

# Poor against Poor

**An Interview with Marjorie Jobson, Khulumani, June 16, 2008**

**1. As an activist of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and today as the director of Khulumani, a very active social movement that runs a strong advocacy and lobbying campaign on behalf of its members, you're involved in struggles and campaigns for social and economic justice in South Africa. How did you (and how did Khulumani) deal with the acts of violence against migrants and refugees during the last weeks?**

## **Personal History with Khulumani**

As a starting point, I want to explain that I was an anti-apartheid activist working as a member of the Black Sash women's human rights movement. (The official Anti-Apartheid Movement did not exist in apartheid South Africa). In my capacity as the co-chair of the Pretoria branch of the Black Sash, I was involved in the Black Sash Campaign against the Death Penalty. The apartheid government was executing up to 21 prisoners a day at their prison in Pretoria. People were sentenced to death for any one of eleven different capital charges. This gave the South African government the notorious reputation of having the third highest rate of executions in the world – exceeded only by Saudi Arabia and China. Amongst the prisoners on death row, were the Uppington Fourteen and the Sharpeville Six, all sentenced on the basis of the dubious legal principle of 'common purpose'. I became familiar with these two groups of death row prisoners through my weekly information-gathering visits to death row.

In 1997, I was invited by one of the Sharpeville Six, Mr Duma Kumalo, a founder member of Khulumani Support Group, to serve on the Board of the recently established Khulumani Support Group. Since its inception in 1995, Khulumani has grown into a national membership organisation of some 55,000 victims and survivors of apartheid-era political violence - a human rights social movement comprising survivors and victims of gross human rights violations, who have become community-level human rights defenders.

## **Position on Recent Xenophobic Attacks**

As human rights defenders, Khulumani Support Group and its members have taken a stand against the xenophobic attacks on foreigners and migrants, temporarily sheltering in South Africa, many having fled situations of political oppression in their countries of origin. Khulumani members understand first-hand how gross human rights violations create lifelong devastating consequences for survivors and how rehabilitation and reintegration requires the fullest participation of survivors in these processes, rather than state-led processes of delivery and dependence-creation. For Khulumani, the struggle to demand respect for the principle of "nothing about us without us" continues on a daily basis with the South African state consistently refusing to apply this principle to survivors of apartheid-era political violence, and presently also to survivors of the violent xenophobic attacks.

## **The South African State and Growing Disillusionment since 1994**

The South African state has in fact distanced itself since the 2004 general election from the lives of the majority of people living in the country. Social and economic conditions have deteriorated each year for poor people. Levels of inequality have increased and rising costs are hurting those least able to deal with them. 45% of South Africans presently live below minimum living levels and 18% are borrowing money each month to buy food. Economic

disparities have widened between the minority employed in the modern formal economy and the majority who subsist in the largely non-working rural and township economies where poor people are trapped in poverty and deprived of opportunities or access to productive resources. Poverty has become endemic amongst the majority of the country's peoples including those who have fled to South Africa. Many of them have lost a sense of dignity and self-esteem and any active sense of control of their economic lives.

### **Informal Traders and Survival for South Africans and Poor Migrants**

Most poor people in the country are reliant on informal trade for their survival and competition in this sector is intense and is often compounded by the fact that foreigners tend to have more skills than South Africans and thus greater resilience. Attacks by South African informal traders or 'spaza shop owners' on foreign informal traders have been a consistent feature of everyday life in South Africa since 1994. The recurrent destruction of the businesses of foreign migrants has often not been reported in the media and the state has done little over the years to end these attacks. The state has in fact been complicit in criminalising informal traders through having metro police officials raid their stands on an almost daily basis. In these operations, property is confiscated, fines that traders cannot afford to pay, are issued and the confiscated goods end up being either sold or destroyed by officials. The continuous harassment and ill-treatment by state officials of informal traders across South Africa and the rest of the continent enforces *an economic apartheid* between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' and intensifies competition amongst the poor. Many will remember the infamous purge of informal traders that was instigated by former President Robert Mugabe on May 25, 2005, Africa Day, named Operation Murambatsvina - Operation Clean-Up or Operation 'Get Rid of the Filth', which resulted in the displacement and loss of the livelihoods of 700,000 people. Similar processes have taken place in many African countries, often unnoticed or unreported, including in South Africa on a smaller scale.

