

Collection Number: AL3290

Project name: Anti Privatisation Forum

Date of interview: 2010-04-25

Location of interview: Khanya College

Language/s of interview: English

Length of interview: 1:15:16

Name of Interviewer: Dale McKinley

Name of interviewee/s: Sithembiso Nhlapho

Name of translator (if any): None

Name of transcriber: Sehlaphi Sibanda

Notes on access and use (if any):

Audio file name/s of interview: AL3290_Nhlapho Sithembiso_2010-04-25



Interviewer: It's the 25th of April 2010. Sithembiso, thanks very much for coming to do the interview. Just before we start please can you state your full name?

Nhlapho: Sithembiso Nhlapho.

Interviewer: Sithembiso before we start asking questions about the APF and the organisation and struggles, I want to know a few things about yourself - we are asking all comrades we interview some personal things because it will be nice to know about the activists who make up the APF. Where and when were you born?

Nhlapho: I was born in 1985 on the 13th November.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

Nhlapho: I was born in Evaton which is in the Vaal

Interviewer: And have you lived in Evaton all your life or have you moved around?

Nhlapho: I've moved around within Evaton and not moved beyond Evaton so I've been around that area.

Interviewer: Tell us a little bit about your family- brothers and sisters- yeah?

Nhlapho: I've four siblings, which I'm the second one from that group of siblings and there are twins behind me and my dad and my mum, unfortunately my mum passed away. I'm left with my dad. I currently live with my granny and other siblings from my granny and grandfather only..

Interviewer: Are you the youngest, oldest, in the middle somewhere?

Nhlapho: I'm the second one from my dad, I'm the second one in the family in a group of four.

Interviewer: Also a little bit about your schooling? What kind of schooling have you had?

Nhlapho: Like previously or currently?

Interviewer: All. I'm assuming you matric(d), ya?

Nhlapho: Ya I did my matric in 2004 and I stayed at home for two years. I'm studying again. In 2007 I joined Central Johannesburg College (CJC), I did a bit of human resources there and got tired of its understanding. Then in 2008 I started doing community health psychology with UNISA, ya I'm currently doing that.

Interviewer: And is that what you would like to do, community health and psychology?

Nhlapho: Ya the thing is that I wanted to do so sociology. I found out they have broken up there is no longer a course specifically for passing it but there is only modules so I had to do a course so that can constitute a degree programme. So I ended up taking community and health psychology but then I found it at the end of the day but I'm still wanting to pursue industrial psychology at a later stage in life but what I'm doing currently is also interesting. Surely I'll have to make a choice after completion as to which one do I want to carry up.

Interviewer: And tell us a little bit about any jobs or work that you've done since you got out of school?

Nhlapho: I did some work in one of the shops in Vereeniging. I started doing it when I was at school during weekends then I did it after schooling which I did for close to three years ... I did some bit of research work with Khanya college, I think that was it, I think that was in 2007 late. And in 2008 towards the year end 2008 I worked With Wits university in a project called CLING which was done by PC which amalgamates various research institutions and varsities which previously was CPDE, Centre for Policy Development in Education – it is a research institution at Fort Hare which previously was at part of Wits but currently there was some restructuring at Wits regarding EPU [Education Policy Unit]. But we kind of withdrew but now we are with CPDE and the University of Fort Hare and I think UJ is a big part of it. We are doing a five year programme with them which is around literacy and numeracy in communities which is around introducing literacy in the communities, how we can inspire people to start reading and writing specifically more basically elementary stuff which is not entailed but more on an elementary basis as to finding their feet to read their statements, to read just minor things, encouraging the elders to read their bibles ... Previous researches have found that there is lacking in terms of literacy in young ones doing grade 1 to grade 11 and there was this one research that was released last year that from grade 1 to grade 5 those kids could not read and write which is a problem with that but then, the project as a whole was done because of previous researches around literacy issues. So we are trying to address how we can get the community involved in ensuring that we do away with illiteracy so the project involves bringing the community together and bringing the resources that are in the community to assist in doing away with illiteracy. So we have been doing that project +/- four years and next year is the fifth year which we plan so this is currently the kind of job that I'm doing which is not much but its sustaining a bit of a life.

Interviewer: Now describe how you became politicised ? How did you enter into becoming an activist?

Nhlapho: When I was growing up I wanted to be a politician in a broader view because I remember before I started to do this course I wanted to do political science. So while I was growing up in this argument and so forth, but I think it was in 2005/2006 that I was introduced to YLRF which then was called LRF [Learners Representative Forum] but was later changed to YLRF [Young Learners Representative Forum]. I started at a meeting, there was a workshop, I was invited there and we started discussing issues particularly so I was more interested in finding out cause there was a public debate taking place during the discussions and later on I was introduced to the APF and I was hooked up for life so I ended up being part of it. The interesting part was understanding the politics and the issues that we were fighting for so I think it went through my veins because it was something that I was taking for granted but along the lines it was difficult for me to withdraw from it so understanding how the politics and how the country is being run ... it opened my eyes to see the world in a different way. Those were early days in the APF where discussions were hot - those were the times whereby now this thing of being a politician came up, I thought this will be a right platform for me to find my feet in this field of politics and yeah from that time on I was in for life.

Interviewer: And when did you start getting involved in the youth politics of the YLRF and so forth?

