

Daily Bread Digest

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Editorial

This year marks the fourth year since the inaugural edition of the Daily Bread Digest. Bringing you every edition of the Daily Bread Digest has always been a great pleasure. It is a publication produced by the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) under the theme “Give us this day our daily bread”. The aim of this publication is to create a space for the Church to understand and confront current socio-economic factors that generate acute poverty and inequality in our society. It is worth mentioning that this Daily Bread Digest is completely different from the previous editions.

This year we have decided to combine the *Daily Bread Digest* and *ESSET Update*. We started producing *ESSET Update* in 2010, employing it as an alternative strategic tool to update churches, church activists and all social justice partners about our work and initiating conversations about critical issues affecting marginalized people in our society. Thus this newsletter has served as a mouth-piece for ESSET as well as being a platform for those in the margins of society whose voices have been silenced. Generally, our two publications were warmly received in ecumenical circles.

In the new strategic direction, ESSET is clear that it wants to journey with intent with poor communities in struggle. As part of journeying with the poor, ESSET will be analysing and documenting the struggles of community partners, sharing these struggles with churches and social justice partners to rouse them into action so that they we can all stand united in common struggles. We hope that you will continue to enjoy reading this edition and provide feedback and comments on how we can improve it further.

In this edition, you can read about Church ministers doing public witness by showing solidarity with informal traders who suffer injustices around Johannesburg. There is also an article on the findings of the completed ESSET Research Study Report on Solidarity Finance. You will recall that in the previous edition we reflected with you a bit about the journey undertaken to Brazil last year by ESSET staff, a researcher and informal traders to learn more about Solidarity Economy and Finance.

We also reflect on some of the findings of the consultations ESSET did with informal traders within the SADC countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The Consultations with informal traders which are part of ESSET’s participatory research project were aimed at reflecting on ways that would strengthen the voice and capacity of informal traders in the SADC region. We also bring you an update about the struggle for basic services in the Maila community in Limpopo. Finally, we reflect on the commission God gave to the Church and compare that with Jesus’ commission to His disciples on Matthew 10: 2-26.

1. Church Ministers show Solidarity to the Struggle of Informal Traders

After a series of meetings between informal traders and church ministers organised by ESSET and the SACC, Church leaders eventually ventured out on a pastoral visit to the streets of Johannesburg to have a first-hand experience of the lives of informal traders.

The Pastoral visit initiative was initiated by the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Cape Town, Dr Rev Thabo Makgoba, who approached the SACC with an idea that they should lead a public witness and show the Church's solidarity with the poor and those who suffer injustice by visiting the sites of informal traders and listening to their stories. These visits were meant to help the churches discern what forms of intervention are needed for informal traders.

The Pastoral visitations were made to informal traders' work places around the Johannesburg Central Business District and Yeoville on the 26 June 2012. Other visits were made to different informal trading sites in Bruma and Orange Farm a day before that. These visits provided a platform for church ministers to listen to the experiences of informal traders who have consistently been receiving harsh treatment at the hands of metro police. These visits also are aligned to the accompaniment work by ESSET on the struggle of informal traders. For ESSET, these visitations were a great platform to enable the institutional Church to experience a liberating and prophetic theology by connecting to the struggles of the poor.



Bishop Phasoana from Lutheran church and Bishop Mdlalose from the African Independent church listening to a trader at Pritchard and Kerk streets in Johannesburg during a Pastoral visit

The Co-ordinator of the Pastoral visits at ESSET, Rev Monwabisi Mcopela had this to say about the Pastoral visits:

“We are committed to a theology for justice that is located in the struggles of the poor, which Jesus identified Himself with. We believe that theological reflection is more meaningful if it stems from immersion in people’s struggles. Therefore, by exposing Church ministers to concrete experiences of the poor through pastoral visits to local sites of struggles, we hope to challenge the Church to its prophetic role. We have to move beyond just condemning, instead we must act against that which deprive the poor access to the bread”.

