



Youth Voices for Social Change in Maila Mapitsane

An initiative of Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation
2013 – 2014



**Mensen
met een
Missie**



Foreword from the Executive Director of ESSET



Nomasonto Magwaza

The aim of this pamphlet is to give voice to the youth of Maila Mapitsane on the socio-economic and political challenges faced by their community, including poverty, unemployment, weak democracy, unresponsive government and political corruption – patronage and nepotism –, etc. The pamphlet contains a collection of short and pungent personal stories in furtherance of an initiative started by Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) in 2013 to promote solidarity and collective action in poor working class communities through collective story-telling and demand-making. The initiative has been generously funded by Mensen met een Missie (MMM).

The Maila Mapitsane community is located in Ward 15 of the Makhuduthamaga local municipality. The municipality falls within the Sekhukhune district of the Limpopo province of South Africa. As of 2011, the municipality is 94% rural, its population size is 274 358 and it comprises 189 settlements and 65 217 households (Makhuduthamaga IDP review, 2014). The municipality has a youthful population with the majority of its residents being under 34 years of age (Makhuduthamaga IDP review, 2014). Shockingly, the number of female headed households in the municipality increased from 30 932 in 1996 to 39 217 in 2011 (Makhuduthamaga IDP review, 2014). The increase could be attributed to, inter alia, the migrant labour phenomenon, in terms of which men migrate to the cities to look for work. Moreover, average household income per month is R4 000.00 and no income was recorded for 121 946 individuals, 2011 (Makhuduthamaga IDP review, 2014), pointing to the extent of the unemployment problem in the municipality. It accounted, for example, for the highest unemployment rate (67.7%) at a municipal level in the second quarter of 2013¹. According to the current ward councillor, Ms MM Mashilo, approximately 7000 people are currently living in Maila Mapitsane (Mashilo, personal communication, 14 April 2015). She observed that nearly half of the community's population is unemployed (Mashilo, personal communication, 14 April 2015). Moreover, the community

¹Berkowitz, P., 2013. SA's unemployment rates rise to near-record levels. Available on: <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-08-02-sas-unemployment-rates-rise-to-near-record-levels/#.VS0AOCwfpY0> (Accessed 14 April 2015).

lacks paved roads and adequate water and sanitation facilities (Makhuduthamaga IDP review, 2014), amongst other.

ESSET has been providing capacity-building, advocacy and solidarity support to young people in the community through the Dimatane Community Development Organization, which was formed to serve as an organized voice for social change in the community, for the past seven years. Our interventions have mobilized the community to collectively strive for social and economic change. This is evidenced by a march staged in 2012 by 400 people to submit the community's demands for water, roads, health facilities and local economic development. In response, the then ward councillor, Ms Alleta Phokane, undertook to explore ways of mobilizing financial resources for development in the community. In addition, the South African Human Rights Commission conducted an independent investigation of the social and economic challenges faced by the community. Moreover, in 2014, we provided writing skills training to young people in the community. It is envisaged that they will deploy these skills in community-based activism. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the authors of the personal stories presented in this pamphlet participated in the writing skills training.

Thus the support that we are providing to the youth of Maila Mapitsane holds the potential to engender active citizenship for social change among young people in the community. This is an important intervention in a context in which young people in poor communities have generally become disillusioned with the government's ability to address their socioeconomic problems. Accordingly, many of them have lost hope for their future. Moreover, given that young people generally constitute the dominant force in community protests, our interventions can have the effect of combining their conflictual political actions with engagements that yield inclusive solutions to the socioeconomic problems of their communities.

Finally, over the next three years, our interventions will be aimed at increasing the community's influence in decision-making on the development plans of the Makhuduthamaga local municipality, and at mobilizing young women and men to take an active stance against gender-based violence in the community.

Foreword from ESSET's Community-driven Development programme officer



Mandla Mdebele

During ESSET's activities in Maila Mapitsane, the need for access to information about the service delivery programmes of the municipality is frequently being raised. The participants, mainly young people, stridently bemoan the lack of basic social services in the community such as clean water, road infrastructure and public health clinics.

They accuse their political leaders of making empty election promises to members of the community concerning improvements in their social and economic conditions. Many of them feel that because they are members of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and the African National Congress (ANC) their needs deserve more attention from the ANC-led Makhuduthamaga local municipality.

The above and a litany of other issues were raised at ESSET's writing skills workshop held in Maila Mapitsane in 2014. Some of them are being articulated in this pamphlet by some of the young people who participated in the workshop.

