

Equal Education Office
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Interviewer 2 (I2): Colleen Brandt
Interviewer 3 (I3): Vuyo Bikitsha
Narrator (N): Sinazo Makawula

I: Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself, your name, and how you came to start working for Equal Education?

N: Okay, my name is Sinazo Makawula. Um, I'm from a township called Mdantsane, closer to East London. And, um, I was first exposed to Equal Education when I was studying at the University of Forté. I was involved in an organization there called Students for Law and Social Justice. Um, it was when Equal Education had a campaign for "One School, One Library," which we had then joined and participated in, where there was, like, marches across the country. That's when I was first exposed to Equal Education. With my involvement in the Students for Law and Social Justice organization, I got exposed to more of the work that they do, where, um, we would mostly invite them every time we have a national seminar. Equal Education would have a speaker that, um, comes across to speak on the work that they do. I then, uh, became a fuller part of the organization this year in February, when I joined them as the Eastern Cape Youth Organizer.

I: Can you tell me a little bit about what you do as the youth or-organizer here, in the Eastern Cape?

N: Okay, I do a lot of globalization work, a lot of campaigning, um, a lot of recruitment, and, um, I play a leadership role for a team of facilitators who are helping me in making sure that all the youth department work becomes a success. We've got currently ten schools which we're working with, where we have got members in all of those schools who we, we normally call them "Equalizers." So, um, our day-to-day work is basically having to prepare and to, um, organize ourselves to make sure that we run fruitful sessions every week with the comrades, that's what we refer to each other [laughter], um, where we go to schools like every Friday, some schools prefer different days but most it's Fridays. And then one Friday of the month we have a group meeting, what we call a mass meeting, where all the other Equalizers from our—within and around King Williams Town—from all ten schools we meet in one venue and have our discussions about issues that are surrounding the organization provincially and nationally.

I: Are most of your, or all of your, Equalizers um, learners or are teachers involved as well? Other members of the community? What kind of is the makeup of your Equalizers?

N: Okay. Um, an Equalizer is a, a student, a pupil in a high school setting. Once you become a member on your own you participate in Equal Education's programs, we refer to those students as Equalizers. Then, within the organization, Equal Education is a activist movement that works with, um, learners, teachers, um, parents, community, and community members in fighting or advocating for equal, equality of education in South Africa. So, um, in essence we do have, um, what you would call a parent's sector, but, um, in here, in Eastern Cape we don't have one as yet because the office recently opened last year in October. So if you go to Cape Town and [inaudible] our branch you will find that they have a parent's sector which is vibrant and which is working very well with the other sectors which is the youth sector which is where the Equalizers are belonging. And, um, community members, we have liaisons, um, relationships with SGBs, with principals, and other, um, community-based organizations.

I: Okay, great. Um, so at your weekly meetings, what are, um, like, what's kind of on the, on the docket of things you would do? Do you—mostly conversations? Do you have activities you do with Equalizers? What's your weekly meetings with them like?

N: Okay, firstly we have weekly meetings with facilitators, which is like our Monday meetings, where we plan our work for the entire week and we reflect on the last week's work. And then we've got, on Thursdays, sessions, which we call them "reading sessions," where we [inaudible] ourselves because at some point, when you're going to go train other people, you need to be knowledgeable about the work that you're training them and you need to be a step ahead. So, and then we have got, um, our Fridays with the Equalizers. Now we've got different types of topics that we deal with and we've run a consultative process with Equalizers asking them, "What type of work do you want to learn about, what type of activities that you guys want to get up to and do?" And last week I was at Hector Pieterse, high school, where I was running a session on the topic of Marikana. Um, it is one of the congress resolutions at Equal Education that we want to commemorate and show support to the Marikana Massacre. And, uh, few days ago, um, I think on the twelfth of August, we marked the anniversary of the Marikana Massacre, so we ran a session, ran a session on that, which was quite exciting because it showed that a lot of our Equalizers are quite knowledgeable about these things that are happening within, around our, uh, country and they are knowledgeable of things that are legal matters that are, need to be taken into place, and how, they have a view on how they see the police in our country, how they do things and how they should do things. And sometimes it also varies from season to season. Because, um, a few months ago, like in July, most of our sessions were focused on congress—teaching our comrades on what is a congress and, um, workshopping them about the constitution because you need to understand what a constitution is, firstly, and what is, what is it entail, and how much power does it hold and how much power does it has, and for you to be understand the National Council of Equal Education, as well: Who is the National Council? What is the work of the National Council? How are they elected into office? And matters related to that. So during that

time we had, um, our sessions focused mainly on that. And then, earlier, um, in the year, we had, um, Michael Komape, um campaign, we had the Michael Komape march, which marked the halfway mark between the three-year time frame which is the first time frame for the implementation of the Minimum Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure. Um, so during that time, we had our work focusing on Norms and Standards and focusing on exactly what needs to, uh, to happen and how, what measures we can take into place to make sure that our government is accountable for the work that they need to do.

I: On the Norms and Standards, I think I'm going to ask you to speak a little bit more about that. Um, could you just give a brief background of Norms and Standard, the law, and how it came into being, um, and what kind of the main—are its main goals and what you guys are doing to, um, ensure it lives up to its main goals?

