

Collection Number AL3290

Project name: Anti Privatisation Forum

Date of interview: 2010-11-22

Location of interview: Johannesburg

Language/s of interview: English

Length of interview: 30:30

Name of Interviewer: Dale McKinley

Name of interviewee/s: Johannes Mokonyane

Name of translator (if any): None

Name of transcriber: Sehlaphi Sibanda

Notes on access and use (if any): None

Audio file name/s of interview: AL3290_Mokonyane Johannes_2010-11-22



Interviewer: It's the 22nd November 2010, Johannes thanks for coming through. Can you just for the record state your full name?

Mokonyane: My full name is Johannes Moloki Mokonyane

Interviewer: And Johannes just before I start asking you questions about TECRA [Thembisa Concerned Residents Association] and the organisation I want to get to know everybody a bit personally so I'm asking this little bit about yourself so we can locate people. So where and when were you born?

Mokonyane: I'm born in Johannesburg in Baragwanath but I grew up in the rural area called Hammaskraal which is Marapeng village. Then I've been studying from there, grade naught until grade 12 and then I did matric there and I went on to the department of education where I trained to be a teacher. I just went there for two years then I drop off then I come back to Johannesburg then I do some human resource management with Damelin and logistics management. Then from there that's where I started to participate in community organisations from my village at Hammaskraal but I come back to Thembisa but I stayed in the suburb of Houghton, it's not far from here so I grew up with these difficult DA people and we normally see these Winnie Mandelas and Ramaphosas coming to the place where I used to live. That is where I heard a different form the politics because there was a time where that person I was living with was arrested with Mandela in the same cell then when he got out of prison he just took that door which used to be security for him and brought it back to his house and he just put it on the garden and we used it as a garden door all the time. Then from there I get married and I buy my house in Thembisa and then from there I become the general secretary of Thembisa which is TECRA.

Interviewer: What does TECRA stand for?

Mokonyane: TECRA is Thembisa Concerned Residents but from before we can form TECRA we were having this idea from SANCO, Thembisa Civil Society before then at the end of day we formed TECRA in 2000.

Interviewer: I'll ask you about TECRA. You said you are married, do you have children?

Mokonyane: Yes I have 5 children?

Interviewer: 5 children? How old are they?

Mokonyane: Its 23, 22, 14, 12 and 5

Interviewer: Okay. And they are all here with you?

Mokonyane: Yes they are all here. Two have just passed from the universities, I'm left with three.

Interviewer: You've already told me a little bit about your schooling, what other work have you done?

Mokonyane: I worked as a sector driver at Nampak and there I worked for a long time because I worked for 18 years and I just become a human resources developer at Nampak I think for 10 years. Then from there I got retrenched in 2004. Then from there I just worked part time in TECRA then until now I can't say I'm working because I'm working for one of the car rentals in Johannesburg.

Interviewer: You just mentioned that in terms of your politics, how you became politically active was it initially in Hamanskraal and the community there?

Mokonyane: I started from there because in school I was a prefect from standard 1 until standard 5. From standard 7 until standard 10 at that time I was chief prefect of the school and my community was ... I was still young but I was having those positions.

Interviewer: When did you first become involved in political organisations and activist organisations?

Mokonyane: I think in 1980 I became involved because it was after '76 riots. Then from there I learnt to be involved in that kind of things.

Interviewer: Were you a member of a political party or just a civic organisation member?

Mokonyane: From the onset I was a member of the civic organisation, from home until here. But during 1994 election I went on as South African because I was so excited because of the first election and I voted for the ANC - but since from there I didn't vote for them.

Interviewer: Okay, we will come to that. What was your specific interest when you formed TECRA in 2000? So it was pretty much the same year that the APF was formed, so how did you come to hear of the Anti Privatisation Forum?

Mokonyane: We started TECRA in February 14 and then we hear about APF in June the same year then we contacted comrades. There is a man who comes from APF who just come to our community meetings and then from there we interacted with APF.

Interviewer: And why the interest in the APF? Why the APF?

