

Collection number: AL3290

Project Name: Anti Privatisation Forum

Date of Interview: 2010-04-06

Location of Interview: Johannesburg

Language/s of interview: English

Length of interview: 1:39:56

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Notes on access and use (if any):

Audio file name/s of interview: AL3290_Tladi Meshack_2010-04-06



Dale: Alright, it is the 6th of April 2010. Thanks very much Mish for agreeing to be interviewed. Just first please state your full name.

Meshack: My name is Meshack Masuluyana Tladi.

Dale: Okay, and Mish, before we start talking a little bit about the APF and the affiliate's stuff that you are involved in, we just want to know a little bit about yourself. Where and when were you born?

Meshack: Okay. I was born in the year 1982 on the 24th of December. I was born in Zone 3 Sebokeng, and at home actually I was born at home.

Dale: Okay and have you lived in Sebokeng all your life.

Meshack: Yes all my life I have been living in Sebokeng. I was born and raised there and living there ever since.

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

Meshack: Actually I am from a very big family. We are eight children, which are two sisters and six brothers including myself. And currently I have actually I have moved out. I am living with my fiancée to be. I am having a daughter which is Rethabile, she was born in 2003 on the 1st of December so she is my only single child at the moment that I am having.

Dale: Okay and schooling, tell us about your schooling.

Meshack: I started schooling in 1989. I started grade one in Kisto Primary School which is in the same area which is in Zone 3 then I passed my grade 7 in 1995. I went to Qedilizwe Secondary school in '96 until I completed my matric in 2000. In 2001 I went to Wilberforce College to do some computer skills training courses, that's what I did and currently I'm studying in College SA - I'm doing a project management and secretarial course.

Dale: Okay, and what about any work/jobs that you had?

Meshack: Okay, in 2002 I worked in Sebokeng Hospital but I was doing general work as I was working on a construction that was, doing plumbing, I was a labourer and a plumber. In 2007 during my involvement with the struggle I was appointed by Wits University, there was a project called CLING, which is Community Literacy and Numeracy Group. It was going to run for five years. It was meant to be in community level to increase literacy and numeracy issues in the community so I'm involved in that project until the moment because it will be ending next year 2011 on the 31st July. So I'm still busy with that project at the moment.

Dale: Just describe for me how you became a political activist, how did you become involved in the struggle so to speak?

Meshack: I think this started at school. I was elected an LRC member at school so automatically what was happening was I would deal with internal school politics around so I became more involved with such politics and then when going back to my community there was this organisation called Evaton Construction Forum which is now called Vaal Community Forum (VCF) and I became interested and became a member to that organisation. So I think in general it was the issue of community service issues then along the way it becomes more exposed to other issues not only in my community but other communities. So that organisation introduced me to the APF that's when I became an activist that I am today.

Dale: When was that, when did you become an activist at the APF, when did you find out about the APF?

Meshack: I found out about the APF in 2000 around November/December but I was not formally introduced. I heard about the APF and I became a member of the APF in 2001 around February that's when I became involved until the moment.

Dale: And that was through the Vaal Community Forum?

Meshack: That was through the Vaal Community Forum because I think the APF platform was allowing us to get more information, more knowledge about other community struggles and how can we advise each other in terms of community struggles that we are currently faced with.

Dale: Okay. And just before I ask you some questions about the community and other things - why for you the specific interest in privatisation, issues of privatisation?

Meshack: I think in my involvement I saw a lot of issues happening around a lot of communities like I'm saying my activism started from schooling . Automatically I was one of the pupil's who are coming from a very disadvantaged family which I was struggling to pay even R50 for school fees for the rest of the year so with such background I became interested to understand, to unpack the real issues and then ... there was a campaign called 'No Fee Schools'. I became interested in the campaign so along the campaign that's when I learnt that paying school fees or paying such services that government should cater for elements of privatisation. So automatically, because I was opposing that I became interested in other issues. I became involved in a project that was in Orange Farm on the water pre paid meter so automatically it's when I was becoming more exposed to a lot of privatisation, to understand the nitty-gritty's about this privatisation. So automatically through my involvement I was growing in understanding and even my interest was also growing in a sense.

Dale: Just tell us a little about the history of the community you live in and how people began to organise in a community organisation and then became involved in the APF?

Meshack: I think the community that I'm coming from was implemented in 1979 which is Sebokeng Zone 3. So I think ever since I was born in that community ever since I was born there there were no changes, so automatically people were starting to ask some questions to say that there are newly developed areas that have just come out presently but you could see development is taking place, there are changes that are happening in those areas but this one is still the same and there are councillors. People started to be concerned about such issues and then a lot of evictions were happening as well where people were evicted from their houses although some are bond houses. Some you'll find that they are jobless because at the end of the job the bank will come and repossess houses so people were starting to gather themselves to make some sort of a community concerned residents to say we need to stop these evictions from continuing - so that's how we started. But I think what I can tell you is that the area that I'm coming from is disadvantaged, it's still underdeveloped even at the moment but there are councillors that are, local elections that are happening each and every five years. But there are no developments that are happening there, everything is still the same. When it rains there won't be cars that are moving around so from such communities we understand that over the weekend that's when we have a lot of burials so we struggle, some buses, even the hearse, cars will be stuck in that mud that is caused by the rain. So those are the kind of issues that were raised by the community residents to say we have to form - what do you call it - an alternative structure which is a committee concerned residents that their views will be much more heard than sending a delegate which is a ward councillor that was not even passing the message that is delegated to send through to his or her superior. So they felt there is a need for them to organise themselves and be united. I think that's how it started and it interests me and I become part of it. I think in my involvement I was more focusing on the youth. The youth what we are faced with mostly is the issue of unemployment, that was the major issue. It has been happening for quite a long time so I think one of the burning issues was ever since the ANC won the elections in 1994 so automatically there was that belief that there was going to be a lot of changes so things were becoming worse than there were in the apartheid era. So people started to stand up now and say we need to fight. Because they were doing it even pre '94 so they continue doing it even after '94 because it was the best thing to do.

Dale: You were just saying that some of the problems, in particular around the youth ...?

Meshack: Yes unemployment being one of the issues, school leavers, you will find out that some of the youth are not even completing their matric because you find that the issues are there are no school fees, they do not have the money to pay school fees, they do not have money for uniforms so I was organising the youth around such issues. There was a youth programme whereby each and every Sunday we would have a community mass meeting, a public meeting

whereby we would address such issues and then we would grab more new members to come on board and to understand, to unpack the real issues that our communities are faced with.

Dale: Just tell me a little bit also ... when I said the history of your community, but politically in that area, in particular ... I mean you say that residents felt the need to establish a separate organisation, was it dominated by the ANC or other political groups? What was the history politically in that area?

Meshack: I think the community that I'm coming from is a very diverse one - I mean we've got PAC members, ANC members, SOPA members. So automatically it's their choice to follow which parties but however I think the problem that was encountered was after the local elections which was happening in 1999 because I mean the community was having a lot of complaints immediately after 1994, a lot of expectations were expected that there was going to be development, there was going to be jobs creation, there was going to be a lot of issues. However because that development didn't happen some members from ANC, from PAC, from SOPA from these political parties they themselves said they need to distance themselves from political parties but to stand as community residents now because they felt a necessity because if a problem like when it rains the mud that is stuck on the streets, the water that is running on the streets is affecting them. It does not matter whether you are from a political party which is in power or not. But they decided that as residents they need to gather themselves, come together and address such issues that they are faced with so that's how it was decided to formulate what you call a community concerned structure so I think that's initially that was happening. But I think most of the people are coming from the ANC, even PAC because most are card carrying members of both those parties. Those are the dominant parties in the community that I'm coming from. Then through the public meetings that they were having, I mean people themselves saw the necessity, I mean of not following the political parties because political parties are having a specific political interest in coming to elections they mobilise, after elections there is no development that is happening. So they decided that after even before these campaigns are taking place we as residents need to say these are our issues whatever party that is going to approach this community must come and address these issues before we could even consider being part of such party so I think that's how I came in contact.

Dale: And as far as I understand it, the Vaal Community Forum when it was eventually formed it brought together several different communities, is that correct?

