



South Africa at the dawn of 2018

Report of a Listening Post held in Port Elizabeth on 18 January 2018

PART 1: THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part, the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experiences in their various social roles, be they: in work, unemployed or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood, 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': the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

On this day the ANC, the ruling party in our country is voting for a new president of the ANC at their National Conference. As is probably well known, our country has experienced a few difficult years with an unpredictable president and allegations of corruption and state capture from inside and outside South Africa. There have been many calls for President Zuma to step down and although there has been open opposition to him within the ANC at the highest level, members have not supported the call for him to step down. The party is deeply divided and conflict is often heated and ends in court cases. Several court cases on the eve of this conference resulted in members from numerous branches being barred by the court to vote at the conference. This was as a result of correct procedures not having been followed in the run up to the conference. Approach to experiences of loneliness and social isolation that is projected on social networks where you want to be connected, but quality relationships are not generated.

Participants were: M, H, G, MA, AM and L.

M began the discussion by saying that she felt "heart sore" at the moment about the many children for whom there were no services. (Within the past few months the State Department has withdrawn subsidies to NGOs which has led to retrenchments and reduction of services in the NGO sector. In Port Elizabeth and elsewhere now, only the state department can deliver services for abused or neglected children and their record of service delivery is very low. M also pointed out though that it was impressive to see innovative methods undertaken by organizations to keep some services going.

G expressed distress at how people's lives are affected by these decisions and

his concern is for the children who are our future and that now there are no organizations looking after them. He mentioned attempts by the mental health NGO (on who's Board he sits) to speak to people in authority, but to no avail, despite repeated attempts and now taking the State to court appeared the last option available. The State itself does not offer the mental health services so the most vulnerable in our society will be affected.

MA spoke about Uviwe (previously known as Child Welfare or Childline) with whom he has had dealings in the past. These NGOs have had to hand over all their files to the Department. It took him 6 weeks to get a response regarding a child with a brain haemorrhage. It was difficult to say categorically that it was due to neglect but it required urgent investigation. Uviwe were powerless to do anything and to date he does not know what is happening.

M then mentioned that the Department made bursaries available for students to study Social Work but when they qualified the Department did not have money to pay 250 newly qualified Social Workers which led to the move to stop funding of NGOs. These inexperienced newly qualified Social Workers were also not equipped to do the work which was required.

L mentioned a mother and her 3 children who were referred by a police social worker and admitted to a Haven for Abused Women and Children. The social worker instructed that if the mother returned to her home, the children were not to go with her as there were suspicions of abuse. When the mother wanted to return home the Department was contacted regarding the placement of the children and the request was just not followed up.

G The organization referred to above was busy with a project to generate funds themselves but having lost their subsidy they are unable to continue with this project so it is a double blow to the organization.

L mentioned a conversation with a recently retrenched Social Worker who felt aggrieved that the Social Workers on the ground were the ones retrenched while the older more experienced staff remained. The concern was about who would now provide services "on the ground".

H mentioned a competent person who took up a new position at a NGO in another nearby city and was there for only 3 months. (It reminded one about the Esidiemeni tragedy in the health department where more than 150 mentally handicapped people lost their lives when they were transferred from accredited facilities of care to NGO's which proved totally unable to feed and / or care for them resulting in death.)

M talked about how enthusiasm of star studded students became eroded and led to disillusionment. There were not enough cars to do home visits so 4 Social Workers would travel together and be dropped off individually in the community to see clients. In a very short time the car would return and hooting indicated that the Social Worker had to return whether or not the work had been completed. Social Workers earned the same salary in some NGOs as in the

department but they worked much harder in the NGO, however in many NGOs they earned less. They often chose the route of “non service delivery” in order to work in the department.

H spoke about a deep seated mentality which is prevalent and may have to do with the bursaries for 1st year students who enter Social Work with no idea about doing anything for anyone else. The problem is multi faceted and layered. She has been trying to contact an official in Bisho (the local seat of Provincial Government) to do some work in the Department regarding strategies. Despite being on first name terms with an official with some standing, and numerous attempts, she has not been able to have a conversation with the relevant person.