During the Pastoral visitation in the Johannesburg CBD, leaders of informal traders took the Church ministers on tour to the two types of trading sites; namely, the well managed trading sites and the unmanaged trading sites. The first stop was at Pritchard and Rissik streets where the traders are trading at managed sites. In this trading environment, the traders go about their work without any problems. They do not need to worry about having to guard against their stock being confiscated by the metro police. The streets are cleaned on a daily basis, they have security and the traders don’t have to pay anything to continue selling their goods there. This conducive environment is made possible by the Central Management Partnership that is comprised of big businesses that have even renovated and built new stalls for traders in Kerk Street. This benevolent gesture towards informal traders by big businesses is indeed very uncommon. However, we must take note that it is only a few business owners who treat informal traders with respect, as human beings and not their competitors.



Rev Mcopela standing next to uncollected dustbins at Jeppe and Kerk streets in Johannesburg. He watches helplessly at a homeless man scraping from the dustbins

In contrast, when the Pastoral delegation went to the unmanaged trading sites (from Jeppe street until the Noord taxi rank) just a stone throw from the managed trading sites, they were left speechless at the appalling conditions on which the traders were selling under. Usually in the unmanaged trading sites, the metro police rule by harassing and confiscating the goods of informal traders; nobody cares to clean the streets and even when the traders have cleaned, the dustbins seldom get collected. The informal traders selling on the unmanaged trading sites are expected to have smartcards in order to be allocated a trading space. However, those who have smartcards still experience impoundment of their stock by the metro police officials. The church ministers were shown a fine ticket of R2000 recently given to a woman trader, Gladness Sithole who was told that she was trading illegally though she has a smartcard.

According to Siphon Thwala, the Coordinator of the SADC Informal Traders Network, the law enforcers (metro police) usually do not respect the rights of informal traders and also do not understand the by-laws of informal trading. He explains:

“If a trader is given a smartcard it means he/she is free to trade in a demarcated area and should not be harassed or have her/his stock confiscated. However, for the fact that the opposite still happens, it shows that they do not understand the by-laws and that there is no communication between the Metro Trading Company (MTC), Department of Economic Development and the metro police officials who all have a say in the management of the informal trade sector”.

The last stop of the Pastoral visit was an unmanaged trading site on Yeoville’s main streets (Raleigh and Rocky), where informal traders operate close to big retailers such as Shoprite. The Church ministers were shocked to learn that informal traders have been served with verbal notice to vacate their current trading site. A woman trader, Neo Mokoena (34) who has four kids aged below seven expressed her frustration:

“I have been trading here for six years and just out of the blue we are told we have to go. I don’t even want to imagine how I will be able to survive and feed my family. My husband’s piece jobs cannot sustain us.

Bishop Phasoana and Rev Mcopela listens to the plight of informal traders in Yeoville whilst The Star journalist capture the story



One of the leaders from the South African National Traders Alliance (SANTRA), Edmund Elias who accompanied the Church ministers in their Pastoral visitation, said informal trading should not be equated to criminal activities and government should provide them with support instead of clamping them down.

“By taking the Church ministers to the managed and unmanaged trading sites we wanted to show them that informal trading is not a problem, it’s how it is managed. If the management of trading is done well then there will be no need to impound their stock. The model used by big business in the managed sites has proven that. Therefore, it is important that we have processes of genuine engagement at all levels of Government that can usher in a new proactive developmental era. We trust that the Church Leaders will help facilitate such processes as a matter of extreme urgency,” said Elias.

When approached by the media to comment on the ill-treatment of informal traders, Nthatsi Modingoane, the City of Johannesburg's spokesperson gave a contradictory statement:

“Johannesburg Metropolitan Police department is responsible for enforcing all by-laws in the City of Johannesburg. Enforcement is on-going throughout the City of Johannesburg and individuals trading illegally will be dealt with in accordance to the by-laws. The City of Johannesburg acknowledges the relevance and contribution of informal trading to the economic and social life of the City. Informal Trading provides income to those unemployed and also represent an alternative to established traditional formal sector retail. The City always welcomes all interested stakeholder views to participate and engage on finding sustainable solutions in addressing informal trading developmental approach”.

A planned visit to hand over the Memorandum of the demands of informal traders at the African National Congress Policy Conference at Midrand by a delegation of church leaders, street trader representatives and other civil society groupings, including the Law Review Project, ESSET, SACC, Free Market Foundation etc. had to be called off. This was after the office of the ANC General Secretary; Gwede Mantashe indicated that the logistical arrangement could not allow him to welcome the delegation which was to deliver the Memorandum. The decision to deliver the Memorandum to the ANC Policy Conference instead of the Johannesburg Metro Police Department or Department of Economic Development was taken by the traders and church leaders because it was felt that these agencies were but only implementers of the policy decisions taken at party level. Therefore the ANC Policy Conference was strongly viewed at strategic space to advocate for policy change in relation to the demands and concerns of informal traders.

