

**“Free yourselves”**  
**The Case for Community Leadership**  
**and Activism**

Richard Bricks Mokolo



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## Introduction

South Africa featured prominently in the international media from the late 1980s, especially after the apartheid Government of P.W. Botha declared the second State of Emergency<sup>1</sup>, this intensified the call for sanctions against SA government by the oppressed people. A call led by liberation movements and others including the World Council of Churches and The Anti-apartheid Movement<sup>2</sup>, in order to end apartheid and bring about a more democratic society.

The hopes and dreams of people inside and outside SA was heighten with the relatively peaceful transition to a democratic government led by Nelson Mandela in 1994. However, in the back of people's minds, was the fear that SA might become another 'banana republic'.

More than twenty years later SA is still known as the country with one of the biggest Gini-coefficient that is growing and threatening the future of the country. This legacy of apartheid is characterized by the huge wealth that remains in the hands of a small sector of the white population<sup>3</sup>. Attempts to the "share the wealth of the country" through the Black Economic Empowerment program has resulted in the creation of the nova riche - "instant millionaires and billionaires" of the new SA<sup>4</sup> and resentment among the poor and the middle class. Therefore the BEE program was expanded to the 'Broad-based BEE' in order to grow the black middle class. However many, despite the BBEE shares, ended indebted to banks and defaulting on their bonds and loans, slipping back into poverty.

On the other side of this widening gap is the painful increase of poverty amongst the bottom society: visible in the mushrooming of informal settlements around the cities and big towns; the alarming unemployment rates and daily protest against poor services by government and corruption in society.

The neglect of the black townships is hardly noticed by the media, except for major disasters such as the perennial shack fires and floods in Cape Town and Johannesburg. It is clear that the government is unable to cope with the ever increasing demands for: housing; quality education and health facilities; proper roads or electricity or water/sanitation services or decent jobs to the poor and the working class.

The SA government seems to lack clear and strong leadership and good policies, which in turn seems to have created a “vacuum” of leadership in the marginalised communities. In reality there is a layer of leadership that struggled against apartheid and still see the need to continue under the new democratic government. For them the material conditions have not improved as expected and promised.

A lot is also happening in terms of leadership on the ‘ground’ even in the “forgotten” rural areas, including the former homelands. Black people realised that the ‘freedom and democracy’ promised in 1994 will not come to them on a silver platter (as it came to the black elite). They will have to fight for it, over and over again and under dedicated and selfless leadership in their attempts to deal with inequality and poverty.

This poverty is characterized by: high unemployment rates, especially among the black youth (who received a poor quality education); the spread of Multiple Drug Resistant Tuberculosis that appears to be getting out of hand; the spread of prosperity religion/cults (promising instant salvation and riches, whilst depriving poor people of the hard earned money in the name of God); increased tensions amongst social groups due to the competition for resources, dispelling the myth of the rainbow nation as an illusion; and neglect of the environment, mostly around mining and industrial areas.

Poor communities and their leaders are facing these and other legacies of apartheid and colonialism daily and they sit with almost no material resources to bring about real change in their lives in the rural areas and townships where they live.

Therefore the chapter will explore the following themes: the black township context of community leaders, including the origins of townships, and its historical and present challenges; this excursion will include the specific legacies of colonialism and apartheid, and the present day impact of neo-liberalism. This chapter further endeavours to highlight the unique leadership challenges of the community leader – therefore what competencies will make for effective community leadership, and manifested in the story a community leader of Orange Farm township, Richard Bricks Mokolo.



## **Origins of Townships**

## **Background to the Townships**

Tuning in to the radio, especially the English and Afrikaans stations it appears that many rich and middle class citizens find it hard to understand why township blacks are protesting after 1994. These protests do not seem to fit into the 'new South Africa' when you have a "black" democratic government. Protests occur almost daily in the black townships<sup>5</sup> and are reported in the traffic reports as inconvenience. The forebears of these Blacks were initially "imported" as cheap labour and forced to live in compounds/hostels near the mines by mining magnates such as Cecil John Rhodes, who instituted the poll tax for the indigenous people.<sup>6</sup>

Many others moved to farms near towns such as Johannesburg due to the dispossession of their land and in order to get the cash to pay the poll tax; it was these farms that developed into "locations"<sup>7</sup> and later black townships. Alexandra, Kliptown and Soweto are examples and officially these were deemed by the British and later by apartheid regime as temporary settlements. At the end of each year blacks had to return to their homelands: all in all there were about ten of these homelands for the indigenous people. According to the homeland policy and based on ethnicity they were for: Zulus, Xhosas, Pedis, Tswanas, Ndebeles, Shangaans, Vendas and Swazis. There were even plans of ones for Indians and "Coloureds".