G is also involved with a “land empowerment” process between a farmer and his workers. The workers would not talk to G because he is a white male and fear he will support the farmer. The farmer in turn is unable to see his patriarchy and what is required to make empowerment work. Both groups were suspicious of each other and had used various power options to resolve the dispute in their favour, so lawyers by the farmer and an NGO who does “protest action” for hire allegedly to mobilise their power base were used. To no avail, it simply escalated the conflict.

M added to this but suggesting that students who start out energetic take a lead from their colleagues and superiors and get contaminated.

G then added a positive experience he had when working at Collegiate (a local successful girls’ high school which is 2/3 white but with a significant number of black girls now attending both as day girls and boarders). He worked with different groups, a Transformation Task Team (TTT - consisting of 22 persons, 11 of which were parent volunteers, 3 pupils / learners, 3 educators and 3 persons from the School Governing Body/SGB). There were 2 dominant mind sets – the white mindset was to prevent debt and not disrupt the establishment. A “black” mindset considered themselves oppressed by the system. The Black parents prepared for their demonstration with well made placards and stuck to the time boundary of 20 minutes. Their demands included rewriting the disciplinary code and building in matters regarding conciliation and discrimination. It emerged during the process that neither white nor black students were comfortable “in their own skin” and “race” but that race was a useful platform off which to mobilise discontent. Some teachers and parents protested that all knew the rules before admission so what the necessity to change them after arrival? Dialogue was very successfully used within the TTT process, but engagements with the SGB followed a very formalised presentation process, which led more to confrontation than engagement. There was a “white” inability to see that any form of prejudice existed and focussed more on seeing that the educational standard did not decline through the increased bad debt. Another problem was that 95% of the teachers were White. Black teachers are not applying for positions. The Chairman of the Governing Body was a labour lawyer who wanted some focus on research which could be seen as an escape from dealing with what was really happening. There was a white inability to see that any prejudice

existed and focussed more on seeing that the educational standard did not decline. Teachers in the township schools and other schools are paid the same but those at Township schools they go home at the end of the school day while those in other schools have after-hours functions.

At a Township School (which is situated alongside upmarket suburbs) pupils go home at 13h00 and if asked what they are going to do they make claims such as going to fetch their ID. The rugby field is unable to be used as the mower is broken. An area paved for pupils to use for play is unusable due to weeds. A community centre constructed for youth remained unused for years as there was no manager. This building has a lift to the first floor and it is hard to understand how this expense was justified or what the purpose of the lift is.

Fields near by which have recently been fenced, grassed are being well maintained, are being used by children and adults over the weekends but while this grass is suitable for soccer it is not suitable for rugby.

MA then spoke about the difference between resources available at schools such as Collegiate and township schools and what could be done to make a difference. Management seemed a crucial skill as well as preservation of education which promoted competence in pupils in order to be able to facilitate a well managed process. Creative ways also need to be found to educate regarding values.

L referred to the fact that the values of caring, pride in work and honesty seem to be lacking in several professions as evidenced in what was said above regarding some Social Workers and Teachers but this goes further. Traumatic experiences by her and husband recently at a private hospital were spoken about and the lack of taking responsibility, showing care and concern seemed largely missing and verged on negligence and abuse.

G spoke crime and the murder rate (as an indicator of crime) and how the perception existed that the main problem area in NMB was the Northern Areas (mainly people of mixed race) but that according to the statistics, two adjoining "township" areas had higher incidents of murder on average over a ten year period. These statistics make one think about the value placed on life presently and the question posed was about how to develop a sense of responsibility in people. A link may be found in economies of the past where people were producers and consumers but today we are largely consumers who purchase what others have produced and we have lost the value of producing.

M then spoke about teambuilding leading to positive attitudes in the workplace and students then wanting to be part of such an organization but the positive attitude did not last when they encountered obstacles in their work.

