→ **Report 2**

"South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2011"
Report 1 of a Listening Post held in January

Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

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. We have identified the following themes.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post 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.

Theme 1. Paradise Gained (Hope), Paradise Lost (Despair)

Good and bad experiences continuously oscillate which leaves citizens with hopelessness. Good (hopeful) events are the successful presentation of the 2010 FIFA World cup which made South Africans proud, during the event crime was minimal, presently we are enjoying good summer rains with dams being filled for the winter months, the economy is strong and growing, politicians are promising to work hard on service delivery, to address crime and poverty, and the average National Grade 12 end-of-year results were impressive. Yet, despair is created by the world cup as a financial burden on the economy, the crime and violence which escalated to its previous levels after the FIFA event, the heavy rains that flooded parts of the country and led to destruction and deaths, strikes amongst professionals in education and health care that damaged important relationships, politicians who do not deliver on their promises, and by the doubt in the authenticity of the standards of the schooling system. Two dominant metaphors were around fire (the devastating effect of lightning in various regions) and water (rain, floods). It is hoped that there will be enough water to extinguish the fire when it breaks out.

Hypothesis
Life is very uncertain and filled with intense fear — the uncontained fear leads to anger which is acted out in hostility and lawlessness. The country seems to be at war with itself, and racial issues seem to be on a needle point ('a ticking time bomb'). At the same time it seems that we can't stay in the hope for long — before we denigrate our own achievements and successes.

Theme 2. Identity Crises — Will The Real Citizen Please Stand Up

The country is (as always) obsessed with its identity and overwhelmed by its plurality. The young democracy has been led by three presidents, each one with a very different style and impact. Mandela represented the superego ('et's not kill the whites, do the right thing and work together as a rainbow nation'). He is presently out of the public eye and experienced as a fragile container — no wonder that our society is lawless, violent and hostile). Mbeki represented the ego — the cold and disconnected intellectual who rationalised and denied almost all issues of emotional importance. Zuma represents the id — the 'song and dance president' (the joker?), a polygamist, who wants to be popular, promises everything to everyone, and is often seen in the press as partying with people over the whole political spectrum. The hope was expressed that the next president will be able to 'integrate the Freudian personality parts' into a meaningful whole.

Hypothesis
Because of the constant fear the country is overly dependent on its political leadership to integrate the identity and care for everyone — which does not seem to happen. There is a very strong need for the messiah to come now and to end the struggle.

Theme 3. All The World Is A Stage — Politicians As Actors

People in political positions struggle to take up their authority with conviction, seriousness and ethicality. On the one hand they talk an inclusive 'we-ness' language in fighting common enemies such as poverty, crime and mediocrity. On the other hand they act in a 'me-ness' manner in their search for personal power, influence and affluence. They are experienced as inauthentic prima donnas on stage, acting as if they care, but actually serving their own narcissistic agendas which dissociate and alienate them from communities. Specifically, the Zuma administration has silenced the liberals and intellectuals from the Mbeki era as well as the poor. For example, he would visit poor black and white communities, promise them different kinds of resources which are not delivered, and then these communities act in a strange way — it is as if they disappear from the social radar silenced by authority.

Hypothesis
Through their narcissism and self-enrichment, politicians detach themselves from the real discourse and reflection on deeper existential values such as a tolerance for difference and a search for truth and progress. This leads to the detachment from their electorate and the citizens of the country.

Convener: Frans Cilliers

South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2011
Report 2 of a Listening Post held on 2nd December 2010

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.

Resources and restrictions go together
This is experienced within facilities such as a Psychiatric Hospital where there are huge demands and inadequate resources. In general and across contexts there is need for more resources such as reformatories for troubled adolescents, places where brain injured people and adolescents who need psychiatric care can be admitted. Even facilities for adults who become psychotic and require psychiatric care are lacking. Those who are not able to admit themselves due to their psychosis are then faced with certification and forced removal by the police to a very poorly resourced state hospital.