N: Okay, thanks. Um, well our South African Schools Act does not prescribe what a school should look like, or what a school should be. So a Norms and Standards was influenced or informed by the fact that Equal Education had the primary goal in—to, um, achieving equal and quality education for all South Africans and that was recognized and seen as something that was a fundamental barrier which was resources and infrastructure. It is from that campaign of saying, um, “Can you please build our schools?” One of the first campaigns that Equal Education had—had was a campaign for windows, like it replaced, it was a campaign to replace over 500 windows in a particular school in Cape Town—in Khayelitsha to be precise. So, from there, what happened was that there was more other infrastructural campaigns that were coming that comrades were participating in and, um, the Minimum Norms and Standards was then something that they channeled through the Department of Education to say in fact, there needs to be a binding, a legal document, a statute that says, “This is what a school should look like, it should have a, b, c, and d for it to be called a school.” Because, in reality, you find that in our own communities, in our rural communities, there are places that, um, you one would be shocked to know that in fact there is a teaching and learning process that is happening within this structure—which I don't even want to call it a school—but you call it a school because of the teaching and learning process that happens there. So it then, um, put it, our Department of Education under pressure to say that you need to be able to have something documented that guides you to say this is what makes a school. And then the Michael Komape campaign is the same as the Norms and Standards campaign. It was named after a six-year-old who died in a pit latrine in Limpopo because, um, he had, um, fell in the pit latrine and he passed on. So the campaign was called after his name in commemoration of his passing on. And that was a clear indication that if our government was doing what is, um, just minimum of its standard to say this is what we're going to do and doing and fulfilling what is just expected—the minimum that is expected of them, Michael Komape wouldn't have died the way that he did.

I: Um, yeah, I think we have seen a couple of schools, the past week or so, where that's a main concern, sanitation, um, in particular. Um, I don't know if you want to add any...? Um, we—I'm just wondering you maybe hear from the Equalizers, maybe see, since you're going into schools on a weekly basis, how you're seeing that progress, or not seeing that progress, um, are the facilities that your Equalizers are working in some of these facilities that you're talking about? Um, and maybe how they might help you see more what's on the ground, um, as you—and how you might use that information to further your campaign?

N: Okay, yeah. For, for starters, sanitation is a huge crisis. You go to Vukile Tshwete High School in Keiskammahoek, um, well that school to begin with is in a military base, and they were told to be there—it's a former military base—to be, to use that premises in the meantime whilst their school's going to be built. Previously the school was started by community members and they had, um, their sessions of teaching and learning in a community hall. The community hall became too small and they were taken into the military base. Up until today, since, um, they've tried to speak to the Department to actually get their school to be built, nothing has seemed to be materializing. Up until recently, where they protested, a few—I think two weeks ago—they've been protesting for a number of years, but this time, um, there was a bit of-of-of hope. Because every time they protest, government officials would come through and promise them that someone would do something about these things but in essence nothing has ever, um, come out of it. But recently there have been, um, communications that in fact their school is going to be built, um, soon and in the meantime they will have, um, refurbishments, um, so that their kids are in a safe environment. Because the reality of it is that if it's raining, water, the roof leaks, and if it's hot, they run a risk having snakes falling from the roof, um, on top of the students during the teaching sessions. So it's quite a risky environment and an environment that's not healthy and not viable for anyone to be in, both for the teachers and for the students. And on sanitation, it's-it's-it's horrible. Um, other issues that we face in other schools is issues of desks, um, fencing, um, there's no writing boards, there's no writing boards, there's no—like the blackboard, there's not textbooks at all. So it's those types of things that we're facing. And Equalizers do bring up these things and to say that—and we see them at face value—this, this is the challenge that is happening. Even for myself, when I go to run a session at a particular school, when I need to go relieve myself it's an experience that I am to go through. Unfortunately there's no other way that one can escape that. So um, it is through the campaigns and the work that we do that encourages Equalizers themselves to say, “We are going to be a part of Equal Education, we're going to be part of the Michael Komape campaign, we're going to make sure that in fact the implementation of the Norms and Standards for School Infrastructure is [inaudible] realized in our own lifetime, in our studying time, that we are able to say we are the Equalizers that actually made sure that schools are bettered through the Norms and Standards campaign.” So it's one of those things, to be able to experience what we talk about and what they hear, um, and to be able to see that there's a plan, there's a way out, encourages them more, to say in fact we are going to be a part of this up until we are able to see results from it.

I: You mentioned a bit about the Department of Education, um, actually that's kind of a recurring theme that we've heard, um, from people that we've spoken to at different schools. A lot of teachers and administrators, when we ask them what their relationship with the Department is like say they feel as though people are listening but then when it comes time for actual change or action it doesn't materialize. But it seems that most administrators, I would say, were saying to us, "Well we do—they do listen to us," but, um, there seems to me something missing from the listening to action. Um, and I'm just wondering what your organization's relationship with Department of Education's like, um, kind of who do you go to there? Um, who are you looking to to make the steps, um, for the implementation of the Norms and Standards Act? Um, what would, in what ways can you guys ensure implementation or are you working to ensure implementation? Who needs to act? I guess is my question.