Meshack: Yes. Like I said at first it was called Evaton Reconstruction Forum, it was Evaton based but along the way they could see the necessity for other communities that wanted to be part of this. But by saying the word Evaton was not capturing for everybody like Sebokeng and Bophelong so they decided to call it Vaal Community Forum which will cover the rest of the Vaal triangle as a whole.

Dale: Describe a little bit about the membership of the organisation in terms of older, pensioners, youth, shack dwellers, formal house dwellers, who makes up the kind of community structure?

Meshack: I think Vaal Community Forum is a very big organisation, I think there are branches. In Evaton branch you will find there are mainly because Evaton is dominated by the shacks so there are shacks, the shack dwellers. You find that the membership on its own, the elderly people are most dominant from 40 years upwards they are the majority. Then came the youth. the youth from let's say 13 years, the minute they enter high school until let's say 30 years and there is a bit of a difference from 30 and 40, there is a bit of a gap there but from these age groups there is a lot of membership. Coming to the Zone 3 side where I'm coming from mainly its dominated by the elderly, elder people, actually the household people are the ones that are most dominant, I cannot even specify the age but I mean if I were to check on it I would say from 35 upward. They are the people that are dominating and the youth, but mainly the youth is the one that are in high school. The youth are coming in after they have completed their matric and so forth actually some are moving their life from the community so when they came back they will be older, they will be that age from 35 upwards so that is the composition of the Vaal Community Forum.

Dale: In terms of the gender mix?

Meshack: I think the gender is mixed. Obviously the females still dominate. I think I can say 55% are females and then 45 is male

Dale: How is the organisation structured?

Meshack: We are having the executive which is meeting; actually it depends on the day, on the availability of the members. It was meeting every Sunday then it was stretched to Thursdays. The way it's structured currently the branches is Evaton branch, its Zone 3, Dunusa which is Zone 6, so we are talking about those 3 sites. Every Sunday to the executive meeting they send 3 reps from each to come and be part of the executive, we call it executive which is Vaal Community Forum Executive that's where actions will be discussed and tasks can be shared and so forth. But apart from that there are executive committees from each and every community that is responsible for such. We already have structures there, we have sub committees but they are still forming one structure, it is still called Vaal Community Forum even in Dunusa so they are still having their executive from their respective communities and then we've got the youth structure. Within the youth structure that's where we share portfolios, there are those that are focusing on education, there are those that are focusing on the issue of unemployment, there are those that are focusing on the general youth programmes at large like general SETA programmes that are happening somewhere that are engaging with the government and the media and so forth. So that's how I think it's structured.

Dale: And do you have regular AGMs, elected office bearers?

Meshack: Actually every year, once every year I think about June/July that's when we have our AGMs to elect the broader structure but I think two years ago in 2008 we changed that - we adopted what APF was doing we said that after two years that's when we will have elective AGMs. Actually we are saying the office must sit for two years and then after, we have annual general meeting every year but the election will be on the second year obviously. But in the communities they are happening in an annual basis whereby the election will keep on happening every July.

Dale: What positions have you held in the structure?

Meshack: On the broader structure I think we are having the chairperson, the deputy chair, the secretary, the deputy secretary, the treasurer and then we call that person the organiser which is the overall coordinator coordinating that entire structure as a whole. And then we are having other four positions which is the youth coordinator and then we have the treasurer for the youth, the secretary and we have the treasurer for the youth on its own. The youth is accountable to a broader structure but they are still part of the entire executive committee meetings.

Dale: And yourself? What positions have you held?

Meshack: I was the youth coordinator and then I came to the bigger structure of which I'm the organiser for the bigger structure currently in the Vaal Community Forum.

Dale: Presently you're the organiser?

Meshack: I am the organiser

Dale: How would you describe the resources that your organisation has, both financial as well as human resources?

Meshack: I think in terms of human resources it's easier because we are a community based organisation to access as many members as possible. I mean there are many campaigns that we are doing that is door-to-door campaign, pamphlet distribution, we hold public meetings, holding workshops so a lot of activities that we are doing. So I think in terms of membership we are very strong. In terms of resources because we are not yet a registered organisation we are still operating as a community based organisation that is not yet registered - I think we will process our registration documents this year. In terms of finance what we are dealing with mainly what we are focusing on is having public meetings to say we can contribute. We are relying on the contribution that the residents are making, whatever 20c, 50c it will be up to an individual to say how much they can afford. That was indeed helping us. I remember when APF was in crisis that assisted us a lot because we were able to go to our account and fork out something to progress the campaigns that the organisation should take them up.

Dale: One question that I didn't ask you about the membership base of your organisation, is it predominantly unemployed?

Meshack: Yes the majority of the people were unemployed and pensioners especially the unemployed people. I mean there are employed especially in the executive I think we are having four people that are employed. So I can say the majority is dominated by unemployed people. Let's say 60 % is unemployed people then let's say 30% is pensioners then 10% we can say because there are some piece jobs somewhere somehow so we can say 10% is sometimes it goes down, sometimes it goes up - it depends.

Dale: You said you personally heard about the APF in 2000 which is the year it was formed

Meshack: Yes.

Dale: ... and that VCF came on board in 2001

Meshack: No in 2000.

Dale: In the same year? So VCF became an affiliate in 2000? Okay. How did you hear about the APF ...?

Meshack: I think through, hence I'm saying we were having campaigns. We were having a lot of campaigns. I think VCF is well known around Vaal especially in Evaton and around other communities around there so what we are doing each and every Sunday the regional committee must meet in/around communities so around such meetings there was a lady who stood up in the meeting and spoke about SECC. So we tried to build contact with SECC then through SECC they then promised to come and visit us on that side. Then we had to invite other structures that are part of VCF then we had a broader some sort of a workshop meeting where SECC came down there. SECC came along with Rob Rees, he was part of that meeting so automatically there were members of the APF. We were expecting SECC more importantly as the Anti Privatisation Forum so we were looking at the SECC through our focus on the SECC because it was looking at electricity - we were dealing with evictions - so automatically we wanted to build that relationship. Along we were gonna share our ideas on how we resist evictions, they were going to share how they resist electricity cut off and so forth. Then through that meeting APF was introduced and then the sudden interest was there that we need to affiliate not to SECC but to the APF because I think with the SECC it was not the issue of affiliation it was a matter of building a working relationship because the APF was introduced on that meeting, VCF then became interested to affiliate to APF.

Dale: What are the main goals or objectives of VCF if you were to describe them?

Meshack: I think obviously it's to see these current conditions changing especially on the unemployment issue. At least there should be a shift, some percentage that are dropping so that

you can see that maybe the youth is being developed. There are a lot of development programmes to say that if there are particular programmes somewhere that are happening the youth is much more involved to work on such programmes. I think that's a major issue. The second issue is the issue of evictions. I think we would appreciate if we could see that the evictions, the way that they are happening in our communities maybe they could stop a bit because I think maybe the government could come on the level to understand the issues, to say well people are not affording, why are they no longer affording to pay for their houses and so forth. Such issues if they can be addressed I think maybe our achievements. I think the other issue; I think however we managed to achieve it, but not 100%, the issue of school fees. It was a major issue where a lot of us were not attending school and so forth but it was addressed a bit but I think the matter was not school fees *per se* as to say pay R50 to attend the entire year of school but the issue of school uniforms as well, school resources, because I think the school fees were a very broader issue. We were talking about the issue of uniforms; we are talking about the issue of books because those are still issues. You can't say you won't pay R50 for the rest of the year but you have to buy stationery books. If you were to share stationery, books, it's much more expensive than if you were to pay that R50. Firstly you will pay R50 the school will provide with books; firstly what they did now was to change the responsibility so they said now you won't pay school fees but you will have to buy the books so it was still the same thing. So it was one of the challenges that we are faced with but we are still working towards to overcome it because we are involved in many campaigns around to make public education to be free to all South African residents, not even South Africans but entire African students.

Dale: In your goals and objectives what about basic services?