Nhlapho: It was in 2006 ... there was a workshop organised there because I used to go there to the library for just readings and one of my friends invited me saying that he had been invited by other friends of ours that we were having a workshop there so it was in 2006 that I started attending there.

Interviewer: Just tell me a little bit about some things that the youth was doing. Why did it organise itself? What issues and campaigns was it interested in taking up?

Nhlapho: From my understanding at that time the structure was LRCN which was formed by LRC which is from student representative councils, I think it was in 2003. I knew about it but it never clicked in my mind as to what it was one of those things that people from our schools were participating. So once I got there they kind of explained what it was and how it was formed. It was formed because they wanted to try and raise the issue of learners rights within school, I mean they must understand their rights, the issue of school fees, their representatives within schools and free education which was one of the key elements we fight for, those were the issues that they were raising, they were trying to unpack. So in my understanding those were the issues, so when I went in and started understanding the broader issues besides those which were explained to me that there were learners who were oppressed. I remember at that time there was corporal punishment which was banned in

schools I think more of resisting learners within schools and in the higher schools educating them about their rights and fighting for free education and text books and money and texts book, yah.

Interviewer: And how did that then translate into hooking up with an organisation like the APF? I mean what was the connection between those struggles and what the APF stood for and what it was fighting for? How did you understand that?

Nhlapho: When I came to the APF I think there were 3 subcommittees ... I remember that there was the education subcommittee which was also entertaining those issues and I think also there was an issue of getting into the broader understanding of how it works. By that time I was not clear as to what was going on what are we doing exactly I was just coming to meetings, I was still grappling to find my feet. But I think that the connection that was within there was as APF was more of fighting for people's rights and what I think was also key was that learners, education was another part of rights that people can get educated and get freedom in understanding the key issues around them. So I think that was the key aspect in that education was one of the key issues that can also assist the entire organisation with transformation. I think if people are not educated enough they won't be understating those issues that we were fighting for and whatever was transpiring within themselves and in the communities but through education was key in that people can understand issues that they were fighting for ...and I think that connection it was there not only being in the school yard being educated but also going outside the school yard being educated yourself and understanding issues that you're fighting for within. So I think there is a broader link I mean not the specifically one thing that you can say this is specific, it's in a broader sense in terms of education within the APF and our organisation.

Interviewer: And when you started coming to these meetings in the APF and education what is it that you learned about issues of privatisation because it is the APF - anti privatisation? Just tell us a little bit about how those issues of privatisation connected to the concerns of students and struggles in the communities you were coming from?

Nhlapho: Can I get that again?

Interviewer: As you started working in the APF and attending the meetings I'm trying to find out how it is that you understood privatisation because you were in an organisation that says 'we are anti-privatisation', so the connection between anti privatisation and your own struggles and issues of students?

Nhlapho: I think that what I'm saying earlier on that there was a bit of a grapple for me to understand because when we found schools, schools were privatised you know it was a public entity whereby there was a fight to get more books, free teaching and access to basic education and down with corporal punishment and so forth. When I got to the APF it was like 'privatisation of amanzi', 'privatisation of that and I was like 'what was happening it was a bit of a confusion for me because I was coming from an educational background and now getting into these other issues of privatisation. And I think it was a bit of a confusion for me to adjust to it, to understand what was happening. But I think later from when you start understanding the issues of privatisation that they also affect not only adult people but also students themselves because when you go home there is no water, there is no electricity there is no toilet running even at school you find difficulties of not having nice running water sometimes if there was no water we had to leave and go home. They will tell us that we must go home and we would have lost out in terms of studying and so forth, so I think it did kind of linked in the long run in that we are affected by the issue of privatisation either we are around at school or we are at home. Because one cannot study because we were brought up unfortunately we were one of a generation that was fortunate enough to grow up using electricity for studying and not using candles, so I think if one does not have electricity it does affect you and if one does not have water it does affect you. In my understanding water is one of the key, if you drink a lot you read a lot so water can assist you ... I think it kind of worked in a sense that one cannot go to school without using water, one cannot go to school without using electricity. In school you find that there is no photocopier so you cannot study so it affected us in many ways that if issues are privatised many wouldn't have access to things like books and so forth and even taking a bath to school, we wouldn't be able to do that so think it affected us in such a negative way in saying people wanted to privatise water and electricity and it's difficult for us who are disadvantaged to access issues of water and electricity.

Interviewer: When you came into the APF and started becoming active how did you – I'm just trying to get a sense of when you met other people and other communities - what kind of impact did that have on your own understanding of the struggles that you were undertaking? In other words there were all these communities that were part of the APF, there were some intellectuals and individual activists, there were some political groupings, how did you interact with that and this forum of people that was together in this organisation?

