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Dale: Okay it is the 23rd of February 2010 and this is Dale McKinley and I am interviewing Silumko Radebe. Silumko, just for the record can you just state your full name?

Silumko: The name is Silumko Khethokuhle Einstein Radebe.

Dale: Okay Silumko, just before you start talking and I ask you a few questions specifically about the APF and its history, I just want to know a little bit about yourself, I am asking everybody this. Where and when were you born?

Silumko: I was born on the 22nd of January 1979 in Soweto.

Dale: And have you lived in Soweto all your life or have you lived other places?

Silumko: I've been in Soweto all my life.

Dale: Your whole life. Okay just tell us a little bit about your family. Do you have brothers, sisters are you married do you have children?

Silumko: Okay, I only have one boy who is two years, two months and I don't have any brothers or sisters. Raised by a single parent and I am the only child.

Dale: Okay and schooling. Just tell us how far did you go, how far had you gone in school?

Silumko: Completed my matric in '96, went on to my sports admin at Wits but did not complete it and post- matric it has just been short courses that I have done.

Dale: Okay and also just in terms of work or jobs that you have held?

Silumko: Starting right after, immediately after matric trying to raise some money so that I could actually go and do my diploma. Started to work at Shoprite Checkers in Mayfair for quite a while as a cashier then went on to be a supervisor, but left it. Went on to work at a call centre for about two years or so in Randburg and doing debt collecting and immediately after that I think I went to Wits University to work with the ERP (Education Rights Project) for about a year and then moved onto the APF in 2006 April.

Dale: 2006. Okay and just give us a brief description of how you became politicised, how did you enter into becoming an activist?

Silumko: I think it all started back at school with the student movements [which were] quite active and immediately I think after school ... working at Shoprite. And also there I was also quite active and it all changed you know from my material conditions whereby around I think especially issues of basic services. You know we had electricity cut off at home and I think it was my task since my mother wasn't working by then. Nobody was working at home so you know you had the responsibility of making sure

that you do get to connect the electricity and I think it was in and around 1999. Around then when we got our electricity disconnected and immediately if you could get a few rand's you go into Eskom to make a few arrangements and you pay them and immediately after doing that you will get disconnected if you skip a month or two. So after some time I decided to tell my mom 'no, this time we don't have to continue paying them'. We organised some guys who could reconnect and then that is where I started looking at issues of saying well it doesn't help if you continue to pay, you skip a month or two they disconnect and so forth. And herself, I think by then she had started changing you know, community meetings and I think through her involvement as well it had quite a lot of influence because most of the time she is away in community meetings but not only now focusing in Pimville where we are staying but she went to other townships as well where things were also happening and I think through her involvement I also started becoming quite aware of issues which were supposed to be taking place. So I think since from 1999 I have been quite involved with Pimville where I was staying and it started slowly for myself I think right up until World Conference Against Racism and WSSD in 2000. I think in 2000 I was quite involved within the SECC as one of my affiliate but wasn't full time active within it given the fact that I was also employed and working. So if weekends I am not working then I go and participate and so forth right up until I started with the Education Rights Project. That is where I think I started being active quite a lot and grappling with the issues of what was happening within South Africa and globally as well.

Dale: Alright and try to describe just a little bit in terms of how you became specifically interested in or paid interest in issues of privatisation in particular?

Silumko: Mainly I think through my involvement within SECC [Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee] you could see there was a much more bigger challenge. You know to see if government promises that it is going to deliver basic services to our communities and they are doing it as they said they have to privatise the whole entities that they have making sure that people do get services. But the question was, the promises that they made back in '94 saying "you're going to get free housing and so forth" and you could see the entities are privatised - it wasn't going to be possible for our government to render the services to the people and it became an issue to say well if we are just going to continue stopping Eskom from disconnecting or any other services which we are supposed to be getting for free. Well it has to be a bigger role that we need to play, you know we can stop them through actions in the street and so forth, but I mean if the deals and they still have also the law in place to say they can go ahead and privatise then we are fighting a futile journey. We need to make sure we change all of those and it was a issue for me to say well not only does it disturb not only my personal life but it also gives the government control on how I have to live as a person, how to use your electricity, how to use your water, how to use all the other services. So it became an issue of saying well as much as we are saying we are politically free but there is a way that they can be able to control a life. And there was one thing to say this was not just only benefiting them - we are making sure there are certain individuals getting profits - but it is also a disturbance to my personal life as well.

Dale: Okay, now you have already mentioned that you started becoming involved in the Soweto Electricity Crises Committee from the time it formed in '99/2000 right? So just tell us a little bit about how that translated into your involvement initially with the APF?

Silumko: Normally what would happen is that there will be struggles taking place in other communities from Soweto and attending meetings with the Electricity Crises Committee. You have to maybe be delegated to other meetings that were taking place, APF Regional meetings, APF sub committee meetings and you will find that you have been tasked from your affiliate to say please go and represent us in that meeting, bring back information or whatever has been discussed. And these are the issues you need to take forward to the meeting and so forth and I think that is when I started attending some of the meetings. But myself I was involved with the Education Sub Committee so those were the meetings that I have been tasked to attend within SECC and I think that is when I started coming to these meetings as well.

Dale: And when you had that first engagement with communities that were part of the APF and activists that were part of the APF; from your knowledge or recollection what organisations and other communities and political groupings do you remember being part of the APF at that point and time?

Silumko: Ja I think there was the Evaton West, there was Mandellaville before they moved it to DRD which was still here in Diepkloof, there was Orange Farm Water Crisis Committee and there were comrades from Soshanguve in Pretoria, there was comrades from Kathrorus, Katlehong the whole KCR and there was the DPRA, there were comrades from Tembisa and quite a lot from the Vaal and Sebokeng, KwaMasiza and I think those were mainly the regions which were there. And political groupings - there was a Socialist Group but I think it was quite underground, there was Keep Left, there was DSM. I think those are the ones that I can remember.

