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INTERVIEW WITH MR SAMUEL MAHOKO

Dale McKinley (DM): Samuel, how long have you been living here?

Samuel Mahoko (SM): It's been about 9 years.

DM: Before you came here where were you living?

SM: I was living at Weltevrede farm.

DM: How long have you stayed there?

SM: For 8 years.

DM: Before that, were you working at another farm?

SM: No I worked at the same farm.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): What kind of work did you do?

SM: I was driving a tractor, cleaning the land.

DM: Can you tell us how it was like working at farms during the apartheid times?

SM: It was hard and difficult working at the farm that time.

DM: When you worked there, did you have a house, electricity and water?

SM: The houses belonged to white people; we fetched water from the windmill water pump.

DM: How was the relationship, with the farmer?

SM: We got along just fine; those old whites' people were good people unlike these ones of today.

DM: So Samuel, how much did you earn per month that time, before 1994.

SM: I was earning R100 and we used to be given mealie meal and any kind of help.

DM: When things started to change what were you expecting to see change at work?

SM: I thought we could get a better life and have an increase of our salary, but nothing changed.

DM: When people got retrenched, were you one of them?

SM: No, I worked until I got to the township.

DM: You left the farm and continue working in it.

SM: No I got a job in town.

DM: Why did you choose to leave the farm?

SM: I left because they were going to retrench us.

DM: Where did your fellow workers go after being retrenched?

SM: Most of them came here in Ramulutsi.

DM: Where did you live when you came here in 1998?

SM: I built myself a shack in an informal sector.

DM: How many members of your family? Are you married, you have kids?

SM: I have a wife and 4 children.

DM: How old are your kids?

SM: Three of them have grown so much, but it's only one who is working.

DM: When you decided to go back to the farm, did you go to that farm you worked at?

SM: No I went to the other farm.

DM: What kind of work did you do and how much salary did you get?

SM: Where I work now, I do a lot of works, driving a tractor, working at the shop and other stuff. I earn R1 400.

DM: How do you find the relationship with the farmer right now?

SM: We have a good relationship, apart from the salary that we are fighting over.

DM: While you have been here at Ramulutsi, have you get any assistance from the government.

SM: Yes the ANC government helped me in building this house.

DM: Did you put yourself on a list or how did you get this house?

SM: It's like that ... I went to apply for the house.

AV: Was this first just a site? Did you build the shack on this property or did you come here after they built the house?

SM: When they build me this house I was staying here on this site.

AV: How long did you wait living on this stand before they built you this house?

SM: I stayed a long time, but I can't remember how many years?

DM: When was the house built?

SM: It's been 3 years since I got the house.

DM: Are you satisfied with the house in terms of the building and living here?

SM: No the house can fall down at any time.

DM: So the construction – you're saying – is not good?

SM: Yes, it's terrible.

DM: What kinds of things are wrong? Give us some examples

SM: I'm not happy with this house cause when you look at the walls there is a short of cement. When you are in the rooms you can see outside and when you are on top of the roof you can see outside.

DM: You said your son is working, is he also working at the farm. What job is he doing?

SM: Yes, he is working at the dairy department – he's a milker (on the same farm).

DM: In this community here ... a lot of the people who got retrenched from the farms live here. Have many of them managed to get jobs on the farms again or are they unemployed?

SM: Most of them are still not working ... they go into town every day to seek a job.

AV: People often speak of mistreatment by the farmers. Have you ever experienced mistreatment – either now or before 1994 – by the farmers?

SM: It is true that the white farmers are not treating people in the right way. I can recognise even now where I am working there is bad treatment of people.

AV: Can you give us an example?

SM: When you request something from the farm owner – for example when you have problems with a funeral – he will demand money from you. Another thing ... he will tell you about the ANC government – go and demand from your government because you voted for your government.

AV: You are a farm worker, your son is a farm worker, and what did your parents do?

SM: They were working at the farms when I grew up.

AV: The farm you were staying on before you left to come to Vreedefort, was that the same farm your parents worked on?

SM: By the time I moved to Vreedefort, my parents were no longer working. It was only me and my elder brothers.

AV: Were you born on the farm?

