

Interview with Boitumelo Manamela

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Boitumelo Manamela

Lesego Ramafoko

Lesego Ramafoko

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TM: Today is the 24th September 2013, I am with Boitumelo, she will tell you who she is. I am Tshepo Moloi and I am with Ntathe Rampo, we are going to speak to Boitumelo for a project for SAHA regardIng the land act legacy. Boitumelo, thank you for the interview and to meet with you as well.

BM: It is a pleasure

TM: Let us start with you telling us who Boitumelo is. Where were you born?

BM: I am Boitumelo Manamela; I was born here in Mogopa in 1983. In 1984 when the forced removals started I was four months old. Anyway I was not doing anything as I was still young, but I do remember when we were in Onderstepoort, I was a little older and could understand things better then. We lived there, for me it was not a nice place. We moved back to Mogopa and went to school here, I went to school at Digorong [Name of School]. There was no classes, we attended school in shacks and at times we attended classes under a tree as well. When it was hot because the shacks were too hot we went to attend the class under the trees at times. There were no chairs in the classes. As my father was a carpenter, he made us chairs that we would be able to use at school, so we were fortunate that we had something to sit on while we were at school. That is what I remember about that time.

TM: Let me ask you, you said at Onderstepoort, you said you did not like the place? Why is it that you did not like the place at all?

BM: For me it was too hot, maybe that is why I did not like it and there were too many trees as well. I did not really like the place at all.

TM: If you can explain to me how the place was that you stayed in?

BM: We lived in a shack and it was very hot and at night you could not have a good night's rest as there was also no electricity as well.

TM: In the shack, how many were you that stayed in one house?

BM: There were a lot of us that stayed in the shack. I think we had two shacks if I can recall correctly.

TM: Would you say there were more than five of you that stayed in one house?

BM: Yes, there was more than five of us in one house

TM: Okay, when you cooked, did they give a stove to cook with?

BM: We would need to make a fire and use the pots to cook on an open fire, however if you had your own stove, you would cook on the stove.

[TIMECODE: 02m:57s]

TM: As children was there a place to play that you could go to?

BM: There was a place to play. You could play in the street in front of your yard. But we played in the yard a lot. There were three of us as girls that were playing in the yard. Our grandmother did not like it if we went far from home to play so we played at home a lot as she did not want us to play too far from where she would be able to see us.

TM: So did you play with the other children that you found there?

BM: Yes we were able to play with the children that were close by

TM: Okay, when did you start school: did you start it here or in Mogopa?

BM: I started school in Mogopa

TM: Okay

BM: There was no school there as there were shacks and there were no tables and chairs and we would write on our thighs.

TM: When the community of Mogopa came back from Onderstepoort, do you still remember anything about that day?

BM: I only remember being transported by the hirfs [long cars] (hearse?), they would tell us to go into the car and our luggage as well that were transported back to Mogopa with. That is the only thing that I remember about the move. I do not remember anything much about that time really.

TM: When you got back here, where did you go and stay?

BM: Where we stay at the moment, at the bottom there; that is where we got back and stayed there.

TM: But then, the story was that when they removed people they had broken the houses down: what was the state of the house when you came back?

BM: It was a mess, you could see that there was a house but it has been crushed. However, because they told me that this is where you stayed and that is how you knew that you stayed there.

TM: So when you started at school, where did you start?

BM: I started school again

TM: Where did you start when you came back?

BM: I had to start at the beginning really and I had missed a year of school. The school that we moved back to Mogopa that is when I had to start school and due to the move, I was unable to start school that year and therefore had to wait a year before I could go back to school.

TM: When you came back there was no classes at school?

BM: Yes there were no classes at all

TM: Would you be able to explain how the classes were then?

BM: They were shacks. There was about five of them and there were no chairs and tables. Our parents had to make sure we had books as they were not supplied at that time. When it was hot we could not attend class in a shack as it was too hot so we would go outside and attend class there however there were distractions as we were now outside and you could look at other things. In the class it was hot and we would not be able to listen.

[TIMECODE: 06m:05m]

TM: How long did it take for you to attend school in this manner?

