



**"South Africa and the World
at the Dawn of 2010"**
Report of two Listening Posts
held in January

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

→ [Report 2](#)

South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2010
Report 1 of a Listening Post held in January

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. Many dichotomies and the need to create balance
2. A new identity with different voices
3. Leadership void

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Many dichotomies and the need to create balance

Analysis: Our society experiences many dichotomies and ambivalences. In discussions, speaking about one side is immediately followed by reference to the opposite. Examples are the old (associated with apartheid and trauma) versus the new, democratic South Africa; cultural tradition (young Black males attending initiation ceremonies in rural areas) versus modern city living (with the sophistication of high-tech and global influences); poverty (millions of citizens are living below the 'bread line') versus

affluence (especially amongst celebrities and politicians); exclusion (the millions without financial and educational resources) versus inclusion (people enjoying powerful connections); and fear (of violence and impending doom) versus hope (to build communities and transform organisations).

The country is gearing itself to host the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. The conversation contains fantasies around having fun and getting rich versus real concerns about high food prices and congested traffic. The metaphor of prostitution came to the fore. The (round / oval) soccer stadiums represent South Africa in the receiving and serving female role, the host for the world's entertainment (soccer, 'the African experience' of game viewing, visiting townships, sexual experiences). The world's soccer players and enthusiasts entering the country in big phallic aeroplanes represent the male role, who come in search of excitement, prepared to face violence on the streets (what the country has become known for), and to explore and exploit Africa and Africans. Citizens focus so strongly on the immediate, that little awareness of and planning for the future is done – we will have to cope with the 'morning after' (or perhaps the 'mourning after').

Hypothesis: The deep rooted historic apartheid splits stay in the mind and conversations of citizens – the apartheid in the mind. The system creates a kind of balance by constantly reciprocating the negative with the positive. Yet, it fails to integrate the opposites and transcend the dichotomies. The evidence lies in how the bad parts are projected onto the international visitors as if anything on the other side of the boundary is a threat and an invasion. The anxiety about this anticipated invasion is so high, that no vision of the future can exist.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

A new identity with different voices

Analysis: Citizens are becoming aware of the emerging identity of a country moving out of adolescence into young adulthood. The new democracy is approaching its 16th birthday – the time when the (male) voice breaks. This differentiation between child and adult voice manifests as follows. The loud adult voice is represented by the politicians and economists talking about power, control and violence, as if that is the only reality. The softer child voice is represented by those who care for and work towards social collaboration in communities and transformation in organisations. Because these independent and alternative voices are not easily heard, the work is not generally known. There is a concern about the silent (or silenced) voices, such as the Black women who do not speak out towards Black males about domestic violence and the effect of having multiple wives. There is confusion around Black-White relationships. A book by Antjie Krog (a White woman) called 'Begging to be Black' was misinterpreted by many fellow White people, blaming her for 'joining the enemy'.

Hypothesis: The different voices are talking in different volumes and in silos, not listening to one another. The strong political voice is narcissistically driving its own power agenda, while most of the transformational work happens below the surface. The lack of listening to one another makes hope fragile.

Analysis and Hypothesis 3

Leadership void

Analysis: Citizens are in need for strong leadership to direct the country away from struggle, violence and poverty, towards equality, harmony and providing resources for all, and no leader (past, present, future) seems to be good enough for this task. Mbeki's style of 'intellectually managing-by-distance' is fiercely criticised. President Zuma seems to balance controversy (his recent court cases) with popularity, but his motives and 'political bedfellows' are questioned. The behaviour of the youth league president Malema, causes concern – what if he is the future ANC and country president? When will the messiah come?

Hypothesis: Citizens are acutely aware of the practical day-to-day threat to their economic and social survival. Relying on macro level leadership does not seem to work, leading to a hopeless situation and creating fantasies.

Convener: Frans Cilliers

→ [Report 1](#)

South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2010
Report 2 of a Listening Post held on
3rd December 2009 in Port Elizabeth

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

The discussions began when feedback was given to the group by a member who had previously discussed a consultation she did in a church context where there was considerable conflict between two Ministers. Since her presentation one Minister had accepted a transfer to another city and the church membership then terminated the services of the other Minister.

