

TRANSCRIPT

"AFRICAN URBANISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS"

A Conversation With Gavin Silber

Moderator: Akwe Amosu

ANNOUNCER:

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AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you so much for being here in such numbers. That's completely wonderful and-- especially because this is just such an important issue and so underattended to-- in settings where we all work within silos, in particular topical silos and by definition, this is an issue which requires you to think about many things at once. And so I think this is going to be valuable-- as a lesson in doing that, as much as it is in-- in the substance itself.

So we're told that Africa's urban population is going to more than double, in fact, increase by-- one and a half times in the course of the next 35, 40 years. It's a pretty shocking-- su-- suggestion. And having heard the drum beat of Africa rising-- going round and round these last few years, you might be forgiven for assuming that this was happening because of expanding economic opportunity and increased jobs and improving services.

But sadly-- sadly, that really doesn't seem to be the case. And as in other parts of the world and perhaps-- perhaps even more than in other parts of the world, you're seeing extremely unequal growth. You're seeing grow-- growth, but it's often in enclaves and the proceeds are not being equitably shared.

You've got a tiny number of rich getting very much richer. You've got a small-- and somewhat expanding middle class being able to reap some benefit, but the vast, vast

majority of the population-- in Africa is getting poorer and facing not just economic insecurity, but also an in-- increased uncertainty-- in their lives. And-- and-- and that not least because of the direct and indirect consequences of climate change.

I think-- it would be true to characterize the poor in cities as-- suffering a serious lack of access to health and education services, grim levels of crime, discrimination-- on many bases, but-- as we've seen in so many settings-- often on the basis of identity. And-- these things are all present in the society in general, but they're very much aggravated in settings when there's overcrowding and poor governance and the lack of-- of a population's capacity to be able to en-- enforce improvements-- via political channels.

And indeed, to improve their circumstances through-- getting jobs and-- and increasing their own personal-- incomes. So how do-- thoughtful, passionate advocates of social justice respond to this situation which has got so many elements reinforcing each other?

That's what I'm hoping we're going to learn, somewhat, from Gavin Silber today. Gavin was the director of the social justice coalition in South Africa from 2010 until last year, when I first met him on a walking tour around part of Kayalicha (PH), an informal settlement outside Cape Town, where I think I'm right in saying you were known as Mr. Toilet.

GAVIN SILBER:

(LAUGHTER) That's true. I'm trying to keep that kinda-- secret--

AKWE AMOSU:

(LAUGHTER) Well, I'm happy to-- I'm happy to let you all know about--

GAVIN SILBER:

It was Mr. T, if you prefer brevity.

AKWE AMOSU:

It was not, of course, a term of abuse, but a term of admiration-- in recognition of the work that he and colleagues and the SJC were doing to try and bring decent sanitation to that community. And the SJC has been engaged on many things, not just sanitation, and I hope that Gavin's gonna give us some sense of what they were doing there, partly in order to give a sense of how (COUGHING) one can come at the diverse problems of rapid and-- and unserved urbanization-- from a justice and rights perspective.

I-- I think I'm right in saying also that there are a number of other groups in South Africa like equal education-- right-- right to know and others, coalitions and organizations that are trying to combat-- many of South Africa's problems from the same perspective.

And I-- I expect it would be valuable for people to hear how you think that that connects-- what you've been doing in the-- in the SJC with what these other groups are doing. So why is Gavin here? It's our good fortune that he's doing a masters in urban planning at NYU. So we get this opportunity to hear from him. And I'm going to let him-- take over, talk for about 20 minutes and that will give us still-- hopefully another-- half an hour, 40 minutes to have some questions and conversation. So thank you, Gavin.

GAVIN SILBER:

(UNINTEL) Thanks, Akwe. And thanks-- John, also, for setting this up. It's good to be back. I should probably say at the outside that-- if you're expecting answers-- you're probably not gonna get many, because we're still trying to figure a lot of this stuff out ourselves-- and I'm very interested to hear what all of you have to say-- at the end of the presentation.

I'm gonna start by talking a bit about what we know about-- population trends in Africa. And the reality is, we don't really know that much. The quality of the data isn't fantastic-- but we'll look at-- at some of that and then we'll move onto the experience we've had in South Africa, primarily through the lens of our work on sanitation, but hopefully we'll have some time to touch on some of our other campaigns.

So yeah, I'd like to be as brief as possible. You know, there was-- there was a time in my life not so long ago where I talked about toilets in my sleep. And-- I hope I don't use-- I haven't done that in a while, (LAUGH) so if I ramble on, Akwe, please-- please stop me.

But yeah, let's-- let's start by looking at what's happening in the developing world at the moment. As Akwe mentioned, since 1950, we've seen an enormous expansion-- in the urban population-- and that is really intensifying, going forward over the next-- 25 years or so. We're seeing a reduction in-- the urban rural population. We're seeing developed cities-- growing at a fairly constant pace and in some cases, decreasing. So if we look at Africa specifically-- we know that Africa's population is likely to double by 2040-- depending on what-- model you're-- you're using. It is likely the fastest rate of growth we're seeing-- on any continent in the moment.

And most of that is happening in urban areas. So we can see up until-- fairly recently, there's been a steady increase in both rural and urban-- populations in Africa. But that's changing quite rapidly, so by 2030, we're likely to see the urban population overtake the rural population, which is eventually gonna be decreasing, whilst the urban population is increasing quite steadily.

When we think of African cities, we often think of the so-called mega-cities. You know, that-- that illustrates some of the bigger cities in Africa at the moment. And we know that cities like Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Lwanda are currently going through one of the fastest rates of growth.

The biggest cities remain cities like Lagos, which is likely to-- to-- you know, be the biggest cities, overtaking Cairo quite quickly. But what we don't think about very often is mid-size cities and this is something we don't know very much about, particularly in Africa, but what we've seen globally-- particularly in Asia is a shift-- of production away from mega-cities to medium-size cities. And by me-- medium-size cities, we mean cities with a population about 150,000, but below 10 million.