The violent attacks on foreign migrants has been an intensification of a process that has been going on over many years since migrants first sought out South Africa as a safe destination from the violence and conflict prevalent in their countries of origin. The intensification of the feelings of resentment against often more competent migrants and the consequent unprovoked violent attacks have been cause for deep reflection about the state that the country is in.

In the first days of the attacks early in May 2008, Khulumani members were active in their local community safety forums. These are organised community forums that have been developed in collaboration with the South African Police Services to support the efforts of local residents to make their own communities more secure for the people living in them. Many Khulumani members are actively involved in these community safety forums and receive some compensation for the services they provide by having access to space to meet at police stations and some limited access to resources such as fax machines.

### **Factors contributing to the Xenophobic Attacks**

While it remains difficult to identify the root causes of the xenophobic attacks, South African civil society is able to name some of the contributing factors – competitiveness for formal jobs and for resources; inadequate levels of provision of basic services to members of communities and in particular to informal settlements against popular expectations of a better life after 1994; government's failure to tackle the root causes of poverty and economic deprivation within townships and informal settlements; and increasing inflation which bites deeply into the limited income of members of these communities.

In this context, many South Africans attributed their dire social and economic situations to the presence of foreigners in their communities, thereby resorting to their internalised stereotypes dating back to the apartheid era. For many South Africans of colour, the years of apartheid economic deprivation resulted in an extreme form of nationalism after the democratic elections of 1994 – that only South Africans should be entitled to benefits, not foreigners, because it was black South Africans who were deprived of benefits under apartheid. For the majority of South Africans, the power dynamics of apartheid remain internalised and individuals still tend to regard themselves as 'black people' as of lesser value than a 'white person.'

### **The Status of Refugees**

The South African government has shown itself unwilling to provide refugee status to persons who have fled political persecution in their countries of origin, most noticeably to Zimbabwean victims of political oppression. The state has been hostile to those who have fled political persecution, even although they themselves were sheltered as fugitives and guests of foreign African government for many years. The background to this situation is that South Africans who fled South Africa under apartheid and were hosted in foreign countries, did not fit the definition of refugees because they were continuing an underground armed struggle in their home country. According to international convention, a refugee can only qualify for refugee status if they have abandoned armed struggle. South Africans exiles thus never qualified for 'refugee status' and were consequently named 'guests' of different governments, or *imbizis* (fugitives), not refugees. This has continued to influence South Africa's current leadership and has created a situation where the state refuses in most cases to make a finding that an individual is a refugee and therefore qualifies for certain benefits in terms of refugee law. This has meant that South Africans have not learned to understand the many different reasons why people migrate and to distinguish between different migrants.

### **Taking Measures against Xenophobic Violence**

Khulumani and SACST (the Southern African Centre for Survivors of Torture) decided to join forces to implement a rapid response to the current xenophobic violence in informal settlements, recognising the different strengths and capacities of the two organisations – the record of anti-xenophobia skills training that SACST has been conducting with various role-players in the country (in particular with the SA Police Services) and the organised networks and forums for support and debate that Khulumani Support Group has established across many affected communities. Khulumani has become known and recognised for its work in documenting the narratives of victims of human rights violations under apartheid. Their presence has given them a level of legitimacy and acceptance that is required if informal dialogues are to be successful amongst ordinary members of these communities.

**2. Khulumani did demand publicly for quite some time to put the increasing xenophobia on the political agenda, but nothing happened. Which measures would have helped to prevent the outbreak of violence?**

### **Unfinished Business of the TRC**

Khulumani has not directly advocated against xenophobia, until these recent events. As a social movement for human rights, Khulumani has worked for the internalisation of the provisions and rights of the Constitution and their application to everyone living in the country. But this process has not until recently included direct advocacy to end xenophobia, mainly

because Khulumani's own advocacy agenda for redress has not yet been addressed by government in the 10 years since the closing of the TRC. This unfinished business of the nation is reflected in Khulumani's Charter for Redress (See [www.khulumani.net](http://www.khulumani.net)) this advocacy agenda has been the predominant occupation of the efforts and focus of Khulumani Support Group and its members. Khulumani has for the first time since 1994 been invited to present oral testimony in Parliament (June 11, 2008) Khulumani has, however, taken a stand alongside victims of contemporary human rights violations, such as supporting families of rape survivors in the legal process and victims of xenophobic attacks.