In this instance the minister, whose services were terminated, viewed himself as the righteous and superior party and confronted the system in a 'show down' manner. The group then discussed how systems retaliate and unconsciously take revenge and how the persecuted then often become persecutors.

Another member also spoke about several incidents in a church context:

- An executive body in the church located in Port Elizabeth had been doing really good work in development and in promoting young women other than white. The focus was on skills development and leadership. In this way they were promoting youth and gender and providing opportunities for people of other races. Sadly this body is now to move to a bigger city.

- Another issue arose in an executive committee of a Leadership development wing of the same church when a man was accused of verbal sexual abuse. In this instance when the leaders of the executive took action to address the allegation, there was an outcry about their authority and right to take up this issue. There seemed to be desire to 'kiss and make up' rather than deal with what was at stake. In this process there also seemed to be a greater focus on the perpetrator rather than addressing what this was like for the victim.
- Another example was mentioned about a divorced woman having a relationship with a Priest and the ex husband then wanting retribution and for the Priest to be moved out of the city. The Bishop refused to deal with the matter because the Priest belonged to another order.

A member was dealing with several couples where one was having an affair. In the one instance the husband expected the wife to accept the affair and go on as if nothing had changed. In the other, the 'affair' was discovered by a child who read text messages on his mother's mobile. In both instances the disruptions in the broader family were enormous.

This was followed by a discussion about leadership, our own and that of others and disappointment was expressed in terms of internal, external and political leadership.

Several examples were quoted

- Julius Malema from ANC Youth League is very outspoken and receives a great deal of support from some and criticism from others. A well known author pointed out that he talks on behalf of those who feel they do not have a voice. A group member was disappointed that she had not seen that although it is a concept she knows and works with. She got caught up in a one sided view.
- A realization that a member had protected people in order to get the work done and not taken up a leadership role to confront.
- Anger at people in management roles not using their authority and knowledge about what needed to be confronted yet waiting for staff to complain before taking action. When there were complaints the management in fact verbalized that they had been waiting for the complaints. This can also be seen as a dependence on others before dealing with issues or it can be seen as leadership's perception of their powerlessness and as an abdication of responsibility (WHY?), relying on subordinates to take the responsibility to hold their managers accountable.
- On the other hand there was some evidence of mature leadership where a very senior person was confronted with a disagreement to his suggestion and he was able to listen and consider what was said.
- In another situation when a director took action against one staff member after other staff complained, the staff then felt sorry for that member so at times leaders cannot please no matter what they do.
- It seemed that no one was willing to take responsibility and a person like Julius Malema did take responsibility even though it might be destructive in the process

and the ruling party did nothing about it. He has been likened to Hitler and Eugene Terblanche as he has a charisma about him that is compelling. It was also suggested that the more he says, the less the President says.

- South Africa was able to move through a transition peacefully and without being punitive or seeking retribution. This seems to be changing and is acted out by Julius Malema. Race relations are possibly at their lowest ebb since before 1994 and largely as a result of corruption and fraud which leave the poor and needy more desperate than ever. They are now beginning to mobilize themselves. Race relations have also moved to be less across colour lines and more to do with factions within one race.
- One member felt good about taking up his own authority and moving from a combined practice to working on his own. He was able to confront his fears honestly and move on and this has been liberating and exciting.
- Mention was made about how people vote leaders into positions and then want to be punitive against the same leaders.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following interrelated themes:

- Ambivalent leadership
- Abdication of responsibility
- Non acknowledgment of own authority or the authority of leadership
- Splitting in organizations
- The impact of retribution, fear and attempts 'to do the right thing'
- Lack of commitment
- An inability to be all good – evil is within

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

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- Humans are fickle.
- The fear of retribution makes it very difficult to own one's own leadership or trust another to lead well enough.

- Commitment entails risk in a world where there are no guarantees, hence the existential angst.
- When one cannot trust oneself to take responsibility and stay with what that means how can others then be trusted to do it.
- There is a personal responsibility to work at trusting oneself in order to trust others.
- We are all accountable to keep systems thinking alive and prevent only seeing a one sided view.
- Change occurs all the time but culture and church struggle at times to stay with the change.

Citizens are acutely aware of the practical day-to-day threat to their economic and social survival. Relying on macro level leadership does not seem to work, leading to a hopeless situation and creating fantasies.

Convener: Dr Lorna Brown