2. ESSET Research Study Report on Solidarity Finance Challenges our Economic and Financial Systems

Eighteen years after the ushering in of a democratic state, South Africa is sadly still characterised by huge economic disparities. It is clear that those who are rich are getting richer while those who are poor are getting even poorer. It is also clear that the finance and economic models that our government is using only serves to further entrench these gross inequalities. In the course of 2011, ESSET embarked on a research study in an effort to wrestle with these challenges. These were carried out by conducting a desktop research and a study visit on Solidarity Finance to Brazil by informal traders and ESSET staff. The aim of the study visit was to gain first-hand experience on Solidarity Finance. This is a concept amongst alternative economic and financing models practised by countries across the world that contests the neoliberal agenda but also displays the agency of the poor. ESSET completed and launched this Research Study on Solidarity Finance in March 2012.



Rose Nkosi (extreme left), a trader from South Africa, Matsediso Mohale, an informal trader from Lesotho and Mandla Mndebele of ESSET during their study visit on Solidarity Finance in Brazil.

Our on-going engagements with informal traders caused us to realize the need to seek alternative models to the systems of development and financial banking. The SADC conference for Churches that was held by ESSET in 2010 on Justice and Informal Trade in particular was very instrumental in the decision to carry out this study. This conference reminded us of the tragedy and unjust nature of our current economic and financial systems which exclude many of the poor the likes of informal traders. The conference also exposed how many in the Church community are complacent about these injustices because they benefit directly from the system. Whilst this is contested, the conference placed the institutional Church within the centres of power.

At the end of the conference, a call was made to reclaim the financial sector to ensure that banks are not just there to promote profits but are used as instruments to meet the needs of the poor. What has become clear is the sad reality that even the financial opportunities provided by the government in the form of microfinance are no different in the manner in which they are run. Just like the commercial banks, they are used for commercial purposes. Another major flaw is that existing financial support models are geared towards the formalisation agenda whose intent is to incorporate informal activities into the competitive and profit making logic that governs formal operations. They are also biased towards more stable informal enterprises that are able to meet the formal requirements such as producing financial statements. The only difference between commercial banks and the government's microfinance is in their framing which is offered in the name of poverty reduction. It is well known by now that the current forms of micro-finance which are targeted at poor people are just but one of the schemes promoted by the architects of the neoliberal agenda.

Solidarity Economy is seen as a socio-economic order and way of life that deliberately chooses serving the needs of people and ecological sustainability as the goal of economic activity rather than maximization of profits under the unrestrained rule of the market. The main defining feature of Solidarity Economy is that it's aimed primarily at satisfying the social needs of a collective, which could be a specific group or community. Its core principles are co-ownership, self management, cooperation and participatory democracy. Other key principles entail networks, with face to face interactions between producers and consumers. Thus Solidarity Economy steers away from the classical market economy where a mysterious 'invisible hand' determines the price of goods and services. Unlike in the market economy, the main goal of money is to address the needs of people as opposed to generating profits through unfair exchanges between buyers and sellers.



Participants pictured at a Solidarity Economy Fair in Brazil

More importantly, Solidarity Economy fosters mutual care and concern not just for other human beings but also for the environment. In this sense, it is seen as an ideal of an ethical economy that is not driven by exploitation and exclusion of others. Solidarity Finance which is part of Solidarity Economy is defined as a “shared manner of saving, managing and investing people’s money”. Under Solidarity Finance, financial organisations, guided by specific rules, provide loans or capital participation to other structures of Solidarity Economy which are excluded from the traditional financial and banking sector. This money does not end in the commercial banks, but instead people start their own local banks. In other countries, people go to the extent of starting their own currencies, which are recognised by the local retailers. In some countries, Solidarity Finance schemes are supported by government as part of wealth distribution. The bigger aim of both Solidarity Finance is to forge collaborative networks globally in order to make Solidarity Economy a strong alternative to the current economic system.