The expansion of mining and industries led to an increase in the number of townships around SA including Orange Farm, Khayelitsha and Umlazi with no proper housing neither decent social services such as health and education facilities. All of the above led to overcrowding, tensions and conflicts between different communities including the struggle to bring an end to apartheid. Then came 1994! The hopes and dreams (build on the promises of politicians) of the people were high, but the question was whether such adverse conditions will disappear and how long will it take?

## **A 'New' South Africa**

The ANC used the Reconstruction and Development Programme<sup>8</sup> to campaign in the first non-racial elections of 1993, promising to right the wrongs of the past and to build a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa, based on the will of the people<sup>9</sup> under the slogan: 'A better life for all'.

To a limited extent this was achieved, plus the emphasis on reconciliation between the racial groups implying that the poor had to be patient. The poor saw the promise of a “better life” remaining with the rich whites and has trickled down to only the black elite. They were told that the government has to maintain the ‘good economy’ and to let it grow even faster so that the benefits will “trickle down” to them eventually. When the ANC adopted the Growth, Economy and Redistribution policy in 1996, some in SA, including the labour federation COSATU (an alliance partner of the ANC), saw it as a disguised form of Structural Adjustment Program, usually imposed on countries by the IMF and World Bank. Patrick Bond (2005) warns: “Virtually all structural adjustment programmes in Africa generated instability”.<sup>10</sup> Even the Southern African Catholic Bishops went to the government to raise their concerns about GEAR,<sup>11</sup> which Bishop Hurley called: “unbridled capitalism being unleashed on an unsuspecting population”.<sup>12</sup> The Bishops were told to “leave economics to the experts”, as they were told “stay out of politics” by P.W.Botha during apartheid<sup>13</sup>

When people were required in 1996 to pay for water, electricity and other basic services as part of GEAR some community leaders reminded the ANC about their promises of the Freedom Charter that the people shall share in the wealth of the country. Why is it that they have to pay for water, education and other basic services, they asked when they were promised in 1993 that these will be free?

They remembered that it was the same ANC that asked the people to boycott the payment of rent, services and white businesses in order to get rid of apartheid, now poor people cannot make sense how the ANC suddenly changed their tune? How can we pay for services that we cannot afford, rather scrap GEAR they asked they ANC government.

When the government refused to scrap their GEAR policy<sup>14</sup>, communities, led by their leaders took to the streets to protest lack of services delivery. Many attempts were made to recruit and co-opt such leaders into the ANC structures; some acquiesced whilst others decided to remain outside the political system in order to fight for ‘real and meaningful changes’ for the poor and marginalised. One such leader was Richard Bricks Mokolo from Orange Farm, a township south of Johannesburg.



## **Unique Leadership Challenges in this Context**

## **Key Challenges in the past**

During the colonial period and apartheid the biggest threat was that of harassment, detention and torture by the state of community leaders in their opposition to colonialism and apartheid.

Religion and the Bible, especially Christianity was used as part of dispossessing the indigenous people of their land and way of life. They were told that the land was given as a promise by God to White European Christians. When blacks fought for their land they were met with brutal force, imprisonment and exile of their leaders. A few exceptional missionaries and whites tried to oppose the 'wrongs' of colonialism and apartheid, but they were not effective due to their numbers and their strategies. There were hardly any significant opposition to apartheid from the international community, except from few countries such as Nigeria, the Netherlands, Sweden and India that would raise objections to apartheid in the League of Nations/UN from 1948 onward, especially after the massacre in Sharpeville.

