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**Interviewer:** This is Dale, it's the 17<sup>th</sup> November and I'm going to be interviewing Abram Mokete. Abraham thanks very much for coming and making the time to do this. The first thing I want to do is ask you some questions about yourself. When and where were you born?

**Mokete:** Actually I was born in Sharpville that was in 1965. In February 1966 my parents went to Sebokeng where I grew up, thereafter between 1997 and 1996 its where I went to Evaton West, its where I have a wife and I kid.

**Interviewer:** So you've lived more or less in the Vaal your whole life?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Did you live anywhere else outside of the Vaal, Abram?

**Mokete:** No. no.

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little bit about your family. You say you have a wife and a child, how old is your child?

**Mokete:** Is now 13.

**Interviewer:** What about brothers and sisters, your other family? Are they around? Do you have other brothers and sisters?

**Mokete:** Ya actually, I've got my brother, he is working in Focshville and my younger sister she stays at my parents place because she is the only one left at home.

**Interviewer:** You parents have already passed on?

**Mokete:** Yes, both of them.

**Interviewer:** Is she staying at the old family home?

**Mokete:** Yes they are twins. My younger brother is staying somewhere where he is hiring a place there.

**Interviewer:** And what about your own schooling? What schools have you done?

**Mokete:** I done Standard 8 at school.

**Interviewer:** So you went through to Standard 8 in Sebokeng?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And what about work? What kinds of jobs or work in your life have you done?

**Mokete:** I was a salesman and thereafter I was working as a ... we were fixing you know the windmills, I know how to fix those things. And thereafter I went to security, there I spent a lot of time in security.

**Interviewer:** And in the present situation, what is your present situation with regards to work?

**Mokete:** Right now?

**Interviewer:** Or in the last three years. Are you working or unemployed?

**Mokete:** Right now I'm unemployed but I'm still planning to upgrade my grade so that ... actually I have some experience but I should have some more qualification. So I have to upgrade.

**Interviewer:** What other interests or hobbies do you have outside being an activist? What other things do you do?

**Mokete:** Soccer, watching soccer and movies and sometimes partying.

**Interviewer:** So you enjoy partying big time as well, okay. Abram tell me when it was that you became politicised? When did you start thinking about politics, thinking about getting involved in struggles? When did that happen? How did that happen?

**Mokete:** It happened when I was still growing up especially in the time of apartheid when I realised how the government was treating people, from that time I started automatically to become an activist.

**Interviewer:** And did you join an organisation? What did you do at that time during the apartheid days? Did you join the ANC or was it other political or civic organisations?

**Mokete:** At that time I was just an ordinary member because I didn't have a good idea of how to tackle things but later I met with Torong Ramela who influenced me of all sort of things. He taught me many things actually, now it was when I actually started to actually find myself ... what kind of struggle, to understand the struggle ...

**Interviewer:** Just for the information Torong was a fellow comrade who is living in Evaton, right?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** And was he the one that started the Evaton West Crisis Committee – EWCCC, right?

**Mokete:** Him and others

**Interviewer:** When did that begin? When did the Evaton ... when did it start?

**Mokete:** It started in 2000, 22 September.

**Interviewer:** And were you there from the beginning?

**Mokete:** No not from the beginning, I was not there.

**Interviewer:** Okay. When did you start joining or when did you become active?

**Mokete:** 2005.

**Interviewer:** 2005? Okay and what was it about EWCCC that made you want to be part of it? What were they doing in those first 2 or 3 years in the community?

**Mokete:** Pardon

**Interviewer:** What was it that made you want to join the organisation? In other words what kind of things were they doing that made you think I should join this organisation?

**Mokete:** I realised that the organisation is fighting the needs of the community in our area, it is also gonna help myself if I have a problem because I realised you can't challenge municipality individually, you should form an organisation where they will help you challenge some things.

**Interviewer:** And what kind of things were they challenging? What was the EWCCC doing? What issues was it taking up for the community?

**Mokete:** The issues of housing, the issues of water, housing, roads, clinic, health, of course it's part of clinic and environment issues.

