

Report: Facilitated Forum in the Community Hall, Chesterville, Durban, South Africa

November 7, 8, 9 2014

'Imbewu' Community Dialogue South Africa - A forum organised by Lungile Nkosi-Hill as a CFOR 'Seeds' project with facilitators, Arlene and Jean-Claude Audergon

I. Introduction and Overview

Lungile introduced the project. She spoke of her dream to contribute to the conversations needed within South Africa, by way of facilitated dialogue about the serious issues facing communities, the legacy of the Apartheid regime, and resources and direction within community to shape the future. Because Lungile grew up herself in the township of Chesterville, she wanted the project to begin here.

Lungile also introduced Arlene and Jean-Claude. We thanked the Counselor, Jabulisile Lorraine Mbongwa for welcoming us in Chesterville. Thembisile was thanked for the huge work organising this event. We also thanked Toyo and Thokozi for catering our lunches during the forum. Bongani and Maneli, forum participants, were thanked for their willingness to offer Zulu-English interpreting.

Arlene and Jean-Claude said a few words about themselves and their work facilitating within communities and conflict zones. They said they hoped the forum would contribute to the community and said a few words about their approach to facilitation. They spoke about facilitating all points of view and the underlying 'roles' that we share, which are bigger than our individual viewpoints – and how this can support a community to access its sense of awareness and direction. The direction and wisdom comes from inside the community. They talked about their approach which links a deeper dialogue about community relationships and emotional history with community and economic development.

We met over three days, some attending on just one or two days, others all three days.

We discussed issues within the Township including lack of work opportunities, lack of activities and outlook among youth, the drug Whoonga killing the youth, violent crime, and more. The group spoke about the sense of despair and hopelessness. We then represented the 'role', that part of society, or that part of oneself that says: 'You are unworthy of anything more. Who are you to dream of something different?' This was the ghost of Apartheid, which appears still now, when doors close and opportunities are limited, or within the internalized attitude of not believing in one's own ideas.

A powerful sense of community emerged as we worked with these dynamics, and a fountain of ideas sprang up for small businesses (such as raising chickens and eggs, developing crafts and arts, starting a restaurant, printing on fabric), as well as a starting a garden project, a youth center, drug referral center, and an internet and advocacy service, as well as continuing dialogues and reaching out to communicate with neighbours, as well as with diverse groups in the country.

These processes led to a felt sense of community and a spontaneous emergence of a new NPO (NGO), with the purpose of bringing these ideas to life, and continuing the facilitated dialogue.

II. The Forum

Below is a description of some of the key processes each day

DAY 1 Collecting themes, the ghost that puts down, and a fountain of ideas

After the welcome and overview, we opened a conversation, inviting people to talk about the issues that they felt were important, that they would like to see discussed during this forum. These included:

- lack of opportunities for work
- age issues in relation to work: if you are near 50 you can't get a job, yet you receive no benefits until you are 60.
- youth are without activities and outlook
- suicide
- need for forums for one's opinions to be heard and included into decision making
- issues of health, including Aids and Diabetes
- poverty and not enough to eat
- issues concerning many people coming into the country and available resources
- violence and crime linked to unemployment
- substance abuse, alcohol and drugs, easy access to the drug Whoonga for young people

Within the conversation we noticed two roles which we represented:

Role One: I want to work and improve my life and contribute to community

Role Two: There are no opportunities for you! ('You are too old!' Or 'You are too young'. Or 'Who do you think you are?' 'You are worthless.' 'Here take some drugs and alcohol')

As we entered this interaction, there were feelings of despair and hopelessness, due to the magnitude of problems, and the reality of many suicides. Someone came in with a baby and no food, and a problem with her identity card, preventing her from getting support. Others in the group began to find ways to help her.

Recognising there was also a third 'role', of one who finds a way to help, others spoke about the need to connect to something deeper, to one's spirituality and find a way forward. We met in small groups so that people could talk further about the issues the group had listed and to talk about ideas and solutions.

After Lunch, we listened to the ideas that began to emerge for community projects. Each group reported.

Some of the ideas included (and there are more)

- A youth centre and youth activities. One man already involved with youth proposed finding a snooker table, to get young people involved and also off the streets. A young person spoke about how young people need to be seen for their abilities, and included in dialogue about their future
- Crafts: Bring back traditional crafts, teach and find markets to export
- Start a restaurant with traditional food from the region
- Learn to write business plans
- Reach out and create pathways of communication across diverse groups, including between races. Lack of contact creates isolation and prevents people from knowing how it is.
- Casual conversation is also needed among neighbours, about issues that are important to us as a community

- We need regular facilitated dialogue
- Advocacy systems to help people sort out problems such as the Identity Cards (an issue that kept coming up during the forum)
- Need for nutritional support for people who are disabled or in ill health
- Research and seek funds that are available for starting Farms
- Develop transportation for the disabled and elderly
- Center or network needed to support information and referral for substance abuse.
- Appreciate and develop artistic talent in Chesterville
- Learn to write good business plans.
- Computers and internet 'café'

We closed the first day with a great appreciation for the outpouring of ideas. One man, a poet, offered a beautiful poem – welcoming those of us who were visitors to Chesterville, appreciating everyone for working on these important issues.

