

702 & Cape Talk

Redi Direko

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32 min 55 sec.

Redi Direko: Maybe what I should do is give you an idea of the three different scenarios. These are not predictions, they're just scenarios about the present and the future of this country if the present persists. Just very briefly, one of the scenarios is Walk Apart. It is the first scenario. Walk Apart, we continue on the same path that we are today on pressing problems, unemployment, poverty, safety and security, poor health and education delivery and these worsen. Our social fabric unravels as civil society disengages and public trust and public institutions diminishes. That's scenario number one. Scenario number two, Walk Behind – in this scenario the State manages and leads the process of addressing our challenges. In other words, we are pathetic, we are complacent, we're not active as citizens. We Walk Behind the State. Citizens either support strong State intervention or we give in, in the face of a more powerful state. That's a summary of scenario number two. Scenario number three – we Walk Together. Our challenges are addressed through active citizen engagement, strong leadership across all sectors, we hold government to account, there's competent delivery and most importantly, active citizenship and that's where we're going to start and we say good morning to Dr Mamphela Ramphele, who is an activist, academic businesswoman and Convener Chair of the Dinokeng Scenario Team. A very good morning to you and welcome. Lets start with the whole concept of bringing together different leaders from all walks of life. How did you come up with this idea and what is the purpose?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: The idea was suggested by Old Mutual which is a company made in South Africa but also listed in London and they were concerned about the fact that South Africa was moving into the next transition and at moments of transition there is a lot of uncertainties, there is instability even in the ruling party and we are going to have a new leader, so it was time to take the temperature of the nation. But we are also very conscious of the fact that what has happened over the last ten years has silenced a lot of people, that conversations in South Africa were not open and they were not reasons – it was a blaming game. So we came together as South Africans from all sectors, politicians, trade unionists, private sector people, civil society leaders and said

'This is our country. What are the things we have in common, where are our differences and how can we open up a conversation by citizens, by leaders that will help us identify the challenges we face and look at ways in which we can work together to come up with solutions. So the key challenges we find, are education, unemployment and poverty and inequality, health problems particularly HIV/Aids and TB and then finally, safety and security. What was amazing was, from our divergent background we're able to come out after three workshops and many iterations with a shared understanding of the challenges that we face and the opportunities and the risks that lie ahead. And we believe that South Africans have over and over again demonstrated that ability to sit down across differences and come up with solutions to problems as we did prior to 1994 and we think we can do it again. This time we have to do it in a practical way learning from the lessons of the past.

Redi Direko: Just talking about some of those realities that you were talking about, you know the Public Service, our education system, health and so on. There's always room to do even better but looking at where we are after fifteen years, are we where we should be?

Dr Mamphele Ramphele: No, definitely not. We have made huge progress on a number of issues which are largely about laying the foundation – like our constitution, parliamentary democracy, macro-economic framework but we have not succeeded in building on those foundations to have the kind of society we envisaged in our constitution, a non-racial non-sexist egalitarian society. We are still having 40% of South Africans living in destitution. WE still have 50% of young people between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed. We still have only 29% of young people going through our school system coming out with a high school certificate that enables them to tackle the future. There are many, many areas of failure. We have the fourth highest HIV and TB rate in the world. We've gone backwards in terms of life expectancy. It was 63 in 1990, we are now in 2007 with a 50-year life expectancy. That's going backwards. We are losing more infants than we did at the beginning of our democracy. We are losing mothers in childbirth – 400 of them die for every 100 000 births. That is a disaster. So we need to ask ourselves, how did we get here? We got here because, in our view, we as citizens took a back seat after 1994 and said the government will do everything and the government in turn decided that it is going to control and command and there has been

a growing conflation of the leaders, the party, the government and the State. And we've had a number of examples of where state institutions were abused and we have a culture in our civil [Unclear] 6:46 of not serving the public but self-serving and that's where corruption and nepotism is rooted.

Redi Direko: Just talking about citizens and we'll explore these themes and some of the problems that you've been talking about in a moment. I'm just thinking here, Dr Ramphela that often the citizens rely on the government to give information on policy, to report back on what has been done, what has not been done, and obviously the government will focus on the areas where it is most successful. So I'm getting a sense that we as citizens do not really comprehend the full extent of achievements or problems. Is that not why perhaps, you get people being apathetic, being complacent, because we're not ofey with the true extent of the problem. We see it, but when you're given figures and information that glosses over the problem, I just suspect that there's a breakdown between what truly is and the information that we are given.