Many black leaders, including Mandela in SA, felt so much ignored and deserted by the International community and therefore sought to take up arms to fight the apartheid government. They got support mostly from Cuba, the former Soviet Union and China. The arm struggle was often seen as evil by whites and others and unnecessary as the government was always willing to talk and negotiate for change.

On the other hand - the West, led by Britain and the USA supported the SA government with their constructive engagement policy to "change" the apartheid policy. And so there was not much hope for international pressure for real change for blacks.

Inside SA ordinary black people, wanted change but were fearful of the threats by the state, so very few would attend public meetings to oppose the policies of the government. The 'divide and rule' policy of the British and the apartheid regime work well and there were lot of mistrust in families and even hatred between language and cultural groupings in SA.

Challenges in the past for the community leader in the struggle against apartheid therefore included inter alia: threats of torture, detention by the

apartheid state apparatus; opposition by the Dutch Reform Church as well as many main line churches; minimal international support; limited support for the arm struggle; opposition by major superpower such as the USA and Britain with their “constructive engagement” for the SA regime; plus little support from the majority of the people in the township, partly due to their fear of the apartheid government; and divisions between cultural and linguistic communities, as well as competition for resources by the different communities.

### **Present Challenges**

Some of the past threats and repression are still there for community leaders, of course not to the same scale and degree and only a few will be mention here. These leaders are now opposing the neo-liberal policies of the new government today in the same way as they did against the apartheid policy.

When the ANC government campaigned in 1993 they used the Reconstruction and Development Programme and it got widespread acceptance as it ‘spoke’ to the dreams and wishes of the majority, but when they introduced GEAR, there was opposition to it from many corners of our society, including the religious sector. Many community leaders, who could foresee that these policies will have a negative impact on the poor and working class, found it difficult to explain their objections and consequences, as they did not had the necessary analytical tools to inform and educate the people.

People listened more to leaders like Mandela, who focussed on peace and reconciliation, instead of struggling for the rights as promised in the new SA constitution. The new government used the media and other state resources very successfully to convince the poor and the working class that ‘things will get better... just to be patient’! This was a huge challenge to community leaders who read the situation differently, but did not want to criticize Mandela openly.

Many of the black middle class took out loans and bonds to buy cars and build beautiful big houses or moved to the suburbs (previously reserved for Indians and Whites); these are the ones that usually are not interested to talk about the ‘new’ struggle. Many faced foreclosures on their bonds and

loans when the economic crisis came and they realised that the picture was not as rosy as they had hope for. Most of them were still reluctant to join the new struggle, but many community leaders still try and draw them into the struggle.

Another challenge that community leaders face was the lure by political parties to join the government in order 'to bring about change for the people'. Promises of positions in high offices, as well as financial advancement via government tenders or contracts appeared to be very tempting and some community leaders did and do fall for such traps. Then there are the challenges from the masses who appeared not to have learnt enough from the struggle against apartheid, namely to be vigilant and critical at all times. Now it is hard to call for community meetings after 1994, except when there are electricity and water cut offs.

The very same people will go in their droves to vote for the same government hoping that things will change. After the elections all they see are political leaders driving bigger cars and moving to bigger houses.

Many of the community leaders are unemployed or semi-employed; a few will have pensions to support their families, and rarely you may find a small business person working also as a community leader.

Others leaders would depend on donor funding to operate in community projects - funding that is never guaranteed or sustainable. Jumping through the hoops of funding proposals and requirements are not easy and many times it takes you away from the 'real' work of community organisation and mobilization. Many community leaders do not have the necessary skills and education to complete and comply with the proposals and requirements. At times the funding suddenly dries up or gets diverted to a different sector or sphere in society.

Many times community leaders and their families would end up going to bed hungry and angry as the struggle appear to be in vain, with little hope of real meaningful change in their homes. Some would try to get a 'real job' or start a small business and leave the 'struggle' to others. The "lucky ones" get piece jobs or temporary work with the government cleaning graveyards or building roads as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme.

Present challenges for the community leader therefore include threats and repression by the state; the difficulty of explaining the new policies and implications of them to the communities; the strength of the state and big business propaganda, especially when people are asked to be patient and the promise of being rich one day; the lure “getting rich” by political parties and other forms of corruption; the abuse of religion asking people to stay away from “politics”; as well of being hamstrung in building solidarity among the working class and poor. Then of course the personal challenges of being unemployed; poor academic education and working for NGOs – with precarious funding for community work.