Dale: ... tell us what you remember about some of the main events, activities at that time period when you joined the APF; that the APF was involved in and engaging in?

Silumko: I think the main struggles that were taking place were around issues of electricity. It was quite active in terms of now the APF has a movement taking that struggle forward. Issues around quite a lot of evictions in places like in the East Rand where the APF was quite active and I think the main one was also in the Vaal in KwaMasiza where they managed to stop the evictions taking place people being evicted from the hostel. And at that time it was the start or it was the issues of the Soweto struggle around water I think around late 2002 to 2003. Those are the major campaigns that the APF were dealing with within communities and it was just after the period you know of the World Conference against Racism and also the WSSD. I think those were one of the major activities taken by the APF. But I think also these meetings that were taking place coordinating committee meeting, your original meetings and it was sort of a, how can I describe it? You would feel you know attending these meetings that there is lots of unity there, there is lots of comrades willing to struggle and resist the implementation of privatisation by the South African Government and the mood I think within the meetings was that of fighting and struggling for the poor. It's a picture that will always remain there; the

singing together and the coming together of the comrades sort of keeps you lifted to say we will have to go back within the communities and do more, to support our cause and the struggle as a movement.

Dale: Now at that time you were fairly young ... just tell us a bit about as far as you remember the makeup of the APF with regard to the youth, pensioners and...who belonged to the APF who was struggling?

Silumko: I think you know mainly with my affiliate from Soweto attending these meetings it was old people in the meetings itself and that is why there were quite a few of us who were young - that was the youth - but mainly the focus was just on education struggles and these are the struggles taking place. And going to the APF there was that mixture that sort of balance within the different age groups but mainly I would say the majority that were there were fairly old people and quite a lot were in their middle age and not so much with the youth; it was there but not so much.

Dale: Okay and you mentioned the World Conference against Racism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development; did you participate in activities around those events?

Silumko: Mainly it was meetings like within SECC and the discussions but within the APF itself no.

Dale: You didn't go on the WSSD march?

Silumko: I did go on the WSSD march.

Dale: You did?

Silumko: Ja

Dale: Just tell us what that was like for you at the time.

Silumko: I think attending the meetings within the week especially at the SECC there was that hype to say well this is going to be something big, something major and even though we are not going to be able to go within Sandton but the feeling we are going to make a mark even decisions are taken on our behalf it was going to make the mark and attending it especially the first time. Seeing a lot of people out there in the streets and everybody joining in singing and most of the international people also being part of that I think it was electrifying at the same time exciting to say our voices are also going to be heard outside your original movements which were there. And I think knowing that this is something which has been going on for quite a long time but to see so many people being mobilised to be part of that anti privatisation march, anti WSSD march I think it was quite exciting and it's a memory that someone will carry on for quite a long time and I think it brought some excitement to say hang on we are on something new here and something is going to develop. Unlike being within your affiliate where you think it's only us and a very few people who have similar sort of outlook to things and how things should be, it is quite a well, bigger number and a bigger network that was quite exciting.

Dale: And when you came and you were attending the meetings you started becoming more involved in the APF. How did you understand what the APF was about? In other words what was it hoping to achieve and what did you understand was its strategic vision ...?

Silumko: For me I think mainly the main objective issue was to roll back on the issues of privatisation but within some of the debates that were taking place within the organisation and the movement itself was that its fighting for socialism and the space that we are actually utilising, to come together will sort of come up with footprints to forming a conversation of the poor whereby it can become a political organisation that is going to challenge and contest sort of the struggles of the poor. And from there I think a vision its to say that its only the beginning when it gets more exposure and more people understand that the APF is an organisation that is fighting for the poor and perhaps when time goes by they can become a political sort of organisation and that is sort of how I understood it at the beginning to say.

Dale: Okay and just concentrating on those early years when you were part of the APF - before your formal employment by the APF when you were an activist in the APF as a member of the Soweto Electricity Crises Committee - how did you experience at that point the response of the ANC and the State to what the APF was doing and its initial successes?

Silumko: Ja connecting it back to the activities that we were doing within our communities, issues of connecting peoples' electricity. You would sort of get a sense you know that you are doing something which is illegal but becoming much clearer and more involved. That is when you go out into communities and start to connect and you will find that even neighbours don't want you to come during the day so that the neighbours couldn't see that you were connecting electricity for them. And that in itself gave you a sense that hang on maybe we are doing something illegal. And the response from the state as well was that these are *izinyoka* [snakes], people that are connecting electricity illegally and it also responded very negatively to movements like the APF. You know to say well this is just a bunch of disgruntled ex political members who are going around communities influencing people, taking peoples' misery and utilising it for their own benefit, for their own political careers naming people like John Appolis who was expelled from CEPPAWU; Trevor being an ex ANC Councillor and now who is now doing his own thing and Dale McKinley ex-SACP; you know those are just some disgruntled few members and I think it gave it that feeling of saying well this is a non starter, you know something that is going to be shut quite immediately and we met with the force or the brutality that it deserved and it was a negative response to say this is what is happening. And I think what made me to say - well it wasn't just about you know a few individuals - it was that I came here not knowing so much. I mean other communities which are there that are struggling on similar issues that brought me forward to the APF and I think it's much more modern. These individuals which are there but the needs of our communities and I think well the government didn't tolerate some of the issues that were even raised around basic services and kept on blaming it on organisations like the APF and other ones which were there LPM (Landless People's Movement) so forth. To say these people are misleading the nation in taking these issues forward and I think that was the sort of response that was coming from the government. These are just