Dr Mamphela Ramphela: That is absolutely correct and one of the problems is that the majority of South Africans can't read or write and so their ability to go into the web, the net and look at information or read newspapers where there are critical comments on what's going on, is limited. And this is the tragedy of apartheid education and the continuing failure of our education system to have sustained and high quality outcomes. But acting also at the heart of the breakdown of civil and government relationship is the nature of our electoral system where you have MPs elected on the basis of party lists only. Their accountability is to political parties and not to constituents. Unlike in the past where a person like Helen Suzman, who had to go and report to Houghton, her constituency about what's going on, what's going right, what's going wrong and what are the contributions she's making. We don't have that. People don't seem to know who is representing them in Parliament and so parties only get in most cases back to the electorate only during election times and then for the rest the electorate is ignored. And that's why, when the only way people find or get their grievance heard, is to do what is happening today in Khayelitsha where people are jumping up and down and burning and destroying property but that again is an indication of a lack of understanding that the property that they are destroying is their own. It doesn't belong to the government. It belongs to them.

Redi Direko: How do we reclaim that space given that we have an electoral system that does make it difficult for citizens to hold MPs to account?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Well, this is the whole purpose of Dinokeng. Its to create spaces where we can talk to those things and to then put pressure on Parliament to review the constitution and go back to recommendations that were made by the Van Zyl Slabbert Commission which recommended that we have proportional representation retained but a proportion of MPs should be elected on the basis of[Unclear]. That way you have the best out of a constituency system but also out of a proportional representation system. That report and that commission has just been gathering dust on the shelves of Parliament and perhaps this is where you and I as citizens demanding greater accountability from the people representing us in Parliament can force Parliament, because that's the only way that public service works. They work on the basis of where the pressure is coming from and if we are insisting on a review of the electoral system because we want to see greater accountability and we want to do it in a way that is creative and constructive, I don't see Parliament ignoring it.

Redi Direko: I'm chatting to Dr Mamphela Ramphele and we are talking about the Dinokeng Scenario. I gave you information about those who make up the scenarios team, brought together by six conveners. Dr Mamphela Ramphele is the Convener Chair and there are people like Njongonkulu Ndungane, Bob Head, Graca Michel, Rick Menell, Vincent Maphai – they're coming together and the message of this diverse group of 35 South Africans from civil society, government, various political parties, trade unions, business and so on is to create robust debate about the present and the future of South Africa and we are exploring some of the themes that are influencing our present and will influence our future. We'll take your calls in a moment.

Redi Direko: We continue our conversation with Dr Mamphela Ramphele, activist, academic businesswoman and Convener Chair of Dinokeng Scenarios Team and we will be taking your calls in just a moment on 021 4460567, 011 8830702. Dr Ramphele, I want to talk about our constitution. We get all romantic about it and quite excited when we're told we have a progressive constitution and it was heralded as one of the greatest in the world because it does guarantee social economic rights. But that description's in

between what you have on paper what the constitution stands for and the situation on the ground. Its problematic.

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Very problematic. It makes people cynical to be in a country with a human rights constitution and yet on a daily basis, the rights of poor people are violated by our failure to address the socio-economic rights in the form of basic services and basic needs. But also, we have to face up to the fact that notwithstanding the provisions of our constitution in terms of gender equality and the rights of the child, South Africa is going through the most horrendous violence against women and children and we don't talk about it. We have a Gender Commission that hardly ever is visible except when it comes to scandals within the Commission or some disagreement within the Commission. We are failing to leverage both the values and the vision in our constitution as well as the institutions that were set up. So we've got all these institutions which are supposed to be the guardians of the constitution which are not actually doing their job. They're not robust, they're very meek and mild, particularly the Human Rights Commission, the Gender Commission, the Youth Commission – you name it, we have real problems of the ability to effectively execute all our intentions.

Redi Direko: Do you think that government is overwhelmed? When the leadership looks at the problems that we have, the intentions of our constitution, do you think they're overwhelmed and feel they can't cope?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Well, I think when you look at what we inherited, the legacy of apartheid was huge and I think what we all did in the excitement of 1994 was to underestimate the challenge of [Unclear] a government and an economy and a social infrastructure that was geared to only looking after 10% of the population, to look after a large impoverished formerly marginalized group. Secondly, we also underestimated the impact of apartheid on our ability to step up to the plate. You can't have a system that educates a fraction of the population and in schools, only that fraction and then suddenly the following day you are in charge and you are expected to be able to perform. So we both underestimated the challenge as well as underestimated our ability to meet those challenges at all levels. And so it is true that in many instances the government is overwhelmed but there are very interesting examples of departments in the government and institutions in our state which have stepped up to the plate. What have they done?

They have identified the strengths of the institution they inherited, didn't throw the baby with the bath water and then went on to bring in new leadership and new managers and got the old and the new to work together to build a common platform for the future. And that is what is a [Unclear] for us to be able to tackle our challenges which are humungous together. We can only do it by leveraging the skills that exist in our society and stop imagining that you can, by the flip of a coin have all black managers or 50/50 women in every sector of the economy. Its not practically possible.

