

# Solidarity Economy News

*Building Human Solidarity to Sustain Life*

**Newsletter No. 6 2013**

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### Special Issue Conference Report

#### Supported by:

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In addition, COPAC has been working with the Heinrich Bohl Stiftung (HBS) on participatory budgeting and its link with the solidarity economy. We would like to express our gratitude to the HBS for providing funding support for about 6 air tickets for participants /speakers for the Solidarity Economy Conference panel discussion on participatory budgeting.



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## Foreword

Solidarity economy activists, grassroots cooperatives, movements, community-based organisations, academics and individuals gathered in Johannesburg from 23-25 August 2013 for the 2nd Solidarity Economy Conference held in South Africa. The theme of the conference was 'A Solidarity Society is a Democratic Eco-Socialist Society'.

In the context of the total crisis of capitalism being experienced globally, the first international solidarity conference held in South Africa in October 2011 was aimed at discussing, clarifying and understanding the solidarity economy alternative and involved activists, academics and co-operators from Brazil, America, Argentina, Italy, England and South Africa. Through implementing the strategy that was adopted at the 2011 conference, much work has been carried out in building the solidarity economy movement in South Africa. This 1st solidarity economy conference gave COPAC a mandate to support and enable the building of a grassroots-driven solidarity economy movement (SEM). Through this mandate COPAC has worked with 40 grassroots partner organisations, in 15 sites and in 6 provinces to advance the SEM. Important pilots have been developed, research conducted, movement building capacities enabled and even theoretical work has been done, through 2 books on the solidarity economy ( 1 to be published in early 2014 and another in 2015).

Since the 1st conference, the crisis of capitalism has been deepening globally, with countries such as Greece and Spain sinking deeper into unemployment, inequality and social instability. The situation in South Africa has not improved either. The working class, the precariat, the landless poor and fractions of the middle class continue to face high unemployment, increasing retrenchment, unfair working conditions and low wages, together with harsh state repression as was tragically shown with the Marikana Massacre of mineworkers. In this context the need to build power and advance alternatives from below to this crisis have become ever more urgent. The 2013 conference therefore provided an opportunity to assess progress, strengthen movement building and advance a strategic way forward to launch the SEM in South Africa. The conference allowed us to

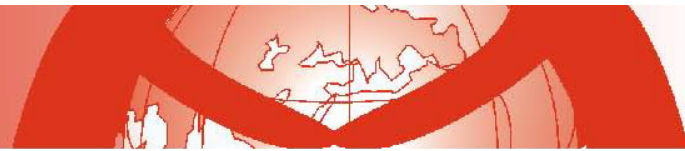
reflect on movement building with organisations and movements that COPAC has been working with for the past few years and to develop a strategic way forward to consolidate and strengthen this work. One of the exciting outcomes of the conference was the attendance of comrades and organisations that have not been formally within the solidarity economy process until now, but have been doing solid and important work and showed great enthusiasm and excitement at the conference to actively become part of the SEM in South Africa.

The objectives of the conference were therefore to:

- Assess our progress in building the solidarity economy movement in South Africa
- Pull all our work and organisations in the various sites together into a national movement structure
- Advance pilot interventions around cooperative banking and participatory budgeting
- Strengthen and launch campaigns eg. food sovereignty and creating work through worker cooperatives
- Develop a strategy for further building and bringing together the national solidarity economy movement

The conference was highly successful and achieved the following:

- Assessment of the current context, reflection on movement building practice and strategic implications;
- Engaged on proposed solidarity economy financing models including a Solidarity Economy Fund and two pilot cooperative banks, and a mandate to begin work towards their establishment;
- Discussion and engagement on the institutionalisation of the movement into a national SEM structure anchored in a Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Net work. It was agreed to start work on its formation, so that it can be launched at the first national assembly of 2014;



- The conference, including a number of organisations already working on issues of food sovereignty, reviewed a national food sovereignty campaign proposal to address hunger, which was accepted overall. Work will therefore begin on building this campaign as outlined in the proposal;
- Participatory budgeting as an important tool in building the solidarity economy was engaged with and it was agreed that work on developing this practice will take place in 2 pilot sites, Ivory Park and Alexandra. The first engagements in these two sites have already begun at the time of writing this report.
- A strategy for building the movement for the next 2 years was reviewed and adopted.

This conference report provides a brief overview of the content of the conference, the main discussion points and outcomes. This report is not only a report, but can also be used as an educational and activist tool to report to and engage with your organisations and communities on understanding the content and structure of the solidarity economy movement that is now emerging in South Africa.

The conference was characterized by high quality discussions, widespread and enthusiastic participation, and rigorous and critical questioning and debate, all of which contributed to deepening our understandings and ownership of the content of the movement that is taking shape. We are confident that the enthusiasm displayed at the conference will continue in the use of this report and the building of the solidarity economy movement in South Africa!





## Conference Inputs

### Day One

Day one of the conference started after lunch on 23 August 2013 and was focused on providing a conceptual and strategic perspective to help inform our thinking on advancing the solidarity economy movement alternative. The second part of day one involved report backs and reflections on movement building from key solidarity economy sites, and so is linked to the strategic perspectives below.