And that graph-- illustrates that over the next 15 years-- whereas developed-- cities are currently producing about 70% of global GDP, that's said to decrease to about 26%-- with small, medium-- and mid-wide cities-- covering that ground. So just to look at some of the development indicators. Africa continues to maintain some of the most human develop-- human development-- scores in the world. That is HDI, which basically shows life expectancy, education and income, which, as you can see, is still quite-- depressing across central Africa.

As Akwe pointed out, we also know that African cities are increasingly unequal. So that graph shows the various regions across the world. We can see that Africa on the far left apparently has a geneco (PH) efficient of about .6. The global average, I believe, is about .4. Latin America, which is-- the next most unequal is at about-- .52. On the right-- we can see how-- urban planners, you know, this is something we've been taught actually in our urban economics class.

The traditional conception of what a city is based on the idea that you have a central business district-- surrounded by a manufacturing industry. And then as you go further away or immediately outside the manufacturing district, you have poor working class communities, middle-class communities and then the affluent living further away, who commute into the city center.

What we're seeing in Africa is quite different. So this is-- a typical African city where we see that firstly, there's a very haphazard-- sense of planning going on in-- in the inner city. So you generally have a city center, which is made up of the old colonial-- town, surrounded by a less formal-- more haphazard-- central business district and then even less organized-- informal economy market.

And then what we see is more affluent people living closer to the city center and the poor-- living very far away from the city center. And we'll come back to that in a couple moments. That image below is one of my favorite pieces of graffiti in Kailicha. The people shall share in the country's wealth was one of the founding statement's in South Africa's freedom charter-- but clearly that hasn't become a reality 20 years later. One of the most worrying things is that 60% or more of South African urban or African urban residents are currently living in slums. I hate the word slum, by the way, but seemingly, that-- that seems to be the way it's referred to it, kind of suggests that these are-- you know, universally horrible, unpleasant places to live where they

are home for many people.

So we like to refer to them more as informal settlements. But we're seeing, especially around central Africa, growing informal settlement populations. In Nigeria, it stands, I think, at about-- 73% at the moment and very similar trends in-- in neighboring countries.

As a direct-- response to this, I would argue-- we-- we're seeing Africans becoming increasing dissatisfied with their government's response-- to improving-- the lives of the poor. So this is a survey conducted by Afrobarometer in-- in-- at the University of Cape Town, which is probably one of the most reliable community surveys across Africa that's been run, assessing perceptions on various issues.

And we know just anecdotally-- you know, that we've seen a lot of-- uprisings across Africa. If we look what's happening in north Africa over the last few years, cities are interesting because they provide-- we-- we see people organizing better in cities than-- than they're doing rural areas, because of those existing networks, like we did in Egypt and Tunisia. As a response to people kind of protesting and-- and voicing their anger. We're seeing-- the states across Af-- or states across Africa clamping down heavily on protest, saying South Africa, we've seen an enormous increase in-- fatalities-- amongst protesters, police who have shut down protesters.

And that's a trend that is apparent across Africa. The graph at the bottom just shows-- a very significant spike over the past two, three years in protest action in various forms across the continent. So again, because government is becoming more and more desperate and there is significant pressure on government to deliver-- they are increasingly resorting to the private sector.

And this is something we grapple with in-- in South Africa, where basic services are outsourced. It's reached the point where, you know, the argument is, well, let's get the private sector to clean trash and let's get the-- the private sector to build toilets and build homes. And it's-- it's-- what you see up on the wall at the moment is this idea that the private sector can come in and rebuild entire cities. And we're seeing it in-- Nigeria. In the top left, you see Echo (PH). I think it's called Ec-- I can't-- I can't remember the name, but that's in-- in Lagos.

On the top right-- you see a development currently underway in Nairobi. On the bottom left, in Lwanda-- a Chinese company just built a city for about a million people. There are about 1000 people living there at the moment, but that-- that's another story. And even in Cape Town, South Africa, there's a plan to build a new city of about 600,000 people-- out on the urban periphery.

And the problem with this sort of approach is that it either results in building ghettos for-- the poor, where the poor are basically sent out-- away from affluent communities and that's certainly the case in-- with Cape Town's plan and Lwanda's plan. And then in other cases-- you see forts for the wealthy being constructed in otherwise chaotic cities.

So in Lagos-- and Kenya, I mean, you just need to look at the picture to see that it's very-- very much an exclusive environment. So the private sector's becoming

increasingly influential in Africa. There's a lot of money to be made-- and governments are becoming more and more-- likely to transfer responsibility to the private sector.

Energy-- so we know at the moment that 70% of Africans don't have adequate access to electricity. Again, the private sector are accelerating over this, because it's an opportunity to make billions and billions of dollars-- providing energy. It's very difficult to forecast energy demand over a long period of time, 'cause you don't really know what technologies are emerging, but basically, if you look at Nigeria, for instance, the end of that orange line is what they're expecting to need by 2030.

At the moment, they're consuming that little blue-- 20th. So we can-- we're seeing a lot of investment on the continent in energy. A lot of that investment is going into dirty energy. South Africa, on the bottom left there, just built-- I believe it's the world biggest coal-- energy plant, called Midoopi (PH).

And so yeah, so that has an impact on the climate. We're seeing enormous-- corruption and kickbacks coming from these deals. Before I go onto the Cape Town example, this just gives-- a sense of the extent of the risks presented by climate change. So on the left, we see-- the threat-- coming from-- the rising sea level. The cities marked in red are seriously at risk. I think the ones marked in yellow are at moderate risk.

And essentially, most of these big cities are along a coastline. So the impact both on people, particularly slum communities and the economy-- could be disastrous. And then of course, you have-- a woman continent. You have issues emerging-- very quickly around crop yields. So conservative estimates show that crop yields are actually in serial in particular is due to decrease dra-- dramatically over the next few years.