Finally, ESSET will continue to support the community in its efforts to seek accountability, and to demand social change. We are particularly inspired by the formation of the "Communities United in Action" forum by young people from Maila Mapitsane and the five adjacent villages. The forum serves as a mobilizing vehicle for engaging the local municipality on the social and economic needs of the six rural communities.

The politicians do not care about the community!



Molamo Ngwaketsi Esseu

Community members in Maila Mapitsane were actively involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. Regular political meetings were held in Dipping section, which is surrounded by two rivers with no proper bridge that crosses over the rivers. However, the community became despondent after 1994 over the lack of basic social services and unemployment in Maila. Their despondency gave rise to Dimatane, a community-based organisation that was formed to engage with our ward councillor in the Makhuduthamaga municipality on the community's socioeconomic needs, including roads, water, health services, electricity and jobs.

On 18 July 2014, the newly elected Mayor ordered the destruction of a bridge that was manually constructed by members of the community due to the municipality's failure to provide sufficient road and bridges infrastructure. The Mayor promised to build a new bridge within a day, but he failed to do this. Strangely, the municipality's road roller disappeared during the destruction of the bridge.



Community members build a bridge

After the destruction of the bridge, Dimatane organized a march to the municipality to submit a memorandum to the Mayor detailing the community's concerns over the lack of basic social services and the loss of the road roller.

The community also demanded that the municipality builds a road from Schonoord-Mashite to Maila, however, the municipality defied the wishes of the community, and decided that the road will be built in Malaeneng.

In the memorandum, we indicated that while the provision of water services has improved, the community is still experiencing water scarcity from time to time. Regarding health services, the community has to travel long distances to the nearest clinic to access health care. We demanded that a clinic be built in Maila, but, instead of upholding our right to health care, the municipality referred us to the Department of Health. Regarding electricity, we demanded that the municipality provides 171 units of electricity to residents in the Malaeneng section of Maila. This was, however, never done. We are also experiencing frequent power outages caused by excessive rain and wind.



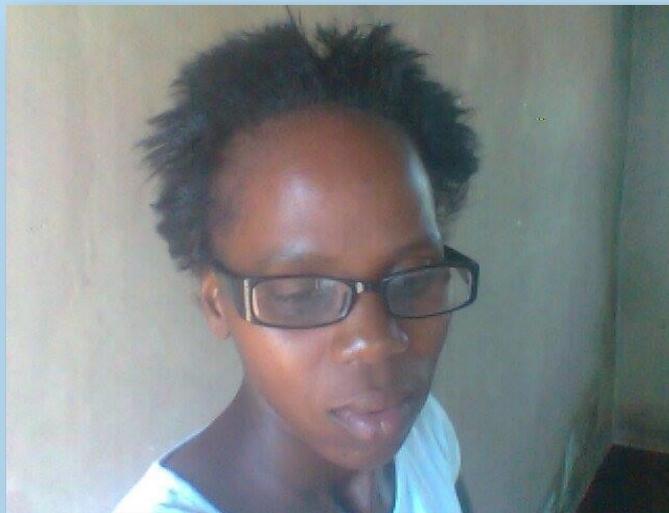
Community members explore solutions to address their problems

Unemployment is a big problem in our community. Close to 90% of those living in Maila are unemployed. We are mainly relying on the municipality and the retail stores in our small shopping complex for jobs. However, our village is very far from the municipal offices and the shopping complex. This distance directly contributes to unemployment in

Maila. Our political leaders, especially from the ruling party, are pursuing their own selfish interests using the community. They are promising the youth jobs and learnerships in exchange for their political support. Incompetent people end up being employed, while those with appropriate qualifications are being ignored. Meanwhile, learnerships are being dished out to the brothers and sisters of the politicians.

The municipality is failing the community of Maila. We are not being consulted; otherwise, the road would not have been built in Manganeng. Those in power are doing as they please, and do not care about the common good of the community! The needs of the community will only be addressed, if the greedy politicians are voted out of office.

Our political leaders need to respond to the community's needs



Winnie Mabowa

It was an exciting time for me because it was my first time to vote. Poor service delivery discourages many people to vote. However, not voting is not a good idea, because, as citizens, we do not vote for a person, but for a political party.

Now that the political leaders have seen how our people are suffering I think they will start to address the community's unmet socioeconomic needs. We do not want to see unfinished projects anymore, and the last thing we need is corruption and nepotism. We need to ensure that every community project is completed in time, and that the expected results are achieved. This will teach those who do shoddy work to improve the quality of their services.