the ultra left, anti revolutionary people who are not on a mission to pursue the revolution and I think they were just sidetracking people and so forth. It was an issue to say government needs to look at all the demands which have been put forward and sort of like responding in a negative way and to remember by then Mbeki I think had just started his term as the President of the country. Groupings such as the APF and so forth were issues which were quite minor to him and issues of service delivery those were maybe on his agenda but not quite immediately. You know he needed to push forward his African dream his vision of Nepad and so forth in that sense I think other movements were part of the ANC and the alliance also had that negative outlook towards the APF. And you would hear with some of the response that was coming from COSATU coming from the SACP as well is that these are ultra leftists and they are on the course of the NDR and they are pursuing NDR and groupings such as the APF would make sure that you get some political guidance you know from COSATU and SACP. And I think they didn't that look to say that pressure movements like social movements like the APF and so forth, there is a space that we are contesting and to say that peoples issues need to be put first and I think with time all that changed from what has happened from '99 until now 2010 - how the whole government looked or perceived movement like the APF from being third force instigators within the communities but I think the government generally had a negative outlook towards us.

Dale: Okay and on the other side of the picture what was, again sort of in the early years the response of - from your experience - of the poor, the working class not necessarily just those communities that were belonging to the APF but outside of that as well to some of the activities and politics of the APF?

Silumko: Ja, I think it all depended on how the APF was sort of relating to its affiliates and the community at large. As much as people who are still on that high on the rainbow nation dream because those realities were beginning to bite in to say we don't have water, we don't have sanitation we don't have electricity, the kids can't actually go to school. I mean those were the politics that the APF was pushing to the people and people I think in the early years responded positively to say well us too, we do think these issues are quite important to us and quite a lot of them were receptive of a movement like the APF. Looking at the numbers of people who turned out to be part of the APF so many cadres or comrades who were part of the APF in the beginning and that gave you a sort of positive sort of outlook to say well people are listening, people are quite sympathetic but when they are still remaining quite loyal to the ANC and so forth. And at times I think it will also be quite difficult to go to other communities outside the APF and try to mobilise to say well hang on this is how the ANC is actually pushing things and people actually in general wouldn't agree with you on that and it was quite a sensitive issue to say there is still the Madiba legacy intact and Mbeki must begin and he should be given a chance to carry on and implement what Madiba has started. So there was that sort of a mixed feeling within the communities but generally I think people were beginning to listen to the issues that were brought forward by the APF and would feel free to go to a particular community and issue out a pamphlet inviting people to meetings and public spaces sort of to say come and listen to what is it we have to say. And generally when you attend meetings you will find that people do attend quite huge numbers and they will come and listen and be active to say when we can build sort of our own forum or

you can be able to come and address us. So I think generally there was that positive outlook towards the APF in the beginning.

Dale: Okay and now we are just going to shift the time, when did you become the organiser for the APF?

Silumko: Beginning of 2006 in April I think, March April by the APF.

Dale: March 2006? Okay and I mean there are so many different aspects because once you became a part of the APF obviously you were working full time in the organisation as opposed to just being an activist or occasionally going to meetings and so the first question I would have is once you became the organiser what kind of things first of all were you doing as part of your work?

Silumko: Ja I think it was within a period where I think Gauteng, Soweto was quite an active affiliate of the APF and for myself. I think at the beginning what was happening also was quite a lot of internal politics that were taking place within the APF, lots of personality clashes, affiliates being disgruntled in terms of how the leadership was running the APF. I think one of the first things that I had to come up with is to make sure that we go back to the affiliates of the APF and try to work with them and create their own activities that they were busy with within their own communities, resuscitate some of their own campaigns which they were handling and making sure that they have that outlook, sort of focus within themselves and trying to build the APF. Because generally I think there was that tendency to say if so and so doesn't come and help us to move forward in the campaign as the communities we cannot depend on ourselves. So one of the first things was maybe changing the mindset which was there because I think another challenge from the very beginning which was it wasn't the majority decision to say let's have Silumko being employed as the organiser of the APF, there were some affiliates and comrades generally who wanted other people to be in that position and I think the most important issues because I think in the very same there was going to be an AGM taking place so how do you make sure that everybody comes together and we will move forward from there.

Dale: Okay ... as the organiser you obviously got to know the APF in terms of organisationally much better than you did before. Tell us a little bit of something about how you experienced the process or shall we say the internal democracy of the APF how it was structured, decisions were made and how those were carried out?

Silumko: Ja I think quite importantly was that as much as I think I understood the APF I learnt along as well to say this is how decisions are taken in the organisation whereby through the different structural meetings which are there and you have things being discussed maybe in the office bearers meeting and having to recommend either to the coordinating committee and whereby the majority of the affiliates will be attending that meeting and making sure this is how a decision is taken. And I think that in itself was quite healthy even to say there was lots of disagreement within an organisation like the APF the positive things that at the end of the day, the majority decision has got to be implemented and one thing positive is whether you are not in agreement with the decision but once the majority decide on it I think the other affiliates even though they are quite autonomous they also support the decision taking

place. So it is not only the elected office bearers that will take a decision but it will be discussed within the movement and there are two or three positions that are coming forward or suggestions that are coming forward at the end of the day a decision that I think will be beneficial to the entire organisation gets to be decided by the majority and that in itself I think it was quite a healthy thing. Because if you attend some of the APF meetings you will think that people will generally hate each other and there won't be any agreement taking place but the unity [once] that decision has been taken and I think it was quite key to say even after that people are still comrades and they are moving forward within the organisation. So individuals were not bigger than the organisation itself ... that was the most important thing, its quite healthy. Also for other movements as well I think to learn from that process to say well as much as you give your leadership the honours to take things forward but how or who do you maybe account to is more important, issues of accountability on taking that decision and the APF has been an organisation that can be able to say we give you the leadership, these issues need to move forward and you need to account to the organisation and that happened.

