times.

definition, a new meaning to counterrevolutionary. So, it's just a repetition of what has happened in the past.

What happened in 1997 in this meeting is that we struggled to control people. You must understand that there will be provocateurs and you cannot handle that. There are times when the passion, the gravity of the situation, is so bad that it attracts a big crowd. You also had a lumpen proletariat, the tsotsis, the gangsters, they have their own agenda. They come to the meeting and they say, tomorrow we will have a stale where I will march on Shoprite for my own purposes, so how could you manage them? You can't stop them. You must also understand that a hungry man is an angry man, and an angry man doesn't just follow your ideas of marching. He's got his ideas too, but also there is an element, the criminal element that you will get it all over, and we never did. That was the most difficult to control, it was sad. It was just the most challenging, something I don't revere, I don't appreciate.

So in 1997 in Eldorado Park<sup>267</sup>, SOWEJOCA had a big rally where we thought there was going to be two thousand people but more than twenty thousand people came to the stadium. Somebody sabotaged the sound system and we couldn't talk because the wires were taken. I do not know if it was the state or whatever. Then we had a crowd that broke away from the main gathering, which could have easily been five thousand, who were marching to the Shoprite to burn down the shops. There was something else going on there in Eldo. Amongst our midst we had people who felt they should sabotage us. I will not get into names but we knew them. So yes, there are many occasions where you have the young people and you must watch what you say. If not, you are going to have a problem when they become uncontrollable. But those are isolated

incidents. The majority of the marches we had in town there was no violence.

So, with this commission of enquiry, some people dead, SOWEJOCA executive disappeared, I had, I think only two people who testified. The others disappeared, they didn't come. And you learned about the knives, the great long knives of politics. I always said to myself that Jesus Christ was crucified by his own people, and he was a holy man, so what the hell am I? I can take it, let me carry on, I am not going to give up...

And for SOWEJOCA today..., you can't go on and on. Some members have passed on, others have retired, others are in political parties, pursuing careers, but we do talk to one another, and you won't believe, we still interact with the people, they still come and say no, I want to talk to you. People are tiring, people are getting older, people are changing direction. I don't think you want me to throw stones, I can't even run anymore! But the spirit they carry with them, it's forever there. So they say the spirit lives on.

## **Activism and Politics**

Even if you just hand out a pamphlet, you are an activist. If you just email and get into the internet, you are an activist. Activist, it is not how they define you, how I define myself only, but anyone active in any way is an activist. And surely the judges of you being an activist are the people who are the recipients of your activism, where it is producing results, whether it is educational, changes in their lives, or changes in their material conditions. Many people are activists without even knowing it. Because without being a leader of some organisation that makes activism more acceptable, many activists are not even being recognised.

To me an activist and a political figure are not two different things. As an activist, you were active in fighting for political change, you were political figure. Today I am occupying public office – it doesn't mean that it

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<sup>267</sup> Main Coloured township in Johannesburg.

changed me into a political figure. When you are an activist you are fighting against a political system. That must give and affect change, it must deliver. So there is really no difference between a political activist and a politician. I've been a politician all my life, I've always been a politician, I don't see a difference between the two.

If I had to go to university and study to be a politician, that's something else. Back then you became a politician because situations, what you call situational ethics, made you one. The situation determined what you're going to be. If you directed uprisings, if you read Karl Marx, and you were reading Engels, you were being a politician. You wanted to know the relationship between the different forces, whether it is capital, whether it is labour: what is the relationship and why do we suffer? You had to understand why others came out with certain theories, as to how to remedy our situations. That is a political arena that you went into, taking on issues, you were a politician.

A politician isn't some badge that you are allocated, to say, "he's from the DA, now he's a politician," no. We have been nobody in apartheid, but we were politicians. Some of us weren't even big names with recognition, we just hated the state. You just emphasise this, you are a politician. All were politicians. You don't have to belong to a party to be a politician. What is politics? Everything.

You are a politician if you go to school, to varsity, and the students have their own little things, that is varsity politics. When you go and work in the corporate world, there is corporate politics. All politics is not confined to state politics. Even preachers are politicians. Jesus Christ was a politician: he wanted to change something. You are a politician if you advocate for change, especially positive change.

## Codes of Conduct

People expect you to be available at all times, which can't happen because you also have a family, and you need time to relax. People expect you to grow angel wings. You can't drink a beer without them being shocked; even if it is your beer and not theirs. When I say they expect you to behave like an angel, I'm not talking about being moral. I mean there are certain people you are suddenly expected to not associate with. Some guys are gangsters. I grew up with them. I want to be able to sit and talk to them. But now there's that idea that "this is a drug dealer", which limits you. You can't be a human anymore; yet they want you to solve the problems. You can't stick to a fixed bearing, you know? You can only get votes if you associate with everybody. This does not mean condoning wrong, immoral practices, but you have to speak to people. How do you get through to the gangster if you don't speak to him? Only if you sit with him, will you be able to exchange views and give him something to think about.

Likewise, you can't expect me to wear this badge in a township, I will take it off, I have got other clothes in the car. I'm one of the people. If the sewage overflows, I will go with my put-on, and we go, see if we can maybe divert it so that it's going into the *veld*, where it doesn't go into the storm water, it's going to go into the stream, then the stream goes into the rivers, how many casualties will we have? Now those are the things, but the expectation is some people want you to be higher, some people want you to be a preacher, and you can never be. Others want you to be a counsellor, not a councillor of the city, a counsellor, you must counsel them, 'hey my husband and I, come and tell us, give us advice'... You become so many things.

## Remaining involved in Noordgesig

I am definitely still involved in Noordgesig, my hometown. The City Council was so kind to give us a house there, where we put up a

computer development centre. My brother is the *fundi*<sup>268</sup> of that, he's running it. There are about 20, 30 computers already in; the youth are using it, coming from Noordgesig, but also Orlando and Diepkloof<sup>269</sup>. We are getting a sponsor to fund the internet connection. Besides, I'm trying to look at a feeding scheme that might start in June, July, winter time.

I am in Noordgesig on an advisory capacity. I liaise with the civics that are currently active in Noordgesig. I speak to them, I encourage them, I engage in workshops, I teach them small things, such as writing minutes, communications skills, sometimes at the computer center. It's just not something that's going to leave you, while you're still alive and all your faculties are still there, people will ask you, and we will always give advice.

Or sometimes, they will even use you as a conduit to the council. 'Please can you talk to him, he doesn't want to see us, he says we are just mongrels, and he says we are burning and trashing, please can you try to organise?' Yes definitely, definitely, you are a conduit, you will be always.

It's like, being a teacher, if you have been a teacher, you are a teacher for life. And when you have been an activist, you will be one, if you were honest and people don't have look at you through a politically jaundiced, or community judgemental glasses for what you've done wrong. Some of the people, they have confidence in me because they have been dealing with me for all the years. And there's a new civic and they will say, no man, eish. Or the civic will come and say, these old people, man, they don't want to assist. Please speak with them, we are there now and they don't want to listen to us, and we told them that you are training us but they still want you. So it is still difficult, but yeah, we are definitely

involved with them. It's not something we're going to stop. No not when there are problems still.

There will always be problems. I remember talking to somebody and they said they wanted to solve the housing problem, I said no they couldn't solve it, nowhere in the whole world could this be solved. So finding solutions is an objective, but it's not always achievable. That's what you learn when you are in public office and you find out, oh, no, there's not enough money for this. People can't pay rates, so what are you going to do? You're going to send the police in, break down the shacks? You are just going to disturb the community, and then they're going to come back for you. Whenever it is election time you know what's going to happen... There will be a lot of uprisings before 2014.

So I am remaining very much involved. You go to the shop, they say, oh, I'm sorry man, can I ask you something? You can't say no, I'm doing shopping... you say, what is it? No man really, I was trying to get a hold of you. I say, what's your number, when were you trying? They will lie, they will take advantage of you, you will always be involved, whether you want to or not, you will be, they will make you, because if you have a good standing with the communities, and I'm talking over the artificial divides of township borders, they will stop you. If they have faith in you, they will talk to you. Because this one fought for you, this one went to the commission, this one was in the forefront, this one was shot, we know him. And you will always have that recognition and faith and confidence in the community. So it's not a matter of, do you still want to be involved... Leave it? Ha, you try it!

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<sup>268</sup> Zulu for teacher, expert.

<sup>269</sup> Black townships neighboring Noordgesig.



## Context 5: Tamboville & Makause, in Ekurhuleni

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**Claire Bénit-Gbaffou, Seyco Manyaka**

We cannot pretend of course that Makause informal settlement and Tamboville township<sup>270</sup> are ‘representative’ of the extremely diverse forms of local activism found in Ekurhuleni, richly illustrated, along the theme of anti-apartheid struggles mostly, by Bonner, Nieftagodien and Mathabatha’s book: *Ekurhuleni: the Making of an Urban Region* (2012), and its forerunner, by Bonner and Nieftagodien, *Kathorus: A History* (2001). However, we believe it makes sense to analyse these two case studies in an ‘Ekurhuleni’ context, marked by a specific political culture, quite distinct from Johannesburg’s. The new municipality of Ekurhuleni was created in 2000, amalgamating a collection of former municipalities formerly inscribed in a region called East Rand, understood as the industrial and mining periphery of Johannesburg. The importance of these activities for the past and current regional economies is still visible today, in the urban landscapes marked by dominant industrial areas and huge mining land and dumps, often occupied by informal settlements.

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<sup>270</sup> Two other activists in Ekurhuleni were originally to be included in this book: Timothy Maseu from Wattville township, and Zanele Mbatha in Harry Gwala informal settlement. Unfortunately, due to various circumstances (theft of a laptop and loss or recoding for the former, lack of availability for follow-up interview for the latter), and do our great regret, their interview could not eventually be included in the book.