An incomplete bridge and road project

How teenage pregnancy is ruining the lives of young women in Maila



Vinolia Maila

Teenage pregnancy is a very serious problem in our community. Young girls are falling pregnant at a very early age. This is because most of the young girls in Maila and the surrounding villages do not use contraceptives. They also do not use condoms when engaging in sexual intercourse. Their disinterest in condom use is based on the myth that 'one cannot eat sweets while they are still rapped with plastics or papers'. Most girls drop out of school after falling pregnant, and they do not want to return after giving birth. Teenage pregnancy thus contributes to high unemployment, poverty, HIV and AIDS and crime in Maila. Early motherhood and youth unemployment have caused many teenagers in our community to lose hope for their future and to give up on life.



Unemployed youth are socializing

Freedom and democracy are hollow without socio-economic change



Glanda Mamaro

On 18 September 2012, the mayor of the Makhuduthamaga municipality, Mr Alfred Matlala, promised at an event held at Moleshatlou in Mailia that the municipality will build a bridge in Mokadi section. However, the bridge was never built! The river that runs through the Mokadi section of Maila usually floods when it rains and, as a result, children are unable to go to school.



A bridge is flooded and destroyed

How can we, as the community of Maila, celebrate 20 years of freedom and democracy when we live under harsh socioeconomic conditions?

The ANC has and continues to promise us a better life for all. But, for how long do we have to suffer before we will achieve a better life for all?

Perhaps it is time that we use our votes as a way to punish those in power for making endless empty promises to our community.

We need more than slogans to solve poverty and economic misery



Olly Marabele

I live in Manganeng, a village in the Makhuduthamaga municipality. The total population of the municipality is 274 154 people, and the size of the youth population is 42 324. In

Manganeng, 30 932 people, mainly youth, are unemployment. Our main sources of income are social grants and the government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). However, EPWP projects provide only short-term employment, the earnings are very low, and very few among the unemployed in the community are benefitting from these projects.

Because of the high level of unemployment crime is rife in the community, including house-breaking, robbery, fraud, substance abuse, the sale of illicit goods and statutory rape. We are also experiencing high rates of teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, and unprotected sex. As a result of the latter, Sexually Transmitted and HIV and AIDS infections have been increasing in the community.

We need job opportunities that will enable us to sustain our livelihoods. The municipality should stop using the services of labour brokers and, instead, directly employ community members for municipal jobs such as for the construction and maintenance of roads in the different villages. Moreover, it has to employ qualified people for its service provision programmes.

Our community needs to develop a collective response to unemployment. Let us not be swayed by the slogans of political parties. Let us use our access to land to free ourselves from poverty and economic misery. To do this, we need skills training and financial assistance for agricultural projects.

Social change can't happen without activism

Tshepo Mashilo

In my community, service provision has to be improved. During rainy days, the roads are usually flooded preventing members of the community from going to work and school. We also lack health facilities. We have a hospital but it is very far. We therefore need a clinic in the village. Moreover, the government should do more to address the housing needs of our community.

Crime poses a serious threat to community development in Maila. Computers that are delivered to schools are often stolen within three days after their arrival. Crime thus harms teaching and learning in the community. In addition, the use of drugs in our community has a negative effect on people's ability to sustain their livelihoods.

The above-mentioned socioeconomic problems will not be addressed without community-based activism. We should not wait on the councillor and the municipality to act. Constant engagement with them is needed to ensure that service provision is improved in Maila.



About ESSET

ESSET is a faith based organisation that advocates for social justice through solidarity, capacity building and advocacy support to the poor and vulnerable social groups. It also conducts participatory research on socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the poor and vulnerable social groups whose everyday life experiences and struggles inform its theology.

ESSET has the following three programmes:

1. Theology and Social Justice

Through this programme, ESSET provides capacity-building support to church leaders and ecumenical activists in three provinces South Africa including Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Limpopo. The objective of the programme is to bring church leaders, church organizations and ecumenical activists into solidarity with the struggles of workers, poor communities and vulnerable social groups.

2. Community-driven Development

Through this programme, ESSET provides capacity-building, advocacy and lobbying support to two poor communities, namely, Maila Mapitsane in the Limpopo Province and Duncan village in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The objective of the programme is to increase community participation in local governance, support struggles for social change in poor communities, and to mobilize men and women against gender-based violence.

3. Informal Trade

Through this programme, ESSET provides capacity-building, research, advocacy and lobbying support to informal traders in five SADC countries, namely, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia. The objective of the programme is to improve the livelihoods of informal traders, especially female informal traders, and to increase political consciousness concerning the intersection of gender, class and racial inequalities among informal traders.

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