Nhlapho: The first time I remember I came to the APF and comrades were like 'no you must stand up and say this', you know they gave me something to say which I was not clear because when you first come to a meeting there are many people and they are talking about a lot of issues. By that time you are not clear as to who has done what I find these white

people and Indian people and I'm like what's happening here? What are these guys doing there are white guys and I don't understand until I figured out that people are talking about real issues which affected them and by that time these intellectuals who had studied to this level, because by that time I was not yet studying and I did not understand the other levels of education, I just looked at everyone, I didn't understand who was what, when and how. But when you went there in finding that in as much as we are disadvantaged but we are varying in our disadvantages. Some communities have water, some have electricity, some don't have - so where I was coming from lucky enough I had running water, I had electricity and I had those kind of access but then you find other people coming from those situations like whereby they don't have anything cause I also grew up where we were using communal taps in Evaton, whereby we living in one yard, 50 people living in one yard 50 families living in one yard and using one communal tap, one pit toilet that was there and you know I understand those issues. You know coming to find many people living in those circumstances not knowing clear as to where those communities are and some saying I'm from there and there is this issue and this issue, that's very confusing at first but then along the lines when I started understating the issues that were there and also understanding who was what and who was doing what those kind of issues sort of highlighted things in a different way.

Interviewer: So I just want to follow on your comments about when you came into the APF - and there were all these as you said 'what are all these white people doing here' - to the extent that was something completely new for you, in terms of having other white people becoming involved in an organisation like this?

Nhlapho: Ya because ... you know it was still early days for me because I grew up in a community whereby white people were at a distance. We were not very close, you'll go to town and see them and go 'there are white people' that's it and leave them. But in terms of interacting and engaging and so forth you know, them showing solidarity to the circumstances that people are living in, in the communities that we are coming from, it was a different way of understanding issues like hearing from their comments. Because at that time I was not yet clear on the issues that we were deliberating on, I was not even clear about them but then it was fascinating for me to see the kind of interaction that was there, there was not the issue of we are fighting them, there was engagement people were engaging. You know these white people were coming with their perspectives to assist people with institutions and ideas, assisting people with problems that are there. We always thought that white people have this information that we don't have and that was the indecision that I was having occurring in my mind yah.

Interviewer: Just briefly, in the first period after you joined the APF ... you said you remember the education subcommittee and you worked there, but obviously over time that wasn't the only thing that you were involved in with regards to the APF. So, tell us how it was that your own development in the APF happened over the first let's say two to three years that you were in it?

Nhlapho: I think my first year I was non- schooling by that time and there were sub committees by that time, there was research that I attended a lot because education was only sitting on weekends and during the week I'll come and attend the research. It was in my group in the organisation and most of our comrades were studying they were furthering their education at tertiary level so there will be few of us who were not going to school. I'll come and represent the organisation. I started attending the research subcommittee and whereby the likes of Prishani and Mish, comrade Patra was also part. There were lots of comrades there, comrade Meme, comrade West, there were a lot of them and comrade David and comrade Ellen so I started attending there and by the time I came they were doing the research from DRD and I think it was Phiri but it was nearing completion. And I think what they were dealing with was the capturing of data, compiling the report and analysing the report and I heard him say 'what should have been and what had been right, whose name are supposed to be there, and whose names are not supposed to be there', that was my first part of being involved. I was not clear what research was and they told me we can do research on water and other stuff and even research on HIV that was going to be done, and there were fights to say, 'you see Dale cannot take this decision and 'who's this guy Nick the designer?' There were solutions which needed to be confronted but again it was an experience. Prishani was an academic in terms of completion, in terms of research and so forth but when I realised that she was more advanced in understanding issues in the aspects of research and in that field she was key in that field. And it was eye opening seeing these intellectuals within the organisation trying to do this and impacting the skills within comrades and getting involved in that aspect and getting information about what is research, what is happening with research, what we should be doing? I remember one day in a meeting of Office Bearers that we were tasked to do a research on the 'Impact of the expansion of Eskom on Africa' and I think that was the first task I had to research, I think it was me, Mish and Patra we had to research that part. I think that was one of the first office bearers meetings that I had to attend and was given a task as part of the research task team we were given a task to do a research around Eskom and I think that's where I started getting in terms of research and I started to know the ins and outs of research and a bit of understanding as to what is research and what to do and what you need when you research. So I think from that aspect it's where I grew a little bit of information and prior to those I was

in the education subcommittee and I was learning a lot from David because at that time there was this ... it was Rosa if I'm not mistaken, we had a project from Rosa [Rosa Luxemburg Foundation]. There were these socialism workshops I think by that time and we had to do these international workshops whereby we invite all these comrades from foreign communities, I think it was Bolivia or Hungary. Some of them you had to compile their history, their culture, you had to understand their culture so I was involved in that process. So at a later stage David left and got a job and I was left alone to complete that task and for me it was difficult because I was new and I was still grappling with issues as to where to work and how and I was introduced to Khanya via Nina and Nancy. Nancy was key in terms of Bolivia and Venezuela and we met and discuss those issues. So I was a bit of a learning curve in as far as workshops are conducted and what is needed to be there cause you had to develop a pack and I was like 'what is to develop a pack?' What is needed to be in a pack?' I didn't know that facing the programme on its own,' what needed to be done in a programme 'what is what' and that was a kind of a skill that was developed a bit I think I learnt through that processes ... David was key in that regard because he showed me some of the things as to do a pack and how to develop it, how to write an agenda, how to draft an agenda and what is supposed to be written in it. I remember in research I was tasked with that by the research team so I started jotting minutes down so from that aspect I took it from research to education whereby it helped me to understand to draft these kinds of things. But at first it was difficult because I was not yet matured in a sense that I take my first step because I was relying on David now when he left I was finding work was difficult to do alone so I'll start going to Nancy, start finding information, whatever and I think that was a task that failed because I didn't understand what was required at that time but I had a bit of knowledge but it was difficult for me to put all these things, put these elements together, you know it was very difficult and it ended up not materialising at all. But I think I've learnt a little bit of experience and I think I have carried it through to as to what mistake I've done in that part so I think it build me from that aspect to that level of understanding. After that I was appointed to be coordinator of the education task team and you know attending the first office bearers meeting I remember in the research they will tell us that they 'will chop you in the office bearers meeting' 'they will chop your head there' you see because we send someone from the task team and say you must go there' we tell them that there is this and this and this and when you come back and say' no' the comrades have refused they never gave us this and this' and they said we can only get this and that, they will be like you must tell these office bearers that they must give us this and that and you know I wanted to ask what are the office bearers doing there, who are these office bearers? People from subcommittees and coordinators from subcommittees are the ones who form the office bearers and there are other office bearers who are elected and they form the entire office