Dale: Okay. I know that this might be quite a difficult question to answer but ... once you became the organiser and you got familiar with the position and activities, describe what an average week would've been like for yourself as an organiser of the APF the kinds of things that you would be doing? I know you are shaking there because it is a difficult thing, but ...

Silumko: I think one of the things that changed when I became the organiser was that you have been paid to do that so all that responsibility would fall on your shoulders to say we need you to hold these things. And you will have quite a hectic week whereby each and every day you have tasks to complete whether it's in the office, whether its administration or you have to go out within communities and most of them I think they have meetings on different days and they expect you to rotate within all the affiliates which are there when they are having their meetings. Some of them I think were saying that 'you know, hang on we need you to be part of leadership, to be in our community meetings talking to our people within our communities' and I think if you are not attending those meetings it became quite a problem to those affiliates. So I think Monday up to Sunday people were having that expectation to say you must come within our meetings and monitor if our campaigns are taking place and how to best support it and it was one of an activity that became to sort of acquired to do all the time to attend meetings, whether it is on a Saturday or even on a Sunday afternoon, the best time that suited the affiliates when they are having those meetings they actually needed to be there. And I think it became quite tedious looking at the issues of saying simple things like attending a meeting and having to give back a report, you wouldn't just have to give it verbally but there were some sort of requirements of making sure you record it down and put forward a report. I think ja that was one of the issues that were there. So if like myself if I didn't have a laptop by then so having to come back on Monday, have to sit down and try to write up your reports of your previous sort of activities and make sure that some of those meetings or history that is taking place is recorded for the organisation itself so it was ja one issue attending and putting forward the reports. But within, also going to these meetings the communities wants a campaign and it starts to move forward and you need to be there to support them, but that is a meeting with the local officials, local ward councillor's and so forth, you have to be there, they can be

called anytime to say okay, we can be able to meet you on Tuesday around seven o'clock and so forth, you have to avail yourself to go to that meeting ... maybe for instance you're taking up a campaign around issues of water and Mesti a Lekwa will say come to a meeting the following day and so forth. You have to really change your schedule and make sure you attend that as well and I think it depended on what sort of activity a different community is doing and that in itself required quite a lot of time, if time is available then you can be able to attend to those issues.

Dale: And you became quite involved in being deployed by the APF, outside of the APF as well. So tell us a little bit about what that entailed for you and how you represented the APF ... in South Africa as well as internationally?

Silumko: Ja I think this was also based you know on the issues of saying we need to capacitate the leadership that we have and the APF on many occasions will try and make sure they will get somebody who is active within the communities to put forward the demands of those different communities that are affiliated to the APF and pushing the campaigns. And mainly I mean the objectives of the APF to other structures which are there and the APF I think had quite a wide network or similar organisations and forums that they have been working with and they became I think a task that the APF would say well represent us if there is a workshop taking place in Cape Town you will have to go and attend it with other similar movements. And I think also I became quite involved in the South African Social Forum on the hosting or maybe making sure that SASF takes place and that required attending those regional sort of meetings and I think it was quite a task of not saying it's only me. The APF as a movement you have to represent from South Africa you know other movements which are there but it can't be within that structure. You have to take those tasks forward but mainly I think representing what the APF has been doing within South Africa and how we see things as the APF was actually quite important and attending those meetings that I have to put across. And I think the main battle that has been especially around SASF as well as other movements like the SMI (Social Movement Indaba) of which the APF was active was that for us I think as South Africa hosting SASF and I think you have to put forward those views. And other than that it was also to the World Social Forum International Committee and as part of SASF, as part of also the Social Movements Indaba. We were a member of the International Committee so you had to attend some of the meetings that are taking place and put forward our position as the Social Movement Indaba as the APF and how do we see struggles taking place not only within the region but Africa as a whole and internationally. And I think those were some of the tasks but I had to also do within my position as the organiser and they will also require time. A meeting can last up to seven days and so forth and you are away from your daily activities in the APF and that in itself created gaps within the communities because now you have to go back within the process because other communities when you are busy with a campaign and you are out and nobody's been deployed to actually push it forward, they will wait for you until you come back and you will find that there is a sort of work load that is waiting for you. But I think in itself it was quite a learning experience for myself as well as being part of the whole structure of the WSF, SASF and the ASF the Africa Social Forum and I think it is quite important for movements like the SMI and the APF to have its voice being heard within those spaces and quite importantly I think as I have said or indicated make sure that people are aware of the

struggles that we are attacking in South Africa or the organisation was actually doing as in to have solidarity from those movements and also understanding how issues were developing within South Africa post '94.

Dale: Okay and two follow up questions to that. One would be how did you experience in representing the APF and attending a lot of these international or regional meetings, how people perceive the APF or see the APF outside of South Africa?; and two, what can you tell us about acts of solidarity that the APF engaged in with other struggles and movements as well, outside of meetings and conferences?