### Theme 1: A Solidarity Society Is A Democratic Eco-socialist Society – Assessment of Strategic Situation and Challenges for the Solidarity Economy Movement

*Input: Vishwas Satgar, COPAC Chairperson*

- Satgar presented a strategic perspectives document to the conference. He aimed to provide a strategic perspective on the global and national balance of forces in the context of the struggle for alternatives to neoliberalism and capitalism such as the solidarity economy. He also argued that the struggle for the solidarity economy alternative is part of the struggle for Democratic Eco-socialism. He then focused on the character of the emerging Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM) and the strategic challenges that we face to build the SEM from below in South Africa.

- At the global level, Satgar argued that the crisis we are living through is a total crisis of capitalism. That is, it is not just a financial crisis that has resulted from malpractice and greed by banks and investors, but a crisis created by the dynamics of capitalism itself. But within this context we have seen the rise of a new global left and the solidarity economy alternative in the struggle against neoliberal capitalism, especially in Latin America.

- Satgar then turned to the South African context, and argued that the Marikana situation presents the prospect for realigning class and popular struggles from below in South Africa so that a powerful left alternative can emerge. Satgar argued that in this context the emerging Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM) in South Africa must clarify what it stands for, what it is fighting for, and must choose its allies very carefully.

- Lastly, Satgar gave an overview of the emergent solidarity economy movement in South Africa and ended with 5 key strategic challenges that the analysis provided puts forward:

- i. The movement needs to institutionalise itself into a more formal movement centred mainly on Sol-

idity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives (SEECs);

- ii. Ongoing building of activist capacity;

- iii. The SEM has to develop its own financing mechanisms given that access to finance is currently a crucial gap on the ground;

- iv. The profile and a wider popular support base of the SEM must be built. This means building campaigns, such as the food sovereignty campaign and advancing the worker cooperative alternative to create work campaign;

- v. Lastly, the SEM in South Africa should strengthen its links with international movements and forces promoting the solidarity economy alternative.

### Respondents:

*Ayanda Kota (Unemployed Peoples Movement – UPM)*

Ayanda Kota, one of the founders of the Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM), responded to Vishwas Satgar's input from the perspective and experience of the unemployed organised as the UPM. He responded positively to Satgar's input and argued that simply shouting slogans and sounding radical is not enough to really change the conditions of the poor and unemployed. He also argued that simply following compromised leaders who shout radical slogans, such as that of the Economic Freedom Front (EFF), will not help to liberate poor and oppressed. Instead the unemployed must act collectively from below to not just protest but to build alternatives such as the solidarity economy.



Prof. Jacklyn Cock (COPAC Board Member)

Cock responded largely from an ecological perspective and argued that we need to struggle against capitalism and the structures and ideas that it creates, such as the belief that our personal conditions are dependent on how hard and smart we work. But Cock argued that we must rather have faith in humans to act together to create a better world where we have “equality of condition” rather than the notion of “equality of opportunity”, a world that is already being built and is on its way. Cock quoted an important line from the radical Indian writer, Arundhati Roy: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a calm day, if I listen carefully, I can hear her breathe.” However, Cock also noted that in challenging capitalism and building a different and better society, we have to place the environment at the centre of what we do.

*Mazibuko Jara (Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda and Democracy From Below)*

Jara responded to Satgar’s input by saying that we need to think about the language and terms that we use. Jara therefore argued that in our solidarity economy building and practice we have to make it an African practice, not something that is imported from elsewhere that we then try to build. We must bring in our existing values and indigenous practices, such as ensuring our work is filled with song, or our meetings and workshops are opened with a song, poem, or prayer which, even if we are not religious, serves the purpose of binding us together for the engagement to follow. We must therefore ensure that the building of the solidarity economy is injected with and informed by our local histories and practices.

Jara also highlighted that a key challenge for the solidarity economy movement is to build to become a recognised and accepted part of South African society, a social force.

### Discussion Session:

The inputs provided a lot of material to provoke thought and debate, and some of the issues raised in the discussion session included:

- The importance of the left and progressive uniting to build more power
- Using slogans can be an important way to convey a message and communicate with people. That is, slogans don’t have to be just empty rhetoric, but can be important ways of reflecting and inspiring practice and ideals.
- The importance of identity linked to activism of being a proud socialist, women, homosexual, feminist, solidarity economy activist etc
- The place of children in our analysis of capitalism and alternatives – it is not just women, the poor, workers etc that are suffering from the crisis of capitalism, but children also bear a huge brunt. We must therefore be sure to consciously include children in our movement building.
- Issues of state funding – should we not be accessing these, what are the problems, etc?
- Focusing on culture is very important – we need to be aware of how capitalism and the media have influenced people to want certain things and to believe that the ways things are are natural and cannot be changed. Challenging this is important, but we should also revive and call on indigenous knowledge and culture in challenging the dominant logic of capitalism. Culture is also made from below through our poems, photography, art and songs we are already developing in the emerging SEM. This gives our lives meaning, hope and self dignity.
- We are not building an Africanist movement but a humanist and ecologically conscious movement. Our values and principles become important as a means of building solidarity beyond cultural chauvinism, racism and any other form of discrimination. The particular solidarity economy methodology and grass roots organising work COPAC is pioneering with grass roots movements and social forces in South Africa is unique, with its own institutions, language, values and principles. Hence Democratic Eco-socialism as a vision for the South African SEM is also unique in the world.

