

Project name: Alternative History Project
Date of interview: 2007-06-15
Location of interview: Maandagshoek, Limpopo
Language of interview: Sotho
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Audio file name of interview: AHP_MAA_KgweteIsaac_20070615b

INTERVIEW WITH CHIEF ISAAC KGWETE (b)

START OF AHP_MAA_KgweteIsaac_20070615b

Dale: Now just shifting a little bit, when things started to really change after 1990 when Mandela was released and the unbanning of the organisations and things, by that stage you were almost thirty years old ... can the Kgoshi explain to us what things were like here, what happened at that time, how did he feel about these changes that were taking place.

Kgosi: When the old man was released in '94 I was working in Witbank, at Kapai, Highveld. I was so happy on that day that he came out my wife gave birth to a baby boy, who I named Thabang, I was so happy.

Dale: As things began to change from '91, '92, '93, up until the elections in '94, how did that affect the role of the traditional leaders?

Kgosi: It did not affect the role of the traditional leaders at all because it was them as traditional leader who where canvassing to the people to say who should be elected.

Dale: So I'm assuming that Kgosi voted in '94? After voting did you feel like the future looked bright, did you feel like things were going to change?

Kgosi: After '94 we thought that there were going to be changes which were going to affect us, our children and future children to come, but after voting I have seen no changes. We feel oppressed more than when the white people were in power, the white people used to oppress us but at times leave us alone ... the black government oppresses and never stop to oppress.

Dale: What does the Kgosi mean by oppression, what does he mean when he says that they are oppressing us?

Kgosi: They used to oppress us, this government we too it in '94, from '94 look at how our land is, our people have no RDP houses, no roads, no water to drink. The reason I am saying we are being oppressed is that when the whites were in power, all those things we had, why with this government we don't get them. The mine came here by force, shooting at us, doing all kinds of things, and the government hasn't done a thing.

Dale: So as a Kgosi now, as someone in a position of authority in the community, are you saying that on the side of the political freedom it was nice and great but on the side of social and economic side of things, things haven't changed. So in other words is the Kgosi saying or in his opinion that those changes haven't really made any difference in people's lives on the social and economic side of things?

Kgosi: It's true, they told us to choose the black government and promised us everything. Everything is just said verbally but there is never carried out. Mandela and Mbeki are always visiting this province, but they don't know where is Maandagshoek, they are not coming here, so there is no change from our side.

Dale: Just on a personal level, Kgosi before you were talking about working in the fields and with the cattle, after 1994 were there better economic things ... more cattle more fields or less in terms of his working and how he made a living?

Kgosi: When we talk about cows, they are not there any more, it's not like in the olden time. Now they are thin, in each family, you find one or two cows. When I was growing up we never used to eat meat, we used to live on milk. We used to work on the farm, reaping what we had saved. No, today it's worse because people have taken over our land without our permission and have promised to pay us, which they have never,

Dale: So when he says that people are taking over our land, who specifically is he referring to?

Kgosi: The government, the Land Affairs, I can't mention them by name, they took it without our permission.

Dale: What were they taking these lands for, what were they supposedly doing?

Kgosi: When they came they said that they were going to start a mine, but without discussions with us the mine was up and running.

Dale: Supposedly most of these lands were taken for mining, right. We have heard a lot about the mines, can Kgosi give us his version of what happened when the mine came in and why the community and the traditional leaders were so angry at the situation?

Kgosi: Let me backtrack, when the mines started I was a worker, I had not yet come here at home, I was working. I came here at home in 2003 when my uncle passed away long after the mines were here. I don't want to speak about what happened prior to 2003 because I do not know much.

Dale: We didn't hear that earlier on, where were you working away from the community?

Kgosi: I was working Kapai, in Highveld, Witbank, I was a forklift driver, I was a supervisor.

Dale: So when you lived in that community did you see any difference between Witbank and Maandagshoek?