As we reflected on the notion of Solidarity Finance we have likened it to what can be called Ubuntu economy in the African context. Common examples that can be compared to such an economy include informal savings practised mainly in rural areas and townships such as stokvels, credit associations, co-operatives, burial societies, and many such initiatives. As we know, these initiatives emerged out of the need for financial independence as a result of lack of access to financial loans through commercial banks and the difficulty in securing insurance by the majority of poor people which has become popular for burial purposes. Whilst the intentions are good, these initiatives have their own imperfections as well. A major concern is that they tend to promote the same values promoted by the market economy. They are used to satisfy the individual needs of its members as opposed to the broader collective. Unlike Solidarity Finance, they are not motivated by a conscious desire to present an alternative to the current banking system. As such they reinforce the current capitalist system.

Solidarity Finance in particular raises a lot of ethical questions to all of us regarding our own economic activities both as individuals and as a collective. It compels us to reflect on the extent to which we are complacent to a deadly economic system that ostracises others; to what extent do our economic activities reinforce the very same system that we would like to criticise and bring down? And how different are our own income generating initiatives from those of the capitalist system?

ESSET would like to invite churches to reflect on these and other questions that may be arising from this short reflection. Lastly, ESSET will in the next few months work with traders to reflect together and explore with them possible alternative forms of finance that would meet their needs. Churches and other social justice practitioners are encouraged to join in these discussions. We also encourage churches to reflect with those who are involved in stokvels and burial societies on how they can run these in a manner that is resistant to the current capitalistic system. It is hoped that these discussions would become the spring-board for something new that promotes values of mutual support and caring; of equality and social justice. Our hope in particular is that these discussions can bring about different forms of economic activities and finance that whilst they may be localised can at the same time challenge the current neoliberal system from what Arruda, 2008 calls “the belly of the capitalist system”. This requires a strong network that brings together formations of the poor, churches, and other players such as trade unions, and progressive academics. This is to affirm the fullness of life (John 10:10) and to seek and announce the reign and kingdom of God on earth.

3. ESSET Consultations with Informal Traders within the SADC Region Revealed Exclusion and Marginalisation

This year ESSET embarked on the participatory research project that seeks to enhance the collective knowledge of traders regarding the policy, organizational and political challenges impeding street and market trade. The first phase of this project started with a five day consultation meetings with informal traders in Johannesburg in South Africa. The consultations took place in the form of public meetings, focus group discussions and reflective meetings in different townships and locations with local traders before going to other SADC countries such as Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Also participating in these consultations apart from informal traders, were social justice partners such as the Council of Churches and civil society organisations.

A critical part of consultations with informal traders was to collectively analyse the external and internal context impeding their ability to trade. Through their active participation in the research and analysis, the project will develop their technical capacity to provide input to policy debates on economic and social issues. In addition, it hopes to bolster the capacity of organizations and associations of street and market traders to effectively organize as well as to enhance the democratic quality of their mandate-seeking and participatory processes.

There were five themes that emanated from the first public meeting held in South Africa. These themes were then used as framework in deepening and enriching discussions in consultations that took place in other SADC countries. The themes were:

- * Obstacles to effective organizing and mobilizing informal trader organizations.
- * Lack of knowledge and information of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Network of Traders.
- * The effectiveness of government provided training and other non-financial support programmes and projects for informal traders.
- * Lack of access to finance.
- * Lack of access to public land for street and market trade.
- * Effects of formal business on street and market trade.



Participants pictured during discussions at the Consultation held in Johannesburg

Public land is of fundamental importance to the economic activities of street and market traders. The fact that it is generally administered by government or tribal authorities calls for discussion and debate on the motivational factors influencing political decision-making on its use and distribution. Some questions need to be addressed relating to government discourse and policy statements on land and the way it is being distributed. The level at which street and market traders can participate in the decision-making process on public land and its democratic deficits is one important aspect that also need attention.

Lack of access to public land for street and market trade was a common challenge for informal traders in almost all the countries where the consultations were held. In South Africa, the informal traders complained that they are usually allocated trading sites in public land far away from their customers. Informal traders who dare to put their stalls in lucrative areas where customers are likely to pass are often harassed and have their stock impounded by the metro police. Infighting and divisions also weaken their ability to speak with one voice to demand adequate public land for viable trading sites.