## Theme 2: Reflecting on Activism and Movement Building

Site	Reporter
Ivory Park, Johannesburg	Moeketsi Monaheng
Tsakane, East Rand, Johannesburg	Patrick Mabombo
Bethanie, North-west	Peter Matau
Botshabelo, Free State	Thabiso Chaaive
Ficksburg, Free State	Motsarapane Selemakoro
Umlazi, Durban	Sthembile Doncabe
Moutse, Mpumalanga	Boitunelo Molusi
Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda, Keiskammahoek	Vukile Macingwana
Grahamstown, Eastern Cape	Siyasanga Bentele
Pietermaritzburg	Yajna Keshwardat

The report-backs covered the plans and activities that organisations and movements have been undertaking. 3 Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives (SEECs) have been established, some have established new worker co-operatives, some worker co-operatives are functioning already, some places have developed local food sovereignty campaigns, some are engaged in research to inform strategies, and some have already developed strategies for building the local solidarity economy movement. The report-backs were inspiring in their optimism and enthusiasm, but it was also important to take note of the challenges in order to inform the movement building strategy coming out of the conference. Some of the challenges raised during the report backs included:

- Access to finance
- Capacity building
- Local politics that creates barriers to building
- Expectations from both communities and cooperatives
- Making linkages locally and nationally
- Individualism
- Unemployment
- Accessing land for both housing and agriculture
- Finding markets for products produced by cooperatives

- Hunger and malnutrition in communities
- Lack of civic participation in communities
- State patronage and control
- Building the necessary agro-ecological knowledge
- Encouraging and mobilising the youth

Andrew Bennie took note of these challenges as the representatives from each site were reporting on their work. He then ran through these challenges and spoke of the importance of not trying to deal with these challenges on an individual basis. Rather, he highlighted the importance of thinking of dealing with these challenges and advancing the solidarity economy alternative through a deliberate strategy that is made up of clear elements that cover all of the above challenges. He therefore stated that most of the challenges could be dealt with through a strategy that contains the following elements, and which we should leave the conference with:

- Building our power
- Developing educational and activist tools
- Developing solidarity economy financing mechanisms
- Building of campaigns
- Development of local Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives (SEECs)



## Day Two

Day two of the conference focused on proposals for the key elements of a national solidarity economy movement, which included solidarity economy funding mechanisms, the national solidarity economy movement (SEM) structure, and national food sovereignty campaign proposal.

### Theme 3: Solidarity Economy Funding Mechanisms

As was shown in the previous session, a key challenge facing solidarity economy enterprises and the building of the movement is access to finance for start-up, growth and expansion. However, such finance is crucial to expanding the solidarity economy movement in South Africa. This session was therefore aimed at presenting and engaging with proposals for developing two solidarity economy finance mechanisms that will be owned by the movement and that will ensure that it is designed to suit the needs of solidarity economy enterprises and cooperatives who require finance. A presentation was also given by Oloatse Matshane from the Cooperative Banks Development Agency (CBDA), on understanding the support provided by the agency and their possible role in supporting the development of the solidarity economy financing mechanisms.

#### Solidarity Economy Fund Cooperative Proposal – Andrew Bennie (COPAC)

Bennie presented a proposal on the Solidarity Economy Fund Cooperative, which is different to micro-loans and credit unions in that it will only provide loans for production. That is, it will not provide loans to individuals, but only to solidarity economy enterprises and worker cooperatives to, for example, purchase needed equipment, machinery, raw materials etc in order to allow such enterprises to build themselves and provide employment to members, grow and expand. The objectives of the fund will therefore be to contribute to structural transformation and the building of the SEM.

Bennie then presented a proposal on the process for establishing the fund, which will culminate in the SE fund cooperative's documents being formalised at the first national assembly of the SEM in 2014.

#### Solidarity Economy Development Finance Cooperative – Matthews Hlabane (Green Revolutionary Council)

Hlabane presented a proposal on the Solidarity Economy Development Finance Cooperative (SEDFC), which would have similar objectives to the SE fund cooperative and also be guided by the values and principles of the solidarity economy. However, Hlabane first set some context by engaging the conference delegates on questions around the existing banking system and how it is aimed at maximising profits and perpetuates the inequality of capitalism, yet even the poor and anti-capitalists still have accounts with these mainstream banks, thus illustrating their power and the need for an alternative.

All members would be required to purchase a share (which will help to provide capital for the cooperative). Unlike the SE fund cooperative, members will be able to save with the cooperative. However, as with the SE fund cooperative, the loans that the SEDFC provides will not be for consumption purposes, but only for production. Furthermore, once the SEDFC has built up reserves of at least R100 000, it will then be able to register as a cooperative bank.

An important part of the proposal that work on developing the SEDFC would begin by launching two locally-based pilot SEDFCs to first test the model and perfect it before launching it on a national scale.

#### Support Role of the Cooperative Banks Development Agency – Oloatse Matshane (Cooperative Banks Development Agency)

Oloatse Matshane, who is the managing director of the Cooperative Banks Development Agency (CBDA), provided an overview of the CBDA and the framework for the development of Cooperative Financial Institutions (CFIs) and cooperative banks in South Africa. Her presentation was important be-



cause it helped those at the conference to understand the framework within which the proposed solidarity economy fund cooperative and the solidarity economy development finance cooperative (SEDFC) would operate, and their potential, especially of the SEDFC, to become a cooperative bank.

The CBDA is responsible for the development of this framework to promote and support cooperative banks in the country. Its mandate therefore has three aspects: 1) Regulation and supervision 2) Liquidity management and deposit insurance, and 3) Training and development. The training and development aspect will involve comprehensive training for cooperative banks and CFIs, and is focused specifically at training for the board of the coop bank or CFI, its management and staff, and its membership respectively. Such training support will be very useful for the development of the SE fund and the SEDFC.