bearers committee so we fought; 'What are they saying there?', 'Who is saying what?' 'Who is refusing?' 'Who is agreeing and whatever?' So when I went there now I think my first day I was quiet and tired and I never said a word because it was my first time and I was still to understand what was happening in the office bearers and I think along the lines I started a bit by bit and started to engage. I remember by the time we had another one, it was four meetings in a week, I think it was two, it was in a fortnightly basis I think in my second or third I start talking as to what was happening. I started engaging in debates and it's whereby my capacity grew from that aspect to engage in debates and I think in the level of subcommittees, I think I started engaging at that level and engaging in issues and understanding the politics and starting to and now starting to talk on my own and understanding that there were political groups within. I was recruited in a small political group and got to know the Marx thing because someone will come and stand up and say but no one said 'this and this' and I was like 'who is Marx now?' And I remember my first document I got was like a communist manifesto and at that time it was very difficult for me to read it because a communist manifesto was a very difficult document and it had this big English so now it required me to have a dictionary forever so I just stopped it there. I read information which was a bit more easy English to understand. Ya I think from that time on I grew in terms of what was required in terms of skill of developing packs within the APF, in terms of doing the programmes and other aspects and also mentally I grew in terms of engagement and I think in terms of that aspect I've gained quite a lot of things from my time with the APF when I started until now it has grown. Also lucky enough seeing the levels of education is different in the APF, it kind of highlighted that it is also key for one to engage in the issue of education and further his studies for one to be able to, you know see things in a different way and also understating the world but also to develop individual capacity, you know it was key. It was motivating to see other people when they heard that someone is doing ...it was the first time that I heard that there are people who do a PhD in the APF. I never knew about it, I only knew about a degree and diplomas, it was the first time to hear about it. Honours, Masters, PhDs, doctors I only knew that a doctor was one in hospital but then in the long levels of life you understand that one has to study to this level to become this, one has to study to this level to become that and I think I'm kind of getting it. So somewhere, somehow it broadened my capacity to develop individually in terms of capacity not only I was also inspired further my studies. I think what I'm doing currently is through understanding that I got from APF, because I think the very same years whereby understanding that education is key for one to develop in life is when I started taking the issue of education very seriously from that aspect. Getting that moved up learners and I think it was also inspiration for me. I think I've developed a lot.

Interviewer: So in some ways the APF is like a school for you, another kind of school?

Nhlapho: Ya for me it was ...I don't know how to put it ...a very good stepping stone for bringing change in my life, I think for me things have changed a lot. I see things in a different way. It was a stepping stone for me – the APF, in that aspect because in my understanding I wanted to do this managerial post being a manager, getting whatever but when I came to APF I saw things in a different way. You know if you're first studying at school like I said it gave me resource in my first six months I completed, I did my first six months but understanding the view of capitalist systems and how socialism ... now I understand how the country should be like but now again this idea in school this thing is not my thing cause actually I'm not doing this in everyday life so this actually moved me from what I'm doing. So it's like okay, let me find something that will be relevant from what I'm doing politically and that will be relevant to schooling because I want something that will align and not drive me away from the organisation because now I was more interested in going forth with the APF so I wanted something that will also work. But the thing is that the advice that I got while I was doing human resource I was told that 'no' as I wanted to do political science I think I made it clear that I wanted to do political science then they told me there is another key thing which I can do and I said what and they said sociology. So I started doing research about it and I finally got it so I think along those lines. I think I would not be who I am currently if I wasn't part and parcel of the APF and choices that I have made and things that I'm currently doing and the people that I meet. The APF was a big stepping stone, it kind of brought change to who I am. I am what I am because of the APF.

Interviewer: And how did your involvement ...you initially came to the APF as a result of the being a student in the community organisation you were a member of ... how did that membership impact on the struggles of the students and members of the community that you came from?

Nhlapho: I think mostly our struggle was more school oriented and I think in terms of organisation when I came in I find out that most people who form a certain structure are in schools but the problem is that they never laid a base in terms of continuation from schools. Now it was the issue of us going back from the ground to schools and say this is what is happening and you know these policies of government that people from outside shouldn't just be allowed to enter schools. There were difficulties in terms of what was happening and I think because most of them were more of out of schools, finding ways as to how do we move forward because we no longer had that strong base as leadership but we could also mobilise within schools, amongst learners that were within and also integrate then that's where the 'Y' came in, it was then YLRF instead of LRF to integrate because there were

certain issues of unemployment, you know, facilities. Because the struggle was more on educational issues and other issues like water and electricity like the development aspect as such but when it included 'Y' we look at those issues of youth employment, opportunities available for them and development in the communities, what is government doing for our youth in the communities. So I think that's where we started getting those issues but in that aspect because one has to be more organising on youth issues rather than issues of water and others around.