Mining and related industrial activities have marked the politics of this region, and particularly its popular, insurgent politics: from the birth and growth of powerful trade union movements (Bonner et al. 2012), that would later link to the UDF, to the specific political and ethnic violence around migrant workers hostels (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2001), particularly harsh in the East Rand. To some extent, one could hypothesise that the eruption of violence against foreigners in the East Rand in 2008<sup>271</sup>, as much as it shares with the national wave of xenophobic attacks<sup>272</sup> - is caught between these two legacies. On the one hand, the East Rand is marked by a trade unionist political culture, which could provide an alternative vision for integrating migrant labour as part of the working class – but might be in a difficult position in times of deindustrialisation and internal political divisions. On the other hand, it has a traumatic history of extreme violence along ethnic and political lines, used as a way of dealing with conflict.

This history is explicitly present in Abie Nyalunga’s account of his leadership under apartheid and thereafter: having entered the anti-apartheid struggle through trade unions, he was involved in civic movements at different scales – regional, with ERAPO (East Rand People’s Organisation) and local, chairing the Wattville Concerned Residents Forum. His involvement in local, urban affairs was directly linked to the national priorities of the ANC liberation movement. But he also retains from this history a certain wisdom and caution about the use of physical violence in collective mobilisation. The experience of General Moyo, who is ten years younger (born in 1973), is somehow different: less connected

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<sup>271</sup> Illustrated worldwide by the atrocious picture of the ‘burning man’, the Mozambican migrant Ernesto Nhamuave, burnt alive in the informal settlement of Ramaposa,

<sup>272</sup> In particular in terms of the responsibility of the state and of the ANC in constructing and nurturing anti-foreigners resentment (Landau 2012, Neocosmos 2008, Mosselson 2010).

to the ANC, more critical and becoming more antagonist as the ANC's tolerance for dissent and popular protest seems to decrease (FXI 2003, McKinley and Veriava 2005; Duncan 2013), General's activism has developed mostly in the post apartheid era. Then, it is different types of networks that matter: less trade unions and ANC than legal NGOs and national and global networks of informal settlements, such as the Democratic Left Front, the Informal Settlement Network, Planact, Socio Economic Rights Institute and ProBono.org.

## Abie in Tamboville

Tamboville can be seen as a continuation of the nearby Wattville Township. Wattville itself was created out of land invasions that took place in the East Rand due to overcrowding. Council-built houses were invaded in 1941. By 1966 most of the invaded areas, including Wattville, were recognised and officially established as townships by the Mayor of Benoni<sup>273</sup>. The issue of overcrowding and housing shortage was however chronic, as evidenced by the further invasion of what is today known as Tamboville in the early 1990s. Tamboville too is the result of a land invasion, mostly from residents who were staying in backyard structures at the older townships, under the auspices of the Wattville Concerned Residents Committee (WCRC) led by Abie Nyalunga.

Abie stresses the fact that this land invasion was both the result of pressing local needs for dedensification, and a tool for the national struggle against apartheid, in response to a call by the ANC: "In 1988 there was a call made by the late Oliver Tambo in Lusaka, that one of the ways of strengthening the struggle was that people must begin to occupy

land in the country." As a result of this unique context, WCRC was part of the interim arrangements negotiated between the State and Civic Organisation in 1990-91, in par with the Soweto People's Delegation, and other civics in South African cities. The agreement reads

"Negotiate the lease of parts of the 'illegally occupied Tamboville' (Wattville South). Benoni Town Council and the Wattville Concerned Residents Committee (WCRC) to undertake proper planning of the area, provide essential services and tar streets, grant ownership rights, and allocate R500.000 from the Capital Development Fund".<sup>274</sup>

Twenty-five years later, Tamboville includes formal and informal structures, with the area consisting of more than 800 households. It is a low-income community and most of the people who are unemployed are the youth. Tamboville remains less serviced in comparison to areas like Wattville. Issues of water supply, electricity, and incomplete housing projects remain a major issue (Royston, 1998). The civic has lost some of its stamina in the post apartheid period, but Abie has to some extent been able to use the prestige and the networks built during the struggle to access some resources and support for specific projects, such as his attempt to set up a community bank. He is currently busy reviving a Tamboville-Wattville Development Forum, to deal with local issues and new social tensions – around development but also issues of economic competition and xenophobia, in which inclusive solutions still remain to be invented and adopted locally.

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<sup>273</sup> Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, (2011), *A ten year History of Ekurhuleni: 2000-2010*. Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality Directorate: Communications and Marketing, Germiston.

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<sup>274</sup> Interim arrangements negotiated between state and civic organizations 1990-1991, *Indicator South Africa*, 1991, 8(3), p. 20.



## General in Makause

Makause informal settlement, located close to Germiston CBD on former mining land, also dates back to the late 1980s- early 1990s in all likelihood. General explains that the first group to inhabit the area were Shangaan mineworkers from Mozambique who had no place to stay when the mining company where they were working closed down: so they began to squat in the area. He tells the story of the name, Makause, which means ‘socks’:

“The name Makause means socks - *amasokisi* in Zulu - originally given by the Shangaan group. They were referring to the Indian shop owner who had a shop in Makause for more than a century I think, during the times of the mines. The guy was using socks to attract customers, when the mine workers go underground they wear about 3-5 pairs of socks for protection’s sake. So they would take them on credit, and during month end, when they paid back their credit he used to give them bonuses with a pair of socks, so that’s how the name started, socks, referring to him as *amasokisi* by everyone who began to know the place back in those days of the squatting era.”

Unlike Tamboville, which was able to get local government recognition almost immediately, and became a formal township, Makause survived and grew as a settlement through passive resistance and resilience to recurrent eviction attempts led by municipalities. General recalls:

“The first residents had nowhere to go, so they decided to build their shacks, some of them plastic shacks. They would tear it apart whenever they see the police van and run. The next day, they would erect the shack again using plastic and boards, until other groups started to join them in the early 1990s. It grew bigger after 1994 after the so called democratic elections, when the influx started to spread in the area.”

The transition to democracy has not put an end to the risk of forced removals. Bonner et. al. (2012) recount the council-led emergency measures of 2007, where the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan authorities wanted to move the people of Makause under claims that the land was prone to flooding and sinkholes. They were to be relocated about 40km away from their current location, in Tsakane. More than 2000 shacks were destroyed (Bonner et al, 2012: 218). Thus began the Makause Development Forum’s struggle against evictions.

Politically, whilst the DA tries to capitalise on rising discontent towards the ANC<sup>275</sup>, it is clear in General’s view that they collide with the ANC in wanting informal settlements out of the city, out of sight, out of reach. General’s politics is then to join the Democratic Left Front (DLF), a support network for social movements, aiming at developing a political voice from the left, not directly intending to engage in elections but campaigning to support relevant independent candidates in local elections<sup>276</sup>.

The story of the struggle, told by General and others (Duncan 2013), reflects a worrying evolution of the state and the ANC, resorting to violence, intimidation tactics, imprisonment of activists and possibly even xenophobic threats. General himself has been subject to police harassment, arrest and trumped-up charges, and abuse by the court

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<sup>275</sup> Makause is part of a DA dominated ward within the ANC-led Ekurhuleni municipality. In April 2012 the DA embarked on a series of tours in what it called “the Forgotten People of Germiston/ Kathlehong”, as part of its “Don’t forget the forgotten” political campaign. (<http://da-gpl.co.za/?p=744>, accessed 12 June 2013).

<sup>276</sup> Sosibo, K., (2012), Democratic Left Front Comments, *Mail and Guardian*, 16.02.2012.

(Duncan 2013), as a result of his activities. In the *Daily Maverick*<sup>277</sup>, General is quoted as having said,

“The problem in Makause is that there is an unruly mob that is well-supported by the ANC and the police, but which doesn’t have the support of the community.”

These politics threaten the fragile cohesion of the Makause informal settlement, where community efforts have nevertheless succeeded in installing a water system without the assistance of public authorities, but in partnership with other civil society organisations, PLANACT and Informal Settlement Network (ISN).

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<sup>277</sup> *Daily Maverick*, 05 October 2012, Police to people of Makause: 'March and there'll be another Marikana'.

# Abraham Abie Nyalunga

*Born in 1961 in Benoni, Actonville*

*Current address: Tamboville, Ekurhuleni*

*Occupation and activism: Former member of the Wattville Concerned Residents Committee, Former member of the East Rand People Organisation (ERAPO), Former Organiser of the United Democratic Front for the East Rand, Chair of the Tamboville Watville Development Forum.*

**Interviewers: Tshanda Mbuyi and Seyco Manyaka**

## Background

I was born on the 14th of September 1961 here in Benoni. I spent most of my teen years from 1962 to 1966 at the Old Etwatwa location which is now known as Actonville before the forced removals<sup>278</sup>. I did all my schooling at St. Joseph's Catholic School, and after that I went to Etwatwa High School where I matriculated in 1979.

After that there was some kind of pre-arrangement between my father and my uncle so that I get a job. I was employed in a company called Dunswart Iron and Steel works. During those days we didn't have to submit a CV. I was told to go there on a Monday.

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<sup>278</sup> In the mid-1950s, the apartheid government devised a 'grand plan' for the East Rand, where there were to be fewer areas to concentrate racially segregated groups. Actonville was to regroup all the Indians in the region, and was proclaimed an Indian township in 1962 by the apartheid government. Forced removals followed a little bit later (Bonner et al. 2012).



**Figure 25 - Abie Nyalunga in the street that bears his name, Tamboville, © Manyaka 2013.**

Once I was standing outside, that was when my uncle went to the admin block; he was one of the *Indunas*<sup>279</sup> or supervisors so to speak. Later on, he came to me and said, “No, you got your passbook and everything?” I said, “I’ve got it,” so he said, “Okay, wait here. Somebody will come and get you.” Not very long after that one of the clerks actually came and called out, “who is Abraham here?” And I raised my hand. He said, “Come inside.”

I went in, was registered, and then one of the guys actually asked one of the old employees to take me to the department where I was going to work. On our way there, I asked in what they were doing in that department. This guy said, “Well, actually I don’t know, I notice that most of the time I see people sitting there drinking tea”. We got there and it was just about tea time and indeed everybody was sitting there. I was introduced to the elder folks. I was very young. Some of the elder guys introduced me to the supervisor of the department, to the foreman, and they actually gave me a name. They called me Pikinini; do you know what Pikinini means? It means small boy.

