

## Mzamo Zondi of the Treatment Action Campaign on 'Social Networks' CCS Activist Brief October 2018

Political scandals, conspiracies and corruption occur daily in South Africa, hence most politicians are mistrusted even by their supporters. Many believe that politics necessarily breeds corruption. No wonder many people mistrust not only politicians but politics itself. A currently disorganised civil society has further, stigmatised progressive forces like TAC and other formations whose core purpose is social justice.

The greatest hindrance to better health care is corruption, dishonest leaders and dishonest government. Because a hungry stomach knows no law, we have seen violent protests every day in very corner of South Africa. People see no alternative but to burn tyres on the road for those in power to listen to their grievances. Violent protest though cannot be entertained and communities need to be educated to come up with innovative strategies.

Many people are busy asking themselves where the power lies in South Africa. Is it Luthuli House, Union Buildings or Cosatu House?

*“Political power works like a drug. Those who get it - in any State, Church, municipality, school, or family - become addicted to it. They should be treated like addicts\_who do anything to get their drug. Many politicians crave power for its own sake, but even the few who use it to improve society will do anything to hold on to it”. **Unknown.***

The greatest question for progressive civil society formations or organisations is how do we use our political rights or constitutional rights to our advantage? While a growing desperate civil society is infected by disorganisation, capitalists are becoming more organised than ever. But power comes from people who are organised. We need mobilisers, we need strategists, we need academics, we need traditional leaders and traditional authorities. The first step in our community mobilization process is for the TAC branches to learn as much as possible about how communities are organized socially and to understand local politics and its devils. All of this can then be applied to the task of identifying / building social networks for branches to depoliticise participation at a local level. So that when our movements or campaigns are disrupted or there are attempts at division, co-optation or disorganisation the community itself will stand against it.

In identifying social networks for mobilisation we have asked: what is a social network? One way to think about social networks is to imagine a group of individuals joined together in a web of relationships. These interconnected individuals form a clique of people who are linked, probably because they share common interests or background or goals. A network can be broad and loosely knit or it can be small and tightly knit. Networks are not mutually exclusive— they can and do overlap in many complex ways. Examples of networks we may find in our branch communities include:

- networks of people who attend the same religious institution or share the same faith
- networks of parents whose children attend the same school (parent associations for example)
- networks of people who are involved in government (ward councilors, MPs)
- networks of people who are involved in community governance
- networks of traditional healers
- networks of people who play sports together or are fans of the same sport (members of a sports clubs, people who play in a league, fans of a particular team)
- networks of people who are committed to addressing community concerns (a crime watch group, volunteer health workers)
- networks of people who are members of the same mutual aid society (funeral societies, for example)
- networks of people who attend the same recreation venues (a bar or dance club that attracts a regular crowd of patrons every weekend)
- networks of people who share the same occupation or the same workplace (teachers, vendors, taxi drivers, sex workers, shop clerks, business owners, rotary club members, hair dressers to name just a few)
- networks of people who attend the same school, college, or university
- networks of people who live in the same housing complex
- networks of people who share a genealogy (members of a clan or other group who reckon common descent for example)

Without TAC we wouldn't be celebrating and boasting over 2 million people on HIV/AIDS treatment. But it is our responsibility now to mobilise and educate. The current government is good at using public platforms to demonise and criminalise those who challenge it such as, Democracy from Below, Democratic Left Front and other formations. We need to make communities aware of this. In KZN we are trying by all means to educate and to promote accountability.

We must note that community mobilisation is often defined by people who cannot do it, who have never practised it. Community mobilisation is not always taken seriously in other organisations but TAC is unique because community mobilisation is taken very seriously. Comrades what makes TAC different is that it was formed to address a very dangerous virus. We need to look deep as to what made our struggle unique from all other struggles and why we need to devise new and innovative strategies.

**\*All views are author's own.**