Redi Direko: I suppose where you start as well is ownership of the problem and I'm going to use Barack Obama as an example. I've listened to a lot of the interviews and meetings that he's had with the citizens – every time something is pointed out he would respond 'you are right, that is a problem'. Acknowledge it and take ownership. I'm getting a sense that from our government and the leadership, that pointing out any areas that are not working, immediately they are on the defensive and they're trying to persuade us all that they are doing their work. So criticism is not necessarily that you are incompetent, you don't care, but to say this is what we are observing, what are you doing about it? Taking ownership of the problem and not seeing that as being criticism or anti-government.

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Yes, but you know the issue in our society is very, very difficult because we have the legacy of lack of confidence in the ability of black people to do things. The other day when we were doing these quiet briefings on the scenarios and we were talking about the reality of today, that the government and the State as a whole is weak in the face of the challenges we face but it is further weakened by corruption, cronyism, nepotism and an unaccountable culture and this guy who is black, turned to me and said 'are you suggesting that a black government can't govern'? You see that kind of knee-jerk reaction that any pointing to what is not going right is automatically a suggestion that a black government can't govern. I mean, that is very strange for me to be accused of that when I spent my life fighting so that we can have an improvement in government. But that's the trap we've fallen into, that we shut out criticism even if we [Unclear] as we do in our scenarios, an acknowledgement of where things have gone right in the face of all of these difficulties. So we mustn't also underestimate what has gone right but at the same time if we don't address what has gone wrong, what has gone right is going to be undermined but its the problems that we ignore.

Redi Direko: Let's go straight to the lines. This is about you, citizens of South Africa. We need to take ownership and it's been shown that on many fronts we have disengaged from some of the processes that are aimed at building this country. How do we reclaim that space? What do you think? Let's go to George. George, you're calling us from Midrand. Good morning.

Caller: Good morning Redi. I just would like to ask you one question and perhaps make a comment. In 1991 in Mont Fleur Cape Town there was a similar exercise which was facilitated by Adam Kahane. Sixteen years later the very same facilitator including yourself are talking about the three scenarios. What is the difference between what was then and now because for me, I feel like it's the same rhetoric. It's like a group of academics talking about theories for change. What's your comment about it?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Well, I think what you have to acknowledge is that the scenarios are not theories, they are a way of thinking about moments of [Unclear]. In 1992 when the Mont Fleur Scenarios were undertaken and I was not part of them. I was part of the Old Mutual Scenarios, there was a moment of, unfortunately, because the old apartheid was winding down and the new was yet to be born. And that's when you need to think out of the box. That's what scenarios help you do. And we are again today at a moment of uncertainty. Today a new parliament is being sworn in, a new government will be sworn in next week and we have a new leader. Things can't be the same and if we think they should be the same then we really are in trouble. So what we are doing in this particular exercise which is different from the Mont Fleur – Mont Fleur was focusing on a small group of leaders of the ANC who were about to go into government. Here we are addressing a wide network of people who are citizens and leaders in this country. We are saying all South Africans must have a conversation about what have we achieved so far, what have we done well, what haven't we done well and why, and how can we do better? There is no prescription in these scenarios about what we should do. What we have done is to create a say that acknowledges the challenges which in fact echo the challenges that politicians were talking about during the last election campaign. But the issue is what are we going to do about it and we don't believe that there is one solution. We believe that civil society must come together and say how are they going to engage in order to keep pressure on issues of accountability. Second, we need the

private sector to come together and say the global economic crisis is not going to be over tomorrow. We have to work together between government, labour and the private sector to find ways of surviving this crisis and coming out of it much stronger. An so this is an invitation to a conversation by South Africans about the future of their country.

Redi Direko: Lets go to Bagunsi in Soweto.

Caller: Morning to all. Doctor, how are you?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: I am very well.

Caller: Ja, look in this country where intellectuals are being insulted, one of your colleagues, the previous Professor Ntabele [ph] has been called names, a dog, in this country where people refuse to think. You know what happened, you know, the minister for education went to your university where you were [unclear], professors were saying we are scared to talk because we are being [unclear]. We are being the new fight in this country. And how do we deal with [unclear] who don't respect, who are supposed to be leaders tomorrow, who don't respect their elders and intellectualism. Intellectualism is an insult in this country. How [unclear] that one?

Redi Direko: Okay, Bagunsi, we got your point. Dr. Ramphele?

