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INTERVIEW WITH GABRIEL MASHAKHALE

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DM: Tell us about those meetings.

GM: When I arrived there was no communication between the people in the informal settlement. We would discuss about the things that we did not have, the crime that we experienced and also the solutions to those problems. I also used to take those problems to the councillor and the police to see if we could make things better.

DM: Were you successful in that area. What happened as a result of your efforts?

GM: We succeeded so much. In that place people are indigent and 'illegal' ... we also helped each other during the times of pain like funerals. Even the taps of water we have them running. Since I left, it's not that good as people are paying for water monthly.

DM: And during that time, were you also involved in church activities when you arrived here, or were you not yet a pastor of the church?

GM: Yes I was a pastor before I arrived here. And when I was here I also used to help some of the family problems/matters as people used to come to me. So I established a branch here.

DM: How did you find the response of the people here to the things you were doing, and to the church activities?

GM: The response was very positive, they appreciated everything.

DM: As a 'man of God' /a pastor (by the way, my father is a pastor, an ordained minister) ... when you arrived here (1999), how did you find the situation as a pastor ... what was good and what was bad about the situation you found – not just from a socio-economic perspective but also at a social level, the moralities etc?

GM: Compared to Vereeniging, the life here have been quite good, especially since I moved from that informal sector to this legalised place.

DM: When did you move from that side to this side?

GM: About 7 years back.

DM: Tell us ... in this area there are mostly informal house, people have made them for themselves. What do you think about the housing situation here, have people here been waiting for a long time, have you been waiting for a house?

GM: It is a long time since we've been waiting for the houses to be allocated. We have been promised before that the houses would be constructed generally, not like just here and there ... because the situation now is like they are building here and then over the street.

DM: Why do you think they are building one here and one there ... that's what we see, one RDP house here another there. Why do you think that is happening?

GM: We don't know exactly why they do it like this. We don't get answers even if we ask questions about why.

DM: What do you think of the local government/municipality here? As a former municipal worker ... we see lots of municipal workers here, it seems as though the municipality is one of the biggest employers here in this area.

GM: People are not treated equally. If people can be treated equally then things could be much better - because now things are not good.

DM: What do you mean by not getting treated equally - who gets treated better and who gets less?

GM: We were promised houses would be allocated here but they only allocate to those in the location, they are the ones who get the houses. Here we only get houses here and there.

DM: Have you remained active in the community since you came here ... to try and help and bring people together, to get the kinds of services as well as reduce the crime rate you were talking about earlier?

GM: I did take part for the last five years before the councillor was chosen ... in the ward committee. I was defeated in the elections for the ward committee but still take part in the community.

DM: Tell us about the ward committees, since you were involved for many years. Are they effective, are they meaningful?

GM: As compared to the last one, this time it is not so effective. We have problems that must be taken to the municipality and they must be taken by the ward committee. But the ward committee does not consult with the community.

DM: You have a long history in this community as well as being active in the community. What do you think should be happening in this community, not only the houses but all the basics services and other things?

GM: The one thing that can make the service delivery effective is if the ward committee consults the community, also the councillor and the Mayor herself. If they can meet with the people and listen ... but now they do nothing and just sit on their laurels – there are no consultations.

DM: What do you think, as a former municipal worker in the Vaal, of a situation where the municipal offices are in Kroonstad, 70-90 kilometres away and supposed to be dealing with the situation here?

GM: In my experience, that is a big problem and challenge with the offices being so far from us. We must try to sort it out.

DM: It's very clear that in this community most people don't have jobs here. As a community activist, as a pastor, what would you say to people about people being productive ... what kinds of ideas would you have about this community that needs to move forward?

GM: What should be done here is for community to come together like a team, to give people the jobs, like to clean in the grave yard, and also to help those people - the grand mothers and fathers - who can't do things for themselves, like their yards etc. because they have no kids.

DM: Now I just want to shift. Tell us what it is like to be a pastor in this community. What kind of things do you do here as a pastor here?

GM: It is very difficult to be a pastor here. People have their own churches and I have a few people who attend my church – maybe only 5-10 people. I don't have my own place to host the church. I host the church in my garage. People are poor. Poverty plays a big role here. We as Apostolic are praying in the houses so we normally pray in these shacks of ours.

DM: Do lots of people go to church here? Are they very religious or not so much?

GM: Yes, they do go to church most of them, even though most don't have jobs and are poor. So if there is something that needs to be bought for them I will dig into my pocket.

DM: When you say poverty is the biggest problem, what kind of problems do you think that causes ... as a religious man, the social issues?

GM: The biggest problem is that people have no job and there is no income at the end of the month. People only maybe get jobs when the farmers are harvesting ... maybe for 4 or 5 days work

DM: Okay, but the question I was asking is what does that contribute to in terms of the problems in people's lives? As a pastor I'm sure you counsel people, you talk to them about their problems. What are they telling you are their main problems besides not having a job ... in their own lives?

GM: When I talk to the people, some of them don't have food hunger, they don't have anything to eat. This is caused by unemployment, lots of factories are closed because after the ANC came to power maybe some of those factory owners thought this would cause them a problem... and some don't have a place to stay.

DM: Okay. I know my father ... if I were to ask him in the past what do you think the main problems are in the community ... he would probably say things that were about the moral of people like there is too much drinking too many babies outside of marriage. So, the social problems that are caused by poverty. What do you see in this community in terms of the problems caused by poverty?

GM: Socially, some of the problems are that the children, they don't listen to their

grandparents they are living with and thus have babies when they are young ...

DM: After living in a very urban area – Vereeniging - and now you are living here in a small place in the Free State. In the semi-rural area versus the urban area, what do think about both of those lives? Do you like it better here... is it safer, is it nicer than the other place?

GM: The only thing I like about here is it is safer here because it is a small area unlike in Vereeniging which is a little bit fast cause a lot of people they are working and there is more money and service delivery.

DM: How do you think the government is performing for this community?

GM: From my point of view I think the government is performing okay. Maybe like parliament or the province – they are providing money to the regions. So everything is okay at the top but when it comes to middle or lower management it is not going well.

DM: What are your expectations for yourself and your family in the next 5 years?

GM: I expect a better life than this, maybe a new house, live life better, God willing..

DM: What is your dream house?

GM: I want a house with 3 bedrooms, a living room, and 2 bathrooms.
(They are laughing)

Ahmed Veriava (AV): Is there anything that you are afraid of in the future?

GM: I am afraid that I will not get a house even in that 5 years time.

DM: Is there anything that we have no covered in this interview that you want to say?

GM: I would like the government to build houses for everyone. If they only build houses at my side then it might seem like I have paid a bribe, They must work fairly and provide everyone with service delivery.

DM: Okay.

MINUTES: 52:34 (total for both a & b)