In Lesotho, there is no clear public land policy, which makes it difficult for traders to demand land. The government's land policy is biased towards big retailers, especially Chinese owned shops. Often local traders are forced to compete with big businesses for public land. In Swaziland, the allocation of land for traders is all that the King can offer and does not entertain those who question why there are no by-laws or policy for informal trading in his kingdom. Though informal traders in Swaziland are allocated public land to trade in the city and in rural areas, the land they have been given lacks shelter, water and sanitation.



Local traders and Cross Border Traders came in their numbers during one of the Consultations in Zambia

Whilst informal traders from many countries in the SADC region demand access to land for trade and others get harassed and seldom get recognition, Zambian government treasured their own. The government is very supportive of their local and cross border traders and even sold them land to trade. The local and cross border traders in the Copper-belt province in Zambia have built two centres for trading after purchasing two pieces of land worth two million kwacha from their government. It is with the technical and financial support of their government that the local traders and cross border traders are able to grow and become sustainable even being able to afford to purchase land for more trader markets. When selling land, the Zambian government usually give preference to the traders over big businesses. Chiefs also do not just sell land to big businesses, they have to engage and negotiate with the traders and ensure that there is fair compensation for traders if they were to be moved from the land they are trading in.

Another key disturbing issue that was prominent in the consultations was the effects of formal business on street and market trade. An example is the on-going competition between the informal traders and big businesses in Lesotho. The informal traders in Lesotho for years have been up in arms with their government for allocating huge tracts of public land to big businesses with privately owned shopping malls, whilst failing to build linear markets for street and market traders. As if acquiring the land for business was not enough, informal traders in Lesotho lament that some business owners sell the same items or products that are also sold by informal traders on the streets at even much lesser prices. The other disturbing aspect is the fact that the very same big business owners even employ informal traders to sell for them outside their business premises. This competition with street traders, in a way force them to close down their own stalls. These informal traders are then given nice mobile stalls by big business owners to compete with fellow traders on other streets and markets.



A representative from the Lesotho Council of Churches having a word with traders during one of the Consultations in Lesotho

In Swaziland the situation is not different either. Despite informal traders being allocated public land for their trading sites in rural areas and cities, their government is failing to protect them from big businesses. Big businesses like MTN have literally infiltrated the land in which the traders are selling. If the land is given to the traders and MTN also has a right to be there, naturally, MTN with all its financial backing and advertising expertise will garner a great chunk of the profit leaving informal traders with little or no means to sustain themselves. Poor women traders are convinced to wear MTN aprons whilst selling in their own trading sites in exchange for a very small allowance for the airtime sales. The country's undemocratic political context constrains collective action and mobilization of street and market traders. The informal traders have a representative structure, but are not allowed to meet without a municipal official being present. The representative structure does not have a constitution and they are not aware of their rights to trade. The traders fear that they will lose their trading spaces, if they embark on collective action to engage their government on pertinent issues that concerns them.

The macroeconomic policies of many African countries focus on attaining global competitiveness and attracting Foreign Direct Investment for economic growth. As a result, policy tools such as macroeconomic policy, trade policy and skills policy are being deployed to create a business friendly environment for the operation of foreign and local capital. The awkward reality is that whilst economic growth has generated positive effects on technological innovation, business infrastructure development and middle class growth in many African countries, has so far failed to generate any real value for the poor and unemployed masses on the continent. South Africa is a useful example to illustrate this point because its economic growth-development path is characterized in large measure by a winner/loser dichotomy.

As the people of faith we should be concerned about the current economic system that dehumanises and does not favour ordinary people such as informal traders who are trying to make an honest living but often clamped down by the might of the oppressive laws and enforcers. It is unfortunate that informal traders have been alone in their struggles despite the fact that the injustices perpetrated against them are in the public eye. But now that we have been alerted to their challenges why not we come together as churches and church ministers and join in the chariot? The churches need to devise their own strategies on how they would stand in solidarity and engage with informal traders. Let us not sit back and watch but seek ways in which we could enable the informal trading to thrive in the light of the dominant neo-liberal system that excludes the poor.