Hence to work as a community leader in the new South Africa is not easy, much as it was during apartheid and it calls for diligence, foresight, perseverance and sacrifice as never before. Some leaders have managed to persevere despite the challenges and hardships.



## **Competencies of a Community Leader**

Given the challenges facing community leaders outlined above, we argue that for a community leaders to effectively lead in such a contexts, she/he need to manifest the following competencies:

**Self-regulation:** On a very personal level the community leader has to build upon the little support that was there during the struggle against apartheid within their own family and immediate community. Many community leaders find it difficult to sustain this support and rather go on this journey alone 'becoming the voice in the wilderness' for social justice.

**Teaching:** The leader had to help the community members to understand that despite the promises usually made during election campaigns, the government has limitations, limitations set by the World Bank and the IMF, not to overspend on social services, but rather to allow the market forces, e.g., private companies to take over. When these private companies take over basic services, be it water delivery, electricity, education or health; their first priority is to make profits and at all costs. Those who read the newspaper critically and who has the political and economic grasp of social matters can see that system is still skewed towards the rich and the powerful, despite the claim of being a "peoples" government that includes black women.

**Critical analysis:** Whilst affirming the fact that there has been changes in the political sphere, comparisons with the former homeland system are helpful to make people realise, for instance to have a black leaders does not automatically bring about a perfect and caring society. Black leaders are prone to corruption and abuse of power as much as white leaders and it is only by vigilance by civil society that the gains of democracy can be translated into meaningful economic and social changes for all people of the country.

**Organising:** The community leader has to help the community to analyse the socio- economic and political conditions of their lives and suffering in order to raise their awareness and to advocate for changes. Then the challenge is to mobilise other sectors of society for protest, action and meaningful change with the working class. Organisational skills becomes crucial and the moment there is a crisis, e.g., water is cut off by the local council, a meeting is called to analyse the problem and see what can be done to restore water supply. In communities where there

is weak leadership water can be cut off for weeks, if not months or years. Competent leaders can bring such a crisis to the attention of the media quickly and effectively.

**Courage:** It is up to the critical community leaders to point out the inconsistencies and empty promises that help to improve the lives of the elite at the expense of the working class and the poor. Some community leaders find it helpful to debate with and challenge elected political leaders in public meetings, pointing out their empty promises and self-enrichment. It calls for courage and political tolerance, as there is so much anger and impatience among the ordinary community members, who just want to beat up political leaders especially during community meetings.

**Goal-setting:** At such meetings contradictions raised between promises and delivery can be used to point out the strategic orientation of political parties, orientations copied from the previous regime and prescribed by the IMF that has failed<sup>15</sup>. Community leaders then has to point out that true alternatives are possible, but it comes with a lot of sacrifice and community building, including awareness raising, advocacy and mobilisation of the whole community. The ultimate aim is to set common goals, review them together the community, with the aim to build a genuine inclusive and caring vision of society and to realise it.

To persuade community in this direction is not easy and many community leaders can become despondent and impatient. Here it has shown that those who trust and has faith in the beliefs of the community and can respect them, can persevere in their dreams of building caring and committed communities.

The stories of these kinds of community leaders are not well known, as the mainstream media often shirked them and labelled them as “rebel rousers” or trouble makers. Hence the following section will introduce a community leader that exemplifies these competencies.



## **The Case of a Community Leader**

Bricks Mokolo of Orange Farm has worked selflessly for change for many years and now relates his story in his own words. He starts off by acknowledging others, admiring them as they have remained strong and did not change by joining the governing party or private sector to enrich themselves, but remained with their people.

### **My Models**

One of them is **Oupa Lehulere**, a man of his word and who qualifies to be anywhere in government; but he prefers to work with the marginalised; helping people to understand politics of the working class and the poor, through his work in Khanya College. Khanya empowers communities around the country and Southern Africa to analyse, understand and work for change, and I am one of them.