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Well, I think that actually vindicates the purpose of Dinokeng, that our country has gone through a very difficult period over the last ten years of shutting out debate, shouting down people, naming people and labelling people as racist or agents of racists, or even askaris [ph] etcetera. And also we have a problem in South Africa given the history of excluding the majority of the population from opportunities for quality education and so on, that academics and intellectuals are seen and in many cases they are very much on the ivory tower and not connected to ordinary people and their pain. But having said that, no country in the world particularly today which is an interconnected world, where there is competition for skills and innovation and talent, that you cannot afford to marginalize your intellectuals, your academics and your innovators. And so this exercise is also about let us identify our assets and leverage them, use them to help us find creative solutions to our problems. Now what we see, as you call it

disrespect, the language of disrespect is often a language of anger and lack of self-confidence. Because if you respect yourself and you have confidence in yourself you cannot insult others, because the other is you. Because we are all connected by the great chain of being as Neville Alexander said the other day. And so we in South Africa often talk about Ubuntu but we don't live it. And our political leaders need to lead and inspire South Africans to return to the values of our Constitution. To return to those values that make us human and proud. To respect and celebrate diversity and at the same time to work flat out to enable the [unclear] amongst us to regain their dignity.

Redi Direko: Alright, we're going to take Mzwandile and Thabo back to back because we're running out of time. But Mzwandile, let's start with you, good morning.

Caller: Morning Redi. My question is very simple. I want to know from the professor because one of the things that is happening most of the time you find that the intellectual sits alone and discussing, and not include the civil society and the people from the rural areas. And they wherever they are sitting, they decide for the whole entire society that this is what needs to be followed. I want to know how far did they go in terms of engaging the civil society and the people from the rural areas, because if you look at our country we are living in two or three countries in one country, whereby you get... like the Constitution has here... spoken about the Constitution, the Constitution is good for some people whereby they look at it as the best thing, whereas the other people feel that that Constitution doesn't touch on them.

Redi Direko: Okay. Alright. We've got the message, let me take Thabo as well and Dr. Ramphela I'll give you a chance to respond to both callers because we are pressed for time. Thabo in Centurion.

Caller: Hi Redi. Mine's not a... all I want to say is you know this lady, Dr Mamphela Ramphela, is one of the greatest brains to ever emerge from this country. And I feel so pained that she has really... we have actually been deprived of the leadership and ability of a person like Dr Mamphela Ramphela. I wish at a certain point in your life you could be a leader of this great country. Thank you very much.

Redi Direko: But Thabo hold on, before I go... before you go, I want to challenge you on something. Leadership cannot only be in government. You can be a leader in whichever area, whether it's academia or the media or business. So we haven't lost leadership because people are not in the government. You understand what I mean?

Caller: True. But Redi, the kind of brains that we're speaking to right now is the brains that need to take this country to the next level.

Redi Direko: Okay, that's Thabo in Centurion. Dr Ramphela.

Dr Mamphela Ramphela: I agree with you completely about the tendency for us to have conversations among the [unclear]. And one of the strengths of Dinokeng is the diversity of the people who were part of this team of 35. Many came from rural areas, people from the trade unions, civil society organisations, faith based organisations, and all the political parties. But what we are going to be doing now is to have very intense conversations, town hall, village meetings, to make sure that we do not leave rural people behind, because one of the failings of our democracy thus far is that the land reform that was touted with such fanfare has not delivered the goods for poor rural people. We have no rural development strategy as we speak. But in addition, the language that we use for this conversation, I have insisted and many of my team members support this, we are translating this report and we are going to make sure that we have it in the main languages, the Nguni, one Nguni, for example Zulu, Afrikaans, Sepedi and Sishonga. To make sure that this is not a conversation amongst the elite, it must be a conversation of all South African citizens.

Redi Direko: Well, Dr Ramphela, what is next on the agenda? How do you keep the momentum going? We've just had elections and I got a sense from hosting this show that South Africans were interested in what was happening in the country. That sort of disengagement was not there, the slump that we felt last year or a few months ago, and one wants that to continue because that is the beauty of democracy. When we're all saying different things, but committed to one vision and one goal.

Dr Mamphela Ramphela: The fortunate thing is the timing which we didn't plan but it turns out that it is exactly the time when the elections are over, so we can now focus on

what's next. And we are going to be having conversations with the government. We've already them informally before the elections, but now we're going to do a formal briefing to the president and to as many of his Cabinet as possible. We're going to brief all the political parties, we are going to brief groups of the private sector and individual big companies, we are going to brief faith based organisations, civil society organisations, and we are going to make sure that each one of the 35 people who come from different constituencies go back there together with other members so that the diversity of Dinokeng which is a core strength can be turned into the ability for South Africans across the many divides that keep us weak can be leveraged into a strength to make us strong.

Redi Direko: Dr Ramphele, thank you very much for chatting to us, and good luck.

Dr Mamphela Ramphele: Thank you very much.