→ **Report 2**

"South Africa and the World at the Dawn of 2012"
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.

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. The institutionalisation of poverty

Above the surface our society appears to be affluent, sophisticated and progressively technology driven. In this world humanity and emotionality are seen as weaknesses. Below the surface poverty is everywhere, as if it was institutionalised by apartheid. Many citizens are financially poor, uneducated, and living without purpose and hope. Even those with financial resources are becoming increasingly emotionally disconnected and isolated. It is as if people have lost their competence to make connections and build meaningful relationships. To compensate, people use flight into social networks (such as the faceless facebook) and other electronic connections (as non-human connections). Technology now directs the rules of human engagement. Competence in using technology is associated with intelligence and progress. People who do not use it are seen as 'un-cool'. The underlying dynamic in using these electronic communication tools is control — it gives one control over allowing the other into one's space, put them on hold or ignore them. It is as if these sophisticated electronic devices enhance peoples' isolation and emotional detachment.

<u>Hypothesis</u>
Poverty as a way of life has become institutionalised — in financial and educational terms as well as in the absence of real connections between people. As a defence against (viral and emotional) contamination, human connectivity is increasingly avoided in favour of various electronic media. Although communication is wide and global, it is more superficial and leads to isolation. It is as if technology has become an enabler of opportunities as well as a separator of people.

Theme 2. Conflict between real and ideal self

Citizens are torn between being real and being seduced by power. Realness represents the need to be authentic, to live with integrity, to have a safe, meaningful, honest and good-enough life. This life seems to be a fantasy in today's turbulent society. In reality people are seduced into a strong political, economical and social competition for power, affluence, status, and the need to always appear important and busy. It is as if people are compelled to join a quite primitive, envious and infantilised stampede. People seem to be sliding down this nation's idealistic rainbow, painfully realising again that instead of the pot-of-gold there are only crumbs left behind by the greedy ones who were there first. This results in a physically and emotionally unsafe environment characterised by performance anxiety, primitive behaviours, lawlessness, corruption, brutality, raping, non-caring (for disease and disability) and killing. As in the movie '2012', the competition is about survival of the fittest, sacrifice, purification and being chosen by the ultimate authority.

<u>Hypothesis</u>
The fear of the real world of poverty leads to unhealthy competition against systems and all others — even own support systems. The risk includes the possibility of having to ignore or kill the real self in the hope that the ideal will be enough.

Theme 3. Desperately hanging on to the positive

People are overloaded, drained and fatigued by the constant negative and bad news about corruption, power plays amongst authority figures, poverty and other burning issues not being addressed. There is a need to take responsibility towards finding the real self, having a better and humane life, albeit in a self-centred manner. People increasingly seek small, intimate and meaningful face-to-face professional and social conversations. Here people experience being respected, honoured and allowed to grow emotionally and spiritually. In this small and protected space people feel proudly South African and are they reminded of the 'Cape of Good Hope' (as in the movie 2012).

<u>Hypothesis</u>
High levels of frustration manifest in the macro society leading to helplessness and giving up. Hope is expressed in the focus on micro activities and building of relationships. Yet, because relationships are so volatile, the hope is often scattered by society's brutality.

Convener: Frans Cilliers

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1. **Business** in both work and personal life. In most walks of life some professional people are very busy and others are without work. In the labour sector the same holds true — those who are working are stressed because of the demands yet many are employed.

2. **Injustice and the powerful exploiting subordinates** as evidenced in insurance companies repudiating many claims and big corporations taking advantage of employees who are forced to subscribe to for example 'the Vodacom' way.

3. **Big corporations exploiting 'screwing' each other**

4. **The gap between the need and resources** and the pressure which is exerted by those in power, usually the minority, on the majority who struggle to understand why this gap cannot be bridged.

5. **Lack of time** and impatience with queries about administrative issues such as cancelled or changed appointments as well as a preoccupation with **financial constraints** and the feelings of vulnerability that accompany the above. There is then a tension between taking initiative about one's own life vs. allowing life to just happen and just fitting in what has to be done.

6. **Lack of resources** in many spheres and includes financial and human — Social Welfare and NGOs while on the other hand the **unforgiving nature** of many who pressurize and demand. There are opposing poles of those who are **over committed** and those who are **under committed.**

7. **Emphasis on the individual (me-ness)** and the drive to be part of the in-group which often leads to conflict, demonstrations and clashes.

8. **The new pressures of electronic media.** In the past processes took much longer with reports having to be done by hand and delivered for attention. Today instant answers are possible and often expected and demanded which leads to increased stress.

9. **Incompetence** in many areas of life which leads to frustration and even desperation about maintenance of acceptable standards of professionalism or work ethics. At times even minimum standards are not adhered to

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Theme 1
— **Lack is not 'lekker'** (lekker is an Afrikaans word which literally translated means — not nice). In short the preoccupations are around the lack of resources — time, finance, competence and power.

Theme 2
— **Big companies exploit good values for their own interest**
Individuals also exploit business in their own interest — examples Quoted — Jackie Selebi, Gerald Majola, those involved in Arms Deal. When employees feel exploited they feel 'faceless' and abuse their power by maintaining "It is not in my job description" and refuse to walk the extra mile and rather abdicate responsibility and work to the clock. On the other hand employees are often expected to do what they are not able to do and conform because of fear of loosing their work. In this way the culture of incompetence is reinforced and people are afraid to blow the whistle on what is happening. Currently there is an attempt to create a media blackout with new laws.

Theme 3
— **Fear leads to a lack of moral fibre** — subordinates fear loss of work while superiors fear lack of position or power. Group members were reminded of Churchill saying "all that is needed for evil to prosper is for good men to do nothing". It was felt that it is not about the badness of a few but the indifference of many. A pattern that is evident in this scenario is that while the powerful put pressure on the subordinates in order to survive, the subordinates at times 'shut down' to survive. This was likened to feeling like a bone in a pressure cooker and it was mentioned that bones which have been put in a pressure cooker become very porous and if they are coloured with paint they will remain that way forever.

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

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Hypothesis 1

Because of pressure, members in society have to self preserve resulting in less than optimal experience of a constrained self.

Hypothesis 2

Because of lack of resources members of society get disillusioned and then focus on basic survival needs vs. existential (being) needs. (Maslow's hierarchy of needs).

Hypothesis 3

The formation of corporations is a defense against powerlessness and poverty but has also led to greed which then leads to the creation of even bigger structures, even international monopolies, which have not alleviated poverty and in fact increased powerlessness in the very people the corporations claim to protect.

Hypothesis 4

The huge corporations reflect a need to protect the poor but because of the greed and the fact that these monster structures need to be sustained, this gobbles up resources which were intended to protect and become self serving.

Convener: Dr Lorna Brown