H reflected on the "honour of the organization" previously being important as well as having many checks and balances and dead-lines which had to be met in order to ensure accountability towards customers of the welfare system. If these criteria were not met then for example the grant would not be paid out.

H also spoke about working with an academic department around race and an interaction with a student who challenged H regarding a comment made : “you saying the other has a better view” – H clarified “no – a different view as you, a man of mixed race would have”. This was “too much for the student”.

At this stage in the discussions the group took a break to watch and hear the result of the ANC voting and have refreshments.

M began by speaking about the newly announced “free education” for students. (This announcement was made by President Zuma on the eve of the conference despite his Finance Minister having asked him to wait until February and it would seem few, if any in his executive knowing in advance about his decision). It was wondered what was to happen now.

G commented that the students did not trust what has happened.

H referred to a comment made about Zuma handing Cyril Ramaphosa (the newly elected President of the ANC) a “poisoned chalice” and that President Zuma had sinister motives by making the announcement now.

G commented that it was like an old man establishing a legacy to leave behind. It was, after all, his son-in-law’s proposal and the finance minister’s comment to the proposal was to take it as a suggestion. It will be hard for Cyril Ramaphosa to now say “no”.

H pointed out that the new budget starts in April but students go back in February

M said that student grants only get paid out in April so February till March are lean months for students. There will be much less control with the suggested system as the money will be handed out to them. Up till now they were given a card for purchase of food and stationery etc. It is known that often food purchased goes home to family members.

G seeking positive aspects of his experience talked about being involved as a hobby with the anti nuclear protests about the construction of a nuclear power station at Koeberg and the process has been delayed while court cases take place. With the new ANC chairman there is a likelihood that the power station will not happen.

AM was involved with nuclear medicine and at the time that Koeberg was built there was supposed to be an exclusion zone where no building could take place. This did not happen and in the event of an emergency there would have to be total shut down which would create chaos.

G added that this was thought to be a done deal and Eskom put a huge amount of money into the project for a new power station.

AM Zuma has contaminated the whole system and now he is about to go.

G then referred to Zuma as a symptom – the malaise was throughout society. People do not care and are more concerned about the money involved.

(thinking about pros and cons)

H saw Zuma as both the product and the cause. He was brought to this place. There are bigger forces and people at a political level. She then spoke about a personal experience and her own resentment which prompted her to want to be dishonest.

AM Others steal in different ways by not working, buying a pension payout and this is what children are growing up with.

G we resist when we see something unfair and corruption is both a way of protest and self enrichment.

M then spoke to a phrase which was going around in his head “state capture leads to mental state capture”.

H despite knowing something is wrong self protest is seen as justified. If she could have found a crooked lawyer she would have felt justified in getting herself off the hook.

L following up on the state / mind capture remark, the energy goes into the political fight and there is no energy left for governing.

M another play on words (thinking about pros and cons) “protest” seen as potentially positive while “contest” seen as potentially conflicted

G when both parties feel that they have no chance of winning they protest

M Protests against nuclear power are positive and worked

H protests can be productive when there is injustice. Political wars are a contest between unjust parties. Because of corruption charges between parties there was no energy to focus on good governance to be done and the battle so fierce that service delivery suffered.

L in the address by President Zuma at the start of the conference he slated people who ran to the courts instead engaging and discussing issues but it was precisely because people were not heard or listened to that they ran to the courts

G confirmed that many protests arose because people felt that their causes and issues were not heard or attended to. He also felt that people did not know how to reflect. Black people suffered from feelings of inferiority while what people suffered from feelings of superiority and both ended up feeling like imposters.

Some questions then arose about how we get a country to reflect or go for therapy and it was suggested that people go for therapy only when the pain

becomes too much.

H referred to Peter Block who writes about the “unit of change being the small group”. There is a potential to do something different in a small group. In the Collegiate story work was done in small groups and the work then continues within the individual. Mention was made of the CS Lewis comment “Isn’t it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back everything is different?”