BM: I think I don't remember but in Standard 1 [Grade 3], we still attended in a shack but there were chairs and tables but we were still in the shacks and then they built about five classes, and when I did Standard 7 [Grade 9] as the classes ended off in Standard 6 [Grade 8] that were not in shacks. In Standard 7 [Grade 9], I went back to attend in a shack and Standard 8 [Grade 10] and then I moved to Zeerust to complete school there. However it had improved a lot by that point, there were classes and tables and chairs as well.

TM: When you finished your Standard 10 [Grade 12], where to from there?

BM: It was difficult as I delayed by one class and I was in one class with my sister. However she was promoted at one point and therefore we were in one class from Standard 5 – Standard 10 [Grade 7 – Grade 12]. It was difficult for a single parent to educate us both at the same time. My younger sister went to Klerksdorp to do Electrical Engineering after Grade 12 and with me I wanted to do Beauty Therapist however it was too expensive and my registration alone was R5000.

TM: Where was that?

BM: This was at Potch Academy

TM: Okay

BM: My mom had to buy me all the things that they needed, such as the manicure set and she could not afford it and I did not want to understand it and I did not want to hear it as this is what I wanted to do. I remember I stayed at my sister's place for about five days crying and not waking up and not eating because I could not do what I wanted to do. Eventually I ended up understanding and going to FET College and that is where I went to for a year.

TM: Okay, and you went to which school?

BM: Vuselela

TM: Okay, and where is this?

BM: It is also at Potchefstroom

TM: Okay, what did you do there?

BM: I did Public Administration and Computer Practice

TM: Okay, how long did you do this for?

BM: It was a year

TM: What happened after that?

BM: The next year, I got pregnant and I got a child and I decided to go look for a job as my mom could not support us all as she is alone. My sister got a bursary at a mine. She did the Electrical Engineering for one year and then she went to do Geology and I worked at Idrascan as an assistant Geologist on a contract and that came to an end and I looked for job as I could not attend school on a full time basis. I needed to find a job and go to school and study from home as I was looking at the situation at home. The contract came to an end and the years went by as well, I worked again at Idrascan on a contract as they had sub contracted another company and I worked for this company under Idrascan.

TM: Where was this?

BM: Yes it was here in Mogopa. Thereafter it came to end and we had no employment. They then decided to call the youth to start something.

[TIMECODE: 10m:05s]

TM: You said who started this?

BM: It was Pule Morotsi(?), then he spoke to Idrascan to start this project and we went to school and training in Potchefstroom. Idrascan paid for accommodation and transport and everything we needed.

TM: What were they training you on?

BM: How to start a business - those type of things and how to manage a business and how to attract funders and things like that.

TM: How many of you were chosen for this, or was everyone able to do it?

BM: The youth was a lot, however they only chose five people amoung the youth to attend this programme. So luckily I was among those five that were chosen to represent the youth.

TM: Okay, how did they select these five individuals?

BM: They would elect: someone would choose Boitumelo and your parents would confirm that they agree to this that will allow you to represent the youth of the community. That is how it happened and after the training we received, we started a project. There was a garden where we worked years back and the structures of the buildings were too old. Idrascan, they made everything. We could build a resevoir and we fixed the yard and the irrigation system and they built one room for storage and the office was the community office as we did not have an office of our own. I was the secretary and an administrator at the time and my manager was Hendrik Kgatitso and I had a lot of work and that is how I taught myself a lot of things. He was not at the office most of the time so I got the opportunity to learn more things. It is not that he was not acting as a manager but because he was part of the management team he was called for a lot of projects. In 2006 if I am not mistaken that is when the NDA gave us funding.

TM: NDA

BM: National Development Agencies, they funded us

TM: Okay, so they funded who?

BM: They funded the project

TM: What did you call this project?

BM: We called it, I don't remember, I think it was Mogopa

Other Mogopa Vegetable Garden

BM: Yes, Vegetable project. When they funded us we needed to register this project as they would not provide us with funding unless the project was registered. Then we registered it under my name and Emma Morusiwe, she was originally Emma Manamela but she got married and changed to Emma Morusiwe. Then the other members were Rekatliso and we had two trustees Matlakala, Rasefola and Arthur Murray. We registered it with all these five names and the NDA gave us R1 200 000.00. In that money we needed to get salaries from there and also upgraded where we needed to and also got an office.

TM: Okay, so there are still five of you as management there?