And the impact that has on droughts and famine-- is very worrying. Another thing that people aren't really talking about when they speak about climate change is the impact this is gonna have on malaria. So what we're seeing is also forecast that the malaria belt in southern Africa is due to expand very significantly-- which could actually set us back in the fight against malaria.

I guess after that-- that thoroughly depressing (LAUGHTER)-- little primer-- I'm gonna chat a bit about Cape Town, South Africa-- both because it's where I come from and where I've worked, but also because I think it's a great case study-- in urban inequality. And I would argue that it's probably the one city, well, the city in South Africa where the apartheid government were most successful in keeping peoples-- people separate.

And that division-- persists today. So the Cape Town on the top is the one that many of you are probably familiar with. The *New York Times*, I think, currently ranked Cape Town as the number one tourism destination of 2014. And that's-- that's the Cape Town most people know. But 30 miles away-- I still struggle with miles, it's (LAUGHTER)-- 40 kilometers or so away-- you have about a third of the population or a million people living in substandard housing. So that's just another example of--

you know, the kind of more affluent parts of Cape Town. That's pleasantly referred to as Africa's Amolfi Coast (PH). And there you have a view from one of our-- meeting places in Kailicha (PH).

So just to look very quickly at spatial planning in Cape Town. You'll see that this is very-- it appears very similar to that model I-- I showed earlier. The city center is in the middle-- and you can see it as very low-- density. Very few people live there. It's surrounded by affluent communities.

And then way on the outskirts of the city where you see those red spikes are the most densely populated parts of the city, all of which are informal settlements. They have to travel into the city center for work most days or to find work. It's an expensive trip. There's no formal public transport yet. It's all-- provided by informal companies. A trip to and from an informal settlement to the city center costs about \$4, which is a lot of money if you don't have an income.

So just to look at some urban interventions-- to move onto the social justice coalition. I gue-- I guess like many organizations, the SJC was born from crisis. So at the time I was working at the treatment action campaign-- a public health advocacy group in Cape Town and in 2008, we saw what I believe was one of the most significant-- reckonings in post-Apartheid South Africa where we had over the space of about four weeks-- 200,000 people displaced from their home, 2000-- 200,000 migrants, all from poor, working-class communities.

And this continued with very little intervention from the state. And what happened was a coalition of organizations and individuals came together to try to provide some form of support. And the initial support was material. We provided food. We provided shelter. We then tried to campaign for the state to take on a bigger role, so we had to actually take the government to court to force them to adopt norms and standards for refugee camps, which was something that was completely new to South-- post-Apartheid South Africa. We had one UNHCR officer in South Africa who are-- I won't go into detail about. But they-- they-- they had no idea what-- what to do. And this-- as I said, this continued for about four weeks. Once the crisis had subsided-- there was a sense that we needed to find some-- some way to sustain this very unique coalition of-- organizations that have come together, in a way that tried to address some of the root causes of the xenophobic violence.

And we realized that this went well beyond xenophobia. You know, a lot of our work has continued to focus on migrant rights, but what it spoke to fundamentally was-- a culture of violence in South Africa-- a culture of impunity.

So we know that in many informal settlements-- crime is at its highest. And again, the statistics for this are quite patchy, but one of the best indicators of violent crime-- we believe is homicide, because very few homicides go unreported. And it's a lot harder for police just to throw out-- homicide dockets. I mean, it happens all the time, but it's a lot-- it's a lot harder.

So again, if you look at that map on the left-- again, it kind of echoes the previous-- spatial-- illustrations we've been looking at by-- you know, by a long shot, the highest

homicide rates are happening in the poor working class informal settlements on the periphery of the city. On the right-- shows sexual assault and-- rape reports. I mean, again, heavily underreported. In South Africa, it's estimated that it's one in nine rapes that are reported, although we also think that it's probably far-- far more than that.

So you can see very clearly where crime is located and yes, crime is about police-- crime is about an efficient police force and you know, we've spent a lot of time working on improving-- policing in South Africa. But South Africa is also, I think, the second-most policed society on the planet after Mexico and despite increasing the amount of officers we have in the street-- crime has continued-- to worsen.

So what you wanted to do and again, this all came about as a result of being a membership-based organization. So because we came from organizations like the Treatment Action Campaign-- like the Trade Union Movement-- you know, we had-- the majority of our members lived in-- lived in informal settlements, lived in poor, working-class communities, which I think gave us an advantage in identifying a campaign, 'cause I think very often, you know, we sit in ivory towers and speculate about what people care about-- which often doesn't actually capture the-- the real issues.

So immediately after the xenophobic violence, we sat down and we had scores of meetings and workshops. And we actually went into informal settlements to see how we could work-- work to-- not just fix policing, but fix the urban environment itself, which was inherently unsafe and it was completely overwhelming, as you-- you know, that was kind of what we-- what we walked into.

And there are a million different things that need to be addressed yet. You know, the fact that there are no roads, for instance, means that emergency personnel can't get into these communities when people are in trouble. The fact that there's no lighting means that people feel and are-- very unsafe, walking around late at night. And you know, the list goes on, but something we decided to focus on and something that kept coming up more and more as we spoke with people-- was the issue of sanitation. So people in informal settlements in South Africa either have no access to a toilet in some cases or have to walk miles and miles to get to a toilet.

I think at the moment, there are about a half a million people in Cape Town, a city of three million people, without basic sanitation facilities and about ten million people across the country-- depending on who you-- who you speak to. So again, so we-- we decided to focus in on sanitation and you know, we thought we'd kind of sorted that all out and we all had a campaign, but we then realized how complicated sanitation was, which then took more meetings.

And (LAUGH) you know, a lot of what we did was-- you know, trying to engage community members on what the challenges were and using that information and then also partnering with academic-- with academic community and conducting our own audits of the area. I mean, again, you must remember that none of us were plumbers or engineers or urban planners. We all came from a public health or a

union background, so you know, I never imagined I'd be working with-- with-- with toilets.