Silumko: Okay I think quite importantly the issue that I always tried to bring across within the APF itself and within our affiliates it was the issue of certain individuals who will be able to do all the things for a movement and not have an affiliate of the movement being dependent and other people taking up tasks. Cause I think like representing the APF internationally people will always say 'oh but where's Trevor' and so forth, Trevor Ngwane the ex-organiser before I came in. So you know all these meetings, they would sort of think well the struggle is on and taking place in Soweto and how are things happening in Soweto. And I think my challenge was to make sure that people get to hear of these other struggles that are taking place within other communities or other affiliates within the APF and have a broader picture. And also movements outside the APF have a broader picture of struggles that are taking place even if it's around land, even if it is around issues of climate change but it was quite important to say these struggles were also taking place. And quite importantly I think people had a sort of positive outlook to what the APF was doing with issues around water struggles not only around pre-paid meters but around access to water - those were sort of issues that people were much more interested in issues around air pollution and people had a sort of a positive outlook on the APF of taking forward the struggles for the poor. And you will find in all these meetings people would come and ask many questions of organisations and there and how the APF is surviving through all these years since its inception. And you will get to share all the politics that were taking place or all the campaigns that the APF were actually pushing and I think that is where you will find that many people were actually struggling around these common issues and they will be willing to say lets share information so that they can also find a way of supporting struggles. But that was an issue of saying that it became quite positive that people will hear that there are other members within the other communities within the APF besides having only Trevor Ngwane and there are other struggles taking place and the other activists which are active within the APF besides maybe the comrades that they have got to know when they came here. Because many of these networks which were there were also present during the WSSD and they have seen struggles that were taking place within the communities and especially in Alexandra because many of them marched through Alexandra and they will sort of be willing to have that picture played of the WSSD but also what has happened since the WSSD and it was quite positive and people hear what's been happening here and the APF is still there. It is still taking forward community struggles and I think that is the outlook that they have to say 'well mostly I think APF is taking forward community struggles as struggles' from within our communities and I think that was the main thing that we got to discuss. And what was the second question again?

Dale: The second one was when you were organiser, acts of solidarity that the APF provided or gave outside of meetings or conferences, to other struggles, communities whether in South Africa or outside?

Silumko: Ja I think quite a lot that we managed to do and there were movements like the Landless Peoples Movement and I think what happened during the WSSD that whole slip up from the LPM and the APF and not perhaps working together or unity which was there. It all also started to change whereby APF by then could not only provide just financial assistance to these movements which are there but also try and share some of the organising skills within communities. You know because movements like the LPM were quite dysfunctional at times and they needed human resource to actually help them and also give some political direction, taking some issues within the communities. So the APF supported Protea South for example in organising meetings and organising their campaigns in and around issues of evictions and we supported that struggle for quite a long time whether there it be marches and also the court case that they were taking forward. I think we managed to support it not only through perhaps being with them, giving our media statements on that issue but also quite important for the APF and I think we supported other communities like Merafong, those struggles that were taking place in Merafong and the APF was [for] a year or two supporting the struggle of Khutsong, whether it be educational workshops with the leadership but also organising within the community was also quite key and important. And I think locally, organisations that were not affiliated to the APF, the APF would go out and do leadership workshops and I think some of them then end up affiliated to the APF but quite importantly was taking forward those community campaigns. And in the Free State as well APF supported I think the issue of the idea of comrades within the Free State having their own sort of movement that will unite or take forward struggles within the Free State, APF played a role making sure that some of those meetings do take place and provide some leadership skills to different communities that were organising the Free State. In the Eastern Cape as well where we went down to support struggles in Queenstown and East London and all those areas I think it was sort of the APF having that outlook orientation to other struggles that were taking place not just within Gauteng but other Provinces as well. In Limpopo I think the APF was also supportive in those areas and other than that I think it was still the Global Day of Actions that would normally take place whether you were from the WSF you will find that countries or social movements within the globe decide on a particular day of demonstrating and I think APF was to be part of those International Global Days of Action. We supported quite a lot of initiatives that have taken place especially within the region - Zimbabwe, Swaziland there will be actions that are organised by some comrades who are in South Africa and who are from Swaziland, who are from Zimbabwe who say can you support us we are from Lesotho can you support us marching to our Embassies and this is our campaign? And the APF was also quite key in supporting those networks as well.

Dale: Okay now a lot of that support and solidarity required resources. Now the APF was one of the few movements during that whole period of time that had in relative terms, a substantial amount of financial resources. From your experience and being at the coal face of those activities, representing the APF how would you characterise what some people would call the double edged nature of financial

resources? In other words you can't do without but at the same time you can, sometimes; what is your experience with regards to having to deal with dispensing resources as well as managing them?

Silumko: I think what we normally have said we also need to be financially independent, we don't need money to struggle and we can't struggle without money and that is true, we can't struggle without money. But the reality is we couldn't or wouldn't have been able to do those activities if we didn't have financial resources. So it will all boil down to the issues of saying ja comrades we do support your struggle, here's our statement but now in terms of there or making sure that that activity happens, it wouldn't have been quite possible. I mean a simple thing of making sure that you have what you call the closing maybe of the Golden Highway, the blockage of the highway but people say you don't need resources to do that but I think as we have seen in the past the campaigns that we have kept supporting in solidarity with other movements and other networks is that there are things which need to be done physically or you know practically. And those boil down to finances and I think in a way some movements started coming to the APF because now the APF has finances and they say 'come support us, we are doing this activity and can you please try and support us financially to making sure the activity does happen or does take place. There was a lot of people who sort of jumped to the APF hoping that all the time they will be getting that financial backing and when I think the APF at many a times was quite wise to say well we can see those sort of elements creeping up within those communities but quite importantly I think we supported anyhow the struggles that were taking place within those communities. I think it was quite necessary to do that and it also boiled down to myself having to disperse those monies, whether it be in a rally or whether it would be within a march and so forth you have to be there and pop out that money and I think it was a challenge you know, at times because now you have to go back and account for it, and you will find one community say 'we broke down...

Dale: Okay we were just taking a little bit of a pause there, sorry Silumko, you were talking specifically with regards to I think it was still resources?