N: Thanks, I think one thing is that, um, indeed the Department of Education would come and take a memorandum and would listen to your, um, concerns. And um, the person that we are normally talking to there is, um, the Deputy of—I think he is an acting agent [inaudible] and um, in all essence, they-they-they even sometimes would call to say let's set up a meeting because I couldn't be available to you the other day and then when that day comes, "No, he's busy," type of a thing, so they give us a run around. Um, it's not to say the relationship—it's okay because they don't, um, see us as, um, people that they would run away from completely, um, but it's not good because they don't actually come to the party, they don't play their ball, so that's the one part that I feel that is lacking. And there's a huge barrier of implementation that they are not fulfilling at all. So, one thing that we as activists, we do is to continue to campaign and to actually even find different avenues and different strategies of campaigning. When one is actually already used to our particular way of campaigning, they're like, "No, we know they're going to come and toyi-toyi and sing revolutionary songs, give us a memorandum and go," you find other strategy avenues of trying to make people to actually do something about—not just to listen—but to do something about what you guys are actually campaigning for. So I think, the fall short between hear—they hearing us and them implementing, I think it's a bigger picture of politics that are happening within the Department which we, um, might not be totally aware of them in terms of what exactly is going on there and, um, which at some point might not even be, um, directly relevant to our work, but I think it-it-it's such things... Because if you hear, even the MEC when he's—he's often on the radio, speaks on the radio, and speaks as if like, "Everything is fine, um, we have done this and this for this particular school." They name particular schools that they have visited in the former Transkei and what, what they're doing there and type of a thing. But there's a school directly behind his office, um, they actually share a fence, uh, where you find that resources are not good: there are no textbooks, there are not enough desks, the-the school doesn't have a yard to begin with, it's just a block, and you can't be in a situation whereby you've got young people and there's not even a playground for them, there isn't even a sport's field for them to practice physical training and things like that. So you-you worry and you

wonder that where exactly is funding going, there's backlogs of implementation and things like that.

I: Um, on implementation, I guess what kind of things have you, um, seen? What steps have you made since the passage of the Act? Um, what are you waiting still to see? And do you—how, um—I know you set a time goal, was it five years? How much do you think that that time will, um, will be enough? And, um, is there a way for you to maybe bypass the Department of Education? Are there other organizations you're working with to maybe implement change now? Um, things like that.

N: Okay, I think because we are working with government schools, public schools, um, the best people to actually to make the changes there, because like in all reality the government does have money, um, it's just the matter of actually being able to have the, um, the capacity to make sure these things do happen. And, um, I think, one of the things that we've seen, we've seen schools be built. Um, there's a program called the SID project and that project is something separate from the Norms and Standards. You see, um, work happening in other schools but then, uh, for you to know whether it's Norms and Standards we have to do our groundwork ourselves to go find out whether is this just, um, another project that the school is doing on its own capacity to say we want to fix our school or maybe there's another organization that sponsored the school to fix particular things in the school or whether it's, um, the Norms and Standards recommendation that's taking place. But in essence, the three year timeframe—because it's a three year timeframe—and then there's, um, up 'til 2030, so, and those timeframes have got, um, things that need to happen immediate, for the [inaudible] immediate, um, urgency and the need for like, schools that are made from improper, um, material, improper infrastructure like asbestos, wood, and those [inaudible], needs to be eradicated and they need to build proper, um, schools from, um, bricks and-and material of that nature instead of mud and things like that. So there isn't much work that is happening, to be quite honest, there isn't much implementation. In particular, when you look at the fact that we've already, um, have gone beyond the halfway mark and the plans for the implementation themselves were released very late. They were released I think sometime in July, they were released very late or—I think in June, before we left for [inaudible] which was in June—and even the plans themselves are not as detailed enough. They seem to be like generalizing things, they seem to be, um, to be done in a rushed type of a way because you can't follow, because you want to go even to ask the government to have a public commentary of that so that they're able to say, “No-no-no-no, this, this, and that, how are then do you able to implement this, this, and that.” And the there are schools that are prioritized that are not even in a serious need of particular things, because if you are needing fence, fence is in the seven year timeframe, type of a thing. So, other schools that were our priority, now are seemingly like further down on the list. So there are such concerns that we want to raise. And some plans, because each province has a plan for its implementation, some plans don't even have a list of the schools that are these are the schools that are on the Norms and Standards list, so these are the

schools that we have identified that need our attention and we need to actually make sure that, um, the infrastructure in the school is built from scratch or we need to just need to fix fencing and, um, install water, and install electricity, or be able to say this is what is needed in this particular school, this one is fine—it needs computer labs and science labs and it need, uh, sports fields. So they're not detailed to that extent. So how then are you going to be able to change the system? Or how you then going to be able to actually implement on what is needed without a proper plan in place.

I: I know that when we were here last week, um, you mentioned that you were finding when you went to visit schools a lot of people didn't even know about the Norms and Standards Act and that you were going around and kind of informing, um, teachers, principals, of the Act. Um, I found that in our interviews with other teachers and administrators when they have sorts of material lacks—like no textbooks, um, things like that—that they weren't even sure themselves who to contact. What kind of—what were you informing them of when you went to go talk to them about these things? What do you—what advice do you give, um, principals in that, um, who would be under the Norms and Standards Act, the ones who are made—in schools made of improper materials—how do you, um, what do you tell them after you inform them? And how do you maybe help them advocate for themselves moving forward?

N: Okay, um, all that—well, like that's quite true, that the schools that we worked with—um, and the one person that was channeling or at the forefront of that school visit campaign was Daniel Linde, who is, um, the Deputy Head of this office, um, he is the one who is at the forefront of the Michael Komape campaign, and I'm the one who's heading the youth work. So, in essence, what-what-what we tell, we-we-we go around and we tell people and we educate them about the Norms and Standards because in reality even District Directors don't know. They're like, “What are you talking about?” And we actually make it our-our-our duty to actually make sure that people are aware of the Norms and Standards and they are aware of what needs to be done in their schools. And we refer them to the relevant stakeholders: Department of Education, District Directors, and um, other relevant stakeholders, preciseley. And one thing that we are able to offer them is, um, advice and offer them the support that they need as best as possible. Because, um, we also have a Equal Education Law Center which-where people are then finding themselves in a position whereby they are in an the unfortunate receiving end of the system whereby it's unfair—unfairly treated—they have the opportunity to come to the Equal Education Law Center to be able to voice out as to say this is the help I tried to get from the Department and this is what I'm receiving back. So I believe that in the part of the advocacy that, um, Law Center is also in place to be able to assist in the process. I remember there was also a student from, I think Queenstown, where they could not receive their school, end of the year school report, because there is some contribution fee that is paid, um, to the school by parents themselves. So they didn't have that money, and the didn't pay that money, and the principal denied them their end of the year report and that was illegal. So there's no such thing in the