It's been-- it's been great, but at the time, it was-- it was a bit overwhelming. So we conducted meetings. We conducted regular audits of different communities. And importantly, we kept communicating this data back to our members and to our partner organizations. So on our right, you can see that was our first toilet paper, which is our kind of quarterly newspaper-- which, you know, we distributed about 25,000 of those ever quarter around Kailicha, to, again, just to inform people about, you know, what we've been doing, what we've heard the concerns are and how people can get-- can get involved.

Okay, these are just some pictures from the community meetings and audits giving a sense of how bad the situation was. Again, sanitation isn't limited to toilets. It's also, you know, refuse collection is a very serious issue. You think the rats in New York are bad, but nothing on Kailicha rats. Water is-- is a massive issue.

You know, we-- we took water samples, for example, from many of these stand pipes. And I'm-- again, I'm not-- a chemist or what is someone who studies water? But-- E. coli, the-- the kind of bacteria that causes diarrhea, I think anything more than 100 units per something is very dangerous to drink. Anything more than 1000 is dangerous to touch. The reading we took from the stand pipe in the top left is about 10 million. Diarrhea in Kailicha is the primary cause of death for children under the age of five. And again that's very much bound to-- other issues around disease burden, HIV in particular-- but these are very preventable illnesses-- that just aren't being addressed.

So just-- just very basically, so once we had enough research and data, we said, well, okay, let's develop a program. And the program was very simple. And I think a simple program is important in order to build support and to make progress. And that program simply was, you know, telling government, "Fix what isn't working."

You know, as you can-- as you saw earlier, a lot of these toilets are just completely dysfunctional, but are there. Introduce maintenance programs. Intro-- introduce monitoring programs, but then parallel to that, start developing a broader plan for the development of or the introduction of new sanitation services where they're necessary.

Once we had that program, we started trying to put this issue on the public agenda. And people don't like talking about toilets, because it is a very private function, you know, people don't-- you don't go to work in the morning and say, "Hey, you know, this happened," well, most people don't go to work and talk about what they did in the toilet the night before.

But the first-- the first event we had was on Human Rights Day in South Africa. To get about 800 people to cue, to line up behind a public toilet in that affluent-- on the Amalfi (PH) coast, if you will-- where the public toilets are beautiful. They're maintained by dedicated janitors. They have lights, stocked with provisions-- just to draw attention to the fact that millions of people in South Africa continue to wait for

this basic service.

And we had several other pro-- protests following that. A year later, we had a bigger march of about 3000 people, where we lined up outside the mayor's office, asking to use her toilet, (LAUGHTER) led by the archbishop at the time, who was at the front of the line-- requesting to use the men's toilet.

So we also worked to try to cross traditional divides. So even though toilets and sanitation-- is an issue affecting poor, working-class communities, we understand the value in bringing people from middle class communities on board as well. So we had a series of lectures. We have an annual lecture series where we try to speak about issues related to the campaigns on which we're working.

This one was, I think, two years ago, where we focused on how do we create a more united Cape Town? And there have been subsequent lecture series since then. The one on the right wasn't-- was after my time, so it's-- it's a bit ugly. Never underestimate the importance of a well-designed poster. People on the left seem to think that design is not important, but it needs to look-- it needs to look pretty.

Another critical aspect of our relative success, I think, has been building partnerships. So there in the front, you can see the archbishop-- walking through Kailicha. The religious community has been incredibly useful, just because they are respected-- both by the community and government. It's very difficult for the mayor to come in and say, "Archbishop, you're lying." And it's very difficult for a community member to do something similar, so whenever we've had meetings that are a bit tense, we tend to bring in a religious figure to try to-- find some middle ground.

This week, we had a national sanitation summit back in Cape Town where we brought together activists from across the country working on issues affecting slum dwellers, or to try to talk about we can better-- coordinate our work. We've also worked quite closely with government-- which has been very-- very tricky at times.

You know, at-- at first they refused to engage with us, when we-- when we had that toilet queue in the beginning-- they called us liars. They called us-- yeah, (UNINTEL) can't even remember the list of things they called us, but it was-- after a while, we managed to convince them to kind of let us in and tried to assist in actually developing these policies.

And the-- the kind of-- the age-old problem is, as an activist organization at least is that, you know, you want that. You want government to succeed. You want to get government support, but generally, as soon as you start engaging with government, they become complacent-- when you're not on the street, when you're not taking up newspaper columns, when they think they have you under their-- under their wing. That kind of starts slacking off a bit. And you've had a bit of a cyclical relationship with them where we've entered into negotiations, where we've achieved very significant gains.

We forced the government to introduce a janitorial system, for example. We're-- we're now taking responsibility for cleaning all toilets in Cape Town. They've hired about 1000 people to actually work full-time, cleaning toilet facilities, but we've kind

of gone from that back to protest, back to work with them.

So that's kind of a lesson. We're still-- or something we're still trying to figure out how to get that balance right. My experiences in local government, local government has two settings. It's either, you know, you let us do our job and you stay out of it. You come and vote for us once every five years and they let us implement our program. Or it's, like, yeah, well, you guys seem to know what you're talking about. You do it. And we'll-- and we'll do nothing. (LAUGH) So that's something else that maybe we can discuss a bit later at this time, the issue of where-- how an activist organization-- finds balance between contributing to policy and implementation, but at the same time, not taking on the role of the state, which the state is always very happy to give up. Okay, maybe another two minutes or something? I've gone over my limit--

AKWE AMOSU:

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). That's all right.

GAVIN SILBER:

--but so very quickly, what has the SJV achieved? So at the first-- you know, the first and probably the hardest thing to get was getting government to acknowledge that there was a problem. It took us about a year for them to admit that their numbers were wrong. And that only came after, you know, it was actually more than a year. So getting them to acknowledge that there's a problem, which means that I have to come up with some sort of a plan to fix it. They've-- they've repaired, as I said, they've done a lot of maintenance to repair-- sanitation facilities that have broken down.