My ambition was actually to become a lawyer. I was inspired at primary school by one of our teachers, I remember her very well. One of the things I was very good at was debating. One day actually she asked, “What are your talents?” and one of the guys stood up and said, “Well, I can play soccer”, then was asked to come in front and show us how you do it, and you had to come up and mimic. With most of the girls it was basketball, you show how you jump and all that. And they came to me and “Abraham tell us what is your talent?” I said my talent is debating. She said, “Debating?” ... “Yes.” She said, “Come in front.” I went in front. Then she said to me, “Debate.” And I said, “Give me a topic and an

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<sup>279</sup> Zulu for traditional leaders, who were often given supervision roles in factories and hostels.

opponent.” Somehow, it was ingrained in me, being argumentative and debating.

I actually entered High school in 1977, and it was right immediately after the peak of ‘76<sup>280</sup>; at that point I became very active. 1976 had a lot of influence on me. I had a lot of the ring-leaders approaching me. I remember one of the things that they asked us to do was to go and burn the beer hall. I heard that it was decided in a meeting with student representatives, because at the time we were not found under any political organisation. We were just political students joining the Soweto uprising. They said the best thing is to target the beer halls and they asked, do you know why we should target those? My answer was quite simple, I said why should our parents go and drink and actually piss on the outside because the place was also smelly, so that really irritated me you know that mentality of beer halls being built to subdue black people. We actually went out to burn the beer halls and all that and the police came and we all scattered. I even ran away, I went to Daveyton, because at the time my grandparents had moved to Daveyton<sup>281</sup> after the forced removals. Of course we couldn’t attend school regularly. Sometimes we went to school and sometimes we didn’t go to school. Sometimes we went to school not to learn but to plan our political activities and which targets we actually wanted hit. The main targets at the time were bakeries and trucks that came to deliver alcohol, milk, and any white person in townships because whites at the time were perceived as enemies; and the police.

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<sup>280</sup> Soweto youth uprising that marked the beginning of persistent township unrest and the rise of international mobilization against apartheid.

<sup>281</sup> Daveyton was established as a black township to the north east of Benoni. Daveyton, together with Thokoza and Katlehong, was to become one of the strongholds of ERAPO, East Rand People’s Organisation.

## Joining the struggle through trade unions and civics

We had a way of hiding our involvement, that's one of the things we made sure of. Both of my parents were working in factories, so one thing that we used to do was that by 4 o'clock we were at home cleaning, making sure that everything is perfect: making fire, preparing so that when they come back they find that the house is in order. In a way they didn't suspect anything but they knew that we were kind of involved. They didn't have guts to pursue us because all the house chores were actually being conducted. We were a family of 6 and it was 5 brothers and 1 sister, my other sister was already teaching at the time, two boys were working, the other three including me were still at school together so we would actually rush, clean outside, clean the pots and we would all sleep in the kitchen. Not of all of them were involved. I remember my younger brother, Titus, actually said this one is going around with the black power people, the term comrade was not popular and all that I said was no I'm not going around with the black people. I said they actually found us on our way and they forced us to join them...so I had a way of defending myself.

At the time I worked for the company Steel Works, from 1982, we had just moved to establish an organisation called the East Rand People's Organisation. At the time I was a friend of the late Phiri ma Matabane. Phiri was working at General Electric and MAWU, which is now known as NUMSA<sup>282</sup>, was beginning to organize workers, and he introduced me to Sam Ntuli. Sam Ntuli was one of the organizers of the then MAU. And then he said "Look man, we know that you are actually very vocal of certain things in your companies. One, we are targeting your company because it is one of the biggest companies here in Benoni". I think at that

time it had employed more than 6000 people. It wasn't unionized yet, then we had on-going discussions and then they introduced me to the East Rand People Organisation which was then ERAPO. ERAPO was introduced to fight against higher rentals, for tarred roads, all sorts of services. I know that in one section in Daveyton they were still using bucket systems. ERAPO was made up of different activists coming from Daveyton, Wattville, Tsakane, Duduza, Katlehong, Tembisa, Thokoza... We had Actonville: these were the guys from the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC)<sup>283</sup> joining us. We had people from Kwa-Thema<sup>284</sup> joining us. I think one of the guys, Cyril Jantjies, later became president of the East Rand UDF<sup>285</sup>. There was another one Eddie from Duduza and there was Kheti from Katlehong and there was Malebo from Tembisa<sup>286</sup>. At the time there was a trade union called the South African Allied Workers Union which was mobilizing almost in every sector and some of the guys were Sisa Njikelana, Stone Sizani<sup>287</sup> etc. And the influence of the trade unions at that time was that the struggle in the factories must also be extended to the townships where we live. I remember very well Sam Ntuli's argument was that there is no point in coming here to fight for money. What about the areas where we live? In fact it was very political.

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<sup>283</sup> A movement formed in 1903 to fight anti-Indian legislation, TIC became closer to African and Coloured anti-apartheid movements, under the leadership of Yusuf Dadoo in the 1950s. In decline in the 1970s, the TIC was revived in the early 1980s and to play a crucial role in the United Democratic Front from 1983 (<http://www.sahistory.org.za>).

<sup>284</sup> Springs' black township, established in 1951, where Africans were resettled from Payneville.

<sup>285</sup> United Democratic Front.

<sup>286</sup> Duduza: black township of Nigel, established in 1964. Katlehong: one of the three black townships for the former municipality of Germiston. Tembisa: black township to the North of Kempton Park, established in 1957.

<sup>287</sup> Both are currently ANC Members of Parliament.

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<sup>282</sup> National Union of Metal Workers in South Africa.

Then in about 1983, there was the formation of the Tricameral Parliament where the Indians and Coloureds were represented separately, and we the Blacks had the Black Local Authorities<sup>288</sup>. There was resistance, and we discussed that at the ERAPO level. Fortunately, when we discussed that there was this move to establish the United Democratic Front. We actually had to be part of the United Democratic Front; we were at the fore front of it actually. I was not present when it was established in the Cape<sup>289</sup> but it was then provincially formed in each area. I remember Valli Moosa<sup>290</sup> was one of the guys who moved around. We used to call him Bones, because he was skinny. And there was Murphy Morobe<sup>291</sup>, Titus Mafolo<sup>292</sup>, and also FEDTRAW, the Federation of Transvaal Women. We began to mobilize in communities that were against the Tricameral system, against the Black Local Authorities. And then we called on the rent boycotts - that people must actually stop paying rent. In the later years it escalated.

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<sup>288</sup> The Black Local Authorities were introduced in 1983 as a way to offer limited local autonomy to black townships, in terms of urban management. As these BLA were still inscribed in an apartheid, racially segregated system, had limited resources and had to respond to huge social and developmental needs in black townships, they were – besides being inadequate- considered illegitimate by most township residents.

<sup>289</sup> UDF was launched on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1983 in Cape Town.

<sup>290</sup> An anti-apartheid activist, close to the Black Consciousness Movement in the mid-1970s, executive member of SASO (South African Students Organisation), one of the founding members of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC). He was very active in the UDF, and in the CODESA negotiations. He has been several times minister in the post-apartheid government (<http://www.sahistory.org.za>).

<sup>291</sup> One of the students' leaders of the June 1976 uprising, Morobe was detained on Robben Island, and was involved in several organizations, such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the General and Allied Workers Union, and the UDF.

<sup>292</sup> An anti-apartheid activist who was to become President Thabo Mbeki's political adviser.

In 1986 I was retrenched from my company. Initially at the beginning of the year they wanted to retrench me alone from the company, but two months later they had to lay down about 300 workers. We went through the negotiation process and we got a settlement and I left that company. Immediately after, because I already was an activist with the main guys, Murphy, Morobe, Vally Moosa, who had actually sought asylum at the American embassy in Johannesburg and the UDF factions had collapsed because of the State of Emergency<sup>293</sup>, I was then called in to be the organizer of the United Democratic Front of the East Rand.

During my first 2 months I was arrested, and I was detained for 6 months. At the time they would actually detain you for 6 months and I don't know; assess your situation; release you or extend your detention. So I was fortunately one of the guys who when the six months expired they actually released me. It was detention without trial where at some point we were denied things like access to newspapers, radio, the food was horrible; there were hunger strikes inside the prisons. I remember very well at some point the only way we could actually get out was maybe to go to a hospital. One of the prisoners advised us that the best way to do it would be to swallow or eat red floor polish which would demonstrate that when you excrete it will look like blood. So we did that and then every morning they would come in clusters, and we said, "No we are all sick". They would say no, we would say "We are excreting blood" They would say, "No man you are talking nonsense"...and then one man will say, "Go into the loo, let's see." We go and they say, "These guys, I don't know the entire ward is excreting blood". They took us to hospital, not the local hospital, but to Baragwanath Hospital<sup>294</sup>. Fortunately when they took us there, there were liberal doctors, and we told them all our

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<sup>293</sup> Declared in 1985, and then again in 1986 by the apartheid government – resulting in massive detentions of political opponents.

<sup>294</sup> Major South African hospital in Soweto.

motives. They said, “You stay here where there is food”. So once we were outside we were able to read newspapers, we could get visitors because in detention we couldn’t get visitors and some of us who smoked at that time we couldn’t even get smokes.

I continued with my workers and organizers and the time came for advice on the structures that had collapsed during the state of the emergency which was introduced early in 1984; it was revised again in 1986. I was in charge of something like 11 townships on the East Rand. The major task was to mobilize the youth which was then SAYCO, South African Youth Congress and there was COSAF; the Children’s Congress and FEDTRAW; Federation of Transvaal Women, also the Transvaal Indian Congress TIC. I think I actually carried that effectively, because the East Rand then became very vibrant. In 1986 or 1987 we called for a 2 day stay away. The East Rand had 90% success rate, where people did not actually go to work. We called for consumer boycotts where people didn’t buy in white companies. We had a situation where the Benoni Chamber of Traders spokesperson said that they wanted to negotiate with us. Our campaign was also linked with the Release Mandela campaign.

## National and local battles

The intention was for me to skip the country. The aim was actually to join the ANC. The link was that the person who was mobilizing for the ANC, the late Thibita Nkwamba. Nkwamba’s father was a friend to Boaz Machel, Samora Machel<sup>295</sup>’s brother, and Boaz Machel was also a close associate of my father, they came from the same village in Mozambique called Xilembeni. So Boaz told my father what our intentions were. Hence they were pre-arranged things that I would have to do: go and work, or even take further studies. That was the time I was actually joining the African National Congress.