Mokonyane: We have got similarities on the programme, they are doing similar things that we are doing on the ground and we think they have got the same goals that we've got that's why we interacted with them.

Interviewer: Tell me specifically what kind of issues and struggles does TECRA take up on the ground?

Mokonyane: What we are taking on is water and sanitation, electricity, housing and education and HIV/AIDS and some sort of training.

Interviewer: What kind of training?

Mokonyane: Especially on basic computer training.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about Thembisa itself, the community what kind of community, what kind of soci-economic conditions in Thembisa there?

Mokonyane: As you know Thembisa is surrounded by lots of companies, we've got Oliver Tambo, we've got Isando and Olisfoentein so its surrounded by a lot of big companies so for that because we've got 1.5 million communities in Thembisa and we've got different types of them we've got semi, poor, suburban ...

Interviewer: is it mostly formal housing or is it also a lot of shacks?

Mokonyane: We've got informal, we've got shacks and we've got formal houses so we've got bonds and so forth.

Interviewer: How would you describe Thembisa politically in terms of its history?

Mokonyane: Come again.

Interviewer: Thembisa's political history? Is it predominantly an ANC area?

Mokonyane: It's not dominant of the ANC. It's a lot of open because there is a lot of political parties there.

Interviewer: When you first started TECRA, you were saying you took up all sorts of issues but why initially did TECRA start?

Mokonyane: On that time we were having a programme with the councillors there was an issue with the councillors. Most of the time they were switching off our electricity and they don't take our waste removals so we have seen and sit down as a community and say this thing we want to take the municipality by its horn so that's when we start forming TECRA.

Because at that time we were still with TRA which is Thembisa Residents Association, so normally we were sending some of the executives to speak to the councillors but they were not doing that. So we just get out of that TRA and formed TECRA that one because we know that we know how to communicate with the councillors and the mayors and so forth. So we opened that platform since from that day.

Interviewer: Describe how TECRA is structured as an organisation, what is the structure?

Mokonyane: We've got LEC which is local executive members, we've got the sectional committees and we've got ward as sectional committees and we've got street communities. That is the way it's structured.

Interviewer: And you meet on a regular basis?

Mokonyane: Yes we meet on a regular basis especially Tuesdays and Thursdays but we normally use schools. We don't have an office because we don't believe in office organisations so we use schools in order that everyone must participate.

Interviewer: You've talked about some of the issues in TECRA, electricity, water, housing ... what would you describe as the main goals and objectives of TECRA, what is it trying to achieve?

Mokonyane: Just to teach the community. If you can see just from 2000 there is a lot of things that is happening on the ground especially the formation of the municipalities, as you know we were having the old East Rand one now it's Ekurhuleni and so we are participating in two municipalities which is Ekurhuleni Metro and Joburg metro. So for instance most of the people they do not differentiate between the mayor and the councillors, the premier and the president, they do not know the difference. So our main aim and objective is that they know their rights and to know whom they are dealing with.

Interviewer: What kind of tactics has TECRA used in its struggles ...?

Mokonyane: Normally we use marches, petitions, memorandums and we use face-to-face talk with the politicians and councillors.

Interviewer: What kind of achievements has TECRA made?

Mokonyane: So far we can say we have achieved because I remember 2001 there was a switch of whole Thembisa for a year and when we came in that year we managed to change the councillors mind that they must switch on the electricity in Thembisa.

Interviewer: Other programmes that you've initiated, how successful are they going?

Mokonyane: Especially now water and sanitation because we managed to make sure that most of the communities must have water and sanitation. We tried to have our small sanitation in order that we must surrender to the government for a small project of that some of the councillors refused it but at a later stage they took some of our desires and used it as if it's their desires.

Interviewer: On basic services you've generally been able to get what you've been struggling for?

Mokonyane: Not exactly we are still struggling ...

Interviewer: What about on the HIV front?

Mokonyane: On the HIV/AIDS we managed to have people speak openly about it so now we know people who are having it are not ashamed to speak openly about it to say I'm HIV positive.

Interviewer: Tell me the makeup of TECRA, is it youth, elderly ... how is the makeup of the membership?