### **Spectrum of Violence**

In reflecting on this question, there are two components to the possible answer - the violence needs to be seen as a spectrum of violence -

- from the violence of the exclusion caused by the deep impoverishment of around 30 million people in South Africa - the poverty that violates their human dignity and self-esteem on a daily basis;
- to the violence of the raids on poor informal traders trying to subsist by selling goods on the streets and getting harassed every day and having their goods confiscated by the authorities (because the authorities do not like the untidy appearance of haphazard stalls lining the streets);
- to the violence of the criminal attacks on vulnerable people travelling home on Friday evenings to former homeland areas arriving home in the dark where few streets have street lights (unprotected by the police who rather maintain a high and more visible profile in the more wealthy areas where the more well-off spend their time and money and whose voice counts more when they complain about crime) and being waylaid as they get off public transport by the thugs / tsotsis who lie in wait for them to rob them of their weekly wage package;
- to the violence of the xenophobia with which black people, both South African and foreign, are treated when they go to the offices of the Department of Home Affairs to apply for valid documents and visas and permits - a violence that sees black staff of these offices treating black clients with disdain because of their internalisation of apartheid messages about the value of black people;
- to the violence of the failure of the South African Police Services to protect black visitors to the country and their harassment of black people who look generally more dark-skinned than most South Africans and whose valid documents are torn up by these police so that they can be forced to leave the country;
- to the violence of refusing to recognise that Zimbabweans in South Africa have valid reasons for having fled the political terror of their home country and for refusing to give them official status in South Africa as official refugees or asylum-seekers;
- to the violence of the bribes that police officers demand from foreigners to allow them to stay even although they have valid documents and permits;
- to the recent eruption of violent xenophobic attacks by members of poor communities on the foreign migrants trying to shelter in these communities.

### **Steps to eradicate Violence**

This means that each of these manifestations of violence and violation needs to be dealt with -

- the eradication of the corruption and inefficiency of the officials of the Department of Home Affairs;

- the eradication and transformation of apartheid mindsets and stereotypes about the value attached to different races;
- the declaration of a moratorium on attacks on informal traders and a new valuing of the efforts of poor people to make a living;
- the adoption of policies on local economic development that makes government at every level a supporter of peoples' own efforts rather than gatekeepers trying to exclude people from economic viability and participation;
- the protection of all people in South Africa from criminal attacks regardless of their wealth status;
- measures to ensure that the media tell the full story that includes the terrible stories of violent attacks and killings but also the compassionate face of what local people have done to balance the horror of what has and is still taking place;
- the 'cleaning out' of all forms of corruption amongst police and home affairs officials so that a civil service tradition is developed with the purpose of truly serving all the people (not only the wealthy or the white or the lighter-skinned);
- the establishment of an Institute for Civil Service Training, modelled on the Indian model of a Civil Service training Institute that truly serves the best interests of the people and citizens;
- the formal recognition of Robert Mugabe and the ZANU-PF Military Forces as a force of destruction and crimes against humanity and their holding to account in the ICC;
- support for and the expansion of the Khulumani-SACST process of 'diffuse dialogues' within communities by trained individuals living within those communities to start developing a new discourse about foreign migrants; and
- a much fuller and deeper understanding that the TRC did not solve all the problems of a history of decades of statutory discrimination and that the process needs to be systematically addressed and those who were violated need ongoing support to overcome what was done to them. This means that there needs to be an understanding that there is a very serious agenda for dealing with the Unfinished Business of the Nation and that the expectation that people should just get over what was done to them and put everything behind them in a mere ten years, is a false and discriminatory attitude that is perpetuated against people and that will not bring a stable peace.

### **3. From an outside view in Europe the xenophobia seems to take place only within the black communities. Is that so and which views can you find within the white minority in South Africa?**

#### **Violence amongst the Poor**

The reality is that the collective violence has been taking place in informal settlements where the poorest people live and where the social stresses are experienced most acutely. There are few white residents of these settlements, white South Africans having been equipped by apartheid with somewhat more accumulated resources than black South Africans in terms of being able to cope with economic pressures.