They've improved how they monitor private service-- providers-- we've been working with national government to get them to improve their auditing of local government services, particularly outsource local government services. So billions and billions of dollars a year are spent on consultants in South Africa and private companies. I guess that's a global phenomenon. And our national treasury in South Africa until recently didn't see that as a high-risk area. I have no idea why not. And actually weren't auditing private firms at the local government level. So they're now looking at doing-- at introducing measures to do that.

Something going on at the moment is we managed to convince government, albeit through a constitutional court case, to set up a commission of inquiry-- to look into policing and safety in Kailicha, which has been a very significant achievement and we can maybe chat a bit more about that if anyone's interested later.

We've worked with bold, broader urban activist networks, both in Cape Town and across the country-- which we think is vital-- in scaling these activities up. I think the SJC's fairly unique in the sense that, you know, we don't want to solve-- we don't

want to expand too rapidly. We're very happy just being focused on Cape Town at the moment and kind of exploring some of these issues and finding ways to inform campaigns happening both outside Cape Town and outside South Africa.

Yeah, so we've held hundreds of community meetings and I think-- and this is what I'm kind of most excited about it is that-- and this came about by surprise. Again, when people selected toilets as our campaign, toilets have actually become a very useful wedge-- to begin to force government to address broader issues around urban development.

One, because it's manageable, you know, to-- to ask government to fix governments isn't a big ask. It's not saying, "We want-- we want half a million homes built by tomorrow." It's simply clean toilets. It speaks to the most basic of needs, which means that you generate support within informal settlements quite easily and it's-- you-- you know, I think-- and you also get support from outside the informal settlement from people concerned about poverty and inequality, 'cause nothing really speaks to those two issues more than being able to use a clean and safe toilet.

And the other great thing about it being a realizable campaign is that you can have incremental improvements. And I think people often underestimate the importance of incremental improvements in sustaining a grassroots movement, because otherwise, people lose interest-- but I think through gradual winds like, just, simply getting toilet doors replaced-- or getting flushes fixed.

And moving onto bigger things from there. We've managed to sustain both-- a large number of supporters but consistent supporters. And I think that's always a problem in activist organizations, turnover of supporters. Very quickly, the last line-- and you can maybe talk about more-- the talk-- talk about this during the discussion.

What have we learned from all of this and again, the first thing to note is that we're still-- we're still learning as we go, yeah? One of the most important lessons, I think, is that there's no one size fits all approach, which I think we as kind of policy-makers are always trying-- trying to find.

The organization I came from, the TAC, was very similar in structure to the SJC. And even though we focused on public health, the broader objectives were the same. And we thought, you know, well, okay, we've done it before with public health. We'll just change the issue. But it was completely different and that model had to be adapted and is still being adapted-- because of the focus area, because of the issue. And I think that's always something important to bear in mind. The best campaigns often emerge organically. Again, sanitation was not something that we sat down as a small groups and said, "Well, this has strategic value." You know, we very much opened it up to the public and communities to decide.

Research and organizing needs to be integrated-- so again, the importance of both, you know, kind of using community members to be a part of the research process, which I think is both important in getting a sense of what's going on and empowering community members.

The-- the narrow focus but wide support, like I said there, essentially, the importance

of picking a realizable campaign-- but still a campaign that somehow is able to garner support across divides. I'm gonna skip a few. (LAUGH) I talked for 20 minutes about each of these.

AKWE AMOSU:

That's fine. Keep going.

GAVIN SILBER:

Again, the idea that local interventions can have national impact, so I'd like to think that what we've done in Cape Town-- has informed work going on elsewhere, both-- both at the governance level. We've managed to get national governments to change policies, but also in bringing various movements operating at the local government level together to kind of share ideas and concerns.

Again, the important to focus on-- importance of focusing on both public and private power, which I think is-- is something we don't really speak much about, but because of increasing influence from the private sector in Africa, that is a very, very serious concern that we need to be spending more time addressing. And it doesn't matter if it's-- a small company cleaning toilets in Kailicha or a national-- an international nuclear energy plant-- boulder. You know, they both need to be subject to scrutiny. The fact that the state needs external assistance to build capacity, particularly in Africa, where we've worked with many local government officials who really have the best intentions, but just don't have the first idea of where to start.

You know, these are people that aren't engineers and planners-- who are being thrust into a position of-- you know, at the same time, bringing communities together, designing roads-- building houses and very often, I think we've put too much-- we think that local government is far more powerful-- and resourceful than it actually is.

And yeah, so the importance of not adopting the role of the state. I've spoken about that. And I've also spoken about the importance of meaningful partnerships and how essential those are for scaling up. I think I'm gonna stop there. So only-- only 15 minutes longer than (LAUGH) I was given, but--

(OVERTALK)

AKWE AMOSU:

It was--

GAVIN SILBER:

I told you I can ramble about toilets.

AKWE AMOSU:

It was enormously interesting and I-- I don't think anybody was saying, "I wish he'd stop," so (LAUGH) you don't need to worry. I have loads of questions, but I'm going to skip the chair's privilege, because I-- I want people to have a privilege to both comment and ask questions if they want to. Certainly don't confine yourselves to questions. I suggest we do-- three or so at a time, so that we get an opportunity and just keep coming back to you, Gavin. And if you'll keep your comments kind of tight, then we'll be able to get a few more people in.

GAVIN SILBER:

If people could just introduce themselves.

AKWE AMOSU:

Very good idea. So the floor is open. Yes.

CATESBY HOLMES:

Hi, Catesby Holmes (PH) from the Latin American Program. So thank you for that presentation. That was really interesting and I think there's a lot of clear overlaps with Latin American urbanization, very similar situation. One of my questions-- I have so many, but I'll limit it to one. One would be, you talk about getting the city to do these repairs, but what we see in Latin America is that the city doesn't acknowledge that the informal settlements are part of the city. They're not connected to the grid in any way, not through water, not through lights, not through transportation, and the rationale for that is that it's not their responsibility. It's not part of the actual urban fabric.

