

Contribution of Prof. Ntsan'wisi in Developing the Mhala Area, Bushbuckridge

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Abstract

This article is based on the presentation that the author made at a conference that was organised by the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA) and that was held in Mthatha, Eastern Cape on October 12, 2017. The theme of the conference was “Oliver Reginald Tambo in Memoriam: Reminiscing on a Centenary of Struggle.”

Keywords: leadership; dedication; determination; devotion; commitment; servanthood

Discussion

This article in no way tries to encourage turning back the wheel of time—its intention is to acknowledge the contribution made by Professor H. W. E. Ntsan'wisi. Apart from the fact that Ntsan'wisi was a leader of a Bantustan, the homeland of Gazankulu, his contribution to the development of the Mhala area in Bushbuckridge can be regarded as considerable, even in this day and age. It is not surprising that some of my colleagues still have his picture pasted on their walls. His is a story that begs to be told and heard. In the Department of Education, Bohlabela District, where I am currently working, there is a picture of Ntsan'wisi that is pasted on the wall of Ezekel Nkuna's office. He speaks highly of the contribution made by Ntsan'wisi. At the Acornhoek District office in Thulamahashe, where I previously worked, I spoke to Mabunda Loyse and she acknowledged that if it was not for Ntsan'wisi's government, she would not have had the opportunity to secure a house of her own. She currently lives in Bushbuckridge, Thulamahashe. In addition, my colleague, John Nyalungu, expressed his appreciation for the bursary granted to him by the Gazankulu Homeland for the years 1989 to 1992 when he was a student at the University of the North.

Ntsan'wisi's contribution to development in the Mhala area was so great that many people who live there still speak fondly of him. Majeje, as he was affectionately called, established the Score Supermarket at Dwarsloop in 1982. This was the first supermarket in Bushbuckridge. The supermarket was the main shop in a shopping centre where there were also other outlets such as a furniture shop, sports shop, bottle store, and a post office. He indeed delivered a service to the people, without their having to resort to service delivery protests. He looked at the needs of the people and provided accordingly. This shopping centre, and in particular the supermarket, was very convenient to the people of Bushbuckridge in general and of Dwarsloop in particular. The centre also created job opportunities for the local people.

Around the shopping centre, the Dwarsloop location was established. The stands were well demarcated and well serviced. The appropriate infrastructure (e.g. sewage, tap water, a tar road and electricity) was provided. Already during the 1980s (before the new dispensation was ushered in), the people of Dwarsloop experienced living in an area that had a tar road. Their services were highly subsidised. One still remembers that in 1999, the household services cost around R7 per month. This would mean that prior to that, the residents were paying far below the abovementioned amount. The Ntsan'wisi "government" took care of its people.

Ntsan'wisi also built houses for pensioners who could not afford to build houses for themselves. For the first time, government gave an opportunity for old ladies to own property so that they could leave an inheritance to their children. These were houses that could not be compared with the RDP houses that were being built for our people. These old people were just expected to contribute only a nominal amount from their pension money for a certain period. These houses in the Dwarsloop location, especially those built in Phase 2, represent the legacy of Prof. Hudson Ntsan'wisi. In the same way that he "towered over" other people, these houses still "tower over" the other houses in the location.

Teachers and other civil servants were given an opportunity to buy houses that the government built. As we all know, a government is not a profit-making institution, so most of the civil servants grabbed this opportunity with both hands and bought the houses at cheaper prices. Since teachers were paid meagre salaries, this gave them the opportunity to have a place that they could call home. They were given an opportunity to have a fixed asset.

Ntsan'wisi prioritised education. Compared to the situation in other Bantustans, such as Lebowa, he granted students bursaries, especially those who wanted to enrol in tertiary institutions such as colleges and universities. All the Shangaan students who studied at the Hoxane College of Education were granted bursaries and were also provided with free tracksuits so as to practise physical education. If they managed the funds properly, they were entitled to a refund at the end of the year. Those who were studying at

Gazankulu institutions, such as the Hoxane College of Education, but were not Shangaani speaking, were compelled to pay school fees. For example, there was a case where a student by the name of Willie Mdluli had his bursary withdrawn as it was suspected that he was not a Shangaan. It was through the intervention of the Rector, Dan Mdluli, that his bursary was reinstated.