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<sup>295</sup> Liberation leader and president of Mozambique 1975-1986.

The other person who was very influential in terms of when we joined the ANC was the late Vincent Francis. Vincent Francis was a member of the Benoni Student Movement and then he later worked for a TV company called WTN it was Worldwide Television News. So he would travel across Africa across the world, but one thing important with the link, was that he had access to guys in Lusaka<sup>296</sup>. So he was one of the guys who were holding staff meetings, reporting communications between Lusaka and the UDF internally. He actually hinted that we need to strengthen the internal mass mobilisation of the communities. In 1988 there was a call made by the late Oliver Tambo<sup>297</sup> in Lusaka, that one of the ways of strengthening the struggle was that people must begin to occupy land in the country.

And that then lead to a situation whereby I had to take deep analysis of what was happening in Wattville. I was exposed to a number of comrades and organisations, including Planact, a very powerful organisation at the time<sup>298</sup>. We did research and found out the last house they built in Wattville was in 1955. There was overcrowding, I’m talking about that from experience: me and my own family were sleeping in the kitchen, literally. We then identified this piece of open land that was between Wattville and Brackpan, they called it Dalpark Extension 6. We took a conscious decision that we are going to invade that land. How we mobilized the community was that we identified a group of women, they used to call themselves Wattville Residents Committee, who were agitating for more houses and they knew me, they had approached me

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<sup>296</sup> One of the strongholds of the ANC in exile.

<sup>297</sup> ANC General Secretary in 1955, ANC Deputy President in 1958, ANC President in 1985. He lived in exile from 1960 to 1990.

<sup>298</sup> Planning NGO aiming at empowering communities in shaping their own environment. It was very influential in shaping ideas for the post apartheid city to come, in the early 1990s (Hunter et al. 2009)

about issues of high rents. I remember there was Ma Mthoko, Ma Khumalo, Ma Mhkalipi and others; most of them are actually late.

I was a member of the UDF at that time. You couldn't come out in the open and say I'm a member of the ANC because when the police arrested you the first question that they will ask you is, "Are you a member of the ANC? Who are the other members of the ANC?" So UDF was a front. I would say, "No, UDF is not a front. UDF is an national organisation." Is Bishop Desmond Tutu<sup>299</sup> a member of the ANC? Is Allan Boesak<sup>300</sup> a member of the ANC?... So we would mention all the clergy people of the ANC; these Catholic bishops. We would actually deny all those things but we know that deep down we were carrying the mission of the African National Congress. Of destabilizing the country because you know there were different pillars of what you call styles. There was international pressure, the boycotts, the mass mobilisation and the armed struggle as well as the sanctions. The internal ones which I believe were much more effective than the others because it was us who on daily basis were making things much more difficult. It was us who were being shot when things were happening in communities. Where there was international media exposure; where the brutality of the apartheid forces was exposed. We actually made the country ungovernable so to speak; even the dis-investments. We were saying to them how can you invest in a country that is burning? Quite a number of American companies actually disinvested in this country in the early 80s, in pursuit of the call that was made.

Going back to the land invasion story, the engagement was just to move in and take the land by force. We knew that while the land was owned by

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<sup>299</sup> Anglican bishop, Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches, he became an anti-apartheid and social rights activist, famous internationally.

<sup>300</sup> President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982, Boesak played a major anti-apartheid activist role as a patron of the UDF, from 1983 to 1991.

the white municipality, the intention was that the Benoni municipality wanted to sell the land or hand it over to the then Town Council, the Black Local Authority where they were going to build middle and upper income group housing projects. Our question was, "What about the poor?" And the only way to circumvent it was to invade the land.

There were a number of other activities which were taking place in the late 1980s. Sisulu, Motsoaledi<sup>301</sup>, the guys that were detained with Madiba<sup>302</sup> were released. There was so much hype and excitement, and our program got delayed because of all those national activities. Prior to its unbanning in 1989 there was a rally here in the East Rand by the East Rand Youth Political Regional Committee who were actually distributing ANC T-shirts nationally. At the rally where we welcomed Sisulu, Motsoaledi, Mhlaba, the Rivonia trialists, everyone was wearing a white T-shirt with ANC emblems: those were t-shirts which were printed by us. I was in charge of distributing those T-shirts. We bought them for R 10 and were selling them for R 20. The intention was to build the funds for the organisation in the East Rand. The UDF were selling the t-shirts like hot cakes. Everyone wanted the t-shirts.

In June, after the unbanning of the ANC, Madiba was released in February 1990. There was also another hype taking place. But then in June we grew the program. I remember it was the 3 May. It was a Monday. We decided that we're going to move on to the land now. And we mobilized the community. We moved in without construction, I think we had bought 7-

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<sup>301</sup> Walter Sisulu, Elias Motsoaledi were part of the 10 ANC leaders condemned to life imprisonment in Robben Island, at the Rivonia Trial. The Rivonia Trial took place in 1963-1964. Ten leaders of the ANC were tried for 221 acts of sabotage against the apartheid government system. This trial was made after the police raid on the Umkhoto weSizwe (armed branch of the ANC) base in Rivonia, Johannesburg.

<sup>302</sup> Nickname for Nelson Mandela.



8 shacks. The police came in full force. And once we were out in the field, they came and said, "This is an illegal operation, and we are arresting you, whatever the case may be," We said, "Fine. Arrest us." But then strategically, we had already planned that when we get arrested, not all of the members of the organisation should go inside. Others should stay behind so they can mobilize the community. It was me and 34 other people that were then taken to the Daveyton Police station. We were kept for a day, but there were massive protests here in the township. Police had two problems. People were saying "You've got to let go of them, or arrest us". So, they were blocking people to enter here. The late Putini, who was one of the stalwarts of Mandela in the Mandela trial, was also mobilizing people to march towards the Actonville police station where they thought we were. So they had to go and block the bridge... For the whole day, police actually kept busy.

Eventually later in the afternoon, the Provincial Commissioner came to Daveyton, and said to me, "Well, we want to make you a favour. We want to release you. But when we release you, go back home. You don't go to the land." But I said, "The moment I leave this place I go back to the land. I'm not compromising". He said to me that I'm "stubborn", and he left. That was at about 5pm. At 8pm, he came back. It was him now, and the Town Clerk, Mr. Conradi. They said, "Look, we are prepared to release you." The one thing that I respect about that commissioner was that he was honest. He was upfront. He said, "I've got a policeman there that is very edgy, they've been there the whole day, they are hungry, they're dirty, and they've not had food for a whole day. And we don't have resources for meeting the situation. And we don't want to shoot people. We want to make peace now with you. If we release you now, are you willing to engage with Benoni City Council?" I said yes, on the condition that Benoni City Council is willing to listen to our grievances. Mr. Conradi said, "Ok. Fine, let's agree on this. We release you, but we go and contest this matter in court." I said, "No. You release me; I go back to the land. You have to arrest me again." And then, I don't know how they got a hold

of Vincent Francis. Vincent also came into the police station. Vincent actually called me aside and said Abie, the situation is so violent. People could die. You could trigger a lot of deaths. Just let the guys release you. Rather, let's go to court with them. We could engage them with our attorneys. I said, "Okay, fine". They released us on charges of trespassing but on warning. We agreed on the terms, they brought me to the land I explained to them what was going to happen.

The following day, we went to court. That Benoni court was packed to capacity. And then before court started, they came to me and said, "Look, we're going in there, I don't want to hear – I don't know what the term was- prepared arguments. I want us to get to the substance matter of this case." Because at that time, Vincent was working for WTH headquarters with all the media people, so the press was now on focusing on Benoni and the Benoni Council was already getting pressure from the Benoni Chamber of Trade and Commerce, because there was a consumer boycott.... So Benoni City Council was squashed. We agreed, let me say the lawyers agreed. And in other normal cases, it's the prosecution that normally leads the case, but in our particular instance, the Magistrate said, "No, the defence must begin the case, and the prosecution must counter". Our lawyer went through all the steps, because there was the briefing of all the history of Wattville, the research that we've conducted with PLANACT, overcrowding and everything. Then prosecution did not proceed: the magistrate called us in and other comrades, and the lawyers. Benoni City council, "I want you in my chamber." And the magistrate said, "These people have a case. Can't you people find a means to address it?" Benoni's lawyers' argument was to say "We are a local white local authority. We are not allowed to have black people to occupy land." But our lawyers countered and said, "A white local authority can establish a transit camp in terms of the urbanisation and settlement of black people. We can provide basic amenities in that camp. So that area can be declared a transit camp and you can provide those amenities." And he settled the case.

Two days later, we had a meeting with the full Benoni white municipality council. And I remember on the case I was wearing an ANC scarf, I remember that very well. I presented the whole history, where we come from, how we organize, what we are planning to do. And then they said, “Look... we’re giving the land over to you, we’re allocating 2 million for infrastructure development.” They agreed that we set up a joint infrastructure committee to establish this area.

We then established a technical committee. They said, “Okay guys, we release the land to you. Now everybody gets off. Let us now do proper planning of the township layout.” We then began to have the process of workshops for proper services, amenities and water systems. If you drive around, you’ll notice that some of the things, the cul-de-sac, those are meant to be the playing area for the children. We had a park which we called Samora Machel Park. Then you had street naming, and I didn’t choose it to be called Abie Nyalunga. In fact I opposed it but people actually threw me out. They literally kicked me out of that meeting; they said you are not going to tell us who we are going to call. The street was named Abie Nyalunga. Then there was the question about, “What about Mandela?” And they everybody is crazy for Mandela; let’s do something that is different. We had a street named Ahmed Kathrada<sup>303</sup>. There’s an open area we called Adelaide Tambo<sup>304</sup>, we had Samora Machel Park, because Samora Machel would actually visit, and the village where my father was actually born, was the same village where Samora Machel is from. That’s where the link came through. People said, “Look, let us honour people who are still alive” in terms of street naming. Most of these streets that you drove through were named after people who were still alive. Well, actually most of them have passed on: Themba,

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<sup>303</sup> See footnote 233.