### Discussion Session:

The presentations on solidarity economy finance options generated a good deal of interest and enthusiasm, and some of the issues and comments raised during the discussion session included:

- The role of unions in supporting and developing cooperative and solidarity economy financial institutions, such as unions having their bank accounts with such banks, members being encouraged to save with such institutions etc.
- Issues of trust in communities to ensure that people will be willing to place their money in such institutions. Furthermore, whether communities can save enough in order to establish a CFI (as it requires share capital of at least R100 000). However, Mazibuko Jara provided an important example of how even poor communities who rely on government grants could save enough. That is, currently 500 households in the village of Rabula in the Eastern Cape each put at least R200 into a burial society in

King Williams Town every month, which equals R100 000. Furthermore, this is money that is flowing out of the community, so there is great potential with a co-operative bank, which would also keep money within local communities.

- It is important that such financing mechanisms are built from below and not from on top through state control etc.

### Commission Discussions:

After this discussion, the conference broke into commissions to engage on the proposals more fully, after which the commissions reported back to the plenary.

The report-backs were largely positive. Commissions generally reported that the proposed finance mechanisms would make a difference to the solidarity economy enterprises in their areas, as they currently face the challenge of access to finance and can therefore assist in addressing unemployment by allowing solidarity economy enterprises to grow and expand. What was also pointed out was that there should be clear provision for exchange and learning visits to come out of the development of the SE fund and of the pilots of the SEDFC. Some commissions also reported that they would like to engage further on the proposals by taking them to their organisations and communities to interrogate them more and then come back with report-backs and further comments. This was agreed and there will therefore need to be follow-up with those present at the conference on how their interactions on the documents in their organisations are proceeding.

It was therefore agreed to proceed with the work to establish the two SE finance models and to have them functioning in 2014.





## Theme 4: Concept Document For Solidarity Economy Movement

*Moloko Mokame (Midrand SEEC) and Athish Kirun (COPAC)*

Crucial to the advancement of the solidarity economy movement in South Africa is for it to develop an institutional structure. Mokame and Kirun therefore explained the conceptual model proposal of the overarching solidarity economy movement structure. The concept fleshed out the structure and activities of the solidarity economy movement in the form of a secondary cooperative. Solidarity economy building is happening in 15 township sites across 6 provinces. The aim is to consolidate this work and bring it into a national movement structure. This will create the space for horizontal learning, sharing and planning between sites as well as expanding and growing the movement to other sites. What is also important about the structure of the model is that it is not 'top heavy'; it consists only of a board, a few small committees and a few planned assemblies and conferences for coordination, and as such is more a means of connecting sites and SEECs. The main work of solidarity economy movement building takes place locally, and the role of the secondary cooperative is just to connect these local sites and assist with coordination between them.

The core activities of the secondary cooperative will be to:

- Provide support to SEECs and movement through information sharing, training and education, and facilitating linkages across sites
- Conduct research relevant to movement building, knowledge and capacity building
- Development and management of national information and communication system: website, social media, SMS database, education and training tools, data base of sources of funding, support etc.
- Fund raising
- Coordination of national campaigns

### Main Discussion Points

After the presentation of the proposal and discussion, the conference broke into its four commissions to engage on the proposal more deeply, guided by the following questions:

1. What do you think about the SEM proposal?
2. Are there any additions or suggested changes?
3. Is the proposed process for establishing the SEM suitable?

There was a majority consensus from the commissions that the conceptual model be adopted and implemented. Some of the main additions and comments from the commissions included:

- There needs to be a focus on the elderly for capacitation and training
- The concept is important and must be implemented; we should take the risk of building it
- Exchange visits and programmes between sites should be planned for
- The strength of the model is that it is bottom-up and different to other more bureaucratic structures
- The proposal was clear and transparent and should play an important role in benefitting communities and building unity
- It will hopefully help with youth unemployment and should specifically aim to do so
- The model provides an important way to build an independent movement that moves away from the government's model of cooperative development
- It was noted by one commission that they would like more time to engage on the model and understand it fully and to engage with their constituencies on it. This is therefore an important task for movements and organisations that attended the conference.
- The same commission also argued that it should also develop a focus on involving children, especially in light of wanting to develop a solidarity society, so embedding children in its ethic from a young age
- The network should have a deliberate media and awareness raising focus, to raise issues broadly that the mainstream media is not talking about

## Theme 5: Food Sovereignty Campaign

*Presentation – Leonard Pheko (Hlanganani Agricultural Worker Cooperative) and Andrew Bennie (COPAC)*

The session involved a presentation of the Food Sovereignty Campaign proposal by Leonard Pheko (Hlanganani Agricultural Worker Cooperative) and Andrew Bennie (COPAC). This was followed by a panel of respondents from organisations currently working on food issues and food sovereignty. There is an important link between the solidarity economy and the struggle for food sovereignty, as the solidarity economy presents many of the structures and institutions of democratic control that would be central in building food sovereignty.

To begin his presentation Leonard Pheko gave some background to the land occupation for food production that his worker cooperative undertook in 2012, as a means of working to build the food sovereignty of their community. This led into an explanation of the current food system and how it causes hunger, including how these trends are reflected and intensified in the South African food system. This is mainly attributed to an unequal and market-based global food system that is reproducing hunger, destroying the environment, and inflating food prices. The food sovereignty alternative challenges this system and provides communities with a solution to the crisis of hunger and a way out from corporate controlled domination of our food system.