Silumko: Ja. I mean you have to disperse money and it became quite a challenge at times, you know. Being there you can see that well we brought about three kombi's and then they will claim for five and it becomes an issue now when you don't hand out that money you know to say 'hey wait, here I am employed by the organisation and this is a decision that was taken by collective to say you are going to pay five kombi's from such a community but now you want to give us for three. And at times it became those personal clashes to say well as much as we need to be accountable politically, but also financially it became an issue that needed to be taken with the comrades and it brought a whole lot of problems but I think it was one aspect that one had to do. As much as I think we were supporting them it also took a strain because now it will strain some relations with the comrades and the people now no longer view you as an activist saying just being accountable to the APF and they will treat you as an employee of the organisation and this is decision taken by the organisation you have to stick to it. But I think we understood each other to say well this is what I have to do and I think as much as many comrades have argued within the movement to say we don't need resources, we need to struggle, we need to struggle but we have given the true reflection of mostly or the members of the APF are unemployed and it will

become impossible to have those activities taking place in supporting the campaigns and the struggles or even you know in terms of solidarity if there were no resources that the APF had. I think it made quite a positive and a negative sort of connotation to the whole thing because people will say 'ya, you don't need money to struggle' but the reality is many of the movements that came forward to the APF for solidarity were also in there because now the APF also had resources that they could utilise - writing up even a press statement, writing up pamphlets within their communities it all boiled down to the issues of resources in a negative way that dependency was going to be there within affiliates to say 'well, we don't have to find our own resources as an affiliate, the APF has resources'. And I think people maybe at times didn't have that outlook of saying there is a need for us to go and look for resources and support the APF, but rather than the APF supporting them as affiliates

Dale: Okay and linked to that, I mean throughout this time that you were - previous to you becoming the organiser but then also the years that you were the organiser of the APF - what would you say about the levels of political and social for lack of a better term, consciousness amongst the core APF affiliates and activists? Did you see change overtime?

Silumko: Well there was that change that whereby now the main focus I think at times was just on the finances, you know to say well we just need the money in order for us to be able to do things, an activity and at times it lacked politics whereby you will find communities have resources within their communities but now there was no campaigns that were taken forward and so forth. And it will all boil down to internal squabbles and other who have just been aware of what's taken place within the communities and so forth and at times I think it required not only meetings that were there but they also needed some capacity building workshops in terms of resolving issues and making sure that struggles are getting forward within our communities. So I think at the beginning I think most people were quite politically aware and conscious of what needed to be done or what is required within their communities and taking issues forward but with time, especially when the APF had lots of financial resources all the politics I think died within sort of those leaders and most of them I think as they were incapacitated in maybe supporting campaigns within their communities it all depended on those who were quite conscious to take those issues and those struggles forward. And you will find as more of the change in leadership it became quite another problem that if I myself, the leader of a certain affiliate who is politically conscious, once I decide to leave the movement the affiliate itself becomes weak and attending that affiliate, the meetings and I think community workshops that were there could find that the leadership which is left had vague space of understanding on taking issues forward and the affiliate doesn't become active and so forth. And losing many of the leaders within those community affiliates it became another issue by now the APF had to come forward with educational sort of workshops but to revive the new layer which was there and I think it became an issue that those were sort of capacitated, go back to the communities and try to share and it became sort of a challenge for affiliates and the APF as well.

Dale: Okay. Over the last several years, I mean you came on board as the organiser as you said in 2006, there were a lot of problems and a lot of decline in the presence of other social movements that the APF

had worked with earlier in its history, in the early part. Two parts to the question; one why do you think that was the case that there was a general decline of the kind of activity that saw it rising in the first part in the 2000's? and second, how did that affect the APF?

Silumko: A lot depended on the internal democracy of those social movements and it also depended on the campaigns that were taken forward and I think financial support as well. And I think the decline that was there that became quite a huge task for the APF to try and support those movements. And I think also what was changing was the nature or the response from the government. I think that it became quite clear that the issue was service delivery. The issue that was also coming forward was that some of the campaigns the government think will find an easy way of making sure that they lead to the death of those movements because most of them were single issue based and once the government responded in a positive way towards that issue then there is no longer a struggle taking place within that movement and so forth. And that leadership style I think was quite also important within those movements and if there was a split then the organisations cease to exist and you will find that people still are having those problems within their communities. And it was the task of the APF to come on board and to support those community campaigns that were taking place. So we are not only now dealing with our own affiliates but also have to assist and strengthen the other movements because now I think it was quite easy you know for the government in dealing with movements like the APF more generally - we are on our own - and also I think at some point we can in the APF itself be the only social movement that is taking struggle forward especially basing it on Gauteng. And hence I think it was quite important for the APF in supporting those other movements and making sure that those campaigns have been taken forward so we had too much more work on our hands as the APF in making sure we resuscitate those campaigns and those communities in taking forward the struggles. So we are not only dealing with capacitating the APF as well but other movements like the Landless Peoples Movement, Jubilee and I think it became quite a challenge for the APF to sustain all that political pressure it has putting forward. And I think the outlook and the change of the ANC Government towards the issues that were taken forward and the tone or the change in the language of the government in saying that 'well hold on, there are problems with regards to service delivery and the issue of free fifty kilowatts of electricity, six thousand free litres of free water - that in itself started to change I think the outlook or the tone of the government towards issues of service delivery. But it even meant that those promises were made by the government, how they were implemented was also quite a challenge therefore the APF to say well we are fighting for example a community like Orange Farm over electricity and the Government comes in with conditions of saying 'well you will get free electricity only if you accept the installation of pre paid electricity meters and I think others will say 'ja well especially within the communities we do have electricity now, even though it is pre paid but it is fine there will be no need for us to take forward that struggle because now we do have free water'. But the problems that we have said okay, the limitations which were there people also started seeing that and coming back to struggle and you find that you attend a community meeting in a place like Soweto, you used to have two hundred people attending the meeting now you have fifty, you have a hundred and in that in itself, becomes a challenge going back to the communities and mobilising to say it is not over you might be having that free fifty kilowatt but it's not enough according to maybe the needs of that household but