<sup>304</sup> A prominent anti-apartheid activist, political exile, and wife of Oliver Tambo (see footnote 297).

Nkonyana, Riba ...he’s the principal of one of the high schools, Ephes Mkele High School, one of the township schools which produced one of the 100% pass rate mark in the township: we are very proud of it.

That was after they had established the township.

## The construction of Tamboville

In terms of mobilizing the community, the biggest challenge that we had to overcome was political ideologies. When we mobilized people for Tamboville, we didn’t go out there as the ANC; we didn’t go out there as UDF. We went there as the Wattville Concerned Residents Committee although we knew that the agenda of the ANC. In that way, we were able to win people even from the outside and other formations.

The other challenge was to ensure accountability. At each and every meeting of the community that we had, because we had meetings almost every fortnight, we had to account, especially for finances, as people contributed R5 as membership for us to travel around and to do the work. We had to account what the money was used for.

The other hassle was, now that we have the area and people have land; getting the subsidy to build houses. We battled to get the Independent Development Trust (IDT)<sup>305</sup> Fund, which was R7500 per household and it had its own conditions, because they said they were only going to put up structures, not do more than that. They were not going to put in toilets, for instance.

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<sup>305</sup> A South African Quasi Non-Governmental Organisation, supporting development. It was established in 1990, funded by the South African government, to supply grants for poverty relief, infrastructure development, services in the education, housing and welfare sectors. It works closely to the South African government.

The other challenge was to keep the organisation together. For me, it was probably the biggest challenge because I had to keep the organisation together and at the same time fend off the attacks from other formations which were coming in. Initially people said, “Give us the land, we’ll build the type of houses that we want”. And those who couldn’t build would then get this subsidy. And those who could afford could build whatever houses. But then they would be compensated for making the effort for example, putting a wall around your house, putting paving etc. Even up to now, we often raise it, when I resuscitated the civic movement, what the agreement was at the point in time in terms of what we were going to do and it hasn’t been forgotten.



Figure 26 – A street in Tamboville, © Manyaka, 2013.

Most of the houses were officially built by the communities themselves. There still has to be upgrading of this as there are people that still have not completed. There are a number of people not having toilets, ablution facilities and electricity. We also have a problem with water reticulation.

The health centre that we are supposed to use as a community is being converted to a crèche and then we also have a problem of the rich pushing the poor out of the area. I’ll give an example... Not being xenophobic or whatever. We have a Muslim group which bought an RDP here, and what they did was they built a mosque. They paid the guy some R80.000. Moreover, a community centre which was built by Urban Dynamics<sup>306</sup> when they were involved in the area, is now being occupied by the very same Muslim group, because of political patronage. We don’t know what money they’ve supplied to whom, in fact, we also calling the City, to say, “We want that community centre back in the hands of the people”. We’re questioning as to how they could actually rezone an area – a house into a mosque right in the middle of a housing project when there are a lot of religious bodies. We see people putting up tents in open spaces etc. because they have got money. Also we are faced with high unemployment rates. It’s a major problem.

Until late last year in 2012 when you’d come here you would have found that every weekend, it’s like a large office at my house. My problem became their problem. Then at some point I had a delegation of about fifty women from the community, I don’t know how they mobilized themselves. They came to me and said, “Abie, but you see what is happening?” I said, “What is happening?” “We’re not having progress. We don’t have any representatives”. This ward was won by the DA. Yet, Oliver Tambo is actually lying in this very ward because of the bickering of the ANC, I don’t want to go into details about that. In January 2013 I

<sup>306</sup> A private town planning agency, established in 1991, and working closely with local governments for township development and housing projects.

began to speak to some of the people, some of them were actually SANCO<sup>307</sup> members, sworn enemies. I approached them individually and said, “Guys, can we let bygones be bygones? Can we look at the development of our community and do something?”

The most difficult thing about being an activist is that you must also acknowledge the fact that with community work, not everybody likes what you are doing. You will always have people slandering you, labelling you, but if you know the focus and where you’re going, what your integrity is, what your mission is, you’ve got to wear a thick crocodile skin. Also take your pride and put it away. That’s one of the things that I did when I revived the Wattville Tamboville civic movement, I went to some of the people who were not on speaking terms with me because you’ve got to humble yourself. You know, whatever happened, it has happened. If I have upset you, in anyway whatsoever, I am sorry. But can we actually do what is good for the community?

## Understanding Leadership and What an Activist Is

I would define a leader as someone who has a vision. People look upon you for guidance. You know the path which you are to follow, and you know the limitations of the program which you are to undertake, and how far and how well the community can act. I would define a leader as a facilitator, as someone who makes things happen for the community, but also as even guiding the community. A leader should also be someone who should be prepared to take unpopular decisions. Someone who is honest. Not flow with the mob. You know at times there’s a mob psyche, saying, “Let’s go there and whatever”...and clapping of hands and

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<sup>307</sup> South African National Civics Organisation. See Context 4 for a broad presentation.

whooping. “Let’s go and attack so and so and whatever...” As a leader you have to stand your ground and say no.

The community does not consider me as a leader. They consider me as a friend; they consider me as a brother. I’ll give you an example. Right now, I’m split as there are five houses which have funerals, and I’m expected to pop up there. They expect me to go there this afternoon to pay my condolences. Yesterday afternoon, another neighbour about a block away walked here into my house, he said that his son is going to pay lobola<sup>308</sup>. He would want me to be to lead the negotiator for the lobola. Two blocks away, there’s a lady who should have organized a party for her 60 years. They invited me to come along. Now, these are not people that I associate with on a daily basis. These are the people who, when they are in crisis, they think of me. When they are in joy, they think of me, when there’s a function they think of me. In church, there’s a wedding this coming Saturday and I will have to be one of the key speakers. I’m actually kind of anything to everything.

Activism is also about building your team; if somebody does something good, or if a member does something good, acknowledge that, people appreciate acknowledgement. You know if somebody does something good, you say, “You know what, well done”. That is priceless.

## The community bank project

We did a housing finance project, where we established a community bank between ‘93 and ‘97. The major activities there were consultation and getting buy-in from trade unions, from community organisations, and small business people. The aim of the community bank was that it was

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<sup>308</sup> Dowry.

the people's bank, like the Grameen bank<sup>309</sup>. The problem with that was we wanted expertise – technical expertise in running a bank, and we brought in people from ABSA. The bankers' mentality was that you must give us money in order to get money. Our study was that people must save before we can borrow. There would be a local community bank in a local area where first we could save together, and if someone actually borrows what they will borrow, there will be a finance committee that would sit down assess all the applications, see how much we've actually saved etc. So the lending would be based on your savings criteria. People were borrowing money to buy food. That's the problem.

The other organisation we engaged with was the specialized project services. It was a private NGO and it was involved in housing. My role again was development facilitation. I played a major role in the conversion of the Newcastle hostel into private and family units<sup>310</sup>. I had to facilitate that. The challenge which the bank recognised was that mostly, the black working class did not have access to loans. I remember very well that in 1993, Black people had saved more than R30 billion with all the banks. And only R2.3 billion was lent out to black people. So that was a catalyst to say, "Here we are, saving the money with the banks, but when it comes to lend, to give loans, we are not getting". Nedbank did not accept a certain category of income threshold. You had to belong to a

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<sup>309</sup> Nobel Peace Prize-winning microfinance organization and community development bank, founded in Bangladesh in 1976. It makes small loans (microcredit) to the poor without requiring collateral, based on the premise that the poor have skills that are under-utilized, and with incentive, and under peer pressure, they can start successful businesses.

<sup>310</sup> Hostels are emblematic of apartheid planning and its take that Black residents are not to be permanent in urban areas. They were also the site of major violence in the 1990s in townships, especially tough in the East rand. The post apartheid project for hostels is mainly to transform them into family units and more permanent accommodation.

certain threshold of an income. For instance, if you earned less than R3500, you didn't open an account with Nedbank. They would say go to Permanent Bank which later became People's Bank.

One of our strategies was that we wanted to have a people-centred bank, like where people can take decisions on how their money could be spent, and how it could be controlled. We used the *stokvel*<sup>311</sup> concept, to build what you call a community bank. The downside of it was that we tried to grow too quickly with very little capitalisation. That was the downfall of community bank... nothing else. We opened branches in the townships. The biggest branch was here in Benoni, I think within 3 months we had an estimated 2,000, in Benoni, Daveyton, Volsoorus, Diepkloof and Central Johannesburg, Guguletu and Nyanga in Cape Town, Rustenburg in North West... We were looking at Pietersburg; that was when the money began to shrink. And then when we went to IDT for recapitalisation, they said, no, they couldn't help. We actually interacted with the Department of Trade and Industry, and with the Department of Housing for incremental loans. Incremental loans were catered for in the housing subsidy, they were to extend people's RDP houses: they could actually come and borrow, but they would have to save. It was the criteria, but then they came and said no, if you qualify, we'll come and give you the money. So they dished out a lot of money without people actually following the due process of actually saving. But it did not work at the end.

Especially with the ANC politics, people understand that there is a need for a Grameen type of Bank in South Africa, because even if one looks at the big four Banks and small micro-enterprises... With finance organisations, I can understand their concern in terms of ensuring the finance and how all the local businesses need to be sustainable. But one thing you need to understand is that if you provide a person with finance,

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<sup>311</sup> (Afrikaans) Saving clubs that serve as rotating credit unions.

and a person has got operating expenses, for 2-3 years, you cannot come and change the modus operandi of how a person actually runs his business.

## **The temptation of xenophobia**

The challenges we actually face now is the influx of illegal foreign traders; Pakistani, Somali, Bangladeshi, etc. They come through political means, some come as potential students so to speak. And you'll find that as soon as the guy has arrived, he has got R50.000 worth of stock in his yard. Where does he get that money? We believe that it is money they got from the hijackings that are happening in the Atlantic Ocean. Where does he get that money? Where does it go? And any of them, if you go to any of their motels, and ask them, can I have a look at your bank account? They don't have a bank account. But, our approach, especially after we formed the Wattville Development Forum, was that we are not going to follow the strategy of attacking them and whatever, because that is promoting xenophobia.