Andrew Bennie then presented the proposed objectives of the campaign, which are to:

- Unify all organisations championing food sovereignty
- Consult with communities about their food issues
- Raise awareness about the causes of hunger
- Conduct education and training about the problems and challenges facing SA's corporate-controlled food economy
- Reclaim the food system to advance food sovereignty and solidarity economy
- Pressure the state on its policies that undermine food sovereignty and to push for policies and practices that support it, such as land reform
- Build a national food sovereignty movement
- Challenge corporate influence and control of the food system

- Build local alternatives through the solidarity economy to realise food sovereignty

One of the main challenges for the food sovereignty campaign, however, is that there are many organisations that are doing important work on food sovereignty, but all of this has not been united into a national food sovereignty campaign. This is therefore one of the key objectives of the campaign.

The key elements of the campaign therefore include:

1. Challenging the state and corporate dominance in the food system
2. Reclaiming the food system by developing food sovereignty alternatives in practice
3. Realising food sovereignty through Right to Food dialogues with state and civil society
4. Awareness raising and communication
5. National Campaign Organiser and Coordination Committee

### Respondents:

A number of people from organisations that are currently working on food sovereignty then responded to the campaign proposal. They were:

- Lawrence Mkhalihi – Biowatch South Africa
- Paula Cardoso – Trust for Community Outreach and Education
- Reggie Waldick, Masifunde
- Davine Witbooi – Surplus Peoples Project; Campaign for Food Sovereignty and Agrarian Reform; and Tshintha Amakhaya
- Ayanda Kota – Unemployed Peoples Movement (UPM)

The respondents on the panel shared their organisations' valuable work and experiences. They further raised support and additions to the campaign proposal. Some of the additions that they offered for the campaign were:

- The campaign could include the threats to land reform and therefore food sovereignty presented by new legislation that is currently under consideration, especially those around communal tenure that place the ownership of community land firmly in the



hands of chiefs. Some of the policies and bills include the Recapitalisation and Development Programme of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform; State Land Lease and Disposal Policy; the Rural Development Framework; the revised version of the Restitution Amendment Bill; and so on;

- Lack of support for land reform beneficiaries;
- Farm worker rights should be included;
- The threats posed to seed sovereignty by seed corporations and their further merging and consolidation;
- The lack of water reform in South Africa;
- Contamination of traditional varieties of maize due to the fact that South Africa is on the only country in the world that has allowed most of its staple food, maize, to be genetically modified;
- A challenge to the National Development Plan and its plans for agriculture should be included more prominently;

- The campaign could also include consideration of African processes, such as the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) which is essentially a framework for corporate takeover of African agriculture. This also affects South African agriculture;

- Awareness raising on good nutrition and health. For example, fast food versus slow food alternative (see Brazilian educational booklets handed out by Paula Cardoso);

- Inclusion of agroecology in school curriculums;

- Paula Cardoso also pointed out that there should be a strong intellectual current in the campaign in order to strengthen and sharpen our arguments on food sovereignty.

**Overall the conference endorsed the proposal to build the campaign.**



### Day Three

#### Theme 6: Participatory Democracy, Budgeting and the Role of Solidarity Economy Movement

##### Panel:

- Mzwonke Mayekiso (ABCO – Alexandra Civic Movement)
- Jerry Khoza ( UPM and Isoyi SEECC, Umlazi)
- Professor Michelle Williams (Wits University and COPAC Associate)

This session involved understanding participatory democracy and participatory budgeting as an important component of the solidarity economy, in terms of building democracy and democratising state action, which is important in forging the space to build the solidarity economy.

*Mzwonke Mayekiso, ABCO* – Mayekiso spoke about the context for the formation of the organization. Key is that SANCO, once an expression of people's power, has now become a moribund organization that is tied to the ruling ANC, and so fails to really express the needs and wishes of communities. The civics that ABCO is working to revive largely aim to reignite democracy at the grassroots and encouraging civic participation by communities in the affairs that affect them. It is about building participatory democracy that will hold government accountable, as part of building a society where people have control over their lives collectively.

*Jerry Khoza, UPM Umlazi and Isoyi SEECC* – Khoza spoke about their struggle to democratize the local ward committee. He explained that the community had been struggling for basic services like toilets and electricity for the past three years and that the councillor was unaccountable. However, their action produced heavy police brutality and repression, which included the arrest of key leaders. So they decided to change tactics and occupy the councillor's office and reclaim their ward. They used the space for political education and discussing the demands that would be taken to the councillor. After the pressure that they put on the municipality, it allowed for new elections for the ward committee to happen, and because the UPM was organized, seven of their members were elected to the ward committee. However, they also realised that this victory was not enough and that they also need to focus on broader economic issues, which is why they have established Isoyi SEECC, to build the solidarity economy movement in Umlazi.

*Michelle Williams, Wits University and COPAC associate* – After the previous two inputs of important struggles for local democracy, Williams then provided some conceptual and theoretical perspectives on participatory democracy. She began from the perspective that the word 'democracy' is one of the most misused and misunderstood terms of the last century. She emphasised that we have different types of democracy and that participation is key, but we need to distinguish between different types of participation: pseudo, partial and real participation. We need to build democracy in terms of both political democracy and economic democracy which, however, cannot be separated. Solidarity economy largely falls under economic democracy, which is about building participatory democracy in production, consumption and finance. However, this also needs to be linked to political democracy. Real political democracy also helps citizens and movements to influence the distribution of state resources and influence state action to play a positive role in social transformation.