So my question would be, is it part, technically-- are these areas part of Cape Town municipality and you know, if so and if not, how do you get-- who-- what government do you get to address these issues? And what's your leverage on that situation?

AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you.

ELIZABETH EAGAN:

Hi, Elizabeth Eagan (PH) with Information Program and the Human Rights Initiative. I was fascinated by your presentation. I think it was a really good mix, because we

got a sense of some key insights about grassroots campaigning-- that are bigger than the issue that you're focused on. And I think this is one area where the foundation itself is sort of looking at what does a grassroots campaign around urban-- urban issues actually look like and how can that be supported.

I wanted to ask you a really specific question. My program has been looking into the issue of land rights and human rights in-- in context. And what keeps coming up is access to the (UNINTEL) data and the development of the data around ownership. And that didn't come up with your discussion.

I'm wondering if it came up in-- as you developed the-- the issue area for the Social Justice Coalition. And since you are this connected to a grass-- grassroots campaigning face, whether-- whether we're overestimating the importance of that factor as a part of the security of tenure argument.

AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you. Did I see a hand up over here? Okay, well, we'll keep going around-- you-- and then we'll have (UNINTEL).

SEAN SEBASTIAN:

Hi. My name's Sean Sebastian (PH). I'm with the Justice Initiative. I had a question about-- the-- the expansion of cities and if they're expanding by population, I assume they're also expanding outward and I was wondering if you're seeing increased land speculation and the fringes around cities and also about how-- people living on the border or intersection who maybe had rural livelihoods are adapting to an urban kind of threshold that's crossing over them. And finally, if you see-- if you collaborate with lawyers and what that collaboration has been like and what role you see for lawyers in these issues.

AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you. We'll come back to you, Gavin, and then I've got these two more waiting.

GAVIN SILBER:

Okay, so I think-- I think the first two-- questions are actually quite interlinked around the recognition of informal settlements or the lack thereof. So most-- this part of Cape Town that I showed you earlier, the periphery, if you look at a map-- of the space where about a million people lived is currently marked as marshland, just a big, green clump.

And there is a sense in all of this that government doesn't want to recognize these

communities, because if they do so, it means that they're actually gonna have to start providing services. So the vast majority of these slum communities are on-- illegally occupied land-- most of which is actually owned by-- well, it depends who you ask.

The city will tell you it's owned by the federal government. The federal government will tell you it's owned by the-- the local government, 'cause nobody wants to take responsibility for it. But in many senses, I think, that's where sanita-- the sanitation campaign's been really useful, because through focusing on something very basic-- it must also be remembered that South Africa's a very progressive constitution-- which guarantees these rights-- to everybody living in South Africa.

And we-- we have used the courts-- we've drawn-- we've used the constitution to advance these rights. And I think through-- as I said earlier, through the sanitation campaign, we've managed to begin to force recognition. It's still a long way off. There's no such thing as land tenure in-- in formal settlements.

Most of these, as I say, are in illegally occupied land. That's something we've been arguing for for a long time, but another challenge is that in South Africa, is-- is an overwhelming or total focus on housing, on the provision of new houses-- which was a big promise in 1994 that we're gonna give everyone a house.

So there is a sense that, well, what's the point of upgrading informal settlements if we're just gonna be building houses eventually. Our argument is to say, well, yes, we should continue to build houses, but we also need other approaches. We need what's known as (UNINTEL) upgrading, so giving people land tenure and then slowly building services in that-- in that space.

A big problem around land is-- I'm sure this-- I know this is a problem in Latin America too is the kind of waiting list database, which at the moment, there are about 400,000 people on this list in-- in Cape Town alone, waiting for-- kind of land or a house. And last time we met with the mayor, I mean, they basically said to us off the record that they actually just want to just-- they think they're gonna have to just start from scratch, because there's so much corruption and people are just kind of bouncing up and down this list, that it's completely not reflective of who's been waiting for however-- however long.

So yeah, I think again, just to-- to respond to your question. I think that where we've been successful in addressing acknowledgement is through, like, three campaigns like the one around sanitation to begin to slowly chip away at this notion that government doesn't have a role to play, that these communities actually do exist. They're not just swamps. And they need to do more to slowly deliver services. I think-- did I address your question about security of tenure-- is that it doesn't really--

FEMALE VOICE #1:

Do you think the cadastral (PH) is not as important?

GAVIN SILBER:

The what-- the what?

FEMALE VOICE #1:

The cadastral data, so the existence and openness of the cadastral data around ownership, is that not important? Like generating it--

GAVIN SILBER:

It's-- it's tremendously-- so what we've done too is we've tried to build local database of people going around and identifying who lives here, who lives there-- which-- and we've only done that at-- at a small, kind of pilot scale, but that's being very useful. We've done a lot of kind of community mapping projects, along with Slum Dwellers International-- which has been very useful-- also mainly to identify toilets in other public facilities.

But also to, like, you know, help with enumeration, trying in some way to formalize the community. Again, the problem there is avoiding taking on the role of the state. So when we start doing our own mapping, governments will-- "Oh, great. Well, give us the map." (LAUGH) Well, it's not-- it's not our job. (LAUGH) And it also gives them the luxury of being able to say, if there's a mistake down the line, "It's not our fault."

(OVERTALK)

GAVIN SILBER:

Blame the HJC. They-- they did the map. (LAUGH) Yeah.

AKWE AMOSU:

The lawyers question.