We want to facilitate the establishment of cooperatives, so that local traders form themselves into cooperatives. So that we can apply for grant money from the government and be able to buy in bulk and compete on par with them. I know there's an argument that local people must learn to trade with foreigners. But the fact of the matter is that, we cannot compete with a cartel. We can engage with police, we have on more than three occasions gone to check these shops. The first operation that took place, there were about 36 tuck shops that were raided, only 5 were found to be compliant and 20 were closed down. There was also another second raid carried out on the 2nd of March 2013. It was carried out very late. It is work done by a committee called the Tamboville Watville Development Forum. We've engaged the law enforcement agents because we also want the local authorities to come in and inspect.

Those people what they do is eat, and sleep there, where they're selling food. Secondly, there's also the issue of compliance. In the township we know, there's space. No maps are being submitted. But now, foreign traders have changed the strategy, they're bringing containers. Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, about a year ago, was telling residents that, no, they don't want containers in the townships. You see the contradiction that is actually happening.

The challenge that is happening - and I have even told the Station police commissioner - is that there is a perception that the police are on these foreign traders' payroll. Police are seen going into these shops, they come out with cold drinks, biscuits, etc. and there's probably R100 or R200 in their pocket. There is probably corruption that is happening with our police forces. What we would like to say is that if we are to trade, we should trade fair and square. For instance, if you go into the stage corner, you'll find those little guys with vegetables, fruits, snacks etc. Who are they? Mainly Mozambicans, maybe Zimbabweans, maybe people from what you call Southern Sahara. Those guys are survivalists, so to speak. But the way they're trading, they're trading fairly. You can see that's what they're doing. The braiding, you can actually look opposite my house, there's somebody doing that. I had a tenant, who was doing braiding. It's fair and square. But if it is unfair and unequal, there's no way the black small traders are going to try to survive. More and more will get problems. We've got a small tuck shop here. We are not managing to make it, it is tough.

We want the law enforcement agencies: first Department of Home affairs, to check on illegal permits; second, we want the SARS, South African Receiver of Revenue to check if taxes are actually being paid properly; thirdly, we want the Municipality to check that licenses are

complied with, because people can be consuming old food stuffs. We just heard the story of contaminated meat<sup>312</sup>.

## Shifting to a cooperative approach to the City

I revived the civic and call it the development forum. It has a huge following, because of the integrity I have with the community. I have built a relationship with the current municipal councillors and officials, senior heads of department.

I've actually acquired a lot of technical skills in terms of development. If somebody is going to put up a township today, nobody can tell me nonsense about the type of soil, conditions... I can interpret geotechnical reports, I can interpret environment assessment impact studies for a township development. I've learnt a lot about that. I've learnt negotiation skills, I've learnt conflict dispute resolution, presentation, development facilitation. Those are actually hard skills which assist me in engaging comfortably with local authorities, when they talk about social programs.

Instead of going to war with the City Council, as we did initially, we believe that with true consultative engagement, we are able to get more. And I'm seeing the progress. Firstly, the township was not cleaned regularly. After engagement with the City, there's regular cleaning. Refuse collection was actually not done properly. I can tell you now every Monday, there's a truck picking up refuse bins. We've got a program now that people are going to get bins, the big ones which are going to be distributed in the township. We also had a problem with title deeds. Some people don't have title deeds, some of the title deeds were issued, but issued wrongly, and people were being sent to lawyers for

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<sup>312</sup> Contaminated Meat or Meat Labelling scandal swept South Africa in April 2013, where major popular supermarkets were identified as stocking incorrectly labelled meat products, containing ingredients such as donkey, pork, goat.

conveyancing and all that, and you know what conveyancing costs are, and people are unemployed. The local authority now is under agreement to review the whole process.

Currently we are engaging with the City of Ekurhuleni, because they are at the coalface of service delivery. But there are other issues which we are dealing with at the Provincial level such as housing. We have identified 3 portions of land within 5km radius of Wattville for housing. Those parcels of land can accommodate between 5 and 10.000 housing units if we divide them by the 100 sq. meters if you go low density. If you go high density, you can probably get more. We wrote them a letter. We had a date with Minister Baloyi, the Minister of COGTA<sup>313</sup>. We met with him, he responded, and said he would liaise with the local Mayor. And we've also linked directly with Mr. Ahmedi Vawda— the executive director in the Presidency, on Monitoring and Evaluation. He's been kept up to date with what we are doing.

One finds that we are getting more from negotiations than from stomping our feet and all that. Yes, marches, we can march, but at times you know that marches can get out of control. And intents and the purpose of the march could be diluted by the violence that could actually happen. Also it creates this them and us attitude because you are being seen by the council as militant, demanding, and all that. It creates a push and pull strategy. So, our strategy that we are applying now is a pull strategy; to say that we want to work with you, not against you. That's how it is. And we believe that we will actually be making inroads. I have no doubt about this.

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<sup>313</sup> Local Government Affairs, Traditional Affairs and Cooperative Governance.





# General Alfred Moyo

*Born: 1973 in Katlehong*

*Residence: Makause Informal Settlement*

*Activism/occupation: Organiser for the Makause Community Development Forum (MAFODECO), Gauteng organiser for the Democratic Left Front (DLF).*



Figure 27 – General Moyo in Makause, © Manyaka 2013.

Interviewers: Seyco Manyaka and Ntandokawabo James

## Becoming politically active

I grew up in Katlehong township, in what was still called the East Rand. My family was a normal family, it was not particularly involved politically, except that some of the brothers from the extended family were politically conscious and active during the 80s.

Then, towards the first democratic elections, I went to prison. I was incarcerated in 1992, during the apartheid era prior to the transition. Some might say it was a criminal offense, but I might not classify it as a criminal offense because but it was part of the very same struggle although it was not this type of activism that I am engaged in but to try and repossess what has been possessed, I mean it was another struggle during that time so.

I was doing a maximum sentence in prison. It is where I really became aware that I am the one who can rehabilitate myself during my stay in prison. There was no one else. There were those so called rehabilitation programs but I preferred to follow what will lead me to be a better person when I am out of prison. After 1998, human rights trainings were organised in prison, and I got myself involved with Wits which offered courses and programs on human rights. We even met with the old man Madiba<sup>314</sup> in Free State in 1998. I was in the first group attending the course, and I came out understanding human rights law and constitutional law.

As an activist from inside prison I was able to deal with the prison gangs and organize them. There was a prison uprising of 1994 where the prisoners around the country were embarking on hunger strikes, mass actions inside and the burning of prisons. I gained the name when I was able to put all the prison gangs into one group so that we can engage with

<sup>314</sup> Nickname of Nelson Mandela.

the prison management and challenge the system. I was influenced by the human rights training I had undertaken in prison, so I knew all the prisoners' rights, and I was taking up the cases with the prison management to represent the prisoners.

When I came out in 2002, I worked with the movement that was called Malamulele for the Social Unemployed, in Kathorus<sup>315</sup>, I worked as a secretary of that organisation for a short time, and then the organisation was swallowed by political figures and used for campaigning for elections.

In 2007 what got me involved in Makause leadership activities was the threat of evictions in 2007, and also the understanding of those policies in the human rights and the bill of rights. There was an injustice that was about to happen, where people were forced out of the land in Makause, to go to Tsakane 40km away without their consent and without being engaged nor being consulted.

## **2007 evictions from Makause**

It started in October 2006, as Makause made news headlines, when a woman accidentally fell into a mine dump, in this very same section where we are now. After that accident the government took a decision to just evict the community. They said it was because we are living in an old mining area which is polluted and heavily mined underground, so it needed intensive land solutions. The government's way of addressing those dangers was to decide on its own that it has to evict the community.

I got myself involved at that time, in saying that that is not the right direction, and they have to engage us. We didn't have even a clue about

the area where we would be relocated to. I started engaging the community around this issue in 2007 when the municipality already had published articles that they were going to evict the people, already had sent notices out to the community, but not disclosing any location.

When these threats happened in Makause I decided to link up with others, because I was not politically connected to political parties. During that time there was about 16 informal settlements that were about to be evicted to the same area. I took the initiative of going around to those settlements. I started engaging with the leadership and making them aware, so that they can mobilize their own communities. Then there was this challenge that some of the leadership will believe in political solutions. They believe that they will get an intervention from their IFP leaders, or their ANC leaders. They cannot believe the very same ANC they support would evict them. But the truth of the matter was that they were listed on the very same list. There is a list of informal settlements on the mining belt, we are all on this mining belt and I started to engage with them and to have backup from some of them.

I worked with many organisations but at the end of the day you find out that there are principles and philosophies are not the same and they are easily swallowed by other organisations. Some of them you find out that they are money motivated and some of them are politically influenced. I work with independent organisations, not expecting money being paid.

The only movement of informal settlements that was fighting evictions was the Landless People's Movement, which was based in Soweto. I engaged with some of the LPM leaders, then we managed together to launch a court order to try to stop the municipality from evicting us before any formal engagement had been first attempted.

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<sup>315</sup> Short for the three East Rand most famous black townships, Katlehong, Thokoza and Vosloorus (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2001).



**Figure 28 - - Makause informal settlement, ©Manyaka 2013.**

Since 2002 I was living in Makause; but I had never gotten involved in community activities. In the threats of evictions I started to make my way into leadership, because it is where you can talk to the community and make them aware.

Things were just happening fast, and the community was convinced by another community group in Makause, close to the ANC, that the community will be taken to Tsakane, where there were houses and proper services. Those promises were influencing some community members: they were falling into the trap.

On 21 January 2007 the municipality called for an urgent meeting in Makause. I managed to make my way in, to challenge them directly in that meeting. I disrupted the meeting and the councillor had to be escorted out. I managed to stand up and take the microphone. I addressed the community and they were able to understand that it is a trap, they were not to be taken to houses. We made a document that we managed to screen so that the community can see that there are no houses in Tsakane.

