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South Africa

Food: an act of the most basic solidarity

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On 14th July, two hundred families in the Briandene informal settlement north of Durban lost everything in a devastating fire. All houses and shacks were burnt down. This catastrophe was only one of many in the Durban area during days of looting, killings and destruction. The Briandene community is a member of the shack dweller movement Abahlali baseMjondolo. AbM claims a membership of over 100,000 in five provinces, 74,000 of them in the Durban area where it was founded in 2005

Since the murder of the Chair of Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) in March 2016, there has been a relationship of solidarity visits and contacts between Abahlali and ACC. Both organisations have a history of having members murdered and of being harassed by the state and the police. In May, a delegation of ACC participated in Abahlali's protests outside the court in Durban. Abahlali's Deputy President, Mqapheli Bonono, was facing trumped-up charges, together with Siniko Miya. The case was finally thrown out by the court in the middle of July.

ACC and Abahlali have another major link – their struggles are over land. The Abahlali communities demand land for proper houses and subsistence farming. In the case of ACC, the struggle is about the control and use of ancestral land on the coast of Amadiba in Mbizana, Eastern Cape. The coastal villages have defended their land against mining for two decades. Today this struggle is also about moving the N2 freeway away from the coast. Sanral's plans for an 80m wide and fenced high way toll road on the coast threatens the livelihood of the coastal villages and would cut them in half.

Solidarity not “tribalism”

In response to the fire in the Briandene settlement, the ACC mobilised the villages of the coast. For three days, surpluses from a bumper harvest were collected in five villages. This act of collective solidarity was in striking contrast to individual, divisive responses on social media, where there were calls to block all cars with KZN number plates from entering Eastern Cape. There was even news of instances where people were actually stopped. In village discussion, these were branded as very dangerous, and also stupid: “Look at everything we get from KZN!”.

This sentiment was also expressed in ACC's public statements and interviews when explaining the campaign for Briandene: “Solidarity crosses borders. We stand together, in defence of land and in demand for land and food security. There is no place for tribalism or racism in the situation that our country finds itself in.” The Amadiba community is a part of the Pondo people. Many families have or have had a member working in Durban. Some of them have been victims of attacks for being amaMpondo.

A 24th July statement by Abahlali echoed the warnings about provocations by people saying they are “100% Zulu, calling amaMpondo and amaXhosa terrible names”. “People in and close to the ANC in KwaZulu-Natal have a long history of open prejudice to amaMpondo. They have often tried to blame amaMpondo and other isiXhosa speaking people for poverty in the province”. The statement commended the Humanitarian Development Alliance SA, Muslims for Humanity, Doctors without Borders and the Amadiba Crisis Committee for the support to Briandene.

Material solidarity

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On Friday 23rd July, a bakkie loaded with sweet potatoes, amadumbe, beans and even oranges that some families can grow on the coast, arrived in Briandene. It was met with hugs, solemn speeches and jubilation by the Abahlali community committee leaders. To the public, the ACC described the campaign as a payback: “As ACC, we finally could give back for the solidarity that the brave shack dweller movement Abahlali baseMjondolo have given to us for many years in our struggle. Our answer was long overdue. Long live the AbM! Long live the comrades of Briandene!”

But another major lesson pointed out by ACC has also circulated widely. There has been no hunger on the Amadiba coast, even during the devastating lockdowns: “The solidarity in action from Amadiba was only possible because for two decades we have defended our ancestral land from mining. Our ancestors defended this land during the Pondo Revolt. Their decision, courage and resolve benefit us now. We continue to feed ourselves and our neighbours from this land. This is ‘the economy’, no matter if the elite speak of something else. Our community can and will never rest in our defence of this land.”

Source: [Amandla](#)

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