##### Main Discussion Points:

- Our power should not be through parliament, our aims should be to build power in our communities;
- Often the ground is weak, so mobilizing like ABCO is an important way to build capacity and power and to mobilise communities;
- People have the right to choose, and this is about building democracy from local structures and up. We should also engage in the electoral system, but this must be after building local democracy from the ground up;
- Party politics divides communities, so it is imperative to bring communities together. Should get away from believing in individuals as leaders. Agreed parliamentary democracy will not emancipate us, but it can be an important form of democracy if we have these other forms of democracy to keep it in check. Agree that putting pressure on ensuring good ground-up research is important, as part of trying to





ensure that we do away with class biases in government institutions.

A key outcome of this session was that it was agreed to do pilot participatory budgeting work in Alexandra and Ivory Park.

### Theme 7: Movement Building Strategic Framework

The final session of the conference was also one of the most important because it focused on the COPAC collective proposal for a strategic framework to guide the building of the solidarity economy movement in South Africa over the next two years. The proposal was presented by Athish Kirun and Andrew Bennie of COPAC and after some discussion, the conference broke up into final commissions to engage on the proposal. Overall, the proposal was welcomed and with very few additions and alterations. Therefore, the strategic framework to guide movement building over the next two years is as follows:

## **Towards A Grass Roots Driven Solidarity Economy Movement**

### **A Strategic Framework for 2014-2015**

**A Solidarity Society Is A Democratic Eco-socialist Society!  
Claim the Future Now, Build the Solidarity Economy Movement  
from Below!**



## Proposal Amended and Adopted at the 2nd Solidarity Economy Conference 23-25 August 2013

### Introduction

The solidarity economy is a process grounded in a bottom up anti-capitalist and emancipatory utopian practice (we bring our vision and values into institution building as we struggle).

In 2010 COPAC made a call to build a grass roots and bottom up Solidarity Economy Movement in South Africa. As an NGO COPAC is not the movement but has played a crucial facilitation role to lay the groundwork for the Solidarity Economy Movement (SEM).

Working collectively and in partnership with grass roots movements, cooperatives and activists we have achieved the following:

- The establishment of 3 community based Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives;
- Solidarity economy movement organising in 15 townships in 6 provinces;
- Building, supporting and organising over 30 worker cooperatives as part of this process;
- Developed various support tools like an online newsletter, activist schools and research resources to assist with movement building;
- Advanced the worker cooperative alternative in various struggles like the Mine-line workers struggles, with NUMSA to secure a recycling plant

and through community organising of land take-overs like in Tsakane;

- Built momentum in all its sites to marry food sovereignty campaigning to solidarity economy building.

While all of this has laid serious groundwork to root the solidarity economy in every day struggles and lives of workers, the unemployed and the poor, there is still a crucial challenge to bring this all together into a vibrant and dynamic grass roots driven movement.

This means working collectively and in a bottom up manner to bring together our collective achievements. It also means using our limited resources strategically to build a grassroots driven movement. The next two years are crucial to consolidate the relationships, capacities and power of the SEM.

This document emerges from COPAC's engagements with grass solidarity economy forces. It is being shared for discussion before the 2nd Solidarity Economy Conference and was engaged with at the Conference. It will guide COPAC's support role and our collective efforts to build and consolidate the Solidarity Economy movement in South Africa for the next two years, 2014-2015.





What is proposed is a modest strategy, to take a few key steps together that would lead to the formation of the SEM. The strategy has 4 key elements.

## Objectives of the Strategy

- To build capacity for a grass roots anti-capitalist emancipatory practice to advance and build the solidarity economy from below;
- To promote popular education and learning about the solidarity economy;
- To link existing examples and learning sites of the solidarity economy movement;
- To provide a framework for envisioning the spread and diffusion of the solidarity economy movement in South Africa;
- To outline strategic elements that are important to guide the building of the solidarity economy movement;
- To outline clearly what role the state should play in this process.

## Key Elements

### (1) Establish local sites of hope and resistance to advance the solidarity economy

Bottom up movement building requires working at the grassroots in communities. Strategic partners are crucial to initiate and support local solidarity economy processes and to link in with existing local social forces. Thus far COPAC has partnered with:

- Ivory Park cooperative movement in Ivory Park
- Masibambane Unemployed Project in Tsakane, Doornkop Soweto and Brits
- Unemployed Peoples Movement in Grahamstown, Bothsabelo in the Free State and Durban
- Mbumbulo womens group
- Pietermaritzburg Northdale community
- Cultural Heritage organisation, Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda in Keiskammahoek, Eastern Cape.

In addition COPAC has initiated solidarity economy processes in Moutse and Marikana2 in Mpu-malanga, has had dialogue with community organisations in Lephalale in Limpopo and has initiated meetings with community organisations in Marikana township in North West.

Key to building the movement will be to identify further sites, cooperatives and movements that can work with the values and principles of the solidarity economy movement and so join the movement and establish further solidarity economy sites. It will also be important to identify further organisations that can play a support and anchoring role for new solidarity economy sites. Existing sites should also strengthen their relationship with one and another through supporting campaigns, struggles, sharing strategies, experiences, resources and information.

There may also be opportunities to link our work with MST activists/Via Campesina in Africa and build some means of communicating on the various approaches to creating regional solidarity. Building solidarity among migrant communities and sharing skills to assist each other to face the challenges. Develop specific interventions for targeting youth and their specific needs within the local sites.