school—South African Schools Act but it's a school policy, "This is what we do." But, forgetting the fact that denying someone their end of the year school report is-is not in-in-in good accord in its entirety and students needed their reports in order to apply to go to other schools to further their education and the EE Law Center actually helped them in that and they were actually able to get their reports without having to actually pay that fee which I think is something that is happening in a number of schools and people, some of them don't even know that there's such help that is available to them. Because, at the end of the day, when you go to those SGB meetings, you find it that there's not even a report about this money—this 200 rand or 220—that people need to donate or to contribute to the school that they need to fix windows—they mention a couple of things—they need to pay this pay that, but you never get a report, each and every single time. But that-that-that's the concern that, um, that we have.

I: Yeah, we asked a couple of students, um, at a school that charged fees if they knew where their school fees were going, what they were going towards, and they said that they had no idea, and that the student government had no say in where those fees go, as well, so it sounds like a problem. On the topic of money and funds, um, a couple of teachers I've talked to as well, um, say that a lot of times funds, they'll get, um—they know what they're budgeted for textbooks but they will not receive that full money. Corruption seems to be an issue, there seems to be money going missing places, um, lost in the network of—from the Department of Ed down kind of thing. Um, are you guys monitoring that at all? Um, I mean I know you—maybe this is outside sort of your specific—but is your office monitoring corruption at all? Um, is it one of the problems that you're taking on? Are you seeing that kind of widespread? Um, how might that be affecting the implementation of the Norms and Standards Act? Things like that.

N: Okay, indeed that does affect the implementation. Like I said that, I think the implementation in it's entirety, is something that's got to do with internal politics that are happening in the Department itself. So, but we're not directly, um, monitoring the, um, maladministration of funds, but we are, um, aware of such things. As a result, we, um, were supporting an anti-corruption march that was happening in the [inaudible] by, um, one of the organizations that we're partners with. So we are totally, um, against such things. But as we focus mainly on the implementation and making sure that infrastructure is, um, improved in our South Africa—South African public schools to put it, um, we don't directly focus on the administration of funds within government.

I: Um, I know teacher shortage, as you were saying earlier, is a huge problem. Um, I don't know if you want to talk about that, just for the camera a little bit. [Laughter]. Um, about the teacher shortage, we've found that everywhere we've gone. Um, today, the school we went today, they said it wasn't, um, uncommon for there to be one teacher per seventy students. Um, and maybe what your learners, your Equalizers, are telling you about that. Um, I know we've asked—a couple of groups have asked students or learners when they have them—if they're interested in

going into education in the future and they'll, almost all of them say no, always. I'm wondering if, um, any of your Equalizers, um, how they see maybe the futurity of education, um, and maybe what you guys talk to them about that.

N: Okay, um, I think, well basically, it's clear that like I said earlier, there is bursaries in place—Department of Education, there's funds [inaudible]—there's different types of bursaries in place for people to go study to be teachers at university. Now, there's an output of graduates every year but those graduates still remain unemployed. There isn't, um, a way they'll be placed, to say go teach at a particular place, um, but some of them do get placed. And then still, now there's a backlog or a shortage of teachers in schools, which is a huge, um, contradiction and a huge confusion to the rest of us as to what exactly is going on here. And, um, I think people would not want to—those that don't want to go into teaching—I think it's the working conditions that are there. Because some people, if you ask them why you want to go into teaching, “Ah, weekends you're off, you finish work at half past two, um, you've got major holidays, June holidays, a month, December holidays, two months.” Some people have got that mentality that it's, um, it's-it's a cool job, you just have a breather, piece of mind type of a thing. But, um, in essence that it needs someone with a real patience because in order for you to teach someone, someone that you've never known before, is-is-is I think it's quite a, a great job for people to actually do that. Because if you look back, even for ourselves sitting here, when we were in grade one, our grade one teachers, the patience and the determination and the diligence that they had to go through to make sure that we became the people that we are today is quite amazing. Now, if you actually, um, say—and I also think that, the thing is that with our Equalizers who are predominantly coming from rural and township areas—now, having said that, the ideal mentality is that, um, African children would become teacher, would become a nurse, would become police, would become a doctor, would become a lawyer, that's it. That was the mentality back then. Now, people want to become pilots, people want to become scientists, people want to become, um, a whole lot of different—architectures, engineers—people want different types of things, something that has never come from your own community. You want to be the first engineer from a particular township. That's—I think that's the drive that people have now and a lot of young people now are driven by, I would say mostly by career, what type of career field that you're in, rather than money, because I think the money part comes later when people are actually in a position whereby they can't find a job and, um, stuff like that, then they're put in a position where, “Okay, fine I'll just accept anything because I just need to be actually making an income, that's—I need to be able to make a living, and to take myself on [inaudible].” But I think, it's not because people don't like teaching itself. For the mere fact that there are bursaries in place and people have to outsmart each other to make sure that, “I get that bursary,” means that a lot of people there are actually still interested in teaching. But in the bigger picture of things, we have a huge number of young people that want to explore into academic fields that are not previously, that were not previously for Black people, to put it that way, as what, um, society had drawn back then.