Another leader is **Sam Radebe** - he works in the rural areas around Harrismith in the Free State with very little resources. He loves to mobilise as many people as possible and he wanted people to stand on their own. I was inspired about his leadership style – he believes in consulting and planning together with the people and not imposing on the people his own ideas during any campaign. He has gone through a lot and many of his comrades got jailed, tortured and even killed by the state in the process, yet he persists.

Still another is **Trevor Ngwane**, who started as an ANC councillor, but since he opposed the privatisation policies of GEAR he was expelled by the ANC. He formed the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee to oppose GEAR and the installation of pre-paid electricity meters. He differs from us, as he thinks one can change the system from within, but he himself did not stand; he encouraged his comrades to stand during the local elections. There was an opportunity for 'floor crossing' and some of his comrades joined the DA party. The other member remained but he only attended the meetings and vote with the opposition parties. I believe that this strategy of Trevor is not effective, as the ANC is too strong and might remain strong through various strategies and means even in the future”.

First and foremost is my mother - Anna Moteeo Nkopane Mokolo, a leader of courage and foresight, who brought me where I am today, is the most important model for me. Therefore let me start with my story.

## My Story

I will focus my story on the Orange Farm community, however the situation is true for many other townships. As a community leader I have seen myself as a servant and this was long before the talk of *servant leadership*. Whenever there has been a major community crisis I would be approached to be part of resolving the matter, which I see as a service to the community. I do not get paid or rewarded for it, at all and that is how I grew up like many other leaders in our communities all over the continent, not thinking about money.

### *My roots as a community leader*

I reflect back how as a youngster in Evaton township other children appointed me to lead; be on the school ground or in the streets during soccer matches, as their captain. That is where I got the nickname of 'Bricks' as defender in the team: "You are like a brick wall and nobody can get past you!" This kind of recognition was part of my formation in Evaton, a black township in Vaal triangle; an industrial area with places such as Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark and Sasolburg near the Vaal River. The Vaal River brings the water from the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme to the Johannesburg.

Township life, in the late 1950s and early 1960s was characterised by hardship and oppression, tempting many a youngster to a world of crime, gangs and drugs; or it could impart very rich leadership skills. This hardship was particularly cruel to black women, my mother was one of them; who had to raise many children (we were nine), while being excluded from formal employment. Work was reserved for their husbands to keep the industries of steel and oil production going under the names of Iscor and Sasol. According to the laws of the land, women should wait for their husbands to visit them once a year in black homelands or "Bantustans." Officially blacks did not belong to South Africa!

The painful experiences of my mother and that of most working class and poor continues after apartheid though under different forms. Then people used to say: 'There is nothing we can do to change the situation, look at Sharpeville (March 1960), they will only kill us if we talk of changing apartheid, better keep quiet' was the refrain back then.

Fortunately for me, my mother was one of those that did not agree with such sentiments. I got inspired by her example of fearlessness and dealing with the hardship of apartheid; and her concern for the suffering of others. Most of all how she wanted things to be different and the way she spoke out against the wrongs of the government. 'Free yourselves' she would remind us time and time again. There were other people who also were part of my formation as leader.

Following the example of many Catholic priests and nuns, I became an activist in the church, though I didn't see myself as a "leader", while others did. The priests in our church had a lot of faith in me.

One such priest appointed me as the youngest funeral leader in our parish:

- I had to lead political mass funerals that some of the church leaders were afraid to conduct during States of Emergency of the 1980's. For me it was service to comrades who gave their lives for our liberation and I saw my work to defend the dignity of fellow Africans even at their funerals. That makes me a servant of the people and an instrument of peace and justice, more than a leader. At that time we would not use the word 'servant' due to the negative connotation in the kitchen and workplace. Since public meetings were banned I could speak out against the oppressive regimes during such funerals and that pushed me to a different position I normally would not have had.
- More and more community members came to me with their problems; be it regarding pass laws, retrenchments, detention without charge/ trial, or even family problems, with the hope that I will attend or help solve them. At times general problems: children who were lazy for school or couples with marital problems. However social justice and political issues were the pressing ones. People who were 'not in politics' also got detained when they happen to pass by a protest march and we had to bail them out! Several became more political as they saw one cannot remain neutral under apartheid.
- I assisted people, with the aid of other leaders to stand up and fight all injustices and at great cost to myself: detention and torture by the security police. At one time I was left in the mortuary for several

hours! It was only my faith that saved me from bitterness and hatred towards whites and has allowed me to continue the struggle today in a different spirit of openness to all people. The example of Jesus of Nazareth helped me to see what kind of struggle we need to wage in order to bring about real change in the world. “An eye for an eye is going to make us all blind” is what I learnt from Jesus, Gandhi and others.