DAY 2 FORUM

Day 2 Morning: Listening to the despair and to the emerging Ideas - and taking them forward.

We reviewed day 1, recognizing the despair, the legacy of Apartheid, and how the 'role' persists, within current government and practices, such that even if it is not intended, people feel that they are considered unimportant or unworthy. We also recognized a new 'role' arising that listens – listens to the despair, and also listens to the fountain of ideas. A part of us that can say 'Yes' 'What a great idea!' 'What might be the first step?' 'What is needed to begin to bring your idea to fruition, even knowing it may be difficult.'

We also referred to the many issues that had come up the first day and that we could not talk about everything, but would come back to talk about some of the things on the list.

A woman came in, in pain, showing us where she had been hurt in an accident and that she was hungry. She also had trouble with her identity card. There was concern among several people that she should go as she was disrupting the forum, but we invited her to feel welcome, as she was an important part of the community, carrying some of the despair we had all been talking about.

We also named the different ideas that had come up, and decided to 'spin the pen', and focus on one person - to listen to that person's idea and find out how they might take it forward.

The pen landed on participant P. She described a great excitement and sense of possibility she had since the previous day. She said she had not one, but 2 or 3 business ideas, and wondered about doing all at once and networking together with others! The ideas included printing material (Tshirts, uniforms and tablecloths), and a business raising chickens and eggs.

She was shy to add that she had a lot of previous experience with printing material, and could offer to train others to join her. Several people raised their hands and someone recorded those names. She was very touched, as we asked questions about how to take this forward, including details. Example: "How many machines are needed? " (three - one machine for children size, one for adult size, and one for tablecloths.) Similarly, for the idea for raising chickens and eggs, and several people were very enthusiastic about joining her.

As additional ideas flowed in the group, there was mention of seeking funds to develop a gardening project. The woman who had been so distressed now stood up and said in English "Spinach, Carrots, I can dig deep, I'm very good", clearly proud and excited by what she might contribute to the community. The group also proposed fund-raising methods from selling cookies and cakes to writing a business plan and getting business loans. Also discussed were the difficulties of getting a loan if you're on a certain register, related to having been off work.

Someone asked if the idea was to focus on the individual or community. *This seemed to be a process of how the community can support an individual to run with an idea... And how an individual following their idea, is a contribution to community.*

The group began to talk about setting up the organisation, and we proposed to look at roles.

Role 1 : 'I'm so excited !!!' 'Lets do it now. We can do this. When shall we start? Today.'

Role 2: 'Are you dreaming?' 'This is too fast!'

A woman stood in Role 1.

Passionately, she said: "I've been dreaming a long long time but since yesterday this is no longer a dream," This is happening now!"

The facilitators framed:

"There is an extraordinary spirit and enthusiasm rising up ...this is wonderful and cannot be stopped and there may be people who may feel a bit more cautious who are also welcome."

By the end of the morning, someone proposed starting an organisation. There was a strong positive feedback. 'What shall we call it?' 'IMBEWU'. Another show of hands. Then a proposal to set up a bank account. In high spirits we had lunch together.

Day 2 Afternoon: A group process on the Drug Whoonga

After a vigorous sorting process about the many important themes that were open, and new ones coming forward, we talked about the following:

- 1) Family disputes over houses and other family matters that resulted in violence and even killing – the need for dispute resolution because these issues cannot be spoken about openly as they are considered 'family matters'
- 2) Teenage pregnancy -that many teens are having babies because they can get public financial benefits.

And

- 3) Youth and drugs – the drug Whoonga

We spun the pen, to choose which issue to focus on more deeply. It was 3.

Jean-Claude played the role of a drugged youth. As others tried to talk sense into him, he cut off more. One participant said he was grateful to see this because it helped him understand his own son. It seemed nothing could help. At this 'edge' or limit, with its sense of hopelessness, there is a need to find new patterns forward. At this point, a man came into the center and spoke about an ANC group of vigilantes, who would line up the youth and demand where stolen computers were from. He referred to an attitude of a whipping. We noticed a 'hotspot', a term we use to describe an important moment, in which there is an escalation, and a potential doorway to a deeper conversation and discovery of a way forward. At hotspots, there is confusion or several conversations at the same time. We invited him to speak more. He said that the point was not to punish the youth for drugs but to hold them accountable to their community in respect to crime and theft.