I: Do you guys have any questions?

I2: Um, I was just wondering, do you, in your experience have you noticed that the schools that, you know, may not have student activism and may not be involved in equal education do they not really get the same attention that maybe schools that have students, um, advocating for? So, like, maybe the school that students advocate, they're more likely to get these resources and things that they need. Do you find that schools without that student activism are less likely to find those resources?

N: Okay, I think, um, on a broader scope of things when implementation takes place, it doesn't, it doesn't pick who actually fought for it, who actually advocated for it. Because when you're speaking about public schools, um, like I said previously, that there is a school that was a priority, top of the list, of schools that need to be given attention, which was the school that had difficulty getting waters, taking place at the military base and then you find it that, when you see the list now the school is farther down, probably like number seven or number eight, but it's coming from number two, you wonder. And, um, it's not matter of who campaigned for it, who advocated for it, you're going to get a priority implementation because you were there in the forefront of things. Um, I, I, I don't necessarily think that it's, that taking that approach, um, like, we also say we're advocating for all South Africans to have equal and quality education in public schools, to be specific. So when, implementation takes place, so as long as it's a public school, we're happy to see work happen and we're happy to see the change and transformation take place within the infrastructure itself.

I2: Do you find, um, you said there's like a list. Do you know how that is, kind of, organized or who gets, you know, to be on the list so that things are implemented in their school?

N: Um, you see, like, with the past of the work that we've actually reflected and seen on is that, government has, like, the list that they've given, for instance, like, we have responsibility of checking to see that the schools that are on the list should actually be on the list. They're doing this themselves as the Department of Education. And you find that, they've stated on the list themselves, that a particular school has got, um, a shortage of water, um, or, and, uh, under level of supply. And then when you go do school visits, when you get to that school you find that in fact this school has got water, and proper water, but doesn't have electricity. So even the information that they give is inaccurate. When you go to schools, some schools they say it doesn't have electricity, um, it doesn't have fencing. When you get there it does have electricity and maybe it really doesn't have fencing so the, the, the, even information that they have on their side is quite inaccurate. Which makes things a bit worry, like I said, even with the plans, um, on how to implement the Minimum Norms and Standards, is a bit shaken and worried on how then

do we begin implementing something that has not been rigidly or well structured into making sure that we're going to do A, B, C and D into achieving the goals that we wanted to achieve.

I2: Yeah, so are you guys also looking to, kind of, to make that information accurate so that the Department can accurately, you know, improve the schools?

N: Yes definitely, because that's one of the reasons why we actually visit in the schools themselves. So we are in essence, um, correcting the information as we go. But we're doing it for the work of Equal Education.

I1: Um, we've found, uh, in a couple of schools that we went to, specifically Z. K. Mathews, which was again a fairly rural school and, uh, definitely one of the most in need schools that we've been to. Um, so they had improper sanitation facilities, but they had, the one thing they had was a pretty up to date computer lab. Um, and we actually ran into two people, the two people who donated the computers while we were there, people from the States actually, um, and we talked to, um, (aside to I2) who did we talk to? I think teachers.

I2: Teachers.

I1: Um, teachers at the school who talked about how outside donors or foundations will come by a lot of times and, kind of, give such things and then monitor it, monitor them, the progress on their own and then take away those things as they see fit, if it doesn't seem to be...

N: Effective.

I1: Effective. Um, how often do you see these, uh, outside actors and, um, do you think they do, um, like how effective do you think they are? Would you rather see that, um, those supplies coming from the Department of Ed themselves? It seems difficult to monitor and it seems to add to the, kind of...

N: Okay, I think, well, there's, every now and then you see these donors from abroad, uh, well for the persons who's receiving the assistance, for like the students and the teachers themselves, it's something that you would actually appreciate. Because when you need help at times you don't care where it comes from, I just need to be out of the barrier that I'm in, I want to break the chains and be liberated from the struggle that I'm in. So sometimes people don't really, it doesn't really matter, as long as I just get out from the system that I am in. But in, in all reality as an activist in a democratic country, you want to see your government that you put into power, actually doing the work. There's a lot of budgets. There's billions in place. Even the Minister of Finance had declared in his, uh, budget speech that he actually allocated for the implementation of Norms and Standards for the Department of Education. You want to see that. You are voters.

You are taxpayers. We are citizens of the country. All those three things in essence speak louder and speak in volumes for you to be able to actually say, you need to put and hold the government accountable and to implement and give to the citizens what is rightfully theirs. Education is a constitutional right. We've got a right to education. And now, what type of education are you giving to the people? And are you giving a, a, a South African child from a public school education if you are saying to them you are going to go study in a mud [inaudible], with no chairs, with no black board, with no textbook and with a teacher that is coming from a way distance to come to work and at times you're gonna arrive late or because of, um, weather conditions you might not even make it to the school. Are you then responsible enough to say you are doing your job quite well, just the minimal of what needs to be done? I don't think so. So in essence I think, um, the work that they do, those donors, is, is, is, is great and one can not appreciate help but preferably it would have been a great thing to see out own, um, government doing what is right, implementing to its people.

I1: We've been, kind of, um, the past couple of days been looking on the Department of Education website and so this information might be up there and I might not have gotten there yet. Does the Department release, um, budgetary information? Um, can you see how much is being spent on education? Do they, kind of lay out every year, um, how much is being allotted to certain things or is that- when I talked to teachers, um, they seemed to know maybe what the budget is for textbooks or something, that they know they get this hard and fast number but there doesn't seem to be a lot of, um, even within a school to school budget to take about how the budgets being, how the budget's spent and where money is going. Um, is there any kind of transparency in that budgetary process?