Mokonyane: The makeup of TECRA is youth and elderly even right now we've got more membership of the elderly even if you can see we've got the stats of 2800 point something membership but mainly are elderly. But youth are not so much, from that 2800 I think youth are like 800 but mainly elderly.

Interviewer: Is TECRA a membership based organisation?

Mokonyane: It is a membership based organisation - we will try and locate; we've got data for that.

Interviewer: What position have you held at TECRA?

Mokonyane: From the beginning I was a secretary for my section then from there we've got these wards then I became general secretary of those wards then from there I became chairperson. From there one time I've been elected a deputy president and then from there we go on and on again now I'm President.

Interviewer: Your membership of the APF, describe to me how it is that the APF has assisted TECRA in various kinds of ways?

Mokonyane: APF assisted mostly on leadership workshops and this HIV/AIDS because for instance there was more leadership than they know how to work on the ground. So since we have most of the leadership workshop they understand how to do things on the ground.

Interviewer: What has it meant for TECRA to belong to an organisation that has 30 different organisations?

Mokonyane: So far we are all over. Soweto they know TECRA, Orange Farm, Tsakane and we know each other. By so doing especially in working together that's where we know each other and expand then we share our expertise from there.

Interviewer: Has TECRA been involved in some of the APFs international activities, or with international people and organisations?

Mokonyane: So far we are unlucky because we don't have some international relationships but for APF just because they have got some interns from international countries then we share some experiences together especially Oxfam one and they teach use how to use computer.

Interviewer: As TECRA has struggled and carried out its programmes what has the response of the government been to TECRA's activities both locally but also at metro and provincially?

Mokonyane: Ya especially metros locally as I said we involve them if we've got problems we march against them in order that they must listen to the community. As you know somehow we don't have power in our hands anymore, this power just because most of the people they vote for the ANC they give them more powers they do what they like but we are trying very hard in order that the municipality must listen to them.

Interviewer: In terms of your marches or your activities have you had any confrontations with the government or the police?

Mokonyane: Sometimes police can be brutal to our community especially when it comes to the tear gas they just shoot straight to the person. As you know they mustn't shoot straight to the person, they must at least shoot downwards so to shoot straight like that cause a problem because some they are injured they don't hear right and some they become blind.

Interviewer: Have any members of TECRA been arrested?

Mokonyane: Often they are arrested even though we are lucky they do not get arrested for a long time but mostly in some of the marches they have been arrested.

Interviewer: What would you describe as the main strengths and weaknesses of TECRA?

Mokonyane: TECRA has got its own strengths by taking the community, making sure that the community and the municipality must understand each other. You can remember even during the taking out of electricity pre paid because there were some devices that they were using in order to see how much electricity has been used. That device inside our boxes is different from other townships. They have got these big boxes because we were doing Operation Khanyisa so they want to stop us doing that so they put these wardrobe things inside that there is a conventional and pre paid electricity so they just switch off from conventional to pre paid. So from there that's where we saw our strength because we know how to take that box off by using our jerks and so forth even though at times it reflects at the municipality that this box from this street has been tampered with although we managed to open it even though it's a heavy one because it needs extra

Interviewer: So you basically by-pass those things

Mokonyane: We know how to by-pass that but right now we are still struggling because we don't know what we can do on that box because now they have got their own way to service it.

Interviewer: On the weaknesses side?

Mokonyane: On the weakness side sometimes due to the fact that we don't have a sponsor you find out that it is difficult to do some of the things because sometimes nowadays we work with electronics things sometimes we don't know how to make neat letters because now they want typed letters all the time. So if you need to do some typing you must come here in Johannesburg and type and so forth.

Interviewer: What other organisation outside the AP ... what other organisations have TECRA worked with?

Mokonyane: We have got other organisations especially in Thembisa. We have worked with Thembisa community, we have worked with the old age of Thembisa and the child and social welfare

Interviewer: And churches?

Mokonyane: Ya some of the churches because they like ANC, they like to be in that party they don't like us very well they say we are against ANC.

Interviewer: How would you respond to someone who says but TECRA and APF is anti ANC what would you say to that?