**Interviewer:** We will come back to some of those but tell me a little bit about the kind of community how is it? Is it mostly workers, unemployed, shacks? What does it look like, the community?

**Mokete:** In the community a lot is unemployment even women are unemployment and that caused, what can I say if the women doesn't work and whereby depend on someone it's easy to get some other diseases because she is unemployment and somebody will promise

this and that and it's where you will get some diseases like HIV spreading because mostly women are not working there.

**Interviewer:** What is the housing situation like, the basic service situation? You said water and electricity, basic services when the organisation started you said it was taking up these issues so what were the problems on those fronts?

**Mokete:** For electricity the problem is that when it is raining the electric went off and that actually causes problems because now when the electric is off when it comes back the TV and some other things they can burn. Since, we were speaking with the Manager of Eskom to put big transformers because those small transformers are causing that problem. And the issue of water we are still doing some research thereafter the research it's where we will make some follow up with water because the water that they are using is not right

**Interviewer:** When you say it's not right, is it the quality, is it bad water, is it not enough water, what is the problem?

**Mokete:** Nobody comes to our houses or to our yards to open and see how many water we have used there, they just charge us - they are sitting there and they just bring us a statement. It's another problem for us because sometimes if you are my next door neighbour there are 10 people there and I'm living alone, now you'll find out that when the statement comes me alone I will have to pay more money. At times somebody is not staying there is working somewhere for some months and will get the same statement ...

**Interviewer:** That's been a problem for many years now?

**Mokete:** Yes so we want to stop that system because it is not fair. We are not saying we are refusing to pay water but we want a fair thing because the system is not fair for us.

**Interviewer:** And the housing situation ...?

**Mokete:** In Evaton West we are the only community that paid R250 to be allocated in RDP houses. The problem is that we are overcrowded because of its one room there.

**Interviewer:** One room houses?

**Mokete:** Yes just imagine if a mother, father you want to sleep, it's a problem.

**Interviewer:** This is the booklet that you made a few years ago?

**Mokete:** Ya, ya. You can see here we pay R250 in Extension 11 for RDP houses.

**Interviewer:** So what you're saying is that that hasn't been delivered, so people pay money but nothing has happened?

**Mokete:** Nothing has happened. The houses were built half so the foundation they didn't finish it since from 1997. But we are the community that paid R250 but other extensions like extensions 2,3,4,5 and 7 - they didn't pay nothing but the house is complete.

**Interviewer:** So it's in a particular section in Evaton and its extension 11 and its extension 11 where there is a big problem with housing in particular? I'm going to ask you some questions about the organisation itself, about EWCCC. What kind of structures does it have? Do you have elected leadership? Do you have regular meetings, do you have AGMs? How is it structured as an organisation?

**Mokete:** Previously our structure Evaton West was a good organisation that time because the leadership was actually active. Right now we meet but others are working especially the executive committee which means the attendance is not good right now so I'm the one trying to see that we organise ourselves like before .

**Interviewer:** What kind of activities ... the EWCCC, what kind of things did it do in order to highlight the problem? I mean did you march, picket? What kind of things did you do in the struggles over the years?

**Mokete:** Right now here I still have our programme of action where there will be marches and pickets but we want to start with Eskom and so on.

**Interviewer:** But in past when you started, when you joined you said in 2004/ 5 so since that time the struggles that Evaton West has taken up, have you had any successes in terms of making things better as a result? Tell me a little bit about that.

**Mokete:** I remember here if you look [at the EWCC booklet] page 29 we were marching for Eskom and also we marched for the supermarket, Score Supermarket to reduce the prices and we did success.

**Interviewer:** And has the situation with the basic services gotten any better since Evaton West started taking up struggles?

**Mokete:** Some of them but the electricity issue is still the same that's why we want to start with workshop of electricity so that if we go to engage with Eskom we must at least have knowledge of what is happening. Like other things, the issue of water, we are still busy making the research so that when we go there we have the knowledge.

**Interviewer:** And before I start asking some questions about the APF in relation to ...you're holding, even though we don't have a camera so you can't see, you are holding a booklet which was produced by Evaton West, what year was that? When did that come out 2007/2008? What year was this booklet produced?