Many students who wanted to be trained as teachers, especially in the 1970s, had to travel to faraway places such as the Lemana College of Education, the Dr C. N. Phatudi College of Education and the Kwenamoloto College of Education. Ntsan'wisi established a teacher training institution at Orhovelani (which also served as a secondary school) and a teacher training institution in Thulamahashe. This gave an opportunity to those who wanted to pursue teaching as a career—they could follow their dream. Due to the high number of students who wanted to study teaching, the college was relocated to Mkhuhlu, and its name was ultimately changed to the Hoxane College of Education. This resulted in the Mhala area having more qualified teachers than the Mapulaneng area in Lebowa.

In 1984, a clash between the Mapulana and the Amashangana ethnic groups occurred. The ripple effect of this conflict resulted in most of the Shangaani students/pupils being expelled from institutions in the Basotho/Mapulana areas, such as Maviljan, Mariti, Casteel and Acornhoek. Instead of lamenting the situation, they rose like phoenixes from the ashes. Ntsan'wisi arranged for the financial resources and built state-of-the-art schools to prove that even when they were down they were not out. Within a period of about three years, these schools, including Lamulelani, James Khosa, Rhinzani, Masana, Nkwenkwezi and Twalakule, were built. Each school had an administration block, which was considered a luxury in Lebowa. These schools are a marvel to see, even today. They were roofed with concrete tiles, and, as we all know, concrete tiles were as scarce as chicken teeth in the 1980s. The prompt response by this leader needs to be credited: we need to give credit where credit is due.

As if that was not enough, he established a science centre in Thulamahashe where schools that did not have laboratories could go to do their science experiments. He also ensured that this laboratory was equipped with all the necessary apparatus and equipment. Further, he made sure that those who worked at the science centre had the capacity to discharge their responsibilities with confidence and in a proper manner. Among those who were assigned to run the centre were P. G Ngobeni, Dennis Mbowane, Busi Nyakane and Shilote (who hailed from Tzaneen). Dr Pearl was the CEO of the whole project. His task was to train those who were working at the science centre to be able to assist both teachers and learners who visited the centre. After the completion of a certain programme, Dr Pearl would issue the members of the science centre with certificates, which ultimately enabled them to move up a notch.

Since Ntsan'wisi was a teacher by profession and believed that a healthy mind dwelled in a healthy body, he established a stadium at the Thulamahashe location. This provided the community of Thulamahashe and the surrounding areas with the opportunity to host various sporting events. Even while the people were still applauding this great stride in development, Ntsan'wisi built another big stadium at Thulamahashe, which is currently used by the community to host big events such as music festivals, political rallies and gospel festivals. Indeed, this was a man who looked after his people. The "new stadium," as it is usually called, was built to the same quality standards as similar stadiums in Nkowankowa in Tzaneen, Phalaborwa, and Giyani. These stadiums comply with the minimum standards set by the South African Football Association.

When Mapulaneng established one circuit office of the Department of Education for the entire Lebowa area in Bushbuckridge, which included Graskop and Matibidi, Ntsan'wisi established *ten* circuit offices for his people. In other words, whereas the Mapulaneng area had one circuit manager, the Mhala area had about ten. These circuit offices included Mkhuhlu, Lehukwe, Ximungwe, Cottendale and Manyeleti. In this way many people were empowered, and they were given the opportunity to become circuit managers. Thus, when new demarcations were introduced, causing the Mapulaneng and Mhala areas to be amalgamated, Mapulaneng had only one circuit manager whereas Mhala had about ten. Is this not empowerment? This is reason enough to give praise where praise is due.

Many teachers in the Mhala area were appointed as principals whereas most teachers in the Mapulaneng area remained acting as if they were Hollywood stars. Many teachers were given the opportunity to lead and also to greatly improve their salaries.

There was a time when the students at the Hoxane College of Education went on strike. The students and the management of the college could not reach a consensus. Ultimately, Ntsan'wisi, who was both the Chief Minister of Gazankulu and the Minister of Police, was called upon to resolve the situation. Having established that there were 300 students at the institution, he brought in 300 police officers and asked them to each stand next to a student. Only then did he address them. This is just one example of the strategies he used to muzzle political activities.

Conclusion

Despite the criticism that Ntsan'wisi did not allow any free political activity, which I acknowledge, it does not take away the contributions that he made to benefit his own people. I want to emphasise that this article is in no way trying to promote Bantustans or Bantustan leadership; rather, its aim is to acknowledge the contributions that they made, and to encourage people to learn from the good things that were done. Oliver Tambo, through his prophetic statements to the MK guerrillas in Angola in 1977, put it succinctly: "Learn from the enemy also. The enemy is not necessarily doing everything

wrong. You may take the right tactics and use them to your advantage.” Frene Ginwala is quoted as saying that Oliver Tambo said: “Don’t fight the Bantustan leader, fight the system.”

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