Kgosi: Yes I did I found a lot of differences, when they do things in white farms, people can easily go in with the owner of the farm and say that “ here we want to dig coal”- they agree and sign the agreement. When I come back home, I find that people don’t work in the same way that they do in Highveld. Here at home they just talk to a certain person. I sat down with the community here at Maandagshoek and said my “brothers and sister, you see how the mine people work; they don’t work like the white people in the city. How come should they be different when they are not different. They ask me what I meant by this because they thought that the people were working nicely. I said first thing, tell me the next time when they come back to work here, and when there start working show me their agreement where they signed and all that they have done for you guys, because the mine started in 2001 and I came here in 2003 but started working in 2004. I said now it’s 2004, in theses three years what have these guys done for the community, show me, and when the agreement is there they should be a Trust. Where is the Trust, we want it, it is needed.

Dale: And why does the Kgosi think that there is such a big difference between the rural area and the urban area, a place like Maandagshoek and a place like Witbank?

Kgosi: There is a difference, look at schools here at home, and the schools in town, our schools are built with blocks scattered everywhere, in town they are built on top of each other as upstairs and they don’t take as much space. Look at how burnt our lands are, it has mines which make money, these mines make more money than coal mines, by far. Coal is just used to cook, here we build ships, cars, bullets, in other words we build anything with the platinum which comes from our area, and we are poor, why.

Dale: Does the Kgosi think that the difference has partly to do with the fact that the community itself is being taken advantage of, does not have the information, does not understand what’s going on, in terms of when people come in and take advantage?

Kgosi: It’s true we don’t know anything, but it doesn’t mean that we must not get anything. They have taught people in Maandagshoek how to mine the platinum, if we can check they have taken people from Maandagshoek to Rustenburg to teach them how to work in the mine.

Dale: Ok just to shift a little bit, can you tell us how you became chief in 2004, officially formally you took the position of Kgosi?

Kgosi: When I came here in 2003 to bury my uncle in December, after the funeral the paramount chief KK Sekhukhune was also attending that funeral, he said to our family he would like to hear from our family in January who is going to take that space or seat from the late chief. In January my family went to see KK and that’s where I was appointed as chief.

Dale: Ok, and when you became chief, did you have a plan, a programme that you thought this is what I want to do as the chief of this community, I see all of these problems, the things that you’ve talked about, did you have a program that you said these are the things I want to do for my community.

Kgosi: I did not have a plan, When I wake up , I do what my conscience tell me to do for the community, I walk with God, everything I do for the community I’m guided by Him. I did not create myself, I was created by God. If God says that I must do a certain thing for the community, I do it.

Dale: What do you think is the role of a traditional leader in this kind of community at this point in time, with all of these situations you described and problems you described?

Kgosi: Rephrase the question.

Dale: What I'm asking, what role should he play, is it things that he is told he must do like we have heard that he must sign for people to open bank accounts, dealing with domestic problems, is that the role of a traditional leader or does the Kgosi think that given the problems and given the character of this community there are other things that he must and should be doing as a traditional leader or is it just continuing the tradition of the father?

Kgosi: My responsibilities, to become a traditional leader you are not chosen by the community, you are born to become chief. If I'm a leader, for the community I'm working, if I check my community and find that it's poor, it shouldn't happen when I'm around, because those people are looking at me, their leader. In the mines they can't go, to the government they can't go, I'm the one that's going to the government to talk for them. The government will come here to hear if it's true what chief is talking about. That why you see me now looking after this community. Why should they suffer, on their land when their soil is rich like this?

Dale: So the Kgosi is saying that he has to work with the government, can you tell us what that relationship is like, what has government been doing, what has it not been doing, is it good, the relationship between him and the government ... what is it like?

Kgosi: Now what they are doing for this community is wrong, a big wrong. If they were not wrong they were supposed to come to us seeing that we need their help. We speak on radio's TV's and newspapers but no one came from the government to ask us what our problems are.

Dale: What does Kgosi think the role/job government is/should be?

Kgosi: I think the government must come fight for the community. When kids are fighting over bread as a parent you have to wake up and show them that they should share and not fight. We are fighting with the mine, now the government won't come fight for us because they have an influence in what the mine is doing to us.

Dale: Can the Kgosi give us some examples - in the last two years- of these negotiations, battles with the mines and with the government of what he is saying has happened?