BM: Yes

TM: Then who works for you?

BM: There were people that we have employed to work for us

TM: Okay

[TIMECODE: 14m:25s]

BM: We employed people from the community. This was disabled people, woman and the youth and those were the people we were looking at. We had also had casuals at the time and we had a lot of them. That is how we worked and then there was a problem that salaries were not the same, as a manager would do a small job and not work but get paid more and then I do the manager's work and my own and then get paid less than the manager. We held back and did not give up and continued like that and when the money of the NDA came to an end and the manager did not work as much and he knew that he would only be getting that R5000 of their normal salary every month. I then decided to continue with this with them or not. We have a vision and if we leave it what about the people that depend on this project? That is how we went on with the project. The people from the Department of Agriculture came and they told us about things like Farmer of the year and for us to qualify, what we need. I told the people that I work with and by that time I did not take them as people that I work with but we spoke about a lot of things. I told them that we are going to enter this competition. It was not simple. The man that came to interview us and take photos: he would take the vegetables that were not good looking to the eye and he did this to ensure that we would be at the bottom. I told her to not worry about this man and I said we would speak to him and I speak a lot and the next time he came and I told him that why do you take the things that are not good, why do you not take the proper vegetables that are here?. He said "Tumi, you talk a lot" but then he started taking the good vegetables. This is when the committee of the Department of Agriculture came and they were impressed that we keep a record of everything that we sell and we have an account where our sales go to and the people that work for us are getting paid. Then we went in that way and we won. However before that we struggled as NDA did not fund as anymore and we volunteered as we were not earning salaries at that point. When you came home with potatoes and tomotoes and that was good enough to go home with food.

TM: Yes

BM: Others were pulling out and there were others that said that cabbage means a lot to them. We won the fund and then Kgatitso had left at that point and I was running the project from that point on. So when we won the fund, that was when the problems came and they wanted statements from us.

Other This fund, what did it come with, what did you win?

BM: We got money, that is what we won

Other Okay

BM: The NDA we would submit a report after three months, we would send the report. As soon as the report goes out we would then get money and this happened every three months. So that is how we worked, they felt that we should apply for the funds again and we were in the process of applying for the funds again. When we won the Farmer of the Year from the Agricultural Department, that is when the problems began. They wanted Financial Audited Statements. We would be audited all the time. Du Toit used to audit our books all the time.

TM: Who wanted the Financial Audited Statements?

BM: These were wanted by the management committee, of which they were not involved from the beginning. We only reported to the Trust and this only happened if we needed to report to the Trust. But NDA, we needed to report to them. There was no negotiation on this. They then wrote me a letter that they wanted a Financial Audited Statement. This was in December, this was in 2010 or 2009, I told them that the company is closed at the time, so let us meet on the 4th January, just to be able to explain how we work. They did not respond. They then had an Annual General Meeting.

TM: Who called this meeting?

[TIMECODE: 19m:58s]

BM: It was called by the Management, this Annual General Meeting. They told the community that we spent the money and we don't want to release the Financial Audited Statement. The community said we need to go. On the 4th of January 2010, this is when they told me that we need to go as we spent the money and we cannot release the Financial Audited Statement. I told them that can we call the community. I told Ragaswane as the head, I would like you to call the community so that I can tell them how we work at the project so they can understand what happens. He disagreed and said what the community wants will happen.

TM: Did you not go to the meeting with the community?

BM: I was not around at the time when the meeting was held. However Emma, the lady that works with the Finances, was available and she was at the meeting as well.

TM: Okay

BM: That is how it was and the community wanted us to go and he said that this is what is going to happen. I told him that you did not explain to the community correctly what is happening and obviously if you tell a person that someone spent the money recklessly, they will obviously say that we must be removed. They have been saying they are not getting paid. It was a problem and I needed to take the money and they had already called the Department of Agriculture as well and said that the money for the female farmer must not be paid and I was very busy during this time. I was travelling from Pretoria and Mafikeng and going all over the place and I was unaware that this call had been made due to me being so busy. I had to submit documents during this time.

TM: Do you know how much this was?

BM: I think it was R50 000 if I remember correctly, we also had a truck and with the money from the NDA we also bought a truck with it. We used to go to the Klerksdorp market and we supplied OK as well in Ventersdorp. In December we would give people here in Mogopa and pack for them all the vegetables that we have and give to them. They then called another meeting and called us in the office

TM: Was this the management committee?