I have used Leonhard Praeg's work and thinking to try to explain the phenomenon of collective violence being directed as those perceived as being foreign within these marginalised and almost exclusively black local communities. The white community remains to a large extent protected from the degree of poverty that exists in largely poor black communities where the consequences of the decades of deliberate dispossession and disempowerment exist and are

experienced most acutely. The country's macroeconomic framework has not in the past fourteen years, addressed the reality of this legacy.

**4. Acts of Solidarity are not in the focus of the partly sensationalist European media. Could you elaborate a bit on that? In which networks of Solidarity is Khulumani integrated?**

**Networks of Solidarity**

Khulumani Support Group participates with other civil society organisations in a range of advocacy activities. For Khulumani, the most important of these relationships are with civil society organisations that support our efforts to hold individuals and corporations accountable for human rights violations and that support our efforts to end impunity and to work for reconciliation through the more costly personal involvement with survivors in sharing skills and supporting local economic initiatives that build sustainable livelihoods.

In South Africa, these have been SANGOCO - the South African NGO Coalition (recently collapsed due to a funding crisis), the South African Council of Churches, the Legal Resources Centre, COSATU, the SACP, Umzabalazo we Jubilee, Jubilee South Africa, the South African Institute for Advanced Constitutional Law, the South African Litigation Centre amongst others. Internationally, our activities have been provided with largely intellectual support by some persons formerly associated with the Anti-Apartheid Movement, who have been concerned about issues of social and economic justice and by organisations such as the International Centre for Transitional Justice and the Canadian organisation, Rights and Democracy.

**5. The failure of the South African Government is striking and was discussed these days. Do you have concrete demands/Ideas what the government should do now and which perspectives do you have based on long-term considerations?**

**International Lawsuit and the Rehabilitation and Healing Fund**

For Khulumani, a starting point would be for the South African government to remove its objections to the Khulumani International Lawsuit ([www.khulumani.net/ny-lawsuit](http://www.khulumani.net/ny-lawsuit)) which could provide legal precedence for securing corporate accountability globally and which would provide a source of funds for Khulumani to support the local economic development initiatives of its members.

Khulumani would also welcome the setting aside of a substantial portion of the funds remaining in the President's Fund that was created for the payment of reparations, which still stands at around R700 million (77 million Euros), into a Khulumani Rehabilitation and Healing Fund to support Khulumani's efforts to address the lifelong consequences of apartheid-era gross human rights violations.

Khulumani also seeks to set up a Khulumani Healing Foundation, based on the Canadian model of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that provides for psychosocial services for victims and survivors and their struggles to overcome various forms of dependence that result for the guilt and psychic shame attached to their torture and other violations. Khulumani is advocating for this fund to be established with a further grant from the President's Fund.

**6. Is there a realistic option for the government in South Africa to deal with the huge expectations of the people after the end of Apartheid after the serious damage that was done by the Apartheid regime? Do you see a failure of other actors?**

### **Governmental Service Delivery or Local Empowerment**

The expectations of people are not and have never been unrealistic. Government has not been able to realise these expectations because it has chosen a service delivery approach, rather than a developmental approach. The delivery of services to people is based on a technocratic approach to governance that seeks to keep citizens inactive and disempowered rather than an approach that involves citizens in become joint problem-solvers with government and that supports people in their efforts to provide for themselves. As the framework below emphasises, wide-scale social mobilisation through information, knowledge and skills programmes can help drive us (South Africa) to a higher growth path. This approach recognises communities as their own change agents, rather than just passive citizens to whom services must be 'delivered'. The active involvement of local populations in the development process is the path to accelerated and shared growth in local spaces.

As detailed in government's review of its first decade, "the advances made in the first decade by far supersede the weaknesses. Yet, if all the indicators were to continue along the same trajectory, especially in respect of the dynamic of economic inclusion and exclusion, South Africa could soon reach a point where the negatives start to overwhelm the positives. This could precipitate a vicious cycle of decline in all spheres". It goes on to call for "*a major intervention to consolidate democracy and to integrate citizens as beneficiaries of a growing economy*". This will require "a framework defining a shared destiny".

### **Global and Local Inequalities**

The 2005 Report on the World Social Situation, (the Inequality Predicament) reinforces the concerns of the review. It sounds an alarm over persistent and deepening inequality worldwide, focusing on the chasm between the formal and informal economies, the widening gap between skilled and unskilled workers, the growing disparities in health, education and opportunities for social, economic and political participation.<sup>1</sup> It stresses that issues of equity and inequality have acquired such importance nowadays that it becomes difficult to strengthen the development agenda without first addressing the segmentation of society among other reasons, rising levels of inequality have produced.