Mokonyane: No I would tell them they are not anti because we are watch dogs. Because they have promised we make sure of the promise that they have promised to the community that they are doing that or not. If they fail then you see us coming in consulting them or marching or do whatever so we are just rectifying what they are not doing well.

Interviewer: What is the general attitude of most of the members to political parties in general not just the ANC?

Mokonyane: Generally they say those political parties are not doing nothing for them even though you know they like one, even that one they like they fail them.

Interviewer: Has anything fundamentally shifted from what you experienced in the townships or the role of the government as a result of the changes in the ANC over the last two years ... the ascension of Jacob Zuma, the things that have happened in the bigger picture?

Mokonyane: So far since the changes of the phases of the ruling party I think it's still the same because they are still promising the same promises, same lies. People are still suffering, people are still not having access to water, electricity and they are still facing evictions so there is no difference.

Interviewer: You are saying the struggles continue as they have?

Mokonyane: Yes.

Interviewer: From TECRA's point of view because of their involvement, the strengths and weaknesses of the APF not just TECRA but the APF as an organisation?

Mokonyane: The strength of APF is that they managed to put us in one bag but I can't say it's a bag because they didn't do what the community wants and again they managed to show us the directions because in APF we've got a lot of people, we've got educated people, semi educated. Everyone is there so you can have any kind of a person that you want at the APF hence you can gain experience and skills from those people. Then the weakest point is firstly, they must know what kind of organisations they are dealing with because you find there are some organisations which are coming in as a community but they are working for some political parties and that weakens the community organisations because they bring their own objectives inside the APF. That will cause problems in the future.

Interviewer: When you look at things right now it's been somewhat of a difficult period for the APF in the last while ... do you see a continued role for the APF? What would you want to see as TECRA?

Mokonyane: So far what I've learnt from the communities especially communities that we have is that from now there are no more interest in having money. They like to do things themselves and if that culture can come on and on then I think there will be a different APF in the next few years to come.

Interviewer: As far as TECRA itself what kind of role do you see for TECRA itself, the continuation from what is in the past or some changes?

Mokonyane: So far as we plan a lot of things for communities of Ekurhuleni and Joburg municipalities. I think for the 5 years coming we will be more powerful than we are right now especially after this forthcoming local election because we will see a lot of changes after that.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

Mokonyane : Because communities are fed up, they have lost trust for the ruling party, even those that are in the ruling party do not trust themselves because they are there for the money and not for the love of the organisation and we have seen a lot of rifts between the members of the ruling party.

Interviewer: And has TECRA ever run any candidates at a local level?

Mokonyane: Ya we do have run in the previous 2 municipalities and we are still going to run it in the forthcoming one.

Interviewer: You have any councillors?

Mokonyane: We do have councillors in the first one then the second one we didn't manage to get any councillor. But the one that we have we did some floor crossing to the ANC but now they have been dumped and he's' claimed to come back, so we say no.

Interviewer: What would you say are the main challenges for first TECRA then the APF as we move forward now from here?

Mokonyane: Our challenge is that as community we must come more together, we must work together as communities and we must make sure that there mustn't be any gap between the communities because if we open any gap between them and us then we will allow these political parties to come and absorb some of the members from the

communities. And we must try and have something on the table for them because you can do some community work whereas your stomach is empty it's going to be difficult. So we must try and do something on that front then we can try and change the attitude of the communities.

Interviewer: Johannes those were the questions that I have but I always ask any of the interviewees if there is anything that we left out that you want to say, anything about TECRA, about the APF? You must feel free.

Mokonyane: Just for APF so maybe they have got some of the funders so they must change attitude of funders' money. This monies that they get they must use that to the community especially they must have some community offices where committees can run their own things in their own yards to do a better work for themselves because this things of coming here all the time is a problem because some of the people will do it just to come to town and not doing work on the ground. So it's bad for the communities but we must do some research on the formation of new community structures because as I have seen right now we have got a lot of political parties inside the communities so that's why sometimes we are not growing so much due to the fact of that kind of things so we need pure community organisation.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