- In the church and Khanya College we were taught: ‘Read the signs of the times’, also ‘Think globally, act locally’, which is what I’m still trying to put in practice after the demise of apartheid and the continued suffering of the people today.

### *Today, the Struggle continues*

After the euphoria of 1994 and seeing how things developed in SA, I started the Orange Farm Water Crisis committee and got elected as the chairperson in 2002. Under the policy of GEAR the new government privatised basic services such as health, education and water – this kind of policy others and myself knew would not help the poor people, as many are unemployed or live on meagre state pensions.

With others we agreed that to oppose the neo-liberal policy of the government we need to focus on one issue and therefore we started by opposing the installation of pre-paid water meters in Orange Farm.

At the beginning we called for consultations with the government officials, who refused to meet with us and scrap this new policy called GEAR. We realised that the only way to get their attention was to organise protest marches. When the government still did not listen, we then decided to block the Golden Highway, a major route that connects the Johannesburg to the rest of the country across the Vaal River.

Many people were surprised and even unhappy, that we could embarrass our newly elected democratic government in such a way after 1994. Several of the governing party leaders came to me and offered me positions of leadership in council and telling me how I could help the community “to advance”. I refused as I saw that the suffering of the people would not stop by me being there in government. I knew deep down that

the problem was with the policies of the government, as prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF and not so much the government officials.

I learnt about these policies and western influences when I attended workshops organised by the Justice and Peace department of the Catholic Church and by other civil society organisations, such as Khanya College and Sekwele Centre for Social Reflection in the Free State. Through the church network I was invited to places such as Canada to speak out against the privatisation of basic services and recently to Budapest. I was even invited to the South African parliament to speak out against their own policies and, yet they did not listen or change!

It is for this reason I decided to remain with the people I grew up instead of moving to the former white suburbs. Staying in the dusty and dirty township, with the people helped me to see what we really need to liberate ourselves from: 'Free yourselves' as my mother used to say. However I realised that I also needed new skills and training, even as a community leader in order to be an effective leader and to bring about meaningful change.

I trained as a paralegal and assisted in setting up an advice office in the parish where I attended church in Orange Farm

### *Organising for change and liberation*

When we arrived in Orange Farm in 1992 from Evaton there were no infrastructure – e.g., no running water, no toilets and very poor roads. We had to build our own toilets and these were pit toilets that effected our health in many ways.

When I visited the clinic, I saw long queues and that worried me. I conducted research and asked: why are there such long queues and mostly women? I discovered that women were more effected by these pit toilets than men and then I approach the Cancer Association of South Africa, asking them how they see the problem.

CANSA replied: "People need to use clean toilets". "Who must build these toilets?" I asked and was told: "The local municipality".

I also discovered that when women go to the clinics they were harassed by the nurses, blaming the husbands for not being faithful. It might be true that some are not faithful, but we knew there was more to the story – that the basic problem was lack of proper sanitation. We started demanding a proper toilet infrastructure - this was one of the first major struggles after 1994 for us in the townships.

A lot of our struggles were very local but then there were international events such as the World Conference on Racism in Durban in 2001. Some of us attended as we could see racism persisting in South Africa after 1994, especially in the socio-economic sphere. When we got back I started organising workshops against racism and xenophobia, raising awareness around these social issues and educating people what could be done in order to bring about change.

Many townships are still rife with tribalism and other forms of discrimination against persons from other African countries or with disabilities.

We made people aware that apartheid was not only between blacks and whites but also amongst us. Even today they use hurtful names and labels according to ethnic backgrounds. These brought back memories of apartheid and I saw that we must learn from our mistakes. One of the lessons I have learnt is to work more closely with others, even if there are disagreements and to look beyond the superficial differences, be it race, ethnic background, gender or political orientations.