N: So I think that the teachers themselves don't know, they don't have a school-based budget that is given to them.

I1: The school's budgets some teachers seemed to know more about them than others. Some seemed to have more input on it than others. Um, the school we went to today, seemed to have a great student/ principal relationship, no, er, teacher/ administration relationship. Uh, yeah, I know some schools they didn't, they just receive numbers they know from the department and that's it.

N: Tali (Lumkile), (40:20) do you want to come answer this question?

(laughter)

N: Come.

Lumkile: Whatever you say, it's right.

(laughter)

N: No. Cause, but I think um. I'm not entirely sure.

I1: That's fine.

N: That's why I asked him to come. Yeah, um, I'm not entirely sure but there's, um, and international budget [talking in Xhosa to her colleague].

Lumkile: International Budget Partnership.

N: Yeah, which is an organization, which is going to train us on how to be able to monitor budgets. So, um, in essence I think when we have access, (aside to Lumkile) do we have access to the department of Education's budget and how they break down money in?

Lumkile: Uhhh, not, I don't think we have that access.

N: We don't have access.

Lumkile: We have a right to access.

N: We have a right.

Lumkile: But we don't have it.

N: But through permission of Access of Information Act I'm sure we will be able to actually to access that. Like you say it's not on their website. That is something that is lacking from their side as the Department of Education. So I wasn't, I never actually, um, gone into that venture of actually seeing how much, what they budget precisely, but I know I think they've got, like, I think 3.7 billion that they have to actually spend and there's money that goes towards Minimum Norms and Standards, it's included. I can remember the Minister mentioning that. So, the money's there. I don't know, we need to change that administration.

I1: Its very varied. [To other interviewers]: Do you guys have any other questions?

I3: [Inaudible]. Do you, uh, uh, you work with such organizations as SASCO and COSAS [inaudible]?

N: I'm a former SASCO member ,by the way. Uh, well, SASCO is basically in Universities.

I3: Yeah, I know.

N: So, we, if we had in the Eastern Cape, uh, uh, organization, Equal Education in the Universities, I'm sure we'd have that relationship with them. But in Universities, it's like I said, we've got Students for Law and Social Justice Organization, which we are working with closely. Uh, because they are, are, are friends of Equal Education and the social justice movement. At COSAS we are, we've had a building relationship meeting with them at the beginning of the year, I think it was in February, with the provincial structure of COSAS, which was very, um, warm receiving to us. They we're very happy to work with us. They we're very happy to that there was an organization that has, um, a, a, a similar, um, similar advocacy to them. Uh, so as a result we even ended up having one of the COSAS leadership being a facilitator in Equal Education. So, we've actually been able to build relationships with them to that extent. But then at times when we have got marches and campaigns and, um, let them know this is the work that we are doing now and yeah, those types of things. So, we've had conversations with them.

[Laughter]

I3: Yeah... this issue of shortage of teachers is great, you know. [Inaudible]. We've been to Funiwe, in the Longport area, which had—ah, there's three schools close down. (43:30)

N: Another thing that causes that is that there's that rationalizing of schools that happening. Previously we had, junior primary, senior primary, junior secondary, senior secondary schools. Now our government says, "No. We need to have two types of schools: primary school and a high school". Now these schools need to merge. The junior primary needs to merge with the senior primary. Now some schools are closing because of that, that merger. And then a junior secondary and the senior secondary need to merge and need to be, to form a high school because there needs to be a uniform education system, where there's a primary school and a high school, period. So it's those types of things that have actually informed that because the number of children even in the schools were dropping. And, um, I think, particularly the townships, there's a huge problem where you find that there are particular schools that, um, school students, school management team is working very well. The school is, is, is clean, it's always, it's fenced, it's looking very nice. And then you find other schools where, uh, it's tough. So, you know, the reality of it is that students now leave the school in from of their house and take a taxi to the school that's twenty or thirty minutes away. Because of what it looks like and because of what the teachers there are, how they are. So a number of schools are closing because students are slowly but surly not going to those schools and... yeah. I know of a school in my own community that closed down because there was no students. And then you ask yourself, you wonder, "But where, where, where are these people? Where are people going to school?". You know, and people cry of overcrowded schools, but, you know, that's then why we actually

strongly advocate for the Minimum Norms and Standards. To say, if they're saying free education, free education for all. If your saying no school gov- no school fee, um, no school, no fee schools, where you don't pay fees and the others schools have got, like, a hundred and fifty or a hundred rand per year, type thing. And then you find that, even those things are a barrier or segregation to access to education. So once we have a uniform or equal and quality education for everyone, then there's no need for you to take a taxi to the next township to go to school. There's a school in front of your house. Which has got exactly the same quality and the same infrastructure as the school you would have wanted to go to, um, in the case of you're looking for a better school. So we wouldn't want to have no better school from the other. Probably choose the school based on subjects. If you're gonna go to technical school or a, um, commerce school, uh, or agricultural school, then you can maybe choose in those cases. As compared to actually choosing on the fact, "No, I can't go there because there are no computers. I want to go learn how to use the computer. Then, I'm gonna go to the next township".