**Mokete:** Let me remember, ya 2007 somewhere there.

**Interviewer:** You are one of the few affiliates that I know that has produced ... this is a history of the community and the history of the struggles there, right? So it's quite impressive. Who did you work with? Who produced this?

**Mokete:** Score, also Khanya was part of this and Rosa Luxemburg they helped us to make this booklet.

**Interviewer:** I'm going to ask you questions about the APF but what other relationships does Evaton West have? You've mentioned now Khanya, this is a research project, you've got Rosa Luxemburg, any other NGOs, organisations that you've worked with?

**Mokete;** Yes, Jubilee, APF, some others I have got them here. We have worked with the South African Centre for Economy and Justice, Environmental Justice Network Forum, and Durable Garden Education, Freedom of Expression, CIDA

**Interviewer:** Now as best as you can remember, when you joined the EWCCC, it was already a member of the APF, right?

**Mokete:** Pardon

**Interviewer:** EWCCC was already a member of the APF when you joined?

**Mokete:** Yes. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay. So tell me a little about the time that you've been involved in EWCCC, what has been the relationship with APF of Everton West? In other words, what did you get from the APF? Why did Evaton want to be part of APF?

**Mokete:** It has helped us a lot because it assists us with knowledge, it assists us with workshops even if we want to march it will go to Vereeniging or wherever, if we need transport they will assist us with transport so that our march can be a success.

**Interviewer:** What I'm trying to ask you is - was the APF assisting you with resources and also some education? Try to give me a sense of what the political relationship was like, the politics because it's the Anti Privatisation Forum, how did the anti privatisation fit to the struggles of Evaton? How did that make a connection?

**Mokete:** Well maybe I didn't hear you clearly.

**Interviewer:** Well if you organise a community organisation and you're looking to belong into something bigger than yourself, you generally say I like that organisation because it is going to help us do 1, 2, 3, and 4 alright? And I'm asking in political terms, ideological terms what was it that the APF brought to Evaton West not just some resources for transport you know.

**Mokete:** Since I became a member of an affiliate of the APF, I can stand with other organisations because it has taught me many things in politics.

**Interviewer:** What kind of things? In other words what kind of things did you learn as part of the APF?

**Mokete:** I have realised that there is socialism, communism and capitalism so we have done workshops about those things and before that I didn't know that that system capitalism is a system that makes poor to become poor and richer to be rich, so I have learnt a lot of things.

**Interviewer:** In terms of the APF, besides the resources as you mentioned, do you remember events or activities that APF did that Evaton joined with other communities in something that was bigger, linking with other communities, other affiliates struggling at another level just not about water in Evaton but maybe about a policy that is in provincial government or something that is bigger than the community?

**Mokete:** I remember some events where we actually joined with some affiliates from other places when we were marching for xenophobia we were together there. Also when we were with Jubilee where we were different affiliates, now it shows that we support one another and



we show solidarity with other affiliates, which is good. Because, if we are more it makes at least pressure to whatever we challenge.

**Interviewer:** In relation to the membership in the APF - the APF has had a lot of challenges over the last few years, how has that affected Evaton? The problems and some challenges in the APF, has that affected Evaton West and the struggles in the community? And if it has how that has affected them?

**Mokete:** You mean when in the past when we challenge APF?

**Interviewer:** No I'm saying the APF has had its own problems and challenges ...have those problems and challenges in the APF affected the community struggles in Evaton and if it has how has it affected them? Do you see what I'm saying? Some of the problems were about monies, about people these kinds of things.

**Mokete:** Yes it has affected the organisation.

**Interviewer:** How so?

**Mokete:** When we see that there is misunderstanding especially in our APF executive then we start to panic, we start to ask ourselves if APF is not stable whether our things will come alright. Will we be able to challenge things because most of the time it helps us to challenge these things because it is difficult for us as the affiliate to organise things by ourselves because we don't have enough resources so if there is a problem in the executive then it affects us too.

**interviewer:** How has the general politics of South Africa over the last 2-3 years ... in other words, change in the ANC, from Mbeki to Zuma and other things ...has that affected people in the community? The things that have happened in the broader politics, has that had an impact?