BM: Yes it was the management committee, we arrived at the meeting and there was management and there was a trust as well. I questioned who called us here is it management or the trust? They then responded that they all work together. We continued with the meeting and they told us that the community said we need to get out of their project and they have elected people who will work on the project, this was on the 16th of December. They said they are only taking out the committee only but the people in the garden can remain. It was painful and I told them that this is not how we work. When we started we were reporting to the trust as the funds were released from the mine. We then got the funds from the NDA and we then report directly to the NDA. You all did not show any interest in the project. We suffered and did not get paid and there was no money and you were all not bothered about how we survived and now that there is money, you are now interested in the project. There was a lot of things, the meeting was then adjourned and they told us that the decision was final and that it would not change.

TM: So it is now competition between management and the trust?

[TIMECODE: 24m:17s]

BM: It was the management. I told them that this project is registered under various individuals. They then asked me who is registered and Hendrik Kgatliso was one of them who was influencing people to close the project. We continued working and we were at the bottom because of the problems. The one day we finished working and the next day we were going to Klerksdorp market. We have already sorted everything done and I got a call from my mother as we are leaving, there are people coming to the project. I told the people who I was working with to wait, it is going to look as though we ran away. I locked the office and all the gates. They then came in and it was Ntathe Kgaswane came in and said that they do not want us anymore so what are we still doing. I told them that you do not chase a person away like that. It was a long time when they requested for us to open the gates. I refused to open the gate and I told them to go and get the police and that will be the only time that the gates will be open. I have the keys.

TM: Were these the members of the committee?

BM: It was the community members, committee there were a lot of them. They broke the gate and this is when I called the police as this is now trespassing and the police came and these are the husbands of the committee members. They wanted us to be removed. I told them no I am not going to be cancelled as these people are trespassing they wanted us to solve the problem, so I said there is nothing that we are going to resolve here. They then called the old Trustees and they came and we set up an appointment with a lawyer as well as the problems were escalating. We went to the lawyer and they said that we are being chased out and we are trespassing. The police said we are wrong when we told them.

TM: Who is the lawyer that was representing you?

BM: It was Naude

TM: Okay, where are they?

BM: They are in Venterdorp

TM: Okay, what is his name?

BM: What is his name by the way?

Other: It was Sakkie Naude

BM: Naude then heard our case and provided a date and we continued working. The date that we needed to go to Naude they came with a tracktor

TM: Who is this now that came?

BM: It was Ntathe Kgaswane and te community, he was leading them. They came and everything was ready and they put a tractor on the things that we were still going to harvest they pulled the irrigation system. It was bad. We just looked at them as there was nothing we could do. We then left and met the lawyer, I locked the office and then I left and I was washing and then I saw the tractor going past and it had the computer and everything that was in the office.

TM: This means they broke into the office and took everything in the office?

BM: That is what happened as when I called and asked what happened, that is when I was told that they had broken into the office. So I said it is fine, I will tell the lawyer what happened and they took everything, including our documents as we have stored everything there. We told the lawyer and we went to court, we then won the court case. In court they told me that they are arresting me as an individual and not the project itself. It was my first time going to court.

TM: Was this the management committee that got you arrested?

BM: Management committee and the community

[TIMECODE: 29m:09s]

TM: Oh, so it was the community as well?

BM: Yes, it was very difficult as it was my first time going to court. The lawyer spoke and it was in and out and the case continued. The NDA decided that we need to return the truck. They then wanted to sell the truck, they had the documents as they had stole the documents in the office. The NDA said can you please bring the truck back, in Klerksdorp in Mafikeng. It was me and Nthate Mogiswe and Nthathe Masdorn and he was driving the truck as we all worked together. While we were going to Ventersdorp, we got a call that the house of Ntathe Masdorn is burning, I asked how is this happening that his house is burning? They told me that they are going to Boitumelo and then to Ntathe Mogiswe to burn the houses down. As you took the truck to go and sell it. I told them that I am not going to sell the truck, I am taking it back to the people that own the truck as this is the agreement with them. Once the house was being burnt then we thought we cannot go to Mafikeng anymore if someone's house is being burnt down. Then we went to the police station in Ventersdorp and we then phoned the police in Mafikeng to tell them of the situation of what is happening. We then left the truck in Ventersdorp to keep the truck safe as we cannot go back with it. We then arrived and the house was burnt, we phoned the police in potchefstroom and they said the house was burnt with the police of Mogopa were there. That was painful as the police were there, we called the police from Potchefstroom and they are the ones that stopped the fire. Ntathe Kgaswane stopped them as they were on their way to Ntathe Mogiswe house from there and he managed to stop them from going there.