I1: Yeah that was the, I think, the situation that the principal was describing today was that, um, the schools that were shut down were, it's just saw a lot of students, like, an excess of students just going to different and better schools and I can't help but wonder, and I don't know that you know this, but the, for the students who can't afford to then travel to the next township to go to these schools, if the school in their community is shut down. How many of them, just, can't go to school after that? Um, I don't know any, I, we, we really haven't looked into this about attendance and, um, maybe drop out percentages but, um, it seems like that would be a huge issues if there's always going to be those few students who can't travel somewhere.

N: I definitely, that does happen. It's quite a reality. Um, that there's a number of students that drop out and rather look for employment or stay at home and become mischievous. Um, so, a, in, in, in all reality it's something that's there and, uh, some, there's also like scholar transport system, which even that is a nightmare. Some, now, because you find it that in rural areas, um, the students as young as grade threes and grade twos need to walk like kilometers to go to school. They, not because it's a better school. Now in that situation it's because it's the only school that's closer. If you're gonna be walking like three or four, five kilometers to the only school you can get, that, that, that serious. So with that and, um, the townships, there's a huge number of dropouts and people, um, end up, um, whether in the taxi industry or working, um, as a cheap labor, uh, uh, jobs, working in contractors, for there's activity processes, there's the roads being built, there will be uh, um, uh, uh getting jobs from such things and other stuff like that.

I1: Yeah, I think transport has been one of the main issues through all schools, I know at Z.K. Mathews, which again, rural school, um, within the first two minutes of my interview with those teachers they were saying all their students walk five, minimum five kilometers to school everyday and they have problems with gang rapes and stuff like that. Um, you mentioned scholar

transport, is there any, do schools, I think today the school, that school provided transport but is that per school basis? Um, How accessible is transportation, in general?

N: Um, it's not, well in rural areas it's not, um, it's not accessible, it's not easily accessible to begin with. And secondly, but with the schools that we are working with they have, um, what you call, scholar, like, private scholar transport, like a contract. Someone who's gonna, um, fetch them from school to the village and back. So there's that system, system in place. But then you're gonna find it that some people can not even afford to pay for that. But, um, in townships, um, it's not a problem, transport is generally not a problem. People can easily walk from the one unit to the other or even take a taxi, which is much, much cheaper. But in rural areas that's where you find a huge, huge, huge problem. In others places it's not even an affordability issue, it's an availability. There is no transport. No one is, um, being able to take people from that one village to another. And, um, scholars are forced to walk. They've got absolutely no option but to walk. And when you, I actually remember the times I take them home from our sessions, I like, I get heartbroken to actually know that they walk, like, that far even with the conditions. If it's too hot, it's not good, if it's raining, and I asked them, like, like, they'll go to school even if it raining. And you don't have a choice. You want to be educated and the situation is what it is and you just have to push and go through it. And some principals will actually tell you that, "We studied in these conditions and we are principals today and we are these people that we are. We went to college and they just need to be able to push". Now that we're in a democratic South Africa, we're gonna push but at the same time we're gonna advocate for what is rightfully, um, need to be actually, um, implemented and delivered to South Africans.

II: Um, I was gonna ask that, actually, about your sessions. Are your sessions after school hours? I know we found a lot of learners want to do things after school but can't because, like you said, they have to walk a lot. So, um, how do you, kind of navigate learners who want to be a part of your organization but who can't stay for sessions and things like that?

N: Uh, we, our sessions are after school. And, um, we assist them and support them with transport. So at times we, um, we transport them ourselves or we would call a, um, hire a taxi to take them home or if it's viable we give them transport money to actually, um, catch a taxi home. If it's, depending on the situation where they stay. Other than that we always provide them with transport. So, it, its, its, um, its not a problem that much. But, um, the only problem it the time they get home sometimes. For instance, um, coming from, let's say we have a session in King and you stay in Mount Cook. You have to, like, drive that distance back and, um, it's the time that it takes to get there as well. We have a session for two hours. We finish at five. What time are you gonna get home? You understand? So sometimes you need to consider such things because people are like living far about. Some stay, like, at Ginsberg, which is like fifteen, ten minutes, five minutes drive or something. Then it's like a twenty minute, I walk twenty minutes from there, thirty minutes, something. Um, so it's those situations and one of the persons is

coming thirty-minute drive from King so because we are in a rural province there are those, um, differences and those barriers. Because if you go to Cape Town, Cape Town is like city province, so you don't have these, um, challenges like this.

I1: I know this office is relatively new as compared to the Western Cape. Um, how have you found community involvement? Um, I know you have several schools that you work with. How's expansion going? Those kinds of things.

N: Okay, um, well, its, from some schools its easy, from some's its not. 'Cause I was talking about this earlier with my colleagues, that we need like, its part of my, the mobilization team. Expansion, um, it varies from principal to principal and school to school. For starters, some principals are welcoming, some principals are like, "Ooo, yeah, I know Equal education. I know of your organization. I've heard of it". Some principals even call us and say. "Can you please come to our school? Can you please come talk to my staff and talk to my pupils? 'Cause I think I'd like you guys to be part of my school". Some principals they look at you funny and think, "No. You're bringing politics to my school. No." um "You bring activism. Now my kids are going to toyi-toyi. No". They hve that mentality because once students learn about activism people think, "Mmmn. No. No way". So, um, it varies from person to person and the experiences they have, um, in their own communities and their own backgrounds. But in situations, where by, you feel that the principal is a barrier, they're like no, no, they're not giving you access to the pupils, we actually, um, approach the pupils themselves, um, individually. And, um, we've got, for instance, from Bisho High we have, uh, approached them in that manner. We met them in the afters, uh, and that type of a things because, um, the principals are not quite comfortable with, uh, maybe the matter that we do things, the activism part of things. Because some people think, for instance with other organizations when you mention their names they're commonly know for chaotic protests and things like that. And they know that school pupils can be really out of hand and they go, uh, bazar. So some principals don't want that in their schools at all. But when we find that barrier we've got alternative, uh, alternative routes, we will, because the peoples all have got a right to be members of the organization individually. So it does not necessarily mean that because your principal is not cool with us we can't, um, mobilize you or to come recruit you. When we recruit them, we have members in the school. And then, um, we'll also put it upon them, the owners that, go speak to this principal, go in class when you have, like, those LO session and history, mention, um, such campaigns because they're relevant. In that way your teachers are able to be comfortable and to understand equal education and then also can be able to buy into the idea. But other than that, it, it, it varies from, yeah...