4. The endless struggle for basic services in Maila community

The intervention undertaken by the Cabinet in 2011 to put five Limpopo departments under administration as a result of bad governance and deep financial crisis came way too late. The Maila village in the Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality located within the Sekhukhune District Municipality is one of the many communities that are greatly affected by flawed tendering processes, abuse of power, greed and corruption in the province. These structural sins have as a result served the interests of few elites and the politically connected whilst communities like Maila, which were supposed to benefit enjoy little or no benefits.

In 2008 ESSET and the South African Council of Churches Limpopo (SACC Limpopo) started walking alongside this community in their endeavour to make their municipality respond to their basic service needs. This was after a participant in the Training for Socio-Economic Training course from Maila together with some concerned and affected community members came to ask ESSET for support. The community of Maila have identified provision of clean water, roads, bridge and a health facility as the main basic services they need from their municipality. They have made efforts to ensure that their municipalities know about their needs. Some of the actions they have undertaken to make these needs known by their municipality, include having numerous consultations with their councillor, and officials from the local and district municipality. They have also participated in the Municipal Planning processes.

In May 2012 ESSET and SACC Limpopo representatives made yet another visit to this community optimistic that things have changed for the better. As we enter Maila we braced ourselves for the bumpy and dusty roads that seemed to have been eroded by floods. The poor state of infrastructural development, poverty and economic stagnation better explains one's expression of the place Maila. More than half of its residents live in abject poverty. Many buildings of local supermarkets with windows broken down lay derelict and abandoned, confirming the impact of poverty also on businesses in the area. We picked two residents of the Maila community who were attending the same meeting we were going to along the road. They appreciated our gesture because had it not been for us it would have to walk about at least two kilometres to reach the venue of our meeting.

As we arrived at venue of the meeting, we waited under a tree next to a small two bedroom house built with stones. Later we learnt that the house was a Presbyterian Church building. Whilst patiently awaiting other members of the community to come we witnessed kids from the same Presbyterian Church building being dispersed to their respective homes, making room for us to have our meeting. Not long the small two room building was nearly full with Maila residents eager to reflect with us on their struggle. In their humble nature, they could not help but express their appreciation that we choose to accompany them in their struggle. For them our journey with them, our prayers and strategic support we gave them brought hope of change to their situation and a sense that they are also human beings with dignity.

A cursed water project

As our meeting with the community eventually began, we quizzed the community to share with us about their struggle. Our first focus was on update made in relation to the water project. A woman from the community was the first to have her say:

“Our hearts were leaping with joy in 2007 when our local municipality contracted service providers to dug water boreholes and installed taps for us. However, our excitement was short-lived as we later learnt that the service providers were paid and left although at the end there was no water. They did not gauge whether the area had sufficient water. Our local municipality enticed us again, rushing with sub-standard water project in order to appease the community before the local government elections last year. Perhaps this was part of the political ploy by politicians and officials at our municipality to portray themselves as caring about the needs of the community”.



One of the residents of Maila community emphasizing a point

A young man added his views, explaining how the sub-standard water project is making his community endure hard work and pain and how the arrangement of accessing water is not accommodating everyone in the community:



“The situation is different here. People have to pump a big machine before anyone can even have a glass of water. On a daily basis the community members have to suffer the agony of carrying a big machine from the Tribal Authority House to a plant where they then pump water before returning it back again to the Tribal Authority House later in the afternoon. If it’s your turn to go and pump the machine and you are not around or you are sickly, then you are obliged to contribute R100 so that whoever is available to go and pump the machine is paid. On a weekly basis, four families are assigned to go pump the machine and ensure that there is water for the whole community. Our elders usually pay the R100 fines for not being able to pump the machine because of old age and ill health”.



A machine that the community have to carry everyday from the Chief’s yard to the veld

Although the community appreciate the fact that their municipality buy the diesel used for the big machine, they are generally distressed and feel robbed at the demand of paying R100 if unable to pump the machine. In the past there were concerns when the money allocated to buy the diesel for pumping water did not last for a month. Sometimes the machine gets broken and it often takes long for the municipality to get it fixed. Members of the Maila community are not happy about their municipality's inability to provide them with water. They feel that their dignity is stripped off as sometimes they are forced to share water with animals in the river beds because of the failure of the water project. They are awaiting the findings from the Human Rights Commission, which they have asked to investigate whether there were no discrepancies and acts of corruption in the awarding of the tender for the project. To many of the community members, the water project is like a curse.