We had done our own investigations about the area and we found out that it was just an open land on the outskirts of the City of Ekurhuleni, where people will be losing jobs and families will be splitting, where children will not go to school, where the cost of living will be high. Here in Makause, the majority of the residents are unemployed, but it's not that bad in terms of survival, because they are close to job opportunities. That is the other reason why we do not want to move. People can get employment, even those who are recycling; they can get their recycling materials around the area.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2007 we launched an urgent application in Johannesburg South High Court but that application was dismissed. Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February evictions started, after that 10 days' notice supposedly given in that meeting which basically never happened. The meeting notices gave us enough evidence to challenge the City in court because the invite to the meeting was saying that it was a housing beneficiary workshop. So I used the invite to challenge them, that this cannot be a meeting to engage about relocating and evicting us, it is about educating the community about housing beneficiary about how they benefiting from the RDP houses. You are using this meeting to try and manipulate the people, play around with their minds and start to say that there are houses while there are none.

We went back to court on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February. We obtained a court order although that court order was not strong enough. The court order

was compelling the police to intervene, to try and get a reasonable agreement within the community and the Red Ants<sup>316</sup> during the evictions. Police intervention according to the court order was to have a high rank police officer, like a Captain, to monitor and supervise the proceedings. That person should also interpret in a language that the community will understand, and also make them aware that they have a right to also say “no” to relocation. Because the municipality at court changed their tone and said that this was voluntary relocation and not an eviction. But if you are taking my belongings and throwing it into a truck, and make me follow a truck leaving no choice for me to decide if I follow or not because of my belongings I have to follow, you are evicting me not relocating me. Anyway, we held the municipality accountable: if you say it’s a voluntary relocation, the community should be made aware that they can resist, because the community was threatened that if you resist, the bulldozer will dismantle your shacks and you won’t even a chance to take out your belongings.

That particular police officer never came to supervise. They gave him a whole pile of consent forms to be signed. That person only signed away from Makaue, authorising the evictions and when they came to get the signatures from the community, they used the food parcels. ‘This is your food parcel can you check? Then you check your items on you food parcel pack: the mealie meal is there, the tin stuffs are there, the fish oil is there, everything and then when you agree that everything is there, then they say come and sign this side. Then when you sign, under the impression that you are signing for the food parcel, and then you are signing for the consent to go to Tsakane. That is how people were tricked into this whole thing.

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<sup>316</sup> Private security company used to carry out evictions. They wear a red uniform.

The whole process, it was under high resistance from the community. That is why we even ended up going to court, thinking that when we come back, we will go together with the municipality to address the community, to say now, this is the procedure, these are the outcomes of court, and this is the direction to be followed. You can agree or you can disagree if you want to go. But it was never clarified to the community. that is why the Red Ants came back armed with the Police and Metro Police to say you have to go, you have no choice, using this consent form and the grocery tactics saying people have signed and have consented to go.

The actual plan was to move the entire Makaue. But they first used the open space to cut Makaue into two parts. The reason behind Makaue being cut into halves was that in their eviction notices they were alleging that there are sink holes, mine openings or shafts, there are dangerous gas pipes which can burst and explode. Starting by moving this portion of Makaue, which was actually a safe portion where there are no mine shafts happening or sinkholes, it was going to be easier for the remaining other part, because just below there are gold recovery pipes which transport mining water, there is mining as you can see the mine dumps. It was going to be easier when they come back to say now we are moving this portions because of those pipes.

So what I am trying to show you is the distance between where the accident of the woman happened and the place where evictions started happening, and to show that this was not a rescuing initiative, there was a hidden motive why we are being evicted in this land. So in this space which was far from the accident, all the people’s structures were destroyed, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February up to 21st of February 2007. There were even proper structures there, proper businesses like taverns and churches in this space.

We said this is our land, this is the land we will fight for, we should bring back those who were taken to Tsakane because they were stolen. That’s

when we started to engage with the City again and they started to agree, saying you can reintegrate those community members by your own initiative, we are not going to provide transport, those who are willing to come back can come back. Then we had to organize the community. However the community was scared, saying the municipality threatened that we should not go back to the same area. We said no, this is our land, we are going to fight for it, because you saw what happened in Tsakane we were given poles and plastic bags as your new homes and most of you build proper structures, so can you go back and start again. From the 3780 families that were taken, over two third came back.

### **Investigating the Reasons Behind Evictions**

You see that piece of land, it is owned by a trust called Business Venture Investments. We have a good understanding with them, they were not even consulted when we were about to get evicted. And other portions of Makause are owned by other private stakeholders, some of them are mining trusts. As I said that things were happening fast, you had to think fast, you had to know who is owning the areas and what did they say when people were getting evicted. But the first thing we did was to look for legal assistance, to know how we could challenge this at court. So when we found this other organisation called Probono.org who are doing probono legal assistance.

In 2006 the only plans from the municipality's side was just to evict Makause settlement, and we believe that this was motivated by the 2010 FIFA World Cup. You have to understand that Makause is located in-between OR Tambo international airport of which is the landing destination of all the tourists they are expecting, and just below us in Germiston, where if you turn right there, you will find the municipality headquarters. So it was going to be a disgrace for them in their perspective for the tourists to come and see these living conditions in the so called democratic South Africa. So they planned and approved plans prior to 2010 to make sure that when 2010 comes the will be no shacks

anymore. So we intervened with the struggle to stop everything they were planning, and as you see Makause is still here. Even the plan to bid for the area, investors saw that there was resistance; they did not want to risk their money to try and fight this battle for the area.

You know that there were business tycoons who wanted to build a shopping complex there: we have their plan and documents. There is a document that we went to investigate from the Ekurhuleni Head Offices, and they placed a notice on Main Reef road sometime in 2008, then there was a notice that was giving us 28 days to respond with objections of the development of a shopping complex. Then we sent our legal team to go and investigate and find out. They found out that there is an agreement that approved the building of a shopping complex by 2010. The Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Council had also approved the building of a 3 storey building for the storage of coal. It is not very clear, but we told ourselves that if they talk about a 3 storey building that means that the area is suitable for development and can be converted into residential area.

When we say we are going to fight something, we have to fight with knowledge and understanding of what they are trying to do. When the city says they are evicting us because of this and that, we give communities evidence to show them that "this is what they want to do", why are they moving us from here.

### **Becoming a community leader**

So in 2007 I was touched with the situation and the understanding that my intervention will make an impact to assist the community.

It is the living conditions that made me an activist. You cannot lead the struggle of land while you have your own house, your own services and you are not actually feeling the pain that the community is feeling. The main thing is that the community has to feel themselves that we are led

by someone who is living the same life as us, who is equal to us, and not different to us, so if he talks about equality he is not talking about something that he was taught at school, heard it from someone or was just part of the debate. The main thing that we are trying to achieve here at Makause because if we talk about a programme, we are all doing it, I won't contribute if there is a contribution of R2, for an example if in a meeting we agree that we will be contributing all of us, then all of us we are doing the same thing. That's the main thing that unifies us as a community - not to have someone who is above us. We might be leading because we are elected to lead the struggle but all of us, we are all equal.

An activist is someone who is self-conscious, who is touched with the thing that he got himself involved, that get touched by this unlawful act of the city and to understand what strategies and laws allows you to challenge it. Obviously you cannot say that we have to resist without having an alternative. The good thing is also to have the knowledge and understanding of the community. At the end of the day you talking to the community and some of them are educated even more than us their leaders, some have been living in this land for more than us and more than a decade, some have arrived in this land before their leaders. If you lead them you have to have an understanding and knowledge so that you can be able to make them aware and also to influence them to get them on board to support your campaigns.

Prior to the 2007 evictions, there were all kinds of structures. We had the business forum, we had the sport forum, we had the youth forum and we had the women's forum. The Makause Community Development Forum (MCDF) was the structure intending to oversee all those structures, to help strategise together and to serve as mother body. The structure was revived after my intervention in 2007, but today it is still informal. There were also disruptions to MCDF after the local government elections of 2011. The political influence that is the main challenge is still busy penetrating to disorganize the community more especially now, they've got the support from the ward councillor and from the SAPS which is a

politically influenced, and they join forces to disorganize this organization. For instance, SAPS has been trying to set up their own structure to overthrow us, but that structure is the very same structure that was initiated by us, that is, the Makause Business Forum. The leaders of the Business Forum came to us, and told us that the SAPS are now influencing them to overthrow us, but they are not interested in doing that. This is one of our challenges.

## **DLF Provincial Organiser**

I am also the Gauteng provincial organiser of the Democratic Left Front, and there are many campaigns like the one the one we are leading in Makause. The 'Police Brutality campaign' is part of the DLF and the 'Land, Housing and Zero Evictions' is also part of the DLF campaigns, as is the electrification of informal settlements. It's up to organisations that are DLF affiliates to drive these campaigns: how are they initiating those campaigns and how are they pushing them? Makause is the first one to lead those campaigns, so that the other settlements can follow. We have started leading in the membership registration so that we can know how many members we have, because the DLF is a socialist organisation to be built from below.

My goal is to achieve a better world where everyone is equal - not just talking of all the drafted policies and laws; I want constitutional law being recognized and everyone is equal, a society where you won't see the inequality still prevailing the country. It's like the socialist kind of struggle, actually socialism is not something that might happen tomorrow or day after tomorrow, it takes time because it took more than 100 decades living under the capitalist system.

Being an activist is my full time job, my full time commitment although it does not pay. It is not about the income but the wellbeing of the community. So it might be service delivery that I get myself involved in. To plan, to strategize, to organize, to mobilize, and to recruit, to develop

campaigns, that is my daily activity. On Wednesdays we meet as DLF to develop weekly programs on what's happening this week and to engage communities, what solidarity and support are needed, and then I would have to organize such things. We do organize community meetings, workshops, and we also have some campaigns that we are also leading, to try and overcome the internal divisions of the Makause community.

I took Makause to a higher level, and now we have international connections through my involvement; we've got involvement of academics which were people who usually would not come and do their research in Makause. I managed to bring the outside world to Makause to come and see for themselves what our struggle is against the City of Ekurhuleni.

### **ANC fostering community divisions**

The ANC is the government so whenever we are challenging issues like the lack of service delivery we are challenging the ANC directly. The ANC got its wings around the community: all the structures, from the region down to the local levels, will be used to disorganize the community and to disempower civic organisations; to demobilize the community, to make all those promises that will not be fulfilled, to keep you unfocused. So while we are fighting those dynamics on the ground they are busy pocketing the money that needs to be spent on those projects and demands, and then they will use that money to influence those divisions amongst the community.