Meshack: I think there are service delivery issues; I think I should have started with service delivery issues. It's the main major concern that affects everybody whether you are employed, unemployed, attending school or not attending school. I think that's a major issue because since that community has been like that there is a lot of corruption that is happening around. I think our community was formed in '79 ... I thinking its forming 31 years this year and we are having one entire road around the community. I think we are having something like +/- 3000 households in that area so it's a very big community. Having one entire road which I think does not make sense. However, there is a clinic around the community but something we don't even have a shopping complex, you have to go outside the community for shopping and so forth. So I think service delivery is one of the issues to address. The issue of tar roads, actually not only the issue of tar roads but electricity, housing, crisis that we are faced with and unemployment; we believe that those are the issues that government should be addressing. I think that that's our primary issues that we are mainly focusing on

Dale: Describe what you would say are the key tactics that VCF has used to pursue the campaigns around these kinds of issues?

Meshack: I think one of the tactics that has been working for us I mean if you are to remember per '94 we used to have what we called street committees so we are still using that. It's the very strongest tool that is working within the community level because if there are street committees if there is an eviction that is happening in that street automatically there is going to be a quick response in terms of they know who their committee members are who are dealing with such issues. If the matter is unresolved they bring it to the bigger executive which is the bigger structure the executive committee so I think that's one of our tactics and then we also encourage members to have a weekly meeting, we are having Sunday meetings.

Dale: Can we just pause just for a second ... we just took a bit of a short break. Sorry Mish you were talking about meetings that you were having, your ways, your tactics.

Meshack: Ya I spoke about the street committee meetings. I think the other thing was to formulate what we call youth programmes so if there is a particular programme that is happening around the community we will agree with our youth to be involved more on such programme. So automatically this advanced us to be knowledgeable about our community at large, to understand exactly what is happening and also to unpack to the broader community to be clear on such issues so we are having many programmes. We are not limiting ourselves to say this is the Vaal Community Forum, if there are particular programme which is happening like this Youth Against AIDS, it's one of the NGOs which is in the community so we are also involved. We are playing a particular role to ensure that their programme is running smoothly, sometimes to enjoy programmes in terms of having workshops and so forth. I think those are working for us. I think one of the key issues was to have weekly Sunday meetings in each and every area. We divided our communities into four areas, we are having three ward councillors in one area so we divided them into four areas where by each particular area will have a meeting. The common days are Sundays which most of the community people are accessible so every Sunday each and every area there is a public meeting once until we have to call the entire committee public meeting that requires loud hailing and so forth. So those are our tactics.

Dale: And what about direct action? In other words when you decide you are going to pursue a campaign, what kind of tactics do you use, to pursue that campaign?

Meshack: I think ya the same approach, we address it to the public meeting and then you go to the street committee then they will address it in their streets and whatever they identified. Like last time we were having a sit-in in the ward councillors' house so it goes the same way, we address it in the meeting and then it went back to the street committee meetings and then particularly it was identified, it came back, it was identified and it was communicated to us. Another meeting was held to say - this day this should be happening - that never took place. I think we are also making use of our local media like Vaal Weekly, Vaal Vision and Theta FM which is the local radio station so we are making use of them. We are regular in addressing other issues. If there are evictions that are happening in other areas we go to such media and make

announcement to say if a particular person from this area are encountering such problems feel free to contact 1,2,3,4,5,6 so that has been working for us. Not so long I think six weeks ago there was a protest that was happening around the area barricading roads and so forth, so I think the same system also worked whereby we communicated to say, as you can see the other communities are revolting due to lack of service delivery, we enquired and they said no we must take to the streets and so we did not reach them we just address the issue and leave it open. They themselves as the community members will provide some instruction to say this is the way that we can do, so we play an advisory role to say if you approach it in this way there are consequences. So we are just advising with the executive to say I think the best way is this, let's try it and that's how we have been working.

Dale: Tell me a little bit about how the state - and when I say the state I mean whether that is the local councillor or the municipality or the province - has responded to the activities, to the complaints and grievances of the organisation?

Meshack: Municipality has been coming, even the provincial government has been coming because what happened is that there is a stadium that is being built in the area so they are claiming that it cost something like R44 million even that tar road that I'm talking about it spent something like R52 million. So there were issues that were raised around such issues and then those were issues that led to the sit-in in the ward councillors' houses and so forth. So automatically the ward councillor responded by calling ward council meetings so he was speaking the very same language and we said you want to speak and not for other people to ask questions and so forth. So we took the matter further to the mayoral office, to the office of the speaker, Sedibeng because Sedibeng is the district municipality and then it had Mid-Vaal, Emfuleni and Lesedi so we took our grievances to the district office. They responded; they came. One of the Imbizo came to Zone 3 which was focusing especially on the issue of education and on the issue of housing so they came and addressed on such issues. So I think the response was not satisfactory as they would come and lecture us and tell us that they are campaigning about 1, 2, 3 and also campaigning about the World Cup that is coming. It was not useful responses that the community was expecting. I think currently the communities are fed up and they are calling for the removal of the ward councillors with immediate effect, actually not only the area that I'm residing but around the entire Vaal triangle so there is a campaign to say let all the ward councillors step down from their positions because they are not happy with what is happening around the Vaal triangle.

Dale: What has been your experience in your organisation when you have taken to the streets, how the state responded to direct actions?

Meshack: I think that's the only language that the state is understanding so cops will come, they will open fire in terms of rubber bullets and so forth to disperse the crowd but that did not result in a demoralising effect because we told them in advance that such decisions as this one are

going to result in 1, 2,3,4,5 so they were expecting such activities to happen. But because of people you see each time in Zone 3 we have barricaded the roads especially the Zone 3 stop sign because that is one of the busiest roads. We occupy that road so that we close down. Evaton joins and others just join so it was a very massive action that was happening so it forced reps from the municipality to come down and address those issues. Then there were some promises that councillors are going to be suspended because of such issues so there was going to be some investigations that are going on and also we were promised that an official report will come to address such issues because I think that one of the issues that we raised was that councillors on their job descriptions they are entitled to call community public meetings on a quarterly base so that is not happening. We raised such issues so there was a promise that such issues are going to be taken care of within a short of time. We are still awaiting, there is a promise that there is going to be a huge Imbizo whereby the national, provincial and even the local government will be coming but not only directly to Zone 3 but they will try a neutral venue around the Vaal area because they are aware that there is a lot of issues that were raised by different communities but which are common issues which are in relation to service delivery issues. So I think the ideal plan is to come and address such issues to say how best can they deal with such issues to make sure that there is some progress.

Dale: Talking about progress, in the time that you formed the VCF, that has been almost a decade. What kind of changes have you seen, if any? You have been saying that you have been struggling around housing, evictions, education and all these things. In other words what is the impact on your own activities as an organisation?

Meshack: I think when we started on the housing one; however the community is very much responsive on evictions. We are able to stop evictions immediately. As much as we are aware that there is this happening even if it's not in a community that is not affiliated to our organisation we are going to respond immediately to call a meeting to say people to come out and we go in large numbers to stop it so we have been successful in that. We have been able to trace some of the estate agents that are selling people's houses, we have been able to expose some of this corrupt people that we are having even in these government areas. We have been able to expose some of the corrupt officials - I think three councillors have been removed. So these are some of the achievements that we have achieved that this councillor was doing 1, 2, 3. What we were checking was because of the IDP, Integrated Development Plan. We say for this period this was promised so council never implemented. We are having some concrete proof that is coming from the municipality to say this is happening, this has happened but whenever they go to the actual files to check they find that there is no such thing, so some of the councillors were removed with immediate effect. I think the problem is that they were removing an ANC councillor replacing them with an ANC councillor so similar problems were happening so the community became aware of such issues so they decided in 2009 the local elections. Matladi decided, Matladi is the chairperson of VCF, she stood up; she was standing as an independent

ward councillor so I think we did well on the votes, the problem were that during the counting because we were not clear of standing the elections so I think that's where some mess up happened. They managed to cheat on there because I think on our side we were having, we were sure of the percent of the community, we were sure that we had already taken this position so they managed to manoeuvre around such issues as they are capable of doing such issues. I think PAC came to tell us about such to say 'you won, you were even supposed to become a PR councillor because if they say you lost you were supposed to take second position and take that stage. I think that happened but however such political parties came on board in terms of saying they are helping us but at the very same time they were recruiting, they were trying to get their ways to come in because they were aware that we have the masses behind so as an organisation was also assisting but on the election they said no because you have been assisting you can't lobby people to vote for this particular party. So at first we made a mistake, we fell for that trick then we mobilised for PAC and they got second position, they got PR councillor and then they did the very same thing that the ANC was doing. They never delivered, they never came back but I think what we did was, we were now saying to people they must fill in the petitions we should start to remove them with immediate effect. So I think that has been one of the key factors that has been happening but I think the community is aware that such is happening because currently we were not told a particular person but we are experiencing them as we were going through with the position.