**Mokete:** Yes

**Interviewer:** What kind of impact has it had? What are people thinking? Has it changed people's minds, has it changed the way they see things?

**Mokete:** Yes sometimes when the President, Zuma was campaigning most of the citizens, the community they thought he will come and change some policies and those things but as

times goes on, if you listen to his speech somewhere often he will say that 'no I'm not going to change some policies' that when people see we voted the same system of previous government, meaning that the policy will remain the same. And if it remains the same people are affected because they are going to suffer because of those policies.

**Interviewer:** In Evaton West, in the community what is the attitude towards the ANC now? Do they support the ANC, are they pulling off or are there other political parties there?

**Mokete:** Most have said in future they won't vote for the ANC because it has promised them lies. The only members of ANC to my knowledge are the ones who are going to vote for the ANC because they have opportunities there.

**Interviewer:** Is the councillor for that area, are they ANC councillors?

**Mokete:** ANC councillors.

**Interviewer:** So they do get elected? They continue to be elected?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** As the ANC but with less people participating, is that what you're saying?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** So each election it's less and less people who are voting, because of the broken promises?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** How did the government respond to struggles that were being taken up in Evaton? In other words when I say government I mean the local councillor or whoever, how did they respond to what Evaton was saying when you were marching, picketing, demanding, handing memorandums - what was the response?

**Mokete:** Sometimes they do not respond at all, they will promise. When we give them memorandum we give them fourteen days to respond to our demand but we don't get the response from government. Eskom okay, they will come and promise us things which is some lies, they will say 'we will fix this' ... when we ask 'when?' They will say before month end of June the transformers will be okay but it won't.

**Interviewer:** Throughout the last five years since you've been there with Evaton has anything changed? Has there been any good thing as a result of your struggles?

**Mokete:** Yes because we have been fighting for the street lights the street lights are there now. We have been fighting for roads because when the ambulance is coming to fetch a patient you find that the road is mud, they are getting problems. I have realised that now they are busy making some tar road although it's not all the streets.

**Interviewer:** But some of them are now being tarred?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Has Evaton taken up issues of education and health as well?

**Mokete:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What has happened there on things about education, schooling, clinics, and these things?

**Mokete:** Schooling have also improved, remember we had only one school called Matome but now we have two schools.

**Interviewer:** And one thing that you mentioned is the environment. I believe there was a big rubbish dump close by, what has happened there? What has happened with that site?

**Mokete:** The people are still going there but now I have realised there is a control now, there is another way of controlling people. When you pass there you see it's not like before.

**Interviewer:** Is there a pollution problem at all? Are there issues of bad air and pollution in the area?

**Mokete:** For the people who are part of Evaton West those who are staying next to Matiki

**Interviewer:** The rubbish dump?

**Mokete:** Yes

**Interviewer:** Is that still a problem for them?

**Mokete:** Right now we never went back to ask them whether they still have that problem.

**Interviewer:** Do you think over the last 2-3 years, do you think organisations like Evaton West ... do you think the struggles that have been taken up on an APF basis - education, housing, electricity and health, and these things - are still needed and necessary for people

on the ground? In other words the APF is now 10 years old, it started in 2000, does it still need to be there for problems of the community or have they changed?

**Mokete:** Some of the things have changed, some are still there like the issue of eviction, it's still a problem but some other things have changed. You see from 2000 , the APF put pressure on the local government for things like water, you see in Soweto the issue of pre paid meters, it has done something.

**Interviewer:** What I'm asking also ... do you still see the need for communities like Evaton West Crisis Community to be active now with issues that are facing, is there a need just like they started in 2002. Is it still the same?

**Mokete:** There is a need

**Interviewer:** Is it mainly just shifting because things haven't changed?

**Mokete:** Yes:

**Interviewer:** And same for APF?

**Mokete:** Yes

**Interviewer:** So the APF in other words still needs to be here?

**Mokete;** Ya because even Johannesburg Water, we are still blaming another system, if you go this side its blaming another. If the APF is not there, I mean they know there is no other organisations that will challenge the things. And especially the issue of Coalition against Water Privatisation, it has played an important role because we even went to the High Court to challenge it and now it's not easy for Johannesburg Water to actually put pre paid meters they have to consult the people, we have to know some of the things.