I1: Are there any, um-[whispers to other interviewers]. Are there any more questions that you guys have? Ikram? [Back to narrator] Well, um, thank you so much for talking to us. I wanted to offer it up if you have questions for us about our system or anything else that we've been working on feel free to ask us.

N: Okay.

I1: Um, but, I think we've gotten a fair amount of information. I was handed this mid-interview, so this looks good. [Laughter].

N: That's it by the way. That's the Permission to Access of Information Act.

I1: Thanks. That looks very helpful. Um, so yeah, otherwise I think, mn, we've gotten great information. Thank you so much for taking that time to talk to us today.

N: Thanks guys for, actually, want to know more about our Equal Education and the work that we do. Um, indeed I'm, um, actually inspired to, um, actually, know that people from quite far are interested to, actually, know what we are doing and to relate to our own struggles and relate to the systems and trends that we are facing in our own educational system. Hopefully the information that I have given you will be of great help and, um, I wish you good luck and best on your project and your assignment and your stay and, um, uh, in South Africa. And, yeah, I hope to see you guys in America soon.

[Laughter]

I1: Please do.

N: I want to ask about your guys, like, what type of education system do you guys have?

I1: Um, so we have, our public education system, um, operates similarly. We have, um, primary, elementary schools usually kindergarten—um, reception—through fifth grade. Then we'll have middle schools, which are through are six, years six through eight. Some maybe two years depending on the school. Then high schools, which are ninth through twelfth. We're, our, we're funded a little bit differently. So, um, we don't get direct funds from our national government or it's usually by state. And then within that, um, a lot of, a majority of public schools, um, money comes from, um, local property taxes. Um, which is actually where we're seeing a lot of problems and inequality. Um, so, if you live in a wealthier area you pay higher property taxes therefore you have more money, right?, um, funding the school and then the inverse of that. Um, so, yeah that's our basic system. Uh, and that's one of the reasons that we've found a lot of these parallels with the South African education system between school fees and, it's the areas, the schools that need the most help are often the ones who get short changed, quite literally, um, the most financially and then, um, help-wise so, we have this, kind of, this unofficial, um, unofficial segregation because a lot of times, unfortunately, the lower socioeconomic statuses areas are, uh, majority black, Hispanic areas. So, you have, where as the wealthy people tend to be white. So

you have, kind of this, even though were several more decades out from the end of segregation in our schools than you guys are, we kind of are starting to have it happen again unofficially, um, because of the way that people live and, um, the way, uh, our wealth is not equally spread. Um, so, so yeah, it's basically why we came to South Africa specifically because we have very similar histories and similar challenges in making sure we live up to the promises we made during the Civil Rights Movement. Um, it's a difficult, it's a difficult situation. I didn't go through the public school system. I actually went to private school. I was fortunate to kind of bypass that but private schools have their own issues too, to some degree. But yeah, I don't know if Colleen wants to add anything or Ikram for that matter. You went to New York City public education, which is front lines of some of our problems.

N: How was that?

Ikram: It was challenging. It was one of the hardest thing I had to do but, uh, it was one of the best things that ever happened to me so, I'm really grateful for it. It inspired me to be a high school history teacher so, uh, now soon as I'm done with, uh, college I'm going to go right to my school and start teaching. So...

N: Wow that's great. Very interesting. Professor?

Professor: I don't have anything else to add.

I1: Other questions...?

N: Like, for instance, now that you guys have, um, to what extend are you going to be able to use the information that you've gathered with your, um, visit to South Africa. Like, what is it that you're going to be able to do with it? And then what impact will it have in your own communities? Because I'm sure that you are taking this with, home.

I2: Well a lot of us are studying either some form of education, like Ikram said he wanted to be a teacher, um, you said you wanted to go into educational policy, um, so I think we're all going to, we're gonna compile the information, um, so that it can be used in those vicinities, in those ways that we continue on studying. We're all going to continue on education in some way so we'll take this information and apply it to whichever venue we go to.

I1: And, yeah, I think one of the things too that we're, well, what I'm most excited about I guess, well first of all just being here and being here with families from this community it's been a huge learning experience. Nut, um, because we're making relationships here we're able to continue the information exchange when we get home. So, we're getting everyone's contact information and making sure that we can kind of keep the lines of communication open. Um, and so Colleen

and I since we're one team we're going to be working for the next couple of months on our main focus is going to be this project and we're compiling—

Professor: Six weeks

I1: —information you guys have given us. Yes six weeks. Thanks for that. Um, yeah... gosh.

N: Sorry about that.

I1: Yeah, the clock is ticking. We start, we start classes as soon as we get back from South Africa, we start classes. So, yeah, yeah.

N: Is this part of your vac or is this part of your class time?

I1: No this is part of our, the last week of summer vacation.

Interviewer one goes on to talk about returning to classes and what the project is.