Interviewer : And also I just want to get your perspectives and your own experience ... you've talked about a lot of positive things in the APF for yourself – learning, capacitation and skills - but there have also been a lot of challenges in the APF and you mentioned some when you came in, there were people debating and arguing and talking about so and so is to blame ... just talk your own experiences about what you see as the main challenges within the APF with regards to the relationships of comrades with each other, organisations and the issue of, for example, resources you mentioned as well. Your own experience and what you've seen?

Nhlapho: Ya I think chowing comrades is different from you know, from challenges chowing money, chowing a comrade who is out of line and in the long run it's the understanding because from my understanding there was money, what money, what was money doing, you know those things were new to me. In the long run I got to understand funding, 'what is funding' and what is needed to build activities. I think APF needed funding and so forth but I think at times you find that you can trust someone today and tomorrow you won't trust them. I learnt that you might rely on this person but in these cases so far if I'm correct I will answer it. It is very challenging in the sense that in the last previous years in the APF we were doing activities and ... were very challenging. From now, not finding any careful ground ... comrades when we go to meetings are like we want leadership, we want you to bring it, what is happening? How comrades sustain themselves is a big challenge for me because we more rely on funding rather than on self. I think the other aspect is to find ways and means of sustaining ourselves as an organisation besides relying on funders. I think the binds of funding have more impact in terms of curbing doing activities and in terms of building structures on the ground because one aspect I would say is that if comrades were finding ways of raising for our own activities that struggle won't be dying and won't be saying where are the funds and this and this ... if Dale didn't raise funds there is no money and so forth. I think that is key and I think for me that is the biggest challenge that we need to work on ... comrades finding ways of getting our own funds with our own ways within this country because I think we rely on international donors and I think the challenges we find in trying to do cooperates within the organisation are that we say we will go and organise, we will do

such stronger organisations that we have worked for and move forward the struggle of the communities. I think for me, that is one of the key challenges that we are facing. The problem of finances within the APF is another aspect that we realised to see how important it was to actually bail out from that perspective as to how do we build up because one would say we don't have resources to pull somewhere. Resources or no resources cause the word resources on its own when I started understanding it was more on the broader sense not specifically the issue of money but other issues were involved in that term of resource and I think in the long run ... I think that's one of the biggest challenges but I think in the long run finding ways of dealing with it I think it can be resolved if comrades can sit down and address it. But for me the biggest challenge is that comrades start building up reliance so they need to find means of surviving without relying on the APF and so forth. Ya I think that's the biggest challenge.

Interviewer: Now the other thing that you have done while you've been in the APF besides just doing campaigns and research and other things is you've represented the APF in various forms in other organisations, other conferences, with other organisations both internationally as well as across the region. Just describe some of those and how that impacted on you and how you thought that impacted on the APF in its linkages and struggles with other movements and with other people?

Nhlapho: For me it was a new thing for me to kind of move around from travelling from Vereeniging to Jozi and around the Vaal since I've been active cause I once went to Cape Town once when I was young and it was a far-fetched dream that one. But in terms of representing the APF I went to SMI [Social Movements Indaba] and I also had stage fright because I had never been a public speaker. But in school I started doing that in Grade 12 when I started to practise to talk in a public sense I think when I first came to APF and start being sent and delegated and representing the APF, addressing the media was one of the difficult parts as to what I'm going to say to these people. But I think understanding issues helped and I was given a mandate as to what needed to be said. My first time to go out to represent the organisation, standing up there talking to other organisations and go there if I said one thing incorrectly that will not impact on me badly but the entire organisation as a whole because one is seen as how they have been groomed and comes from as well, what you are uttering, what people think you have been taught by your organisation. But I think my understanding of the organisation gave light on what to say, it has built me. In the Coalition against Xenophobia I've been doing it. There was this conference that was organised and you find people from this Department of Home Affairs and other departments and now you start talking nice and so forth and I must come hard and stand firm and say this is not what we saw ... its different and we started chowing left, right and centre saying that

this is not right you know. They will portray this picture that is not right and you have to come and show the perspective of the organisation and say to them this is not what we saw as the APF and this is what is happening. So I think for me it has grown and being in the public space for me was stage frightening for me, standing up there saying I'm from Anti Privatisation Forum which deals with this and this and explain issues and brief organisations about the background. I think my first one ... we had to present our presentation which was my first public presentation which was so scaring also because of these different people I did not know. You know for me to give it all that this is where I come from and this is how our stand point is and this is our position regarding 1,2,3 and I think from that point I have grown to an amazing person - now public speaking is easy. Also raising the issue of media and other organisations, it is one of the changing aspect one never find it in the heart that one will talk on radio and hear your voice. Then I think it has impacted very positively on me. Whatever comments I've made when representing the organisation have also reflected positively on the organisation. Those gatherings I've worked and represented the organisation on it have brought positive outcomes. I have done well in most of them. I think I have not worked so much so far but those areas I have worked in representing the organisation I have more than made an impact in those areas.