Repeated calls to have bridge and roads were ignored

When asked about the shameful and sluggish state of infrastructural development such as road and bridge, the community was equally disillusioned. A young lady filled us in:

"We have engaged our former Ward Councillor, Ms Aleta Phokane on numerous occasions to prioritise the urgent building of roads and bridge in our area but our demands have often fell on deaf ears. The time we thought our demands would be realised was when representatives from our community together with Councillor Phokane met the municipal manager of Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality. The meeting led to a public meeting called by the ward councillor, which was also attended by a member of the Mayoral Committee on Water and Roads from the municipality. At that meeting, a commitment was made by the Mayoral Committee that needs to have a bridge and tar road will be prioritised in the 2009/2010 financial year. We are in 2012, and yet to see their commitment translated into action".



A bridge that the community built with their bare hands was washed and destroyed by heavy rains in December 2011 but the Makhuduthamaga Local municipality refuse to build them a proper bridge

There is neither Clinic nor Crèche in Maila

The community told us about the urgent need for health centre. The community members have to travel for almost two hours to the neighbouring Schoonoord clinic for health care services. A mother of three shares her community's ordeal in relation to health care:

"If we have an emergency and we call for ambulance from Schoonoord clinic, they told us that the ambulance can't be released to come to our village because of bad roads and lack of bridge. This has often led to unnecessary and untimely deaths of our neighbours, friends and relatives. We had instances where babies were born in homes instead of clinic or hospital because of not having transport or ambulance coming to ferry expectant mothers to the clinic. Whilst we volunteer to help those who need emergency health care we tend to expose ourselves to health hazards and infectious diseases such as HIV/Aids".

Besides lack of health care, the community is also in need of a crèche. The community has made an arrangement with the Presbyterian Church to use their two roomed building as a crèche during the week. The crèche is not even registered as the effort to register it through the assistance of Social Workers has been to no avail. Though the parents of kids attending at the crèche are unhappy that the crèche is not registered, they are relieved that there is creche in the local vicinity. They are no longer forced to risk their lives, literally carrying kids on shoulders as they cross the overflowing rivers in rainy seasons. In winter most of the mothers are often in pains having to see their little ones brave chilly weather conditions travelling long distance to attend crèche outside their village.



Community members in Maila and neighbouring areas struggle for many things. In the picture, a young man uses donkeys to carry 50 Kg bags of mealie meal. Bad roads and makeshift bridge has made services to be scarce in his village

Exploring strategies to advance the struggle

Whilst the community is concerned about lack of services in their area, the ward committee is also unhappy about the community taking initiatives on their own. The current Ward Councillor of Maila, Councillor Mashilo Mohube is anxious about the initiatives of the concerned community. The Maila community members on the other hand are backing down. They are now strategizing of new ways of engagement that will force the municipality to take them seriously and respond swiftly on their needs and demands. The community have identified other two more neighbouring communities, namely; Hoepakrans and Ga-Seopela that also have the same challenge of lack and poor basic services. The three communities (Maila, Hoepakrans and Ga-Seopela) are starting talks to form a network to force their municipality to respond to their needs.

5. Reflecting on God's Commission to His Church

(Matthew 10:2 – 26)

Jesus sent his 12 disciples on a great mission. He sent them first to the lost sheep of Israel, not that the gospel had no significance to non-Jews. The idea was to clean first the house of God which has gone astray from His will. This indicates that God's own chosen people have gone astray. Is it not true that even as the world out there is so sick, God's children who are called by His name have gone astray?

Social Responsibility and acts of justice vs Escapism and mission:

In verse 8, Jesus tells his disciples that as they preach about the kingdom of God, they must heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy and drive out demons. This was not a simplistic act of laying hands. This was radical. For us to understand what Jesus was saying to His disciples we need to understand the religious and cultural context of Jesus' time. According to the Jewish law and culture, the sick, the lepers, women were considered unclean. You could not touch a dead body because then you would be unclean. The sick and the lepers were outcasts and would be left outside the gates of the cities so that they don't contaminate the rest of the community.