**Interviewer:** What would you say are the main weaknesses? You've mentioned some of the good things, the strengths of the organisation but now, what are the main weaknesses that need to be strengthened?

**Mokete:** Attendance, communication and to be committed because some others when we plan they don't come to the next meeting so that makes us weak because whatever we plan

...

**Interviewer:** You mentioned when I asked you of the kind of place Evaton is you mentioned that there is a lot of people who are trying to find work, they are just surviving. For you as someone who is an activist what are the key, main challenges to try and build an organisation in a community like that? In other words when you look and say, 'I'd like this to be strong we would like to have so many members', what do you see as the main barriers to get to that point? Do you see what I'm saying?

**Mokete:** Ya actually mostly there when you trying and organise and mobilise the community others will ask, 'are we going to get paid' so you see that is the problem caused by unemployment. Someone if he wants to attend where he will get something when he comes back, also others they do not understand about our organisation, they think we are radical, we are chasing the government but I think if we still have workshops we can pull some of them into our organisation because its where they will understand some issues so I think we need to have some more workshops, I think it's where we are going to pull more.

**Interviewer:** One of the strengths of the APF as a forum has been to take different communities and bring them together, communities in the Vaal, Pretoria and Soweto. What has been your experience in doing that with other communities excluding outside the Vaal, how was that? Just tell me a little bit about how the APF has or has not been able to link different struggles so that people in Evaton are saying we have the same problems as those people over there.

**Mokete:** It has helped. Like I said before, if we are many we put more pressure to what we are fighting for, we help one another, we know that if we've got a problem we get help from other affiliates. So it helps a lot and we can be able to fight the same problem if it happens to other provinces.

**Interviewer:** Tell me a little bit about your own experiences in meeting people and what impacts ...around the places, not just communities in Gauteng but around other parts of South Africa and the world? So how has that impacted on your development as a community activist in Evaton? When you are able to, for example meet people from Germany or some other places and they are telling you about their things and what's going on.

**Mokete:** if you meet some people from different places or countries you'll learn from them some other things that maybe we don't have here in this country and we share ideas. You can even understand that the problem we have in South Africa other countries they have the problem and from those people you get some advice on how they handled the kind of problem you are having in your country.

**Interviewer:** And that has proven helpful in terms of struggles here as well, in Evaton in particular?

**Mokete:** Yes

**Interviewer:** These are the last few questions I have ... things now in the last few years have been difficult, not only economically for people who are suffering, you know from a different range of other things but it's been difficult politically because there are organisations that are going like a roller coaster sometimes because they go up and sometimes they go down - what do you think needs to happen to make people's organisations, community organisations stronger, organisations like the APF more effective, what do you think needs to happen?

**Mokete:** Actually I don't know how to explain this. The executive, APF executive must have good people who would pull the organisation with commitment and those people must have a plan and some strategy, they must mobilise and recruit more members. They should try to make APF reflect, for example some t-shirts and caps that will reflect that the APF is still there even if we go to the marches we should have some t-shirts that you regroup yourselves because some members just come to see oh this organisation is that fighting for, but if you are marching they do not understand which party is this.

**Interviewer:** And for Evaton too? What do you think is necessary for a community organisation like Evaton to gain, to become stronger ... to do better?

**Mokete:** We must recruit more members so that they have the knowledge that we have and understand our politics and also to challenge some issues. Then people will realise - oh this organisation is challenging our problems that are facing us. It's where we can get more people and the organisation will be strong.

**Interviewer:** Those were most of the questions I had. Is there anything that you, I mean I've tried to ask you some basic questions about your organisation. Is there anything that we haven't talked about the Evaton, the APF that I haven't asked you to, because this is the opportunity for you to say?

**Mokete:** What I can say is that sometimes we need resources as Evaton West. If we need to organise some other things, compare APF like before it used to help us with other things but now is helping us but its little bit slower, that is what I've realised.

**Interviewer:** So that needs to improve?

**Mokete:** Ya.

**Interviewer:** Abram, thanks comrade