You find strength when people agree with you and see value in your work as a community leader. People's poverty, retrenchment or being laid off after a strike, do not deter them coming to meetings, even when their stomachs are empty, or having to walk from far, or pay taxi fares they can hardly afford.

They come to voice their support for the community struggle against privatisation and corruption, giving you spiritual strength. It is then that you feel humble and say: 'If these people can sacrifice so much, what stops me from carrying on the struggle?'

That spiritual strength does not make things easier in the community struggles, because you also need resources- material resources. You need to make phone calls and write letters to the magistrate to organise a protest march or public meeting, which you know will be denied. But you do it anyway, as it is required and you want to obey the law. They will deny you permission to march at the last moment and at times not even give you the reasons for the denial. At times they do not even acknowledge that they have received your request. As a leader you have to go back to the community and explain to them things that you have no control over and the community gets cross with you.

At times you need a hall to conduct the community mass meetings and sometimes the churches will help. However, today many church leaders are still afraid to be associated with us, due to the stigma of being labelled 'trouble makers'. They are afraid it will tarnish the name of their church or that the collections will go down or that the well-to-do parishioners will join the prosperity churches. In these churches people are told: 'We do not mix politics with religion' and yet you see their leaders mixing with government and political leaders when they make deals or during elections.

At times those with resources, like funding or donor organisations will support you and ask you to set up community projects and then you have to apply for funding. It is not easy, as you may not even have a writing pad, let alone a computer and so you borrow and beg. You have to attend so many workshops in order to write a funding proposal and then have three year audited statements. If you are lucky and can manage to get access to resources and fulfil all the requirements, then you have to wait and wait.

Suddenly without warning you are told you got the funding, but not all of it, and you need to report within the next three months. Then you have a dilemma: Do we take the money and run around conducting as many workshops and including awareness campaigns? Or do you refuse the funds as there are so many strings attached to the money and evictions and retrenchments are more pressing? There are some donor agencies that are genuinely in true solidarity and they try to support you all the way.

In these community projects, with the limited funds and time constraints, you are also burdened with the issue of group dynamics. You are no longer just a community leader, who has to listen to others and support those

who are vulnerable; you are now a 'manager' and you are required to supervise your comrades, who now feel like employees and you are their 'boss'. At times the people you work with feel threatened, as you have to make decisions they do not agree with - but it was in the funding proposal and they were not consulted, due to time constraints. At other times your colleagues do not like your leadership style as a manager. Team mates hold different views and you do not have the comfort of long meetings. During the anti-apartheid struggle you could hold long meetings during the night, after 1994 people do not like to attend long meetings, they want to go and watch soap operas on the TV.

In the meantime the donors want a report and they do not want to know about matters such as electricity cut offs or colleagues who are stubborn or lazy. And you yourself are not familiar how to deal with such conflicts, but you hang in there, knowing it is for the good of the community. Again it would be so easy just to walk away or to take up the offer to work in the local government structure or take a 'tender' to build RDP houses or pavements. At least then you would have some income and can put bread on the table for your family.

Your own family also comes with lots of challenges when you are a community leader and it feels more painful, because you live with them every day. Even though during the anti-apartheid struggle we used to agree a lot about our involvement in the community struggle, it was clear who and what the enemy was as well as the goal, namely the end of apartheid. Things changed after 1994, in our family we have different opinions and views regarding the goal and what kind of society we want.

Some family members are still afraid to criticise the new government and they are aware of the threats and so they would prefer that we rather cooperate with the government and not oppose the government and its policies. At times they feel that I'm too vocal in criticising the new government. As a family we did not talk enough about the times when I was detained and tortured and I believe they do not want such things to happen again - it was also very painful for them.

On the other hand, when you got your own family with a house and some assets, you have to start prioritising your family: protecting your family, against the criminals as burglaries and robberies are rife in the townships.

There are the expenses to maintain a family; this is not easy as you do not have a 'normal' salary like other citizens who work for the government or companies or run their own business. In the back of their minds, your family must be wondering: 'When are we going to have a normal life?' At times you can share your concerns and try help them understand that the 'struggle continues'. To make them aware that a normal life should be for all people, including the so-called 'poor' and that it should not be just the elite that should benefit from the new South Africa. But most of the time you cannot share these ideas and insights, as you are so busy running up and down with community matters and so relationships with your family become difficult.