TM: Who is the community that were doing this, is it the youth, or who was doing all of this?

BM: It was everyone even the elders were involved in this. They wanted audited, I forgot what the name of it. They wanted the Forensic Audit because Audited Statement was not available this is when they wanted a Forensic Audit. We then arrived and the house was burning and they had broken his cars.

TM: What was he doing at the office?

BM: He worked as a driver and he also had a lot of knowledge on vegetables and only to find Mr. Kgaswane did not want him as they had their only personal issues. When we got there the house was burnt and they had brokern his cars and the tyres were slashed. He was also a mechanic on the other end, the cars that belonged to the other people they had pushed them out and did not damage them. We then went to court, we won the case. There was nothing that we did wrong that happened. The Audited Statement was available and there was no money that we had spent recklessly. The NDA came back as well. They came and spoke to the community and the community said they want a Forensic Audit. The NDA told them that the forensic audit is too expensive, they offered to rather get another auditor. We have our docuements and the NDA will find another auditor. They found the auditor and we paid for the audit from the money from the project, not them. We were paying the auditors and the case as well.

TM: So where did you get the money to pay for all of these things as the money from the Department of Agriculture had not been released.

BM: It is the money from our sales that we made. That is what we used for all of this. The auditor from the NDA did not find anything wrong on the use of the money and money was not used recklessly and they explained to the community. There was nothing that you did wrong. The community did not take it even when the auditors came to the tell them and explain it to them. They told us that if they see us in their community hall, they will kill us, they told us straight to our faces. Even the Ba Koena they told us this and during the forced removals I was four months. I was born here in Mogopa, the case went on like that.

TM: What did they say when the auditor's report was issued?

[TIMECODE: 34m:22s]

BM: They felt that we paid for it for them to speak in that manner, the also said we were paying the police. They said we called the police from Ventersdorp and the police from Potchefstroom were their friends. They said we were paying the police. We won the case, individually I said I don't want to work there and I have learned my lesson. They would always plan to come and break in at night. We would sleep in our jeans and shoes on. It was not nice, I would take the children to school and when the school came to an end, I was at the gate waiting for them because of their safety I would be already there waiting for them.

TM: To fetch them?

BM: Yes

TM: Is the project still proceeding though?

BM: It is not going forward as there is no one to run it. They then said that we must do a transformation. I told them that I will not be able to do that

TM: Who said you must do a transformation now?

BM: It was Ntathe Kgaswane, I must go and teach those people the computer, the people that they had chosen to go and show them how it works.

TM: This is now the new management?

BM: Yes, it is the new management. I told them no I will not be able to do so. If you had taken me out correctly and if you had listened to me then I would have been more than willing to assist you. However after the court case and the mess that has been created I will not be able to assist you. We won the case. There was still a case for Ntathe Masdorn as his house was burnt. However people could not point who poured the petrol as there was a large group and as there were no witnesses, he did not win the case because of this. The Mogopa Trust tried to fix his house and buy him a bed as these things were burnt and they tried where they could. The case came to an end as we won the case and NDA kept calling me to proceed with the project and I told them that I am still young for some things and I did not want to go to court. The project ended in that manner, they then said they would continue with the project. I told them that it is fine for them to proceed with the project however I did tell them that the people that worked there have also experienced pain through this process so if you decide to employ them, it might be difficult for them. They also declined and did not want to work with them.

TM: Was this the woman that you had employed?

BM: They wanted to work with the people that we worked with and there was no difficulties that we experienced with them. The project is standing still and there is nothing happening with it. The things have been taken, I don't know where they are. The heating system is being rained on and the tunnel is torn, everything there is a mess. There is no movement on the project. They sent people who were to start the project and they came in for about two or three days, this then they wanted the old people and asked them how did you cope, would you mind coming to assist us? However they also declined. The project is at a standstill

TM: During this time the community benefited during this time, was there no one that felt that this is not right what is happening?