In 2011 after the local government elections, we were labelled, and me especially, as agents of DA. At the same time the DA was saying that I am used by the ANC. We are in a ward controlled by the DA while the ANC is the ruling in government and the services have to be provided by them. The ANC is now colliding with the DA in terms of removing us because the DA too sees us as a disgrace, bringing death in the city and in the suburbs. So our campaign also includes the right to the city. We are saying we have

had enough of being in the townships and in the outskirts and we are right here in the city and we want to formalize, we want RDP houses or our own kind of houses in the very same area, and both the ANC and the DA say that they want to take us back to the townships.

We are politically divided as a community. There are those who still believe in the ANC. There are those who still believe in other organisations such as the DA, COPE and the IFP. If the community was driving towards the same direction, then we could be challenging the system as a collective, but because of those political divisions it is difficult. However, for the main major case of land the community is behind it and supporting.

That is the message we are trying to send out to the community in our workshops: we use those opportunities and spaces to make the community aware that this is the main purpose, this is what is happening like those evictions, this is the main reason why we are not getting services.

### **Police harassment of activists**

Our fight with the Primrose police stating started in 2007, regarding the eviction issue. All these years from 2007 to 2008 they were trying various tactics to overthrow us, how to demobilize the community and to make sure the community were no longer following us, listening to us. Then our battle has continued, with me being arrested sometimes last year, where we were trying to have a march against police brutality.

Police are targeting our community day in and day out. So we had enough of them, we said no, we had to march on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 2012. We followed the processes that we need to follow in terms of applications, and then we were told we could not have the march, because the other opposition group had a march on the same day. We knew the other group, they work with the police, they work with the councillor, and they

work with the city. Then we re-applied again for the march to take place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2012. Then our march was approved on Wednesday the 17<sup>th</sup> telephonically. Then the very same Metro police officer who approved our march is the guy who's been used by the councillor, as she is a friend of his. The police are also friends of the councillor, and the councillor is using the police most of the time to attack us.

Now it was the time for the councillor to give the favour back to the SAPS in terms of protection that we are to march against them. So the councillor used the metro police, who used to go around with the councillor, to try stopping our march. On Thursday they called us for a meeting at the Primrose police station at 12 o'clock. That's where the charges of intimidation emerged from that meeting.

This was supposed to be a section 4 meeting according to the Gathering Act<sup>317</sup>. On that meeting we found out that there was this guy from the Metro Police, but not from the unit that deals with the public gathering and social events. He was from the crime combating unit. We were aware of that because we used to engage with him at the CPF<sup>318</sup> meeting. So he was only used on that section 4 meeting to come and stop our march.

In that meeting we found that they also extended the invitation to the civic opposition group which is politically remote-controlled by the ANC to disorganize our activities. We said, "no, if this our meeting to deal with our application for a march, this group should not be part of this meeting". Then the station commander started to raise her voice and say

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<sup>317</sup> The Regulation of Gathering Act of 1993 is a post apartheid piece of legislation ensuring and regulating the democratic right to assemble. Its section 4 calls in particular for the relevant authorities to consult with the applicants for a gathering's authorization.

<sup>318</sup> Community Policing Forum, see footnote 96.

"you General you cannot come and tell me how to run the station; you are intimidating my police". Then the station commander decided to tell the metro guy that the march will not happen.

So we called a mass meeting on Friday, at the time where we were supposed to gather for the march, to inform the community. It was there on that meeting where I was arrested and charged for intimidation of the station commander.

When the police arrived, we were at the sport ground with the leadership of Makause Community Development Forum and the other supporting structures, like the guys from Thembalihle Crisis Committee<sup>319</sup>, also an affiliate of the DLF. The police said "you know you have no permission to go on the street with this march", then we said "we are on the sports ground, we are having a meeting, this is not a march and we are trying to resolve the challenge we had yesterday after our march was not approved, as we had already distributed pamphlets and we cannot just disperse the community without informing them on what happened". So they said "ok, you can have your meeting but the march is not happening" and later on they came back again and said, "General there is a call at the station that you have to come to".

Two other youth members were arrested at the police station after they followed my arrest from the sports ground. They followed the police vehicles up to the police station and when they arrived at the station because they were wearing 'Remember Marikana'<sup>320</sup> shirts they were arrested. The police said that they are provoking the police, they were charged with that. So those are the charges that are still pending, and we

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<sup>319</sup> An informal settlement located in South Johannesburg, next to Lenasia, also under an eviction / relocation process.

<sup>320</sup> The killing of 44 mine workers in Marikana during a strike created massive public outrage against the police.



are going to court on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June. We went there already for about six appearances at court, and there was no full information that is disclosing what kind of intimidation, what happened on the day of intimidation.

That was police brutality like what happened in Marikana: those were direct orders from the people on top. You can say the orders are politically influenced from above. Because of standing up for our rights you can see how this is politicized. We are now charged with a criminal case but the real case should be a political one because this is their political intervention. Our direction towards the case is to take it to the Constitutional court.

## **Successes and Ongoing Battles**

Towards 2009, we forced our way in into the ward committee meetings<sup>321</sup>. There, we pushed around the community's need for a clinic. Our community was not treated fairly compared to Edenvale, Bedford Germiston or Primrose who have their own clinic and far less needs. So within these meetings we pushed for having our own clinic. And now we have a clinic just across the road from Makause: it was done in response to such a robust debate with the community.

There was another engagement after the crisis of the high speeding vehicles on Pretoria road. We also won that battle after intensive engagement, with the city's road management initially disagreeing with us. We were asking for a traffic light on the entrance of Makause. Eventually we managed to convince them, demonstrating that this is the highest demand by the community. So we are winning some and we are losing some.

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<sup>321</sup> Each ward councillor has to work with an elected ward committee, consisting of ten members of the local civil society.

For now land is the main issue that we want to win, and we are still in a stalemate. The councillor can't do anything, she said. She once told us that she doesn't get any votes from this squatter camp community, so she doesn't care. That is why she is not flexible in assisting with anything. She can't do anything in terms of putting the services; there is a sort of stalemate case on the land issue, where the land owners agreed with us that we want a permanent solution. So it's either the municipality enters into a long term leasing agreement with them before they can install services, or they either purchase automatically the land so that they can start talking about installing the services.

We never received much government service. What we did was we talked to the community and said let us contribute a certain amount so that we can put our own water. We have only two taps that have been provided by the government, for the past 22 years since Makause has been here, of which those taps were put in August 2008 after the pressure we were putting in the so called IDP<sup>322</sup> meetings.

Every service here we do it on our own, as you may have seen the guy who was from Edenvale, the hardware guy, when he was doing some quotations for the pipes. We are currently installing every service for the community, like water taps. It's the people's initiative, it's a people's contribution, it's the people's task to do it for themselves.

When the municipality installed the 2 water taps in 2008, they claimed that they spent over R250 000 for only 2 taps. With our own little initiative we don't spent even R100 000, but we do something that even you can see tomorrow, that the community got involved in, job creation. So that is where we differ with them. They do it with their style which

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<sup>322</sup> Integrated Development Programmes (IDPs) are framed at the ward level to collectively identify local needs and priorities. Local IDPs are then aggregated and adjudicated at higher scales of the City government.

doesn't involve the community. Our projects are actually community driven projects. Because the community still believes in the Makause Community Development Forum that we are not moving off this land. That is why we are taking this initiative of installing our own services.

We connect straight to the municipal pipes. There is no procedure when we do a people's connection, we need no application. Because those water pipes are encroaching around settlements, so there is no water that can pass here when people are thirsty and they cannot get water.

For now we are doing what we call a Makause recruitment drive, which is a campaign of getting members. We are trying to unify the 3 sections of Makause, let's stand for 'One Makause One community', to do away with all these frictions that is happening in Makause, to also address the common issues collectively. We now have a membership form, where the community subscribes with a certain little amount. Two rand fifty (R2, 50) per month individually, that goes to the water project. There are different categories of contributions, like for instance in this section when we did the data collection and mapping of the area, there was a R10/house contribution for renumbering. And then for the water project, there is a R5 contribution and for registration. That is the money that we use for all the paper work for all the proposals, for everything that we do including job opportunity creation.

With this membership drive, and data collection, we are trying to get a sense of how many people we have per section, and who is renting. At the end of July 2013, we will be finished with it and will tell us exactly how many people own and rent, that is what we are targeting in this project. When we do a project we use that money, and we also use that money to attract other donors or funders to say as the community collectively we managed to collect this much, and our quotations for this project amount to this much. So at least the funders can see that we are not actually asking out of having nothing, so if we have nothing and produce something that we have.



Figure 29 - Makause community water project, © Manyaka 2013.

We have a community trust account, for now we are approaching other organisations that we worked with previously like the Mvula Trust<sup>323</sup>. We worked with the Informal Settlement Network (ISN) which has a component of funding, the Community Resources Organisation Centre (CORC) and CUFF which is Community Upgrading Facility Finance. So we are also submitting our proposals to them, because they once financed our water project proposal. We are again appealing to them so say, we have not finished the entire Makause, we have concentrated in one section, and we have to move to two other sections with a shortage of water and shortage of drainage. We have to install these two particular projects in those two communities and also the project of counting and collecting data, entering numbers and shack re-numbering. We are waiting for their intervention after we have submitted all our paper work.

We also want to formalise our street so that we can have street names. Each and every section now will go for a vote and the community will then start putting up the names that this street will be this name and will be doing another project of reblocking: taking over and occupying that land and that open space and start to push shacks to reblock so as to create a way in terms of access in case of emergency vehicles. So we have programs that we will be busy with this coming month.

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<sup>323</sup> NGO advocating for water users' rights.



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Back Row (Left to Right): Tshanda Mbuyi, Muneebah Kara, Prof. Claire Benit-Gbaffou, Mikhaela Sack, Siphelile Ngobese, Lesego Tshuwa, Ntandokabawo James.

Front Row (Left to Right): Thembani Mkhize, Edward Molopi, Loyiso Tunce.

Missing from the picture: Seyco Manyaka, Lentsoe Pagiwa.