As you are so busy with community matters you do not have enough time to support your family and they may not support you, especially when things are tough, like when a colleague is detain or retrenched. You wish you could spend more time with your family and children but the community comes with so many demands and request for help then your family sit back and wait. Deep down you wish things to be different. When you arrive late at night from your community work they may be sleeping or you are too tired and exhausted to listen their stories. Then you feel bad wishing that things could be "normal". You also know that people have different understandings and this is also a challenge.

These differences you have not only in the family, but also on the Church and the community and how to live with them is not easy.

There are not many places where you can go as a community leader to find support for your conviction and ideals. At times I am invited to speak or be part of conferences, seminars and public hearings - yes, even by the government.

I attended a leadership conference at North West University in Potchefstroom when the Public Protector invited me to be part of a discussion of how we translated the SA Constitution into the life of ordinary citizens. She spoke about her experiences and opposition she faces by the ruling party and how they see the Nkandla scandal differently. She explained that people will oppose your position and they do not want to promote the Constitution into the life of people. They see the Constitution in isolation as some people would see the Bible and they will oppose you

but you should not feel threatened. If you are afraid, you become a weak leader and you cannot promote social justice. She said other people will support your position, but the first thing is to believe in yourself.

The public protector's words remind me about those of my mother: "Free yourselves!"

First of all you have to make sense of the importance of fighting for social justice, driven by your conviction that apartheid was wrong, and so is the neo-liberal policy of GEAR, even in the new democratic system needs to be addressed and not left in the hands of a few.

I was inspired by example of Thuli and her courage to stand up for social justice and for promoting the Constitution. It helped me to see the solidarity that we are building, coming from Orange Farm or from the national level where the Public Protector is working.

To be a community leader is not easy, neither is working for social justice in today's world, however we are called to bring about change, as written in the Bible, but also by our conscience when we see so many people suffering in the new South Africa.

I feel honoured that I can walk in the footsteps of my mother and alongside somebody like Thuli Madonsela. This is my story and I hope we can hear and write the stories of many thousand others. It is time for us to tell our own stories and be afraid to "Free ourselves".

Now is the time to speak up and tell our stories...bua batho!!!

Buya Sekwele!!!

Aluta .....



## **Conclusion**

Working as a community leader in the past, today and the future has been and will never be an easy task; whether it is torture by the apartheid regime, apathy of the community today or working with couch activists. Community leaders need to learn from the mistakes and successes of those that went before them. With technology - organising and mobilising may become easier, including accessing information and communicating with the broader community and even with those in government. I hope it will help young leaders to be more effective than we are and were in the past.

Whilst it appear that our focus in the apartheid struggle had a rather “easy” focus, “it was clear cut enemy”, today and in the future social issues will be more intertwine with global matters such as climate change and financial economic structural systems. Community leaders will have to learn to balance the different kinds areas of focus, while trying to show “impact” on a local level (for donors), not, an easy task. Due to the better education of some young community leaders, I hope they will be able “to read the signs of the times” better than us and will build on our mistakes. Our hope is based on the faith of people to overcome suffering and building solidarity across class and group distinctions on a local and global level. I pray and hope that the cry of my mother will be joined to that of Jesus, M.K. Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Junior and Steve Biko and with the young leaders of today and in the future.

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## **Guide Lines for all history interview**

- Introduce yourself (If necessary)
- Write the name of the person you are interviewing

### **Questions:**

1. Please tell me where were you born?
2. What was it like where you grew up?
3. How were you affected by apartheid?
4. What were the difficulties for you and your family?
5. Were you involve in the struggle against apartheid?
6. What was your role in the struggle?
7. Were there any achievements in the local struggle?
8. What message would you have for young activiests in the communities today?

### **Method:**

1. Try and arrange for regular time for the interview
2. Agree for specific duration of time for the interview
3. If possible meet at the same place
4. Write key phrases and rewrite in sentences
5. Correct grammar, style etc afterwards