## (2) Organise, Launch and Consolidate the Solidarity Economy Movement

- **Establish Solidarity Economy Movement structure:**

Task team to prepare constitution and registration documents; constitution to be adopted, elections to take place, movement structure registered and start up strategy adopted at assembly in first 6 months of 2014; setting up of governance structures; implementing strategy; training and capacitation of board; funds mobilization; implementation of membership and movement building. COPAC will provide organising support to the board and assembly of the SEM, up until the 3rd SE conference in 2016.

- **Establish Solidarity Economy Fund:**

Step 1: Consultation with solidarity economy actors and enterprises based on the concept document of the fund and identification of pilot sites. To be completed by COPAC and SE conference in August 2013.

Step 2: Feasibility Assessment

Step 3: Identify training needs and sources of finance

Step 4: Develop the business plan

Step 5: Develop constitution

Step 6: Develop start-up strategy

Step 8: The SE fund cooperative and its documents to be formalised at the first national assembly of the SE movement in 2014

Step 8: Registration and start-up

- **The Role of local SEECCS and Forums**

Without serious and ongoing education and organising the solidarity economy will not build the necessary capacity. The solidarity economy process needs a network of popular educators. COPAC has been working with the model of a solidarity economy education and communication cooperative (SEECC)

for every site to anchor this process. Thus far there are three such cooperatives in existence which provide the basis for such a network.

The SEECCs will be linked into the Solidarity Economy movement structure through the constitution that will be adopted. Essentially the SEECCS will form the backbone of the movement and will be the main drivers of the SEM. The SEM cooperative will coordinate the network, share and develop activist training tools and constantly support the solidarity economy movement building methodology. Every township site must work towards establishing a SEECC.

In addition existing SEECCs must be strengthened to ensure the following:

- Dynamic member and actor partnership in the solidarity economy process;
- Clear strategies to build the local SEM including campaigning work, education (internal and external), membership recruitment, use of technology, incubation capacity etc
- Build the capacity of SEECCs to be responsive to the support needs of solidarity economy enterprises.
- Income generation through various activities linked directly to the SEECC;
- Coordination of the local solidarity networks, enterprises and the movement in general in a community site.
- Convene local community forums to advance the solidarity economy movement, our campaigns such as food sovereignty and other struggles of the movement.
- Provision of support to national movement building.



### **(3) Develop Research, Education and Movement Building Tools**

Crucial to building the solidarity economy movement is the constant building of knowledge and capacities, theoretical and practical. The solidarity economy requires various tools to support its development. Such tools have to emerge from practice. Thus far COPAC has developed five tools to assist this process: (i) the solidarity economy activist guide; (ii) mapping tool developed in Ivory Park; (iii) website with research reports, cooperative building tools, discussion papers etc. (iv) Solidarity Economy News (our collective newsletter) and (v) the SEM activist school.

In addition, more tools will be developed over the course of the next two years:

- (i) A gender training activist guide on the role of women in building grass roots power.
- (ii) A step-by-step toolbox on how to set up a worker cooperative, link with local solidarity networks and the movement.
- (iii) A food sovereignty activist guide.
- (iv) A guide on using documentary film for activism.
- (v) An activist guide on setting up a SE Development Finance Cooperative.
- (vi) An activist guide on participatory democracy and participatory budgeting
- (vii) An activist guide on setting up Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives

There are two books on the solidarity economy that COPAC will also be publishing soon. These books will be used as training resources for activists. In addition to these tools for research and learning, other tools will include:

- The sharing of resources and movement building tools will involve constant research and documenting of processes in each solidarity economy site, which must be written up in popular form for sharing across other sites and through the national forum. Video resources, for example of lectures, workshops and campaigning, as well as cooperatives and solidarity economy actors documenting their experiences, will provide a useful movement building tool.

- International resources from other countries, such as books and tools, will be translated and housed on the COPAC website initially, and websites of participating organisations in South Africa will be linked so as to further facilitate the sharing of resources.

- An online solidarity economy newsletter has been established to share solidarity economy practices and news from below. This has been housed by COPAC so far, but its development and dissemination will then be housed in the movement.

- The Brazilian NGO Solidarius has an excellent online tool which provides a good platform to link together producers of products to improve trade between solidarity economy members. Such a tool needs to be developed and maybe housed on the national solidarity economy forum and movement website

- Use social networks and information and communication technologies to promote actions aimed at bridging the digitizing gap – education among grassroots on use of communication technology to use it for forwarding the aims of solidarity and the struggles of the poor

- Participatory video material done by the cooperatives to contribute to media production and training resources

- Education initiatives should include elements to deconstruct various forms of oppression that we both experience and perpetrate. How do we build our own relations in society looking at power relations, family life, inter personal lives – in order to build and internalize the values and principles of the solidarity economy.

We need to identify and deal with the challenges of cooperatives as vehicles for transforming the economy. This means assisting with resourcing, experience and skills – popular education and communication cooperatives (SEECCS) to assist with developing vision and strategies of cooperatives to further the solidarity economy and support of all cooperatives. Through solidarity economy forums and the Solidarity Economy Education and Communication model cooperatives need to be supported, developed and brought into the solidarity economy and movement.

## (4) Campaigns, Solidarity and Building Alliances for the SE Movement

The solidarity economy has to be built through campaigns and struggles. Such campaigns and struggles should link sites and movements. At this time there are two important campaigns that the solidarity economy movement can champion:

1. Food Sovereignty Campaign – see food sovereignty campaign document and additions made above by conference participants.