Interviewer: Now, more recently in the last while you were given the task in the APF of heading up the Energy Task Team ... that was a new area in some ways, I mean electricity wasn't because electricity had been there from the very beginning but energy is a little bit bigger than electricity ... just describe some of the things, the kinds of struggles and the experiences in entering in that terrain in representing an organisation like the APF.

Nhlapho: Ya I think that was my independence, I think that was the birth of my independence in the organisation because by that time the subcommittee headed by someone entails where you should start from, you know, and I think the electricity, I mean energy task team was one which came up, there was part of starting point as to was I clear as the issue that I understand. It was not much in detail by that time at the APF so it was kind of a new thing that one has to start and had to influence people to understand the way you understand it. I mean because coming from the educational background because at that time I was more interested in education, we meet people like Salim in education and they were very key and enthusiastic in education this is the right path this is not going to work and you know we are battling on this one and this is what one must do. I think Lerato at Earthlife was the capacity that I got because most of the information that I have I'm getting through Earthlife, through their own workshops that they had for me that was eye opening and I started to see because science and things were not things that I ever thought about because science I last did when I was doing grade 9. So things were all about science, this thing of

climate change and electricity and all and so forth, so for me the experience of starting to give people information is a new thing that is there. In the APF there was no energy thing there was water and I think it was different in that I got experience in starting the new forum and I think on its inception it had an impact but also I managed to organise two marches that demanded electricity - to Eskom and also to the Mayor - which I was part of organising that. You know it was a growth for me growing to see things in a different way and how to organise things. And that aspect helped me in organising things and accessing information, I think that is one aspect. I know NERSA (National Energy Regulator of South Africa), I know , understanding Eskom, doing pickets and I remember that we did in Megawatt Park and I think people were amazed at what people were doing there and we stop what, what. So I think it's been a great experience for me. and starting that committee, that forum I have got information shared and I think I have gained a lot and I've seen different things and I think that's what makes me to understand things and I think to see whether there is a different way to challenge, to go for more . Going to NERSA to make those submissions you know it was the first time drafting a presentation and also a submission ...we had to go through processes that one didn't understand and understanding the issues that are within there and I remember one time I asked Tristen as to what is happening and he told me 'no' this is your first time ... and I think you should read and understand that things so you will be able to know what was happening. So I ended up understanding through materials I was giving at the workshop I was having around so I think it also helped me because I also attended the conference in Cape Town which was around the use of energy and understanding the use of energy. It has grown you know It has changed me in impacting the issues of ... because of impacting knowledge to other comrades within the organisation. Seeing things that are happening within which we sometimes neglect and how they impacted on issues of energy and so forth. It was very now becoming a green, a green member now. So I think it brought some change - there has been growth and understanding issues differently not only in education but other issues that we need to focus on which are daily affecting us so I think it has cleared something into me and brought some changes within the APF. So I think it has brought some change to the organisation like issues of what we fought for and with whom people are busy accessing electricity. In communities, even the statements that we have issued out I think they have made some noise out there somehow. You know probably I will also develop a skill within that aspect to write a press statement which was new to me too and get my thoughts on how I see energy issues and so forth and what is the position of the APF regarding this matter. It was a new experience for me to engage in that field and hopefully to grow. There are more people who are here and reading the documents, you know you will be amazed that if I learn this today, if I read this today because you get the comments of comrades who have moved on who are much clearer and you get to that field

and you understand them. It's like developing new ideas on how to take up struggle and what is happening and what needs to happen ...one has to be clear on these issues for one to be able to elaborate on these issues, ya.

Interviewer: Okay and linked to that you talked about specifically an area that you worked on in the APF that was new to the struggles of the APF in the last two years or so. How have communities responded to that work and those struggles in their daily lives?

Nhlapho: I think one thing is that one of the aspects was climate change which people had never taken into consideration. I remember when we studied at school it's all about pollution, water pollution, air pollution, ozone and ozone layer which was damaged by pollution caused by factories and so forth, I think it was in environment studies just people must stop emitting. But they never thought that this was a land issue but this thing if it falls dead if it grows it opens up and opens up then the world will die ... then I think of going to read and understanding it. And also there was issues that people are affected by electricity at the same time and one understanding that we are using coal which is also adding emission to the ozone layer, one uses it to produce electricity to people so the biggest challenge for me is to understand as to how people can access electricity because when you find communities you think one of the key aspects is how they are going to access electricity and now you find ways as to how people will get electricity not only by the means of emitting which was used by Eskom to develop coal and so forth but there is other ways whereby we start having now what we call renewable energy - so these are the issues that one needs to explore and the understanding. So it's a great challenge to understand those types of energy types and forms to utilise and you know when you go to communities and people say '*sifunu gesi thina*' '*we want electricity*' 'Eskom must stop doing this now' - you find out that you must tell people that the electricity that you are using currently is going to kill you at the end of the day if you don't afford and we need to tell them that this is the alternative that you need to start looking at. These are like things that have been tried and tested and we also learned about other ways one can produce and have changes in terms of our health because what is key is issue of us accessing electricity but what is also key is that of our health ... how about today, tomorrow, the next day and the following years? We also need to look at the future not only look for tomorrow or today so those are the kind of things that we need to tell the community to change and to have alternative energy and mindset about it. Also because for me it was issue of electricity, one aspect was the type of electricity that we are getting, there was this basic electricity that was there, was it enough? No. People didn't know how to get it, where to go if one needs to get information from those bureaucratic information as to how people need to access electricity issues and so forth. But I think one other aspect that changing people's mindsets in the community links is to tell them that this is not the only way