L spoke about the many changes in thinking and language which took place pre 1994 in preparation for the new democracy. How we thought about the women and men who worked in our homes and gardens and how we treated them even to the words which had been used at one time like “girl” and “boy” and behaviours such as the domestic worker doing the cooking and looking after children but not permitting her to use the inside toilet as an example. Today much of this has changed and it has made a difference to relationships and in a few circles the old ways prevail.

M spoke about an experience her daughter had when working in Israel as a domestic. Not only was she not permitted to use the inside toilet but there was no provision for her to go elsewhere and she had to resort to using the bush outside. When she left this family she packed all the un-ironed clothing in a cupboard and then locked it before she walked away. This mirrors much of what has been recorded above.

MA looked up a biblical reference in James 2:14-17 which refers to “Faith without works is dead”. This passage also captures something of our reflections above and feelings of helplessness which can be helped by reflecting on experiences which enables the work which is needed to change behaviour.

PART 2: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

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

Theme 1: Mirroring

How sub systems mirror or reflect what happens in the broader context and with authority

The desire or need to take revenge by corruption or criminal behaviour when one feels deprived or taken advantage of or treated unfairly

Theme 2: Energy invested in self enrichment of the political elite and the games of politics as the reason for existence but leaving no energy for accountable governance

Prevalence of corruption mentioned above and the conflict between factions which end up in court battles and enquiries while service delivery is almost non-existent.

Groups and issues not listened to or attended to which leads to protests and

conflict while the real issues are not resolved or attended to.

The many people who died because there was “no money” to keep them in registered places of care and moved to unregistered NGO’s where they died.

Little or no responsibility is taken for crises or tragedies – blame is always laid elsewhere

Theme 3: How does one get society to reflect and change although nothing seems to change but when they look back nothing is the same

This links with the fact that so much time is taken to deal with wheeling and dealing as well as putting out the fires caused by challenges and court cases that there has thus far not been time to reflect, develop more knowledge of what is happening and deal with how governance can be different

Theme 4: The small group is the unit of change

The work done at Collegiate School for Girls and protests against the Nuclear power station development

Theme 5: James 2: 14-17

Words and actions are incongruent – what is said does not happen and the words cannot be trusted

Theme 6: Dehumanizing by the dominant group and the need by the victims to use perverse methods to regain their own authority

The member’s daughter who worked in Israel

The member who felt abused by the system that she wanted to use dishonest means to respond

The systems within government and elsewhere in society which follow the example of the leaders

Theme 7: Neglect of vulnerable

No services for abused children and children in need of care

The treatment of mentally ill patients who were moved

Removal of grants from NGOs while the state cannot deliver the same services

The attitude of people in positions of authority such as nurses, teachers and social workers

Theme 8: Neglect of the “saviour” function of education

Attitude of teachers and others in helping professions as well as general lack of

responsibility, laziness and insufficient care for those receiving the service

PART 3: ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In Part 3, the participants were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, 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, participants 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 1:

General lack of organizational principles in government and other organizations. How state capture and all that is involved and trying to deal with it, confront it, manage it and challenge it feels overwhelming and robs us all of the energy to focus on the real issues. The insight that state capture robs us of our ability to think, the energy to reflect, or ability to change

Hypothesis 1:

Unless there are strong principles and values (such as faith, honesty, commitment and principled leadership) around which to mobilise, organize, and manage important matters (i.e., works) the sense of "farting against thunder" will be overwhelming resulting in a captured mental state which in the South African context reflects in a state of capture.

Hypothesis 2: (positive slant)

When there are strong principles and values (such as faith, honesty, commitment and principled leadership) which mobilise, organize, and manage important matters (i.e., works) the sense of achievement will be overwhelming resulting in a freed mental state which in the South African context will hopefully reflect in a state of freedom.

Hypothesis 3:

Mobilising change has to be underpinned and partnered by what endures, such as principles, values and faith (be it in a deity or simply in "goodness"). Any civic call to action, any leadership initiative risks being seen as "farting against thunder" if not sufficiently grounded, and consequently runs the risk of a "captured" state of mind at individual, institutional and societal level.

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