Process dysfunctionality
Banks and other institutions are frustrating to deal with because of the need for and insistence on conforming to endless requirements which make for frustrating interactions and delays.

Bureaucracy in institutions has increased so that every 'i' has to be dotted and every 't' crossed which makes for inflexibility and lack of being people centred. At the same time this is questioned increasingly by astute consumers of the service.

Administrative procedures are emphasized under the mantle of quality and safety control. This hampers the provision of a therapeutic service when all beds are occupied and administrative procedures interfere with the service.

There is an increasing bombardment and intrusiveness into people's lives from cyberspace — cell phones, emails and the misuse by companies and management who abuse time boundaries with work and advertising communications. The pressure felt by this was likened to being married to a bipolar partner.

Getting things done requires a great deal of negotiation in a world where egos are inflated and it is 'all about me'. The work ethic has changed where the individual is considered more important than the team.

The World Cup
The group was becoming depressed and there was a bid to search for something positive. The World Cup was a success — crime was held at bay, South Africans and those who came from outside were all caught up in the excitement. There was a common bond that united all.

The facilities were excellent and most things were completed on time and worked. Patriotism increased.

Group Relations Event Robben Island
A group member had been on the staff at the event and spoke about having had a different experience from in the past and members seemed to be more daring and adventurous. On three occasions members moved the chairs which had been arranged in a spiral for the Large Study Group. There was a sense that the work done by the members was very therapeutic. Members experimented with more overt confrontation to authority in order to see if the behaviour would be tolerated and still be contained.

On one occasion they seated the staff in the centre surrounded by the membership in a manner reminiscent of riot police converging on protestors and on another occasion three members came in late and they were seated in the middle. The members really worked with diversity and how they had been disillusioned and depressed with what was happening and became angry with the man who had moved the chairs but then began to work on their own internal worlds and their challenge to the staff was more direct and open as they realized that the answers needed to be found within.

Our discussion group tried to use this new knowledge to understand recent strikes and unrest. Sometimes the acting out is contained when people get what they want in terms of salary increases, at other times the acting out seems to peter out as resentments are not worked with.

One consequence of the spate of strikes was the rise of voluntary groups to assist in the crisis for e.g. when there was a crisis in hospitals volunteers went in to assist. It was as if the emergency created by the hospital strikes promoted citizenry amongst civilians and move towards self-sufficiency.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. We have identified the following themes:

— **Fragmentation**
Holding oneself together in the face of so many demands from many directions becomes a riotous experience and feelings of being pulled apart, bombarded and buffeted.

— **Ambivalence**
People being torn between patriotism and a desire to leave the country and yet there does seem to be a more authentic desire in individuals to face their own racism and move away from old stereotypes of white is all good and black is all bad. There is a greater willingness to a shared belief that we are all in this mess together.

— **Optimism intoxication and optimism fatigue**
This was sparked by the World Cup and in the aftermath fatigue set in.

— **Emergence of a super elite — money, power and wealth**
The new super rich bring about an oligarchy in an ostensible democracy with socialist influences. However, there is evidence of the emergence of creativity in young people to see a gap in the market, take a few risks and craft a future for themselves in the depressed economy and increasing scarcity of jobs in the corporate market.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post 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.

- People are tapping into individual resourcefulness because there is no space for them in the known structures

- Because of high frustration levels linked to restricted resources people become more creative and turn to developing and using their own resources to manage their circumstances and crises

- Because of fragmentation in holding systems people are confronted with the individual choice to sink or swim. Paradoxically, this provides an incentive to call on their own resources, while others act out, rebel or regress and become more of a burden on the state and on the dwindling resources

- Because no one is spared the dysfuntionality people have become more real or authentic

- The two polarized waves of resources and deprivation which symbolized the old South African way of life, have now come together resulting in an energy surge of both increased creative taking of responsibility as well as dysfunctionality. Work / working at it is seen as that which sustains the creative, resourceful groundswell, and increased taking of responsibility and work

Convener: Dr Lorna Brown