of getting electricity there are other alternative means for them to get electricity. So for me going there it was changing them and I think people have started learning and understanding it they are saying we 'need amarenewables we need solar we need...', your wind power, you know people are starting to get other ideas and people are starting to attend workshops and understanding these kinds of alternatives and they are more clear now that when talking about this what do you mean and how to achieve and this is how we can sustain - once people start having it in their minds. In the last past few years or so we started changing and telling them about electricity and the engagement that we are having alternatives I think has an impact in the sense that people have changed their minds how to access electricity and what kind of electricity are they needing. In communities that we have worked with and that we have engaged with I think now they are clear as to what are the dangers and what are the positives and negatives of alternative electricity and which we can have electricity, yah.

Interviewer: A few last questions Sithembiso. On a general level in terms of the APF what would you describe as the main strengths and weaknesses? It doesn't matter which ones first, but the strengths and weaknesses of the APF ... in broad terms, not necessarily specifically in relation to your own experience but just as an organisation and politically?

Nhlapho: I think I may start with weaknesses. I think for me APF has failed to sustain its comrades in the long run, I think we have lost key comrades, one by one – very, very key comrades and I have seen the past years losing comrades due to the system and for me that's one of the biggest weaknesses of the APF. For me if APF was able to hold up comrades especially the key ones, as comrades we know who is key and who is not key. I'm not saying we undermine other comrades but we in certain times we know if this comrade is key if the comrade is able to do something at the end of 1, 2,3 and we can rely on these comrades on these issues. We have lost comrades in the organisation and it is a very difficult issue whereby every time we now have to start afresh and teach these comrades. You know we say there is this comrade, let's teach the comrade, then the comrade now leaves the organisation and goes somewhere that is what has been happening, comrades taken to trainings and going away with those skills without benefiting the organisation. So for me I think the sustainability of comrades has been one of the aspects APF has lacked in terms of to assure that comrades-to continue within the organisation because one will see the APF with a different eye trying to transform but then the way we are losing comrades I don't think we will have achieved. It will be like a monkey who pick up mealies in a field and will pick one here and pick one in four and pick up another one ... when they reach there they only have one mealie so it's one of the problems we are facing here. So I think that aspect is one of the biggest weaknesses. I think for me ... by now we should be having like, I

don't know how many members we would be having if we were able to sustain the key comrades and also able to sustain the grassroots organisations that we are having and I think those comrades will also be key in assisting in sustaining the grassroots organisations that we are having. So for me I think that's one of the key aspects on sustaining key comrades within the organisation, ya.

Interviewer: Okay, so that's the weaknesses. Feel free to mention any other ones that you want and also strengths - what do you think?

Nhlapho: In our strengths I think I'm not specifically saying that APF has got to, but in a sense it's the capacity to build comrades and help them to change to see things in a different way is very key in terms of capacity. Because APF has been key in terms of capacitating comrades and that has been one of the greatest strengths and I think also being able to show that APF I think that there were some saying APF is there, APF is no longer there I think those critics were proven wrong. We want to keep APF alive I think in the years there are times where we have been losing comrades but I think we have been able to sustain them. For me the key aspects is the strength and able to capacitate comrades and building communities that we have and also with information comrades have gained and are able to stand up on their own in communities. You know, you find that in a month or two they didn't know anything, they will keep quiet in a meeting you'll find them in within a month or two they are the ones in the forefront making noise – 'you comrades you know nothing and now you are very clear. I was scared to see such things happening in the organisation. The comrades are growing also later you see things differently and you react in a different way. The behaviour will be changing along the lines and you will be able to see that they are challenging the system on its own. It will be good also to see the improvement of APF being able to come up with strategy to develop within the community you know, how to maintain it even though struggles do fluctuate and so forth it is also key that we keep up the momentum and I don't think comrades are interested when the struggle is at high point of struggle but also they die you know, because capitalists are very key when the economy declines they are able to see that it also goes up so it is also key for APF to start when its struggles are ... when there is a recession on its struggles they should go back on its peak to taking forward the struggles that we have within the organisations.

Interviewer: The more recent political changes that have happened in the country and in the ANC within the last year or two, all these things that have been going on ... from your experiences as an activist, how do you think that has affected – two parts of the question - how do you think that has affected the APF as an organisation and how it has affected

comrades on the ground in terms of their understanding of the struggle because of the changes with Zuma and the left and all these things that have happened?