Dale: Besides, you mentioned specifically the lack of transport, roads in the community but has there been any improvement on the basic issues at all over the last few years?

Meshack: No. I think there hasn't been any. I think the only changes that came was the building of the stadium, the building of the tar road and I think last year they were installing a pavement alongside the very same tar road of which a lot of money was chowed as well because they were claiming that instead of that they should be going to other streets where the very same problems are. They will go to the very same area. There is a tar road, they were installing on the side for the pedestrians to walk on the pavement which was nonsensical on our side. It was not making any difference to the community because the major issue was to fix the streets that are having problems. So I think the response that they were doing was immediately when we fight or when we revolt they will send tractor to come and create the street to close the holes that are in the street so automatically there was nothing that they did because if it rains there was gonna be the same problem again, so I think it was just a waste of money, resources on their side maybe for that tractor to create the entire area they should have focused on particular streets that are not in good state. They needed to fix them properly instead of going around the entire area do something that we are not even appreciating.

Dale: You mentioned, talking about the PAC my question was, what relationships do you have with other communities and organisations outside the APF, in other words?

Meshack: I think there is a good relationship because in our meetings, in our memberships cards we are not saying if you are coming from a particular party you are not allowed. As long as you are a resident and you are concerned about such issues, you are welcome to come on board; you are welcome to provide your expertise, your experience, your advice whenever necessary. What we have been firm on because we've got first hand information with political parties that they can manipulate such community structures. What we are saying is, we will stick on our organisational principles to say we are for the community, if the community mandate us to do particular things that is what we are gonna do, we are not gonna maybe have special treatment for particular individuals that are coming from particular parties, but if you are coming here you are not coming here as a member of a particular party but coming here as a concerned resident member wanting to develop the community so I think the relationship is very much good. Currently Matladi was being approached several, last year, early this year to say can't she stand? The community is fed up by ANC councillors but should have still that love, that thing that ANC can do something they just need good leaders within the communities so they were approaching Matladi to say please stand as an ANC councillor so as a forum we said that will be a betrayal to the very masses that are having faith on us to stand for the opposition party. We understand ANC policies and so forth. In fact we would like it to be part of the APF because it was able to show us some of the issues that we were not even aware of because people what they would say is they would prefer an ANC councillor to be replaced by an ANC councillor hoping that the problem is with that councillor but not being aware that the problems is with the policies that are guiding them. That is exactly what we are trying to educate them. We have been doing that, a lot of members are now aware that no matter how many ANC councillors you can replace the bottom line is when you change a particular political councillor you should replace them with a neutral person that is accountable to the community, that is to say if he is not delivering we will be able to say remove them with immediate effect. We think communities are mature in terms of understanding such political issues

Dale: That leads me to my next question, which is how has your membership to the APF benefited the organisation?

Meshack: A lot. Through these workshops we are able to get exactly what we are looking for to the community level. You can see that the response is different from what we are getting here. Here we came as leaders. We are clear on a lot of issues but in the communities it's a bit much more different. The people do not understand such big words like neo liberalism, such words you need to make it to be their language, to make sure that they understand such issues so we have been doing that. Sometime you find that a community workshop that sometimes you will have to take 3 days not only 1 day because you need to translate them accordingly to make sure that whenever they leave they are all clear, they are all on the same page that they are understating very clear what was the cause of that workshop. I think the APF has been helping, has been assisting us in terms of doing that - that's why our membership is still growing because of the

information that we are providing. We get some province members coming to our workshop once, we need to make sure we put such issues on the table and they get to understand; so these are the issues. What we do at our workshops we put the IDP document and say these are the issues that we are faced with let's check on the IDP what the municipality is saying. We question them on what the IDP is saying so the discussion will come from there. They will say this has never happened so they themselves are becoming aware of such issues not to say we are feeding them but as one of the education strategy to say people, they need to understand these issues, we are conscientising them actually so I think they are clear now of what issues they are undertaking.

Dale: So that is more on the political and educational level. So what about the involvement of the APF on the organisational, solidarity links with other movements, exposure to other kinds of things?

Meshack: Exactly, I mean APF is more popular than VCF because mainly when we go to them they refer to us as APF comrades even though they know we are from VCF, even on our pamphlet at first we used to say VCF but now we write VCF/ APF so that they understand clearly that this is a group that is coming from this side that so we are identified as APF comrades. I think APF has been playing a very important role. We have been building solidarity, campaigns like on the xenophobia that was happening. We were able to outline the CAX (Coalition against Xenophobia) programme easier in the community because they will say 'oh that's APF comrades. But then we will tell them that we are from APF but we came for this programme today like what is happening, the Abahlali Basemjondolo we had a solidarity march, some members coming on board that were coming from Soweto because we were able to outline and to say Abahlali Basemjondolo does 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 so we were able to, through APF networks we were able to also make use of such networks or expose or sell our programme on the community level. So it becomes easier for them to understand even when they see Abahlali on TV they say 'oh that is the one that we were talking about in the meeting' so they became much more exposed to a lot of the information. Because I think one of the things that was happening, when they see things on TV they would say 'oh that is Soweto, its none of our business' so we make them understand that even if we are not yet faced with the problem of that pre paid meters that other communities are faced with, this pre paid system but we need to be educated, we need to learn things in advance, we must not only learn when they come here, whenever you see the constructors working around such communities you need to ask whether they are aware of such issues that might bring conflict with the community.

Dale: I'm going to shift a little bit more to the APF side now from the community. You have not only been involved in the community structure but you have held positions within the APF - just tell us first of all what those positions have been from the APF side?

Meshack: The first position that I held was to become a research coordinator, that was one of my interest and then along the way I shifted to media, then I shifted to education which is currently my major focus because of my daily base I'm dealing with education issues so I'm much more into education. You see APF has been my varsity because coming from the college I was having that mentality that everything is possible but since I came to the APF I became more factual in terms of my issues. And I became to be like; before I even raise a particular issue I need to be sure of my facts. If I object to a particular thing I need to have my facts. If they question such a particular way I need to be clear on such issues. I think I will say it first ... okay I was having political background but from the community perspective and then joining APF I became exposed to regional issues, to international issues so I became exposed to the entire world to understand what is happening in other worlds and to be able to compare what is happening in Iraq to what is happening in South Africa so I was able to do that. I was even able to assist some of my colleagues that are within the APF. I was able to help a lot of comrades in the APF to understand the APF better, the likes of Patrick Sindane, the likes of Sithembiso Nhlapho. They were comrades that found me here, I was able to outline very clear in the language that they will understand that this is APF, this is what we do 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. APF has been like my varsity level because the position that I was working, like now I'm working with Wits, I've shifted to ECPD but it is through my involvement with the structure, they could see that I'm a committed person, this is some of the things that we could train that this could be 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 through the interviews I mean I talked a lot about the work that I was doing with the APF even though it's not job per se but the same position that I was occupying in the APF allowed me to when I entered another world like the job world, on the job side of it to be able to execute my program, to execute my task easily because I was doing them here. So APF generally it helped me a lot as a person, personally I learnt a lot from the APF so even today I'm still learning along the way, I'm still sharing the skill to other comrades that are still coming on board to the APF so I think APF has been an educating factor for me, I learned through a lot. There was no need for me to go to university to do 1, 2, 3, so the expertise that I'm having that I gained from the APF I can even implement them better than someone who is coming from the varsity level because I have been directly involved with such issues. If you are doing something and then you are reading about something there is a lot of difference, I'm doing it, I'm able to say I did 1, 2, 3 and then somebody can bring the theory that they did so I think ya, APF has been helping in terms of my side because even personally in terms of my daily life it has been assisting me a lot.

Dale: The APF has since the time that VCF joined when there was probably maybe 3 or 4 community organisations, it has grown also dramatically in the last 10 years. What has been the VCF's relationship with other community affiliates that belong to the APF and give me some of your own experiences with regards to the interactions and also how in particular the APF decided at a particular point a few years ago to form regions that you are also involved in ?