Kgosi: It's going to be a bit tough because I'm going to speak of people in mines benefiting themselves; it means I am going to have to talk about peoples names. But anyway, here's an example: We have our own companies - Masojana, Keahlaba, Mosika, Tsidintsi and Matimatsatsi. These are the community companies, Section 21. Here is your example, they say that the companies belong to the community of Maandagshoek, but the community of Maandagshoek has no shares in the company, they have no control in the company, and the laws at the company were not written by the community but by the mine and the lawyers. You can't write you own laws in my firm, every firm has it's own constitution. In other words it's their companies. I mean from 2001 the community have not even got a penny, but they have companies that make money, so where does the money go?

Dale: What does the Kgosi think is the reason behind why people who where elected, in this case a black government, the old apartheid government goes away, we have comrades in the

government who are supposed to be doing good thing, we have a democracy we have all of these good things, why is it, what do you think Kgosi is the reason why people act that way, why you have a situation in Maandagshoek where they is no development and yet there is a mine, there are rich things under the ground, what is it about that kind of behaviour, can you explain that kind of behaviour given all the other positive things that have happened?

Kgosi: When I have a company and I hire you, you listen to what your manager is saying, if he says every morning make me tea, you are going to make it. Those guys in Section 21 what they are doing is not what they themselves just thought they should do, It's a mandate that has been given to them to let them know how they are going to work, because if they worked in their own way the community would quickly notice that the company has money, we don't want the community to benefit, what the community would have benefited we are going to give it to you, so defend the mine for us.

Dale: So if that's the explanation is what Kgosi is saying is when you're saying very little has changed in this community, we keep hearing this time and again that nothing has changed. Is it about people and what's going on here that's not changed, in other words you're still bass, I'm bass you're the slave, you must do what I want you to do, it doesn't matter what colour you are, it doesn't matter what you're doing or where you're coming from?

Kgosi: It's not that it's like that, they were working for themselves they could have been changes, and we could have had the power to say that we did not agree on this and that, but because the mandate comes straight from Anglo, that says they know that were you are working. Section 21 protects the owner of the company, Anglo. If Section 21 goes out the mine is not going to have protection. Section 21 to the community is like the old government of apartheid, the new government is oppressing us with it now so that we must not be able to notice that it's the old apartheid law which has just been changed a bit. So they bring the old law back with Section 21. Section 21 is doing nothing for us. They might as well say it's Section 22 maybe it would have been better, because the mine guys would have two and we would have two, now with Section 21 they have two and we have one, that why they say Section 21, it doesn't benefit us with nothing.

Dale: Ok a couple of last questions, Kgosi mentioned that he was a man of God. I see the Z.C.C he goes to church, he believes in Jesus Christ and other things, when you look around your community, you are a Kgosi here, you see things, you deal with people's every day problems, what is it that makes you feel sad, what is it that hurts you when you see your community today?

Kgosi: I am thinking about the truth. When our leader (Mandela) went to jail for 27 years to die for his country it was because of the truth. What hurts me is when I look at a black person and see that even today he is still poor. It's only because of God who said, my child know that in this world I did not make only. Where we are we take them out of trouble, out of Egypt to the Promised Land. We are trying to take the community out of the area of poverty, and in doing so we ask the government to help us, and to look at how we are suffering. We say to the government, are we not you're children, who are we supposed to cry to? Tell us who to cry to and we will leave you alone.

Dale: Ok, the last question I have is, all of these things that you've said, how can you describe all of the things that you would like to see happen in the future, what would you like to see ... one

what do you think is going to happen in the future and what would you like to see happen in the next five years?

Kgosi: What I wish could happen for this community in Maandagshoek is for us to be given the things which we need. For example, we have no crèche, no roads, and no perfect electricity, which just bent my TV the other day, because the poles are thin and the wind can easily blow it down. Our government does not feel for us like the rest of the community. All the communities are the same, no matter where they may be. Let's not pass other villages. We want beautiful school, Apollo's, and in short everything that's beautiful we want.

Dale: Ok I think we are finished, Thank you very much Kgosi, thanks.

Minutes: 63 (total for both a & b)