also I mean that is how we view it politically to say it is limiting us and this is not what we have been trying to push and fight as the APF but we have been fighting around the issues of privatisation and who owns it and what's their outlook in terms of delivering those services and those were some of the challenges that were there that the APF could explain within communities and making sure that they do take up struggles. You will have a march whereby you can be able to get five thousand people coming forward in supporting that, but that also changed, you know with some of the tone or the change of the government within those services. So it became quite a challenge but I think overall as the APF challenges, it was to make sure it was to sustain ourself or our existence as the APF within those communities whereby now the government has changed its own orientation or look to the issues of service delivery as much as they are in disagreement with what the APF stands for but what the APF has been fighting for. I think they won't even admit it as the government that it was correct for movements like the APF to take up issues of service delivery within the communities and they will come in as the people who are championing that struggle of making sure that people have access to issues of basic services and to say 'well, we have removed, you know Thabo Mbeki as one person who didn't have an outlook to issues of service delivery, we are putting in somebody who will be able to fast track service delivery within the communities, we will put forward Zuma who is willing to put up a chat line where people can phone him in terms of problems that they have within their communities. Now we will have a government that listens to the needs or the demands of the people but at the end of the day I think it all boils down to the implementation of it whether people are accessing it and so forth and in all that I think the APF has managed to take forward the issues of service delivery and put it on a sort of top list of things that's needed, priorities that government need to look at and so forth. And I think that in itself has some implications, it has some aspects for the movement like the APF to look at its tactics and strategy to say how do we move forward in the era, whereby the government looks like its attending to issues of basic services. But I think communities or affiliates have seen or are quite aware of how the government tries to delay issues of service delivery through the process of privatisation and I think that has been one of the challenges that the APF has been quite keen in taking forward as a movement.

Dale: Okay we just took a quick pause. I wanted to ask you again from your experience, in that very challenging and what were quite difficult times of 2007, 2008, 2009 period - and we are talking about where the APF had to respond to changed conditions, a different kind of government approach - well you've already mentioned what was happening with regards to other movements as well, how do you think or what is your opinion about how the APF survived and didn't suffer the same fate as many of the other movements during that period?

Silumko: Well I think one major aspect was how the APF was handling the whole movement, when coming to your issues of where we wanted to be and in terms of our objectives and our goals. I think the most simple basic thing that the APF has managed to push over the years, is the issues of internal democracy, on how decisions needs to be taken or made as a movement rather than having the issues ordered by the leadership just to decide for the movement. Quite importantly that is how the APF was structured in taking decisions whereby affiliates themselves of the APF are involved in taking up those decisions where they want the organisation to be and that in itself supported the unity of the

organisation. But I think also quite importantly is the issue of resources because the APF played quite a key role whereby I mean the APF has an office and that in itself has helped in a way to keep the APF operating. Other movements fell flat, because they didn't have the unity and also I think given the issues of finances in supporting the structures which are there and I think those years has helped the APF to survive.

Dale: ... one follow up question with regards to the changed nature of the response of the state ANC in recognising some of the legitimacy of the struggles and everything, particularly given what was happening or what has happened over the last three years in the ANC itself and the different factional battles that have played themselves out there. Do you see, or in the experience that you had did you think that that weakened the APF overall or strengthened it?

Silumko: Well it has actually strengthened it. My belief being that many comrades had that look to say 'we really are struggling for the advancement of the poor and the working class and making sure that the government does listen to the demands or the needs of the poor' and I think at one point many didn't have that belief to say we are fighting a legitimate struggle as a movement. Now that the government is actually listening and trying to change its outlook on the issues of service delivery, I think the internal battles within the ANC and how it has responded has been I think a positive thing for comrades to say well we are fighting for the right demands and hence the government is responding to it and that in itself I think for me is one thing that has been able to assist or strengthen APF campaigns or APF demands. So for me it has been a positive thing that the government has actually come out to say 'well the issue it is actually about service delivery and not a few individuals who are disgruntled' and I think in a way it hasn't weakened, to say these demands haven't been implemented so it doesn't mean that the APF has to cease to exist but it has to make sure it monitors how these demands or the needs of the poor are being implemented; rather to say, 'well once people do get free electricity and water then the APF no longer seeks to exist but then quite importantly, it's that over a number of years experience has taught us that well everything can be put on paper but once it is not implemented then it is one issue that needs to be challenged by movements like the APF. Hence I say our demands have not yet been met by the government, they are just talking about it, giving lip service to it. And also I think the main aspect was the issue of pushing or rolling out fighting privatisation and we are seeing the ANC government hasn't sort of lost focus on that; they are pushing privatisation, no doubt in the communities' mind and so forth and that I think still needs to be something that the APF challenges and pushes forward.

Dale: So, in your estimation, the role of the APF still remains as relevant as ever as it was even ten years ago when it formed?

Silumko: Ja quite true. I think as I say it is still relevant and it needs to continue fighting for those demands that have been there within our communities. Because it is one thing having a government that is willing to listen but not actually implementing or fast tracking those demands. I think the resistance from the movements like the APF to say we are still resisting, we are still fighting for basic services of the poor, it hasn't been implemented just some lip service. Hence its key for me and quite

vital if there is an organisation that is going to be pushing and I think the pressure will be let off and it will continue to implement issues of privatisation. I mean if they privatise all these basic services it boils down you know to us having to have let them off the hook and I think APF still has that role to play within communities and the country at large.

Dale: Okay, now you have mentioned a number of key strengths or achievements that you believe the APF has been able to achieve and has possessed of the last years; what about weaknesses, what would you identify on that side, both past and still relevant and present?