GAVIN SILBER:

The law-- I mean, we use-- we use lawyers frequently. So with this commission of inquiry into policing and safety in Kailicha, we actually spent about two years in court. We had to go all the way to the constitutional court, which is the equivalent of your Supreme Court-- to force the police to set up this, in order to participate in a commission of inquiry. We-- I mean, we've used lawyers for small issues around illegal evictions-- which continues to be an enormous-- enormous problem. We've

had tremendous success in informal settlements, bringing lawyers in and running two-hour long workshops on legislation related to illegal evictions, which is, you know, basically we go in. We hand out a copy of the Prevention of Illegal Evictions Act.

We do a basic course and every time the police come in to demolish a home, people just wave this book around and they leave, (LAUGH) because they know the-- the police know the law. They just take advantage of the fact that people-- other people don't.

So we've used lawyers. We-- we use them regular in both our advocacy work in the courts, but also to, you know, kind of work in the communities and advise our members-- and also just to educate ourselves. I mean, local governments law is so complicated. I mean, we're still trying to get our-- our heads around us. And that's just in Cape Town.

AKWE AMOSU:

Let's move on. And if you want to catch up with some more details afterwards, you can.

TERRANCE PITTS:

Thank you. My name is Terrance Pitts (PH). I work in the Justice Fund in US programs. My question is, what was the actual solution? How do you-- did you construct new toilets? Who paid for them and I'm assuming in some of these areas, there's not-- there aren't sewer systems. So what was the alternative solution for toilets?

AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you. Julia?

JULIA:

I'm interested in the-- political power, if any, that slum dwellers have. So if I understand, but I'm not sure that I understand still whether-- in Cape Town-- slum dwellers are able to vote in local elections. I mean, do they legally exist there or by virtue of the fact that their house is illegal, they can't be a registered voter because they don't have a registered residence in the municipality. And I ask because in the context that I'm more familiar with, in India-- slum dwellers-- actually have substantial political power.

So that comes with its own-- problems of essentially politicians promising anything

and then never delivering. But-- these very high density areas actually do have disproportionate power at the ballot box and so someone's always trying to buy them off.

AKWE AMOSU:

Julia, what-- for the Justice Initiative--

JULIA:

Sorry.

AKWE AMOSU:

Anyone else, before I come back to Gavin? Yes.

MARK PANSKI:

Hi, my name's Mark Panski (PH). I'm also with the Justice Initiative. There's a lot of us.

MALE VOICE #1:

(LAUGHTER) justice (UNINTEL).

MARK PANSKI:

My question is-- around this issue. I think-- I mean, from-- one of the things I took away from your presentation which I found fascinating. I have a million questions-- is-- it seemed the-- the toilet campaign was a particular tactic within a broader, organizing strategy of-- of building political power within this particular community.

And I'm interested 'cause the starting point came from this intense moment of, I think, violence or conflict within the community and the xenophobic violence. And I'm curious in-- in your review how this campaign helped address the internal tensions and-- and conflicts.

GAVIN SILBER:

Okay, so just in terms of our interventions, I think like I said, we had two general approaches. The first was improve maintenance. Simply hiring people to go around

toilets-- to toilets and cleaning them regularly. Bear in mind these are the communal toilets. I think we-- when we talk about toilets, a lot of people think we're talking about-- (UNINTEL). a lot of people think we're talking about toilets in people's (UNINTEL). But these are toilets that are often shared between 100, 150 people. Our argument therefore is that, you know, the state has a role to come in and actually maintain these, just as they have a role to come in and maintain roads that are public goods.

So we managed to force them through threat of going to court-- to hire these janitors to go around and actually maintain toilets-- which was a big step, I think, because again, it was a little tiny step in the-- in the direction of taking responsibility for public services in informal settlements. So we continue to do work around improving maintenance.

But then as I say, there's-- there's-- there's also the need to build and deliver more toilets. And that's a lot more complicated. So Kailicha, like most informal settlements across the continent are in, like, the worst part of the city, essentially-- in terms of what type of land it's built on-- it's generally alongside highway, so they serve it to (UNINTEL). You can't build in certain spaces.

So what-- and-- and Kailicha, in particular, is below the water table. So a lot of water boil and sanitation-- technologies weren't work. So the big thing we've been asking government to do is to move from this ad hoc response to building a toilet here, building a toilet there, where we've kind of got to the point now where we can call in and say this community doesn't have a toilet.

And they'll send a truck in to build a toilet, which-- which is fine, but it's not-- that's not-- it's not gonna promise systemic change, so what we've asked is for them to develop a policy and implementation plan-- around what toilet technologies are needed and there are lots of them-- how they're delivered and how they're maintained.

And that's a struggle we're still battling. We feel-- a formal document is critical in order to hold government to account, otherwise it just becomes very ad hoc and not sustainable. The issue of political power, so yes, they get to vote-- they have an election in a week's time, so we have our political parties all over Kailicha at the moment handing out T-shirts and-- there's a big thing at the moment with the social development agency going in and handing out feed parcels-- and the like.

So it's an important vote that people do try to capture that vote. I think the issue that needs to be addressed, particularly in Africa when they talk about political power is inequality. You know, the fact that in Cape Town, you have literally two cities in one. And the inner city functions really well. It functions as well, if not better than New York City.

And then the-- on the periphery, you have a whole 'nother city that relies on a completely different-- set of infrastructure-- and the problem there is when you-- when you-- when you pig (?) poor working-class communities on the periphery against affluent, skilled people in the inner core, you-- you know, they obviously have

a lot more influence a lot of the time. They're accountants. They're lawyers. They're able to go through city budgets. They're able to go to community hearings and they have a lot of influence I would say, a lot more influence in between elections, which is really what matters-- in putting budgets together-- and getting policies adopted than poor, working-class communities do.

And we see that across Africa, where there's vast levels of inequality that you really have a segment of the communities that can opt out of what's going on elsewhere, that have significant, disproportionate needs. And I think that's something we were trying to address by making people go line up for toilets in-- on the Amalfi Coast, to kind of actually try to get middle class people to actually join this campaign. There's a broader social justice campaign-- to-- you know, to force the city to try to address these issues. I'm missing a question. I think I am--

AKWE AMOSU:

Yes, about how it came from xenophobia and got into this--

FEMALE VOICE #1:

Homicides go down.