[TIMECODE: 38m:15s]

BM: There were those that felt that this is wrong but they were afraid to speak out. As I said in December we would give the community vegetables. During the pension days we would sell them here and they would get fresh vegetables and we would sell them at a lower price everyday. Others would leave them and go to OK as we supplied OK. We suppled OK with vegetables as well. I would tell them that it is our vegetables that they sell at OK, but they would still go there maybe it is because of the packaging or whatever but this is what made it expensive. There were people that felt that it was wrong but it is difficult to speak maybe they were afraid of being hated, I am really not sure why they were afraid.

TM: So when did the project come to an end?

BM: It came to an end in 2010, that is when it came to end

TM: For the past three years is there nothing that is happening?

BM: There is nothing that has been happening

TM: What is the community saying about this?

BM: The community they are regretting what happened and they cannot tell the relevant person to say that what you did is wrong. The others do come to me and tell us that we used to eat properly and we got vegetables everyday. Now they need to go and look for vegetables wherever they find them. During the time they did not speak as they were afraid to speak. Now I don't know if they want to start the project again. They can start it again, they will get funding for it. This year the people from NDA called to ask me if we have not resolved the problems that we had, they wanted to start funding us again as we worked well with them. I told them that the fighting is over and the cases have been won but it is hard for us to go back there after what has been experienced.

TM: Okay, you paid for the cases using the money from your sales, how did they pay for the court cases?

BM: They used the money from the community

TM: What do you mean?

BM: The community got money from the mine, and they used the money that they got from the mine and they paid for the court cases with that money from the mine. This was something we could have resolved by just speaking and not going to court. We wasted money a lot of it during this time of going to court cases, we were also paying to the court while it was sitting at the police station, we had to pay for the truck, insurance and tracker but it was not working.

TM: What happened to the truck though in the end?

BM: The NDA took the truck back as they did say that if we do not fix our issues within a year, there would be nothing that they can do, they will need to pass it onto someone else. If you proceed we will see what we do. The truck went back to the NDA.

TM: When you think of it, it is now three years and there is nothing happening, what do you think can be done to turn things around?

BM: The people from Mogopa they have a mental problem. I am not sure if it is not going to school or not understanding anything, I think they need pshycologists really to help them. Even now I heard the project of gardening is proceeding but there are consequences but I am not sure what that means.

TM: Is it not Lucky?

BM: There was another guy or a woman a white person who said they would fund them.

[TIMECODE: 42m:24s]

TM: Okay

BM: It is hard for them to go and work there, I am not sure why it is hard for them to go and work there. They also do not want to give us land as we were willing to start over and do something new but not at that place where we worked before. So it is hard to be given a place to work.

TM: Who is refusing to give you a place to work?

BM: It is management that is refusing

TM: Is it because the land is not available?

BM: They feel that it is their land, so they give who they want to give so if they don't want to give you land then they don't. we are not going anywhere, but it is still going on as we fought for that project and it came to an end. If they want to proceed with the project and they must give us another portion and we can continue with that. But if there is no portion that they can give us then it is hard for us as well. The Department of Agriculture is willing to help us. The NDA as well is willing to help us. I kept all my connections, so there is nothing I can do if I don't have a place and it is also not easy to get a farm as well.

TM: What happened to the equipment that was there?

BM: I don't know really what happened to it. Some of it is still there, there heating system needs to be picked up by special equipment so they could not pick this up so that is why it is still sitting there. It is being rained on and is being burnt by the sun. We also got coal to burn in the heating system. The money just went with the water as they destroyed everything that we had and therefore we could not go and get a refund from the people that we bought them from as we did not have the reciept for them so the money was wasted.

TM: Yes, the people that you employed, what criteria did you use to employ individuals?

BM: There was an unemployment list in the office and that is what we used in most cases, we looked at houses that did not have a main winner and if there was no income or anyone working there. Those were the houses we targeted.

TM: Thank you Boitumelo for your time today, you have given me an idea on how projects work.

BM: It is only my pleasure.

[TIMECODE: 45m:24s]

[END]