Meshack: Through our involvement, what we were doing, I think the APF actually encouraged us to mobilise, to go out there and make sure that a lot of communities understand the real issues that affect it. Because I mean, the reality you are going to form a community structure and along the way it was going to be dissolved there was no way but since the APF was there we were able to make them remain forever. Whenever there was a structure that was formed they will remain forever because we were giving them direct issues that we are faced with, direct solutions that they can approach to resolve such issues. We have been working with WCCC which was one of the old affiliates that came on board to the APF so through that we were able to organise such structures like Evaton West, structures like Kanana, VCF, Boiketlong and so forth. I think the relationship has been good because whatever we were going we were going in the spirit of building, of making sure that such communities understand the real issues, we unpack everything to them. Zone 3 is much more, it's a semi formal area, its only four roomed houses there is no shacks around the area so we would say to them even if you are from the houses the problems that you are faced with they are also facing them so the pain that you are feeling is the very same pain that you are feeling so it's a matter of coming on board. And I think the real issues, some of them like in Zone 7 when they hold their meetings they invite us to come and address their meetings and we go there and address their meetings but we could see that addressing their meetings won't be enough it's high time that people need to stand on their own feet and then we would say you need to form your own structures then we could bring that relationship to say whatever difficulty that you are encountering we will be able to assist if there is a possibility, so I think that kind of relationship we were able to formulate such structures. So I think along the way when it comes to regions now, the plan was, because we could see that if we are having problems for one person let's say if there is a problem in Zone 7, if there is a problem in Zone 3 sometimes you will find that it is good to share information but sometimes communication within the comrades was, you will find that a particular comrade from that particular community are not available, they are not around. You will find that comrades, you introduce yourself sometimes they will not be free to tell you their information because there were those impimpis by apartheid and they are still having that thing that they might be impimpis and so forth. So what they would do was to build a relationship and then one of the advantages was to formulate regional structures whereby a lot of information could be shared amongst ourselves because a lot of issues that we were faced with were common but we were bringing them to the APF. Even if we were bringing them to the APF the very same people that came from particular areas are the ones that can provide such solutions. And then it was then said if there could be some regions to reach out because APF was now growing and then that took place. The formation of the regions was an assisting factor in terms of when there is a region the residents will be able to rule even though they are not yet affiliated to the APF they would manage, they would know that there is a particular group that is meeting somewhere somehow to say if you are having a particular problem you could approach them maybe they could be of assistance in terms of such issues. That is how we came and along the way you could see that the regions are playing a particular

role. Along the way I was even elected the regional coordinator of which I was doing such kind of work with different communities, involve them in our campaigns. Some would feel they do not need to affiliate to APF then it was okay. But as APF we were willing enough to assist them on their issues that they are faced with. Along the way they could see that the importance of them of coming along the way to be full time members of the APF in terms of affiliation. So I think the regions have been a contributing factor and as a way forward I think APF needs restructuring so I think we really need to because a lot of communities are now coming on board and you could see that in 2007. I remember while I was the regional coordinator they used to ... they were putting a lot of posters around Sebokeng so because we were going to communities with real issues like in Dunusa there was construction that was building RDP houses and the construction just left, houses were not complete and so forth. So what we did as APF we went to that community and said the only option is for you to deal with this issue. We gave them a lot of options to say which kind of activity you feel like you can do. We said to them you can march but there is a different mode of marches. You can march and deliver a memorandum, they can take forever not responding, you can either barricade the roads, you can write a signed petition, we gave them all the options but they then decided that the best option was to barricade the roads, to call the municipality to come on board and see the issues. To verify the issues that they are raising and I think that happened. I think four days after that the response was very much positive whereby the construction came back and completed their work in that area. So that was a motivation to other communities to say what we did in Dunusa through the role of APF, they could see it in the newspapers, they could see it everywhere so it became more interested. Whenever we are in the community before we approach a particular community, as a region now, we will take the IDP to say this community is facing these problems, the IDP is saying they have addressed 1, 2, and 3,4,5,6. We go to say we are not aware, the IDP is saying such problems that we are faced with have just address them. There is a budget that was allocated for particular issues so we show them something that we have proof that this is the fact the municipality is saying. So around such issues more different communities became interested and would want to engage in such activities that they are faced with.

Dale: ... you have been involved at different levels in the APF as well as in your own affiliate. Speak to the challenges or problems that you are being confronted with in regards to mobilising and accountability, organisational issues.

Meshack: Let me start by mobilising. In terms of mobilising I think the challenges that we are faced with, we are still having that mentality that an elected person or an elected office bearer has to execute such task. We don't see it as our primary role as each and every member because if we elect a particular person we feel that person has the responsibility to do 1,2,3,4,5, 6 even if that person is not around you don't close that gap even if you are knowledgeable about doing such chores - that is what I have experienced. In terms of the organisation again it depends also to an individual to say what do you feel about your organisation, are you really in love with your

organisation, do you like it? Do you want to see it growing? What are your objectives personally? So if you are positive, you want to see your organisation growing I think it will be your primary role to make sure that the organisation continues. I think while I was a coordinator I was making sure that I was taking care of that. I mobilise around the Vaal, I make sure that APF is known on all corners around the Vaal even if somebody talks about the APF a particular person will be able to respond even if it's not an APF member so I was able to execute such task with my team. Along the way there are a lot of challenges. Some comrades are actually becoming, they start to put their personal issues on the struggle whereby if a particular person is having a particular position instead of supporting that particular person they will try to crash that particular person even if that person is doing good things for the organisation. For the mere fact that they do not like that person they will make sure that they will jeopardise whatever that person is trying to build or even if it's for their own benefit, so I think those are some of the things that were happening even as the APF we were not able enough to address such issues. We have been exposing them but I think we were not having a direct focus as to say this is how we are going to address them - we need to address such issues. There are a lot of problems around the community in terms of mobilisation. When I was the regional coordinator I will call a mass meeting and so forth with other comrades but they will expect me as the organiser to address the meeting but they will be able to address because whatever I am going to address is the very same issues that they know but they will expect me as an organiser to address those issues that they know which becomes a another challenging factor. Because you became ... people know that, especially people that think that you are making trouble like the ANC they became, this is a trouble maker so they clarify you as an individual now not as a an organisation. They say if we can deal with this person automatically we can be able to reclaim this course. But if you were to take collective ownership of the organisation and be able to address such issues, when the questions are put you are all able to respond to such issues so I think they were going to see that this is an organisational position not a particular individual position. This is still happening at the moment especially in the Vaal. If you are having a particular position comrades expect you to do a particular activities on your own, they do not see themselves as capable of doing such activities. So I really think we need to address such activities especially on that issue. So I think it's the only way where APF will grow even personally in terms of individuals in terms of addressing such issues. What was the ...

Dale: The other one was talking about challenges and problems, talking about accountability.

Meshack: Again comrades, I think a similar approach should apply. They will expect you to be as a leader to be accountable. Let's say if you are requesting, not accountable in terms of money, to be accountable to call campaigns about what is happening they themselves also as members they ought to be accountable. If as a leader I'm failing to do 1,2,3,4,,5,6 they as members are supposed to call me and say you need to account, you need by this time to have done 1,2,3,4,5, 6 or they should do it. They should say this is one of your tasks. They do not see themselves as

accounting members but they like to see one person accountable but not they/themselves as accounting members. So of which it becomes a problem hence I'm saying I'm not even sure what kind of education would they need because I was aware of that issue, I was aware that the organisation was trying to address such issues. It was able to address them because on my side I was one of the people that were feeling the very same way but I was elected into position I could see the problems now even if I was out of the positions I was able to address such issues. I was able to say these are my issues as well I must be able to do 1,2,3,4,5,6 I must not wait for a particular person to come and do 1,2,3 or to execute such task even if I'm around area. So I think that is still one of the dominating issues in the APF but I think it's a small issue, it's a matter of us addressing directly to say these are the issues, we have to be honest and say these are the issues and we address them so the problem is that as comrades we are not becoming honest to ourselves even if I'm able to do less and my structure is lacking, if VCF is not having regular meeting I won't even be stopped from saying we are having such problems these are the challenges. I'll paint the good picture to say this is still happening but I should be much more transparent to say this is my organisation. I must be humble to say we need assistance, what kind of help can you provide as APF? These are our challenges and the APF automatically will be able to address that issue but we are not being loyal to ourselves as comrades. We need to open up to ourselves to say I need to be honest, I need to tell I can't do 1,2,3,4,5,6 but I can do 1,2,3,4,5,6 even on positions. If I can't do 1,2,3,4,5,6 I must allow other people that can do it without pointing fingers that such and such has taken my task so I'm unable to execute such task. I think it's a matter to open up as comrades. This is home we need to open up at home to say I'm having difficulties please assist where possible.