Nhlapho: I think when we come to the APF we get this left politics which is very clear and the truth of the nature of how things are and when you go out there you see things - people saying that the comrades were very clear when we told them that in the past 10 years or 15 years this economy would have been saved ... go to past committees and visit the past manifesto of the ANC they have been saying education will be free, there will be free electricity and water even they will come to your place and tell you that they will give you free electricity and free water and free whatever. But that thing have never materialised never in life and that reality although I think for me the changes of administration I mean the leadership of the ANC somewhere somehow you know it was ... if comrades were clear but I think many comrades were clear on the ground because myself I would see it as one of the opportunistic part of other people in the ANC in the Zuma administration but of course some of them were left out in the Mbeki regime. So for me it's like creating enemies whereby these were not needed in the Mbeki regime and they are finding it in the sense that this is our turn now to turn, change things around and have an influence in a sense you know hence these promises to say we will change things and make Zuma some sort of a saint to people that, how the ANC struggled like you it's not like Mbeki went to school he understands our issues you know it can be there, delivery of promises that they have made. I think for my side, from the APF it never had that negative impact because people were very clear on issues regarding - this is just a different jockey but the horse is the same. You know they are going to be riding the same policies and I think there was hype from the community that Zuma will bring change, will be different to Mbeki, he is man of the people he is down on the ground but then we forgot to see that he was on the ground for his benefit, you know for the ANC to gain ranks again to leadership in a very clear that they will say the same what in policies. The polices were drafted by the ANC, by himself, you know there was this idea remember the story I heard in the campus from these guys they said to me no you see he - Mbeki - came with these policies and so forth and all and I said no you see now you're starting to lie - people when they went to Kempton Park there who were drafting those polices? It's the ANC. Mbeki was not drafting alone - people agreed that these were policies that were going to guide the party. Now it's the same policies that the ANC adopted before going to Polokwane which people adopted, now there is no differences. And now you are turning against a leader that you will say was more of a stereotype and never listened to people and done things in his way but some of the policies that implemented were the ANC. And so I think for me it highlighted something that some people in the community were not clear as to what the changes are. They had that hope that because in that sense there were a lot of

protests that were still taking place at the time and people were still furious ... meaning that there were some protests taking place. These are the very same things that we have been saying that these guys in the ANC cannot but things individually there is nothing, you cannot take a unilateral decision you need to consult the organisations and deal with these issues. You take an organisation to deliver on these issues, there was no difference there. So I think they were from the communities that hoped they will bring changes but I think in the APF including myself and other comrades that we were very clear that we will see the same thing. Prior - and even after - there are no changes that we have seen that were concrete, that we can say these guys delivered on this and that ... one cannot shift blame and use resources to provide for disadvantages in the communities so I think people were hyped by the unrealistic leadership of Zuma which they believed will change. It never changed.

Interviewer: And one last question. What would you describe now in the present period as the main role of the APF? And the second part; do you think the APF still remains relevant today?

Nhlapho: Ya I think, can you repeat the first one?

Interviewer: What do you see as the main role of the APF ... in your mind as someone who has been in the organisation for four years ... the role that it should be playing right now in this particular period?

Nhlapho: Ya I think for me APF is relevant now ... and it will continue to be relevant up to so far there are so many issues that are not addressed and some people live in squalor, you know some people are not clear as to which role to take, where to go from now. Taking that from the experiences that we have gained like the issue of Boiketlong being the first community that we mobilised and you will see people not being clear as to they having RDPs they having money for development and so forth. For me APF has played a role helping so I think there is still relevancy in that regard. I mean delivery is not there but I think APF still has a very huge role to play. For me the ground is still fertile for APF to grow and expand particularly in Gauteng because I think our issue was mainly Gauteng issues, many organisations were based here in Gauteng but there are so many communities that are there, that we can also engage and try to align various issues as to this is how we are supposed to be moving on. So I think there is still readiness for this organisation and there are so many issues that the organisation needs to take up ... the issue of electricity is a very key issue, water provision is still key, you know, the issues of deliverance of houses is still very key. Because when we speak for councillors in the urban areas, it is important for the APF to look at them in a broader way not only the urban areas but it is also important looking at outskirts, areas that are not closer to the CBD or urban areas where there are problems in

those areas in terms of development and so forth, so I think APF can play a role. The transformation of APF is key ...if APF can transform and come with a strategy whereby we look things in a national way, it grows. I remember comrades from the Eastern Cape, there were issues, burning issues even now when I'm at home looking at the TV there are some issues, very, very key issues that need to be engaged - not only electricity also water, roads and housing that need to be taken up. And I feel that there is still a big role that APF can intervene and play a significant role, I think they have seen that one of the example that I was saying we came here I think it was me and Mish and Patra - we organised the community, there was no delivery of houses and within a week I was there when I pass there I feel proud that people's houses have been built. People are living in houses now and you know I believe that if we continue doing that in other communities there can be a change in those areas. I think for me APF had done a lot in Gauteng and it's high time that we move and spread and see how to assist communities and work around those issues I think the key I think we heard from comrades from Mpumalanga saying these are the issues you know and with our politics we can make a difference and changes so I think for me APF is still pertinent. It has a huge role to play in those issues you know.

Interviewer: Those were all the questions I had Sithembiso. But at the end of every interview I always ask if there is anything that we haven't covered and any question I haven't asked you about the APF and anything that you would like to add or say something that you feel we haven't talked about? As you know this is about ... trying to get a history of the APF and its activists and different perspectives, so if there is anything you want to add feel free.

Nhlapho: At the present moment I cannot say this is what we need. Everything is covered. For me the interview has covered a vast number of things in view of the future of the APF you know I think it's covered ...

Interviewer: Thank for so much.