Silumko: I think one of the weaknesses that has actually been there is - as I have mentioned - also within the leadership that is ... always changing. I think it is quite important that we have to recognise that the leaders do come and go but I think the movement is much more bigger than that and we need to make sure that the objectives of the APF rise above the composition of the leadership. What has been quite key to the survival of the movement itself and the focus of the leadership can also at times harm the movement whereby we are looking at our own internal battles rather than the larger picture at making sure that service delivery does happen and the movement is able to fight issues of privatisation. Sometimes it is unavoidable but I think it is something that the APF needs to learn within that we have to rise above the individuals and the leadership of the movement and focus on issues that are quite relevant to the movement, some of them as I have said, you cannot avoid them they are there and they do happen but I think it has been maybe a weakness in resolving some of the problems or challenges that are there, of leadership. But I think if clearly through all these years, the APF has been able to take decisions that can be able to guide or become a sort of a principle to say these are the principles that everybody needs to adhere to and I think it will help in the long run in resolving them. Others you cannot give issues of timeframe to say this is how quick things need to be resolved and go forth but as a movement it is learning I think, through all its weakness it will learn to rise above those issues of internal battles and so forth. But the movement in itself I think has not been able to take key decisions when they are necessary and then it needs to be taken and I think that in itself weakens the movement and needs to be addressed; issues of for example taking forward the campaign, whether whatever tactic that needs to be decided or used, I think must be used as a learning process to say, well this is how it happened. But I think also quite importantly is that our organisational history in taking decisions - that needs to be shared as the leadership and making sure that people can have that reference point to always go back and refer to how things can resolve and move forward the organisation. So other than that I think another weakness is the weakness of the dependency on donor funding - I mean it has changed the character of the organisation how it was at the beginning to what it is at the moment whereby I think ... people need to find or strike a balance of making sure that the funds which are there helps to build the movement rather than destroying it. As much as we believe we need to be independent from donor funding we also need to find means and ways of being able to raise your own funds within the community or making sure that the organisation does survive when there are a crash or difficult times or not being able to access donor funding. You know I mean how the APF has survived within the past few years has been quite exceptional because we need to learn from that period to say 'when times like these can arise again as a movement how do you budget forward for your resources?

Dale: We just took one final break; we are almost at the end of the interview. I am sorry Silumko you got interrupted there but you were taking of some of the challenges and weaknesses, is there anything that you wanted to say on that?

Silumko: I think I just reflected on the issues of leadership and the issue of finances and how they are managed in order to make sure that the organisation survives. But lastly I think it has been a constant battle within the APF around the issue of unity; when there is opposing views and arguments within the movement. I think the way that the APF has managed to survive is to make sure that there is still unity within the movement but it is also quite important that it's not false unity. I think it is quite clear when comrades are united in the objectives of the organisation that does continue and does happen because at times I think it has paralysed the APF on numerous occasions when there are frictions here within the movement and sort of not the similar objectives pursued or removed by the organisation that can alter or hinder the organisation to have an internal look rather than more generally focused on what needs to be done within the communities. But as I say, those are some of the things that cannot be avoided, but need to be handled in a manner that can help to shape the politics of the organisation.

Dale: And one last question. As we sort of look forward - I mean as you say struggles are not stopping, people are still continuing even after this long period of time to make demands to government to come out and demonstrate protests and you mentioned that the APF is more relevant than ever - what would you say about the future of the APF in terms of its cadreship and its membership and its ability to respond and to continue doing what it's been doing even with all the weaknesses and things for the last ten years?

Silumko: I think even now, APF can look ten years back from where it has started up until now in order for it to try and find strength in making sure it carries on for the next coming ten years or so given some of the challenges as I have said within the cadres. I think one of the most important things is to continue capacity building workshops for the leaders who are there in order that the focus is not being shifted from the main aims and objectives of the movement for it to survive. One can sit and try to predict what can happen in the next ten years and I think it is also quite a challenge for the organisation to survive the next coming ten years, but as I have said the struggle is still there and people still need to continue building the APF. I think we are all wishing that the APF can still be there after twenty years in regards to issues of service delivery because problems as you said are there within the country and they are going to continue to be there and it's important that such movements as the APF continue to exist whether based on a personal aspect and so forth. But I think quite importantly the work that has been done by the APF has been quite uplifting to some of the communities which have been there and that has not been appreciated by organisations outside the APF, the ANC itself and other movements have not appreciated and looked at the relevance of movements like the APF. I think for some of us we have been there with communities, we have dealt with some of the issues on a daily basis [and] when you start to look back to say somebody comes up to you and say 'well I was helped by the APF I was not evicted from my house, I am still staying in that house, I am still having access to water, I have resolved issues around electricity, my children were able to go to school' - that even in itself will inspire to say the

movement has to continue and give that support to the community. The most key importance is that the community does need the service and hence some of us will wish and will like to see the APF still being relevant to the challenges and the demands of the communities which are there and I think it will be for myself personally it will be quite a setback to the improvement of our people's lives, to see an organisation like the APF you know stopping to exist because of lack of cadres who have the vision to make sure that they carry the objectives of the organisation or the movement in helping or servicing the communities. Because I think it is quite key and it's quite important that the work that was done at the beginning does carry through and I think it will be sad in a way to see I think lack of leadership or lack of people who are willing to take forward the movement to see the APF closing, but I think as I say on a personal level, I wish to see the APF continue to exist.

Dale: Okay and that is all the questions I had for the interview, but I always ask at the end of the interview is there anything that I have not asked or that you would like to say in addition to what we've covered in respect of the history of the APF, it's character?. Please feel free to do so.

Silumko: No I think I'm quite covered by the questions.

Dale: Okay thanks very much.

Silumko: It's a pleasure.