Dale: Now one of the challenges, key challenges is early on the APF managed to receive fairly substantial funding to drive some of its programmes. Now you mention that in your community the vast majority of people are unemployed just like they are at the APF, this has created a situation and challenges - just speak to some of your experiences with regards to financial resources.

Meshack: I think in terms of financial resources we were fortunate enough to be part of the APF I think the APF can assist 70% of our activities are being covered by the APF especially from the VCF even if we are relying on the community to make some donations, they are making some difference but not much because we cannot force people to pop out some money if they don't have it. But APF has been taking care of such issues hence I'm saying we are grateful. The problem that occurred was we became much more relaxed to say if we are having a particular mass meeting APF will provide so we became much more relaxed because we were having other ways. I think we were having means to say as much as we were able to barricade the roads we were able to assist our local business people. I think it's high time that they must also plough back, to assist and make sure that these kinds of campaigns that are also benefiting for them they must contribute to make sure that such things are happening so hence I'm saying we realised that

along the way especially in 2007 or 2008, I can't remember when we were in Braamfontein when APF was having financial difficulties. It was very hard on our side because if APF does not have money we cannot do some of our tasks that the communities has requisitioned us to do them but I think we were able to disclose and be able to say that 'look we are relying on the APF currently we are having this situation what can we do?' A lot of options came on board to say I think we need to knock house-to-house now because not everybody will turn out to a mass meeting. We can develop some sort of a form to say can members contribute whatever they can so that was also assisting. But I think immediately when the APF get back on its feet again we relaxed again of which it was our problem. We were supposed to continue doing that because it was going to sustain us for longer period even if the APF is not there. Of which it's not possible. We were just thinking that it might happen but this was to say that even if the APF is not there VCF will sustain its activities. So I think we were discussing that last year to say really we need to stand up as an organisation and not to be dependent on the APF but to have our own programmes. Like as VCF we are able to say on elections we are able to stand independently even if APF does not stand the elections but as community members we need to stand we are able to do that. So we need to sustain such campaigns that APF is not going to cover so I think one of the things is we processed our documents to register as an NPO so I think one of our advantages is to start making news of the local business. Vaal is very rich in terms of the industries so it's high time that those industries are ploughing back to the communities, making sure that they contribute to such community based organisations, these are NPOs which are fighting for service delivery so I think those companies have a social responsibility to take care of. It is one of our strategies where we are trying to say they must shift focus on of level on the APF but now we must think broadly to think of sustaining the very same APF as it was sustaining us for such 10 years that we have been part of it - that kind of maturity which we managed to develop along the way.

Dale: The APF is made up of three different components; the vast majority are community affiliates but there are also political groupings and there are also individual activists. In your experience in the APF how would you say that those components work together, both the good and the bad?

Meshack: Let me start with the good side, advantageous, reason being from the community based organisations we are able to reflect, I think we are championing the struggle, exactly what is happening in the community. We are able to say this is the solution to this, this is how we can address it but I think again within the APF we are able to meet with political groups for them to give their side of view to say this is how we view things politically. We are able to view them in a community base to say in my community we want to get rid of a councillor and then we put someone who is independent but we were not sure how we were going to approach that and so forth. We were not thinking outside the box in terms of that context. But then with political groupings they were able to come up with some ways to say if we were to stand independently as

councillors this is our way to hold them accountable. So these are some of the things that I have experienced to also engage us on some of the political issues. But I think within the APF people that has been playing a much more particular role are individuals within the organisation. I won't say academics I won't say what I will just say academics because you see they are bringing their individual expertise. As individuals they were able to learn exactly what is happening with the communities, what the political groupings are saying. They provide their views to say our views to things are this so we were able to learn from such. That much I can say those three are the ones that are making sure that the APF grows because they are making sure that we get many angles of discussions; politically, from the community, from the particular individual that is coming from outside with his or her own expertise to provide to the organisation so I think that has been one of the assisting factor within the organisation.

Dale: You said that you will start with the good, now...

Meshack: I think on the bad side the problem is ... let me start with the political groupings and the community based organisations. The problem now is that community based organisations are managed from the communities so I think our task is to come and report and account to the APF. But now the problem with the political groupings they are now bringing their positions to say this is how we view things, this is how we want things to run so it becomes in contradiction to what you are doing in community level because we say to members if you became a political party, APF does not stand in elections, when they meet them they discuss that we need to stand for 1,2,3, we need to stand in elections, we need to form green coalitions and what, what ... so those are contradictions to what is happening because it is seen as if now the reason that we are working with them, remember now some of them come from political parties. We need to associate ourselves with this political group they will say now you want to be in power now; you want to do what these councillors are doing? So it becomes a conflict of interest in the community level even if you are raising them they will say this is our view so I think that becomes a problem. It's good that we are sharing ideas but now that they want to divert the focus of the APF - that will be a problem because really if the APF were to stand the elections we are going to lose our focus because now we need to know who is going to occupy the provincial what, what and I think APF is not ready yet to even address such issues. So personally I'm objecting to that, I mean even at this stage if the communities are giving them the mandate to say this structure needs to stand they still have a chance to stand as independent candidates which I think is good but I think to divert the APF focus that will contradict everything and will put a lot of communities to crisis because a lot of communities are looking at the APF as an organisation that should be directing them - but now if APF were to shift focus and became a political party that will bring about conflict.

Dale: One thing that I specifically wanted to ask you about ... you have been involved in many years in educational aspects. Just tell us a little bit about your experiences particularly in the APF with the APF's work and campaigns and its successes and failures.

Meshack: From the APF perspective now on the education side we've been doing tremendous work. We have been building relationships with universities, relations with other sectors that are directly focusing on education issues of which it was one of my good things. APF has been providing education to its own cadres, to other members that are not even part of the APF. In terms of education it's something that APF is providing on a daily basis even if you are not aware that it's providing it it's something that keeps on happening. Some of the comrades came here not knowing how to use a computer but they are now knowledgeable even in such issues; how to write a press statement, how to design a pamphlet, how to design a poster so these are educational aspects that APF has been able to provide to its own cadres even to outside members. So I think APF has been playing that important role. We have engaged some of the core programs like Education Rights Campaign with universities and so forth so we play an important role in terms of offering solidarity statements, going there in person to offer our solidarity so there were a lot of engagements that we were doing as APF. We have been running workshops, various kinds of workshops ... that people understand the real educational issues that communities are faced with directly so I think we have been achieving in terms of addressing such issues. Last week we were having an educational workshop that we were focusing on the current educational system that is happening in the country. It was excellent because a lot of members were able to understand, to get the theory of what is exactly happening because they keep on blaming, when you hear in the news that OBE as a system is failing then we also assume that without knowing but now we were able to prove consultatively, to approach the direct people that are able to provide relevant expertise, to provide relevant information about what are the real core issues so we were able to draw them on board and to provide relevant educational issues to say these are the issues, this is what is happening, this is what is delaying this so we were able to be knowledgeable about such issues directly now. So I am involved in such campaigns like no fee schools. So we have been playing a very important role especially at a community level. We have been going to schools, we have been able to engage them directly in terms of focus group discussions, in terms of SGB meetings, parents meetings to address such issues to say many people cannot afford. With our voice being out there and with some campaigns maybe pickets, marches, joint marches with the ERP (Education Rights Programme) ... that has been positive response on our side because the government came to recognise that there is a need to scrap the school fees. So we didn't stop there. We went back to our communities to make sure that we are playing another role in terms of, actually we are verifying to say that these schools are not charging their learners school fees and so forth so we have been exposing those that are continuing doing that so I think we have been playing a very important role as an organisation to such education issues of which we are still currently doing it. APF is now part of PPEN (Public Participation in Education Network) which is the bigger network that