2. Worker Cooperative Alternative Campaign Public Policy Demands for a national worker cooperative Act, support program and for resources to support community based solidarity economy cooperative funds. COPAC has developed a host of materials to support such demands and can be used to build activist capacity around such demands. Such demands can be targetted at the national, provincial and local government.

### **Key tasks for the campaign for SEM:**

1. Food Sovereignty Campaign:

- Education and training programs through activist schools and the role of SEECCs that would cover:
  - o The Crisis of Hunger and Corporate control of the food system
  - o Climate Change and Climate Justice
  - o Advancing the Food Sovereignty Alternative through the SEM
  - o Nutrition and cooking receipes
  - o Water and enviromental conservation
  - o Agroecological training
  - o Seed saving and sharing training
- Mobilisation and event planning through SEECCs and SEM as a whole:
  - o Food Festivals
  - o Seasonal Harvesting Parades
  - o Forums
  - o Mass meetings, marches and rallies
- Proposals and submissions for state resources and land through grass roots SEM forces:
  - o Mapping of public land
  - o Applications for use of public open land for

food production

- o Applications for state resources
- o Land occupations and sites of resistance
- Media and communication through SEECCs and the SEM as a whole
  - o Main stream media statements
  - o Website
  - o Email group
  - o SMS groups
  - o Social media
  - o Newsletter articles
  - o Flyers pamphlets and posters
  - o Mural Art
  - o Photography exhibitions
- 2. Worker Cooperative Alternative Campaign - Create Work Through Worker Cooperatives!
  - National Worker cooperative committee for public policy submission for a worker cooperative act
    - o Formulation of demands and laws supporting worker cooperatives
    - o Provincial hearings for submissions and formulation
    - o Case studies and research
  - National support program for worker cooperative development and solidarity economy network building
    - o Ground work training tools
    - o Aftercare training tools
    - o Self management and governance tools
    - o Movement networking and building tools
  - Resourcing and fund raising
    - o Submission of proposals to various state grant funding agencies to support and stream funding to the national solidarity economy movement fund
    - o Issue a call to unions and other progressive organisations to support the campaign and provide funds to the national solidarity economy fund
    - o Worker cooperatives need to contribute to the national fund in how they use loan finance

from the fund

- o National fund budget and finance mechanism be developed.
- o Implementation strategy for financing pilot worker cooperatives nationally

In addition, the SEM will pilot two SE Development Finance Cooperatives (Cooperative Banks ) over the next two years in two sites. This experience will be documented and an activist guide developed out of this experience.

Regarding participatory budgetting. COPAC will ensure two SEM partners pilot such an initiative and capacities are built in the movement. These experiences will be documented and an activist guide developed out of this experience for SEM as a whole.

All the campaigns and pilot interventions of the SEM must be used to rally and mobilise forces in support of the SEM. The SEM needs to actively target the following to advance its perspective on Democratic Eco-socialism, its campaigns and movement building plans:

- All progressive unions, the faith based communities, ABCO and progressive NGOs;
- The unemployed peoples movements are part of the SEM but the SEM needs to also support campaigns and activities of the unemployed. The planned Assembly of the unemployed must be supported by the SEM;
- The environmental justice movement;
- Emerging actors in the Food Sovereignty movement;
- The Left such as the Democratic Left Front.

**End Hunger Through Food Sovereignty!  
Create Work Through Worker Cooperatives!  
A Solidarity Society Is A Democratic Eco-socialist Society!  
Claim the Future Now, Build the Solidarity Economy Movement from  
Below!**



### *Arts & Culture*

The following poem was sent to us by Vukile Macingwana, a fieldworker with Ntinga Ntaba Ka Ndoda in Keiskammahoek, Eastern Cape. The organization is a community heritage and development organization that is also working to build the solidarity economy and food sovereignty in Keiskammaheok.

Way Through  
by Vukile Macingwana

Million souls from each and every home  
Walking through million kilometer street  
They are all in the dark, looking for the light and the way through

One finds the light and lights for the other one  
It continued to be each one light one  
Still others got none and they are looking up to the others  
But none of them bothers  
How could they not light for them knowing what it's like to be in the dark?  
How could they turn their backs and deny seeing?  
Some of those in the dark know the way through  
All that has to be done is to light for them so everyone can make it through.







## Discussion, Notes and Research Page

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A series of horizontal lines for writing, overlaid on a large, faint, light gray illustration of a person holding a globe. The illustration is centered on the left side of the page, with the person's arms and legs visible, holding the globe. The globe shows the continents of Africa and Europe. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page.

# contact us

We invite organisations and activists to make contributions to the Newsletter through writing stories, contributing photographs or cultural contributions, such as poetry, art, songs etc.

### COPAC Contact Details:

#### Contact Persons:

**Athish Kirun**

Mobile: 078 257 3764

Email: [copac2@icon.co.za](mailto:copac2@icon.co.za)

**Andrew Bennie**

Mobile: 072 278 4315

Email: [bennieand@gmail.com](mailto:bennieand@gmail.com)

#### Postal Address:

PO Box 1736, Killarney, 2041

#### Office Tel:

+27 11 447 1013

#### Fax:

+27 11 252 6134

#### Website:

[www.copac.org.za](http://www.copac.org.za)

#### Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/COPACSA>

#### Twitter:

@COPAC\_SA

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