SM: I wasn't born on that farm but I was born on the other farm where my parents used to work before.

DM: After 1994 some legislation was passed about the rights of farm workers and the tenants. Did that have an impact on you ... were you aware of that?

SM: I only heard about the law on radio and I don't even know how long my parents did live on the previous farm where I was born.

DM: Has anyone from the loyal municipality or the department of agriculture/lands/a labour inspector come here (to the farm) to talk about the law or inspect the working conditions?

SM: No. We are so happy you are here because we think you are going to help with the farmers. None of them came here; we only heard on radios that they were coming but up until today, they have not come.

AV: Just to take you a little bit back because it's important. What happened to your parents ... where did they live when they stopped working on the farm?

SM: My parents were staying on a farm near here called Marteplass.

DM: And when they left did they come here to Rammolutsi

SM: From Marteplass they moved to other farms.

AV: Why did they leave the farm? Were they retrenched or were they forced off the farm ... do you know?

SM: No, my father was too old by that time when he left the farm

AV: Did he want to leave the farm or was he asked to leave?

SM: By that time I was still young. Maybe my brothers told me that they did not want him to work anymore. I'm not sure - I don't want to lie.

DM: As a farm worker now, how far do you have to travel to the farm to work?

SM: I don't know about the kilometres, but it's on the other side of town, close by to Viljoenskroon.

DM: How do you get there, do you walk everyday or do you get picked up?

SM: I am walking.

AV: What work did you do at Vreedefort?

SM: I was a mechanic

AV: Why did you leave the job as a mechanic to go back to the farm?

SM: Where I was working in Vreedefort it was difficult, I was working alone and I decided to come to Rammolutsi and work on the farm.

AV: When you say you were working alone do you mean that you were feeling lonely and you wanted to be around people you knew?

SM: The reason is that where I was working in Vreedefort I was working with white people but our boss has chased these white people away. So truly speaking I was working there alone and the salary was too little for me and my family – so I decided to leave this work and come back this way.

DM: In Rammolutsi there are quite a number of people who work on these farms (permanent

and piece jobs). Do you think life has gotten better, if you look back ...do you think the conditions have gotten better than they were in the past?

SM: There is a big difference. The white farmers are hiring people for doing piece jobs even though you are working permanently ... they just don't give a damn. Like when you complain about salaries, they can tell you, you can just go away ... so many people are seeking jobs so we can give them piece jobs – maybe R50, R30 a day..

DM: As a farm worker, why do you think there are so many people in Rammolutsi looking for work and the farmers are able to act like that, to exploit the workers?

SM: The reason is that the farmers are trying to chase out/get rid of those who have worked a long time on the farm/older workers to replace them with the new ones who can do piece jobs, because they don't want to pay.

DM: Samuel, do you think that over the last 15/16 years that you have worked on the farms ... do you think that farmers are making more money, are producing more crops/cattle?

SM: They are making a lot of money these people. There are changes that they brought, at first we were hired on years, but now we sign contracts. We do not get our back-pays. We are signing contracts now even if we've been working here for a long time, the contracts do not include that, it is a new thing.

AV: In terms of the work that you do on the farm, how has that changed overtime? How has your job changed on the farm?

SM: Our jobs have changed so much, the work is much more difficult than in the past, because of these modern things where you have to apply your knowledge, and use your whole body. If can make a slight mistake you will be doing something wrong

AV: Were more people required on the farm before than they are now, to do the work?

SM: They do require people, because those machines that are brought in need to be monitored, and they are not guaranteed and they let you work alone ... some times we work overtime.

AV: When you work overtime, do you get paid for overtime?

SM: This is really painful. We are told that we are going to be paid for overtime but at the end of month there is no such money in the salary pay slip. Instead of an increase, you see your salary go down.

AV: Is there any kind of unions or farm workers union that represent you in this area?

SM: We joined a number of unions so far (three/four), but they don't come back after we joined. Recently we joined another one from Cape Town, the fourth, but it is promising – the leader is in hospital, so when he comes out he is supposed to come to them. There is one that is deducting our money, but it is not working for us.

AV: So there has never been any union activity on the farm?

SM: It is like that, even now. They still deduct money from our salaries but the union does not show up, it does not do anything.