is happening around the country. APF is now part of global network for education so our voice is not only in the communities that we are servicing but across the globe now. We make sure that this is exactly what APF is saying and we have written submissions, we have been exposing principals, we have been exposing officials, you see we have been doing a lot of work that even the organisation is aware that we have been doing it but we have been achieving a lot of work around education ... because that's one of my interests as I have been saying. Currently now - we have been dealing with the problems - we have been identifying the problems but what we have been doing is to direct it to the relevant people to deal with the issues. Currently what we are doing in communities now we've shifted the focus, what we are doing is to attend to the issues directly. We have been complaining that there are no schools libraries there are no degree in terms of educational issues. Now what we are doing, we are encouraging communities to be involved directly now, to say you need to stand up to make sure that we need to take our education system seriously now. If you don't stand up and make a difference in our communities no one will. If we were to rely on the government to make sure that government will come and see it might take fifty years to come so at the moment we will be struggling, suffering because it affects us directly now, so we are standing up. The programme that I just outlined that I'm involved in at CLING (Community Literacy and Numeracy Group) I think the major focus of it is to mobilise schools around communities to have our own libraries from the resources that we are coming from the households even. Currently we are having a shack library which is a start up point. We are involving the municipalities, at first we were not in good terms with the municipalities, but what we are doing is to involve the municipalities to say this is our initiative how can you ensure that it sustains this programme to run because it's one of the programmes and we have already started as a community so now we are approaching things in a different way. Same way but we are approaching things simultaneously, same way we are exposing them at the same way we are engaging them on the programme to say how best can they shape this activity which is one of the biggest factors.

Dale: A few more questions. In the last several years there has been some political changes in the country and in the ruling party - has that at all affected both the struggles and the character of things at the community level, or at the APF level in your opinion?

Meshack: In my opinion especially in the communities it played a particular role, it affected them taking from ANC splitting into two parts, there was now a new formation, COPE was on board. Even other political parties like PAC, APC was formed there was this other one, I can't remember this other one because 1, 2, 3 so communities were like cause you see ANC and PAC are much more popular than political parties within the community so that becomes a concern to them. You come to see things in a different way because they were not clear that ANC is pro privatisation, it's doing 1,2,3,4,5,6 so they were having faith to say because now ANC is splitting maybe COPE is an alternative, we are now going to view things differently. But I think APF played a role again, they were able to indicate to its cadres that whether there is COPE ... the

bottom line is they are still going to follow the very same policies that are drawn up so we were able to go to the community and say why there is COPE why there is what. I remember some of us were politically becoming confused to say now there is COPE, we need to vote for COPE maybe COPE will bring action, maybe PAC is here let's go for it. So automatically we were saying look their stealing or what these people their concern is power, they just want power so if they are not empowering people they are stealing automatically, they are the very same people within the political parties so there is not even going to be any difference within the community its going to be the very same complication that we are having. It is even going to be more even so I think on the APF especially with the comrades of the APF as a member now it becomes a challenging factor because we ourselves were ready to test ourselves to say are we really clear of our politics so some of our comrades moving, joining COPE, some of our comrades moving joining APC. That shows us that as much as we are clear of our political direction but some of our comrades are not as clear as we think they are because they still engage themselves with such parties. Currently we see they are coming back, they realise that whatever we have been saying to them is a true reflection but however we cannot blame them but sometimes people believe in putting things into practise, they believe in going there to see themselves that really this is failing and they will come back and say really this is failing, I've been part of that so I think that is one of the thing as APF that we can say was a challenging factor. Some of the members were confused to say which parties are they aligning themselves with but I think I will also say maybe it's because of the unemployment state that we are having in the organisation, maybe it's they were seeing an opportunity to say there is COPE now maybe if we are active in the communities we might get positions, we might get what but not even sure but that might be one of the issues. They decided when they go out they need to seek some positions to be in power of which being opportunists again is not an option even if we are outlining such issues to them but then it was good that they then learnt a lesson in a hard way. Then they came back to the organisation without even having those positions but regretting and then as APF we are always free to welcome them back to provide us with an information that they had firsthand experience with. It was kind of challenging because a lot of members were a bit confused but however I think the APF has been fair. We are able to outline it in advance that COPE, ANC their politics are the same, changes are here and there, such political workshops that we are having within the organisation we able to assist some of us personally to go back on the communities and pass such information to the community at large.

Dale: The other things that has happened over the past several years is that many of the social movements that arose in 1999/2000 have either become very weak - some of them have disintegrated like the LPM, Jubilee, it's been a very challenging time ... and internal difficulties weakened them. Two parts to my question; why do you think that was the case; and, how did that affect the APF if at all?

Meshack: Let me start by saying the problem that created all this conflict is a matter of transparency, honestly. Comrades we are not honest to ourselves, that's my personal view so I think if comrades were open enough to address such issues I think there were going to be some sort of solutions. Because you see you ask this comrade what exactly is happening they will tell you a story, you go to the other in the very same organisation they will tell you a different story. It was power mongering within social movements it was one of the ... factors. I think there was no transparency in terms of everybody wanted themselves to be in power but when they were not elected in power they decided maybe to take another route of which it was wrong they were supposed to address issues, to be accountable and to be discussed in a fairly manner. I think that was going to be one of the assisting issues. I think it's an issue of leadership, I think as social movements we've got advantages in terms of guiding the country in terms of a collective way in terms of claiming their freedom, but the problem is we ourselves are not clear to say alternatives means to us because some of us thought while I'm in power, while I'm in leadership positions while you are not in leadership position you are trying to regard yourself as a useless person. You don't see yourself useful to other organisations, you seem to be demoralised you only see yourself as being valuable while you are in a particular position which is not true but those are the things that I could say were the causing factors round such issues. If we could overcome such issues and ask ourselves that we are not here to be in power, to be in leadership positions but we are here to build, we are here because of 1, 2, and 3 I think that can be an assisting tool to all of us even to APF as an organisation. I think the impact that it has impacted badly to APF as an organisation. APF has been there with such organisations, we were sharing responsibility in terms of when we are having a particular activity here we know we could just call them to have general activities somewhere around. That has been dropping and that has become an issue especially on our side because really we have to be concerned if our sister organisation is failing we need to check as to how best can we assist them but also we never wanted to see ourselves caught up in the middle of the conflict, we did not involve ourselves directly. We were involved somehow to try and calm things down, to call peace to make sure that the working relationship is still sustained within such organisation but I think we are not entering the problems with both feet we are entering with one leg to say 'I don't want to be caught up in the middle, I'm trying to resolve but at the same time I want to clean up my house so I think that is what has been happening. But I really think if APF had intervened we should have a focus group whereby we call such organisations and sit down and discuss such issues openly because focus group is one of the tools that allows everybody to speak freely your mind to speak issues directly. Maybe if APF were to facilitate such programmes then I think we going to be assisting them like the likes of LPM, understand their weaknesses and also share our ideas and say this is what has helped APF, we were having our own weaknesses, some of the affiliates were not visible, we were having such issues as well hence I'm saying sometimes we were having our own problems as well so I think that contributed to that. But I think really maybe we took a lot of time without involving ourselves in such issues. We thought that maybe they will resolve them but maybe we

should have addressed things in a different way to say APF has taken this position, this is the APF position, if you are here to be in a leadership position clearly that's a mistake then we give it a position to say you need to involve yourself willingly, you need to be a member of the organisation to make it and you will grow, it's not a matter of positions, it's a matter of how do you want to contribute to the organisation. I think we should have played that role, we should have facilitated that one we were going to be able to rescue such organisations, I think we never did that.

Dale: The APF as you said has had its own internal problems and its own challenges but the APF remains here ten years on, why do you think the APF is still here?