### **Local Economic Development Framework**

Regarding the rural areas of South Africa where almost 45% of the population of the Country resides, and where the areas still suffer from past underdevelopment and the fact that they were sustained previously on non-viable incentives to promote the aims of separate development, the LED Framework document acknowledges that these areas require and deserve special attention. Investments in these areas, it suggests, should be based on a new vision of sustainable rural economies and should focus on innovative employment generation strategies that do not necessarily require large sums of capital. Further focus should be placed on adult basic education and training aimed at improving literacy and numeracy as a basis for participating in local economic opportunities. Where it is justifiable to invest in critical infrastructure to unlock agricultural potential this should be considered. Beyond government investment, local citizen involvement in economic development and innovation should be vigorously encouraged. (National LED Framework, adopted in October 2006).

Local citizen involvement is envisaged through the partnering of the state with communities through Sustainable Developmental Community Investment Programmes in order to boost circulation of local income and community organization in these 52 regions. This shift on the

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<sup>1</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, August 2005.

part of government demands a change in government mindsets. It is this shift that Khulumani is seeking to support through its involvement in local sustainable community investment programmes.

The 30 million citizens who live in the marginalised so-called "Second Economy areas", could be assisted to organise, in response to 'offers' of programme support, at street, neighbourhood, and village level into community co-operatives and social enterprises to work on developing sustainable livelihoods and meaningful productive activity (be it in savings clubs or buying clubs or the EPWP) to improve the uptake of the unemployed into the economy. It is possible to consider a link to wards and services through sustainable community investment programming in each municipality. Each ward will encourage the development of trusts, focusing public sector investment, through a process of local dialogue and consensus into key areas of need identified by the community and largely delivered through community trusts, social and cooperative enterprises.

A critical component is to increase the local multiplier in marginalised areas from the present 1.3 to at least 3. The annual government expenditure of billions of rand a year on its programmes in marginalised areas, given the low income multiplier of only 1.3 in local areas, stimulates little in the way of development. In the first economy, this income multiplier is between 7 and 12. If the local income multiplier in marginalised areas can be raised to about 4.0, the economic activity derived from government expenditure could be raised substantially, transforming the areas and allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the national economy.

The proposal is for the new Sustainable Developmental Community Investment Programme (SDCIP) should become an integral part of government's strategy to stimulate local economies so that there is a synergistic balance between State and Community driven LED: one that places 'on offer' community membership of programmes that confer rights and resources, in return for responsibility and accountability, and even liability, to citizens wishing to mobilise, organise and become active themselves by joining as community programme members. This SDCIP is not about small community economic development projects in the traditional sense. It concerns linking communities into the mainstream of the economy as critical players through their own organisation, supported by innovative redesign of methods of delivering government expenditure.

Sustainable Developmental Community Investment Programming (SDCIP) is about moving beyond project-based community economic development. It is rather a much more empowering approach, utilising innovative instruments to systematically build community competence and capacity. SDCIP suggests building community, and using a powerful cultural dynamic as the main vehicle and partner for LED together with the resourcing of organised communities to carry out key local functions, provide services and become important productive units. To do this, there needs to be a paradigm shift, a corrective to the dominant 'globalisation' model. A new balance has to be struck between globalisation and 'localisation'. Localisation requires a new set of policies and programmes to exist. Present policy is moving in that direction but many aspects of implementation remain caught in the 'supply' of objects and services. This means that a large part of official expenditure is not used in a way that partner 'community' and subsequently, the monies spent rarely 'stay to work' in the marginalised poor areas of South Africa.

SDCIP represents a move beyond LED 'delivery'. It begins with the realisation that the supply of objects and services into poor areas when their economic marginalisation means that there is no or little effective local demand with which to buy new local production or to pay for new services.

The National LED Framework is intended to build a shared understanding of LED in South Africa and to put into context the role of local economies in the national economy. It places the emphasis on waging the battle against poverty "on the ground" at the local level by marshalling state action in a locally specific manner in support of local communities. The framework lays the basis for deepening community access to economic initiatives, support programmes and information and for the co-ordination of economic development planning and implementation across government and between key role players.

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