Whilst the Jewish culture and religion was that of alienation, Jesus' message was that of inclusivity. Therefore, identifying with the suffering and the poor was central to His disciples' mission. Jesus told to His disciples identify themselves with these and become unclean with them. He emphasised to them that preaching to a broken society about the kingdom of God, even though important was not enough. They had to get their hands dirty.

John Stott one of the well-known great evangelists in the world says as Christians we can adopt three kinds of attitudes and responses to the world:

- ◆ **Escapism:** we turn our backs on the world in rejection, washing our hands of it, and steeling (toughening) our hearts against its agonised cries for help.
- ◆ **Accommodation:** fitting and accommodating everything, it's about living side by side oppression. This speaks to those of us who say why we should rock the boat. Even if I say something it won't make any difference, so let's just try to live with what we have. We forget that Jesus the one we serve was not the one who would conform. He was not afraid to rock the boat when he had to.
- ◆ **Engagement:** turning our faces towards the world in compassion, getting our hands dirty, sore and worn in service, and feeling deep within us the stirring of the love of God which cannot be contained.

What is our common response amongst these three? Many of us unfortunately have opted for escapism and accommodation. We tend to relegate social responsibility and matters of justice to others. We see no role for ourselves in the sufferings of the people of God as long as we implant in their minds the message for personal salvation.

The question that troubles me is how can we say we will simply pray in the face of suffering and pain of God's people when our children are raped day in face of the suffering of God's people; when women in our neighbourhoods are abused; when acts of corruption by our government leaders are causing unforgivable pain to the poor of this country. We watch and keep quiet when people in our streets, in our country are beaten by police, even unto death. Am I saying prayer is not good? Off course not. We need prayer more than ever in our country, but is prayer enough? No. Some of us off cause believe that we have saved the world and accomplished our Christian mission when we have only prayed. Brothers and sisters, we must not deceive ourselves. Our Christian mission is much more than that.

Taking the cross out of the gospel

From Matthew 10: verse 16, Jesus tells his disciples what to expect as they carry out their mission. He told them that he is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves. They will be arrested, handed over to courts and will be flogged. They will be hated. They will be betrayed and killed. Even worse, he said following Him will be very costly for them. He required His followers to love Him more than their mothers and fathers, something that could not even be imagined in the Jewish culture. Jesus encouraged His disciples in Matthew 10 verse 26: "But don't be afraid of those who threaten you; those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul". He further told them that they are so important to God who in His wisdom and love will not allow even a sparrow to fall on the ground without Him knowing".

However, this is a total contradiction to the gospel message that we often hear these days. Many Christians today would rather deny the message of the cross. The message we are concerned about is the feel nice kind of messages that would brush our egos. Our messages have conformed to the standards of this world, and made its values, the gospel truths:

- ◆ When the bible says "we must say no to all forms of ungodliness, we promote them.
- ◆ We have made greed and prosperity and unlimited wealth so desirable and fashionable that you hardly hear any minister these days who does not preach about this.
- ◆ We promote the individualistic kind of Christianity that is concerned about self, self indulgence and preservation.
- ◆ We are concerned about worldly status instead of the suffering.
- ◆ We even twist the word of God to suit our own desires and selfish ambitions.

If suffering or the cross is so central to the gospel message then why is it that we don't want to hear about it? Why have we taken the cross out of the gospel? Why have we made the gospel a matter of wealth? If Jesus our saviour had to endure suffering for us, what makes, us think that being Christians would be an easy ride?

Friends, anyone who does take the message of the cross from the gospel message does not deserve to belong to Jesus. Today we need to be reminded that Jesus Christ was not killed for his prayerful lifestyle or because of high cholesterol. He was killed for the message he proclaimed, which stood against the teachings of His day; the oppressive culture of Judaism and the Roman Empire. He was killed for challenging the status quo and the heresy of the Jewish leaders.

God is concerned about His house; he is concerned that we have gone astray from His will. He is looking for people that are willing to be sent to pronounce that the Kingdom of God is near. He is calling us to take seriously the suffering and pain of His people. To dirty ourselves and stand against injustices that are perpetrated against the poor and ostracised- to touch the untouchable and denounce evil. He is calling us to a ministry that is not easy. A ministry that goes against the stream, that is not comfortable. Be encouraged for the one who is calling us is greater than the leaders of this world.

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