We asked if he had advice for others in the community. He answered that people should be aware and to not give money to young people who are going deeper and deeper into the drug Whoonga. Another man spoke about the need for strength and to involve families in what is going on. In turn, a woman said that even when families do model strong values, kids are turning to drugs. The discussion continued about how we, as communities and societies are responsible for our youth. Almost all of the youth are involved in Whoonga. Strong intervention is needed in relation to the magnitude of the tragedy of what is occurring.

Two directions emerged:

- 1) The need for an advocacy center or service to be able to refer young people to treatment when they ask for it. There are no such services in Chesterville or even in Durban.
- 2) The need for youth activities and a youth centre, to give young people something to do, alternatives, outlook. This is a matter of life and death for young people, and for the future and outlook of the community.

Speaking of the history of the ANC struggle in liberating the country, we appreciated the man who had brought out the point that resolve and strength is needed to tackle the huge problem of drugs.

We then made space to listen to those who had been quieter to express their feelings. A woman told an excruciatingly painful story about how her son who had died from the drug Whoonga. The group was in silence as she showed how he wasted away and had to crawl on the floor to steal something, to get more drugs. And how he died 3 years ago.

The group felt deeply with her grief. Someone proposed she write this story as a way to support the community to take action. Others were personally impacted. Two women cried but said there were no words. The group felt the pain alongside them. Another woman spoke about a woman who gave her grandson a lot of money to go to rehab but when he came out of rehab, he just started drugs again. We talked about how difficult it is to address the problem of drugs, and how important it is for the community to work together.

There was also a deep recognition that it made a difference to share the pain and tragedy in community, in order to not feel isolated. To end, we proposed that we are silent for a moment together and a participant proposed we stand and hold hands. There were warm goodbyes with plans to meet the next day.

DAY 3 Forum

Community support for the individual, individual contribution to community and setting up the new organisation

We reviewed Days 1 and 2 briefly. The man who had come to deliver the beautiful welcome poem now brought a farewell poem.

A participant proposed that we go around the circle so everyone could say something about themselves and how this forum had impacted them. Each person spoke. There was a profound gratitude for the dialogue and sense of community, and the possibility of supporting one another to develop projects and better individual lives and the life of the community.

There was a lot of enthusiasm for developing small business ideas and a sense of a fresh outlook. There was joy in recognizing one's potential and the potential in community – a feeling of 'nothing can stop me now'.

It was wonderful to hear each individual's voice. There was a sense of community supporting individual projects and individual projects contributing to the needs of the community.

There was also deep appreciation for how the community can support individuals in need. One woman spoke about how she felt deeply moved and blessed, having come with the problem of her identity card having the wrong date, and finding interest and help from others to solve this problem.

With vitality and speed, there was a strong movement in the group to set up an organisation, to support continued dialogue and to support the project ideas.

We also represented that there may be doubts or concerns about setting up an organisation.

We represented the two roles

Role 1 : 'Lets do this now'

Role 2: 'What if these are high hopes and dreams, and we may be let down and hurt? I've been hurt too many times.'

A 'ghost role' was also represented who tries to sabotage the dream, or doesn't want to be involved in such things.

There was a strong reaction to this, about how important it is to not get hypnotized – to stay the course. To stay focused on what you want to achieve, and others will jump aboard.

One participant came to the center and said. "These two roles are both inside of me." Stepping into one role, she spoke about how moved and excited she was about what was happening here. She then went to the other role and said "Inside of me, I also doubt myself, because of the many years I have tried things and met so much difficulty and a sense of failure again and again." Then she went back to the first role. She spoke compassionately and very firmly to herself." I understand your feelings. That was true. But now we are somewhere else, and we can do this."

This was personal and relevant to all of us – in our personal struggles with despair and hope in our lives. It also resonated with the long-term collective struggle in South Africa, imagining all those who have been a part of the struggle until now, so we can go forward now.

Others came to the center of the circle and spoke about their belief in themselves as individuals and a community. A man spoke about what this Forum meant to him, to each person and the community. He spoke with conviction about his belief in the underlying processes of nature, and what may evolve from this forum, this 'seed'.

After lunch, there was a strong consensus that people wanted to set up the organisation before the Forum ended. After discussing pros and cons of various organisational structures, there was an agreement to set up an NPO (equivalent to NGO). All present became members, and the Chair, deputy Chair, Secretary and Treasurer were elected. The name of the organisation is 'IMBEWU Community.'

A meeting to take this further was set for Saturday 6 December.

As we closed, Lungile spoke about having gone to Hyde Park to see Mandela on his 90th Birthday – and how, among the great crowds, she knew she would find her way to see him. That day he said "Where there is oppression, there is more work to be done. After 90 years of life, it is time for new hands to lift the barriers – it is in your hands now. "