Meshack: A lot of comrades have been, some of us we came here focusing on the community issues but since I joined the APF I got to gain a lot of leadership skills than I was having before so I was able to - when I raise my facts - I was able to say these facts, we comment only on issues that I think will build the organisation not destroy the organisation. So you became sceptic on what you are raising in a meeting, you come to say that if I raise it this way it will raise a lot of conflict but if you are coming I must raise these issues in this way even if you could see some of the issues are very offensive you feel like really this is touching personal. But we were able to distinguish our personal issues with the organisational issues so we were able to do that within the organisation. I think one of the other things that kept the APF despite its own internal issues to be still there to overcome such issues, I think it was the issue of APF even if its not ... you see the fighting in the APF is based on the leadership but when we go to the community level where we get our mandate from if you are told to do 1, 2, 3,4,5,6 you have to do it or else you will be removed from that particular position. One way or another you have to pull up your socks and they will call you to order as much as the office will call you to order. You will realise that you have to take things this way because you've got the masses that you are representing; you are not here representing your own cap. Also what I can say this was one of the issues with other movements, they were really not taking mandates directly from community levels where they could say if you can't do this we will remove you but the particular person will vacate that position to execute our task so there was no fear, there was no pressure on their side maybe they were running freely, even if they were having somewhere to account to I don't think maybe the constituencies' were having more power to them like what is happening in the APF because I think the community struggles are having more power. And they are independent from the APF and the APF sometimes allows to guide them if there are problems they will refer them to those regions to discuss that issues and bring a solution. This has been one of the issues that has been assisting and then APF has been honest, it's been open to say we are having problems. I think they did not open up to say these are the problems. Without opening up you will face a lot of problems, you will see yourself in being more and more problems than you were but if you had just outlined that you are having problems and allowed solutions to come on board .

Dale: Two or three last questions. From your organisations' perspective - VCF - what have been the main strengths and weaknesses of the APF, or the main successes and failures? You have mentioned some of them I know but I'm talking about the big picture.

Meshack: APF successes were; APF was able to give direction to the community based organisations, its strengthening that one, there is no way that an organisation can do that, APF can do that. APF has been supporting in terms of supporting community initiatives, struggles that are not even national struggles but that are directly faced with community levels it's been able to do that. APF has been facilitating, it's been able to guide us in terms of drafting our own programme. Sometimes you draft a programme that won't even benefit us, you just draft a programme because you want what ... but it was able to give us knowledge to see things in a different way, to think outside the box, to think to say not only our concern as VCF but we should be concerned as the entire nation to say that whatever is happening here must also happen somewhere even KZN it must happen so we were able to learn in that kind of way. One of the strengths again, APF was able to draw more communities to come on board, to draw more communities to understand the real issues even if they are not APF affiliates, that has happened along the way and so forth. The weakness that we are supposed to have done, I think the APF the mistake that it did hence I'm saying we should check things because we are now ten years now, we must look things in a different way - we need to restructure. A lot of communities are coming on board. A lot of community struggles want to affiliate to the APF; they want to see themselves working with the APF so I think the weakness thing was that APF had one office that is the weakness of the APF. The APF was supposed maybe to have some mobile offices around where people can access it easier because one of the complaints that you will find is people are complaining about accessing the APF, its only accessible through Joburg, it's not accessible in other provinces. I think it's high time that we need to build to say how we build toward having mobile offices closer to the people where we can access it. I think we must have advice offices because that is the job that we are doing, advising community that are going to be run by our own cadres that are trained by the very same APF. So I think in that way that we will overcome a lot of the challenges that we are faced with in these ten years..

Dale: If you were to describe right now in the 10th anniversary of the APF, first of all do you think the APF still remains relevant in the larger political and economic sphere and what do you think is the role of the APF as it moves forward?

Meshack: It is still relevant because it is addressing issues that people are faced with on a daily basis that these are our challenges so APF is able to address the daily issues even if sometimes the APF becomes, like there are political groupings within the APF they became too focused on their issues. However the real issues that communities are faced with are becoming integrated, they are finding space to do, to cast them in the very same discussion so I think it has been good in terms of that. I think APF whatever that it is doing I don't think APF should shift the focus, it

will be a mistake for the APF to shift from what it is doing maybe to standing for elections, you see that will demoralise a lot of people. The APF must continue doing the way it's doing but the only way APF must do is to decentralise its visibility. Its visibility must be much more relevant in most areas, it must be visible. APF is a very good thing. It is good that it addresses some of the issues that we are faced with that are political issues that are directly political however that might impact on our side, check the issue of the Freedom Charter, we thought the Freedom Charter is the way it is, it's good, it's what but APF came to say it's the Freedom Charter you are supposed to be celebrating its anniversary but look at the condition of Kliptown. So you see a lot of things will come, were an eye opener to a lot of things that we were not even concerned about that at first but it becomes our daily issues to say these are our relevant issues we need to address such issues so I think it's being a contributing factor in terms of such issues to address relevant and direct issues, so I don't think the APF must shift the focus that it is doing. I think it's a matter of focusing more on other issues like, the only thing that we are not even focusing more on the APF, yes we are doing it but I don't think the message goes straight into the communities in terms of building solidarity, activities with other countries, I think we need to be doing a lot of work in terms of doing that. We are doing it but I don't see that spreading so much at community level I think that's something that we must start doing it but I think in general, the very same role that it's doing, it's a matter of improving here and there that is 100% clear task of what the communities are looking forward to.

Dale: Those are all the questions I had but I always ask at the end of the interview whether there is anything that I haven't asked you or there is anything that you would like to add on top of what we discussed?

Meshack: What I wanted to outline is my major concern. Whether we call it restructuring or transformation of the APF really we need to consider that there is a lot of communities that are coming on board, a lot of communities are in crisis, a lot of issues, you could see that privatisation, we don't see it stopping anywhere soon. We see that it is growing more. We are going into the World Cup now, those are some of the elements of privatisation because poor people are being evicted from their respective communities where they are sitting for a number of years so I think it's a matter of APF, we need to engage on direct issues now especially on the issue of land now. South Africa is having a crisis in terms of the land. There is this 'willing buyer, willing seller' policy that ANC came with but we don't see it making any changes but as APF, if we could intervene, if we could involve ourselves with that kind of campaign a lot of differences will happen. Because APF has got the way it addresses issues and the way it points them out they are able to respond to issues directly and in a very quick way so that is something that has to happen. I think we also need to check - APF we are in ten years of existence now, we have been providing popular education to our cadres, to the community and so forth but I think we must look on a bigger picture now to say if we are restructuring or transforming the APF to make sure that it is accessible to everyone I think we must now start to look at things in a

different way to say, yes popular education is still relevant, we still need popular education but I think we must make it in conjunction with the formal one. We must make sure that there is formal education that is also happening because I have been seeing in these years that are past a lot of comrades working on the government SETAs now. If we are having that kind of formal education we will have more comrades. I'm not encouraging that comrades must work for government but I'm saying we have more professional comrades. Currently we are having a lot of comrades but if you are to check their state the highest qualification is matric so I think we need to improve that, they are relevant, they are clear in terms of a lot of issues that are relevant to them but in terms of being accredited to say this comrade should lead a particular thing I think it's high time now we need to involve the government initiative to make sure that as APF but now we should drive things. We should drive some of the programmes to say this is the way that government is driving because I think one of the questions will be, I mean they have been asking that. If you are saying we must do this what are you providing? Such questions have been coming up. I think I was asked in one community, is 'APF going to build houses' then I responded by saying that APF is not in government, APF is not a political party, APF is here to guide community structures, APF is consisting of community members, you are an APF member, you are even if you are not affiliated to the APF because we have got concerns around service delivery issues, such issues that's exactly APF, those are elements of APF. So we are already doing the very same thing that I'm doing here, it's a matter of being clear, to conscientise people to understand really, to make sure that APF remains forever, to make sure that APF is there. So we need to challenge things the very same way that we are doing but I think we must spice up along the way to say that these are some of the things that we are able to do. You see at times you go to such networks like PPEN where there are a lot of academics - if comrades from APF stood up, I once stood up at one of the meetings at Wits, I stood up and spoke about the real issues and everyone became interested because I'm talking from direct issues now. So they wanted to know more so I was given more time than any other person who was within that meeting. So such meetings like that one are good but you find that our comrades do not have the trust in themselves to say they can do that so it takes one to do it, maybe I had been exposed to a lot of events where I'm able to stand up in front and speak so I think we are trying to capacitate them, we are trying to make sure that a lot of academics within the APF are having a lot of, you see we must draw more to come on board. We are working with Wits; we are having relations with other institutions, Khanya College and so forth. It's high time that we must use such institutions that are closer to us to make sure that the very same challenges that we are faced with that such organisations that can be able to provide such issues are able to provide with that. Sure, that's it.

Dale: Thanks a lot Mish

Meshack: Sure