DM: Does the farmer deduct the money from the pay slip?

SM: Yes.

AV: Can you name these unions?

SM: Can I mention their names ... they won't fight with me?

AV: No

SM: There is SAPPAWU, FAWU, and SADTU (?). I forgot the third one because the farmer beat them at the CCMA and they just ran away.

AV: Which union is getting paid by you?

SM: It is FAWU. (Laughing)

AV: What do you think of unions?

SM: I'm thinking so many things about the unions. Because around here, the unions are hopeless. We are no longer attending meetings and they not longer come so we are not thinking about them.

DM: All of this time that you been a farm worker, have there ever been any attempts by farm workers or yourself to get some land for yourself, to farm? Because clearly you are skilled, you can do many things and you could probably run the farm yourself, so the land redistribution and things... has there ever been any possibility on that front?

SM: I can farm, but the problem is that I do not have any finance . We need money ... our government said we must come together to maybe get a farm together, but not here around Viljoenskroon. Where will I get a farm for myself?

DM: So has anyone of you ever tried to do that, to come together and apply to the government for some finances for that?

SM: No.

DM: Would you like to do that?

SM: Yes, I would like to do that.

AV: Now that your children are working on the farm as well ... your parents worked at the farm ... so what would you like for your children to do?

SM: I would like if my children would love work, and be strong like myself. Because if you are working with your hands, your hands are what is selling you to get a job. So I'm hoping my kids can do anything they want.

AV: When you were growing up, what did you like to do when you were growing up? Like for me, when I was a child I wanted to be an astronaut. What did you want to be?

SM: When grew up I was the poor of the poorest – I was willing to do any work with my hands. Like to educate someone to fix a car like I'm doing now with my son. There were lot of things I wanted to do, even though I did not go to school that much.

DM: Do all of your children have matric?

SM: Three children have completed matric, others failed and my last born is in Std 6.

DM: You said it was important to work with their hands – you have very practical skills. You also say education is very important but many children here who have an education/matric, they have not been able to find a job. What do you think now in a place like Rammolutsi is important for people to be able to work?

SM: I know education is very important but if a person can work with his/her own hands ... you can't just rely on education and say I want this or that job. When I grew up I wasn't able to choose jobs ... I did any job. So, I'm willing that my kids can be like me even though they are education. If there is any work for education then they can go but if there is jobs you can do with your hands they must do it.

AV: how far did you go in school?

SM: I left school in grade 2 (laughing)

AV: Did you go to a farm school?

DM: Yes.

DM: ... What do you think the government should be doing for people here in Rammolutsi?

SM: In my opinion, the government of SA still has many things to do. There are lot of things the government should be doing. For example like the RDP houses they are building now, these are not houses for people, they are just building traps for people, they are very bad for people to live in.

DM: Do you like living here at Rammolutsi or you wish you like to be other places.

SM: Going somewhere won't help in anything - like moving from here to Joburg - because the government is still the same all over South Africa. So the government must fulfil their promises to the people.

DM: What do you see as the future for yourself, and your children here in this community and in working on the farms?

SM: It's really difficult... what do we see that the government is doing in development especially in Rammolutsi?. To me it's still dark, I don't see anything the government is doing ... it's still empty promises.

DM: What are your dreams for you and your family?

SM: We have to look thoroughly as what needs to be done, for my family and the entire community. We must see what we can do to press the government ... what they must do for us. For my family I would like us to see that we have enough to eat and we have clothes to wear. For my community I would like us to stand together and fight poverty.

AV: Is there anything you are afraid of in the future, anything that makes you worried about the future?

SM: What worries me in the future is the fact that I will live like this, struggling to get food and clothing, because there is no money, and no jobs. People must get something ... not just for me and my family but for the entire people, in the continent, in Africa. We must look at what needs to be done because there is no one who will stand up for us, unless we stand up for

our own.

AV: Before we close ... is there anything you think we left out that you want to say? If there anything you want to say so people who watch this will get the message?.

SM: My message is that we have to look at both sides – where we come from and look forward. The main thin is forward.

DM: Okay, thank you very much

SM: Thank you.

Minutes: 57:14