GAVIN SILBER:

Yeah. Do homicides go down, is it?

FEMALE VOICE #1:

Well, you started there. I think that's implied in the question.

GAVIN SILBER:

It is. Answer to that is kind of, but I'll come back to that in-- in a second. In terms of-- yeah, I mean, I-- I could speak a lot longer about the genesis of the SJC and it is an interesting genesis. So when we first started, before we got onto sanitation issues, everyone was really ex-- excited or kind of passionate. Excited is the wrong word, but passionate about the sense that we'd brought all these people together.

Everyone thought that, oh, well, we have the power to-- to change everything. You know, there was the sense that this was the biggest people's movement since the United Democratic Front, which was instrumental in ending Apartheid in the 1980s. We thought we-- we were gonna build a movement across class and racial divides to argue for-- to call for accountability, transparency, accountability in government.

And that lasted for a couple weeks. And that got, like, middle class people very excited, which obviously went for people that we really wanted to get excited. But it wasn't concrete. It wasn't something that people could touch and smell and see. So we lost support around those campaigns very quickly. And I think ultimately, by honing in on something like violence and sanitation specifically, we've actually done a lot more to advance the struggles for accountability and transparency and-- you know, responsive governance than we ever could do, calling for them in kind of ethereal, kind of pie in the sky ways which we were doing originally. In terms of-- does that-- does that answer your question or not really?

MALE VOICE #1:

(LAUGH) Yeah, no, it made it seem-- maybe some of the conflict that was at the heart when SJ-- SJC started wasn't there--

GAVIN SILBER:

Was-- was further in conflict.

MALE VOICE #1:

Yeah, yeah, exact-- exactly and how that (UNINTEL) in this campaign.

GAVIN SILBER:

The xenophobic conflict-- has always been there. I mean, it was-- it's been a serious problem-- you know, well before-- 2008. It's a serious problem today. We saw another-- kind of spike in xenophobia around the time of the World Cup, so when everyone was out, enjoying the World Cup final, there were people running around, saying once all these tourists leave, we're going to come and chase you out of your homes. The problem was kind of World Cups and patriotism and nationalism-- a lot of people waving South African flags and whatnot.

But yeah, I mean, we've continued to work very closely with particularly the Somali community in Kailicha. There's still a tremendous amount of fear amongst migrants, which is a big problem because they don't-- they haven't able to vote and they don't factor into a lot of these population-- estimates.

But yeah, again, we see xenophobia as a symptom of something else that's very wrong. I think people feel-- poor working-class people in South Africa feel very threatened all the time. I mean, like I've said, going to the toilets, you have to fear for your life and it's something you don't do every now and then. It's something you do several times a day. And if your four-year-old daughter wakes you up at night and--

says, "Mommy, I need to go to the toilet," you take her to the toilet.

It doesn't matter if it's-- if it's-- if it's a couple hundred meters away. And I-- and I think that fear, in many ways, drove the xenophobic violence. I think the fear of crime and people's propensity to pick on the most honorable-- to kind of vent that anger is a very real thing. And I think that the aftermath of the xenophobia also showed exactly why or how the state is failing-- everyone, but particularly vulnerable, the fact that it took weeks and weeks and weeks for the violence to subside and it wasn't because of state intervention, it was just that people basically got bored and had to go back to work.

You know, I think is-- is-- is-- is-- it illustrates how, you know, the state really is failing to-- to provide the most fundamental right, which is freedom from violence. So yeah, I mean, it's-- it's just-- we've tried to focus as much as possible on that-- but we've also tried to stay as focused as possible, I mean, this is another issue I could talk about for a long time. It's very difficult to stay focus doing work like this-- because things emergence every day as another crisis.

And to stay honed in on what it is that your kind of mandate is is incredibly, incredibly difficult, but it's important. And again, that's where the networks come into play, the idea of not, as an organization, trying to do everything yourself, but building networks of people who, you know, can come to some of the-- the snack.

AKWE AMOSU:

And that is actually a question that I really wanted to ask you-- I think I remember in reading that in-- in 2012 that there were about 11,000 social protests and-- across South Africa and that the next year, they were two or three times that-- that number.

I don't know about this year, but I think what has been becoming evident is that-- decreasing tolerance in the poor population for suffering these conditions on-- on several fronts, not just sanitation. How far are their other SJs emerging in other places and how far is there-- a sort of comparable or similar approach being taken? In other words, is it something to do with the Cape Town's situation or-- or set of-- of-- of factors that has generated the SJC and it's not really being replicated or is this something that we could learn from as a kind of a broader response?

GAVIN SILBER:

Yeah. I mean, I've always been a bit skeptical about social protest data, just because what is a valid protest? You know, we know South Africa has-- a strong culture of voicing-- of holding protests. Most of the protests, by the way, are quite peaceful. The only ones we hear about are the ones where stones are thrown-- but you know, equal education last year had a protest of 20,000 people, 20,000 kids which was terrifying. One kid is enough to-- to worry about having to watch 20,000 marching through the streets, aged like 10 years that day. But--

AKWE AMOSU:

I didn't-- if I said violent, I didn't intend to. That was not the reference I wanted to make. It was more the volume of protests.

GAVIN SILBER:

Sure, sure. Yeah, I think-- I think people are frustrated. I'm more concerned about people who aren't frustrated. I think a lot of people are just-- have kind of opted out, said, "Well you know, I kind of give up. There's no one in political-- in the political structures I can depend on, who I can rely on. You know, I'm just-- I'm just really giving up.

And we see that in the elections, for instance. More and more people are just (UNINTEL). And the selections are really interesting. Some information came out two days ago that I think it's only one in three 18 or 19 year olds have registered to vote next week. So those are the people I'm worried about, the people who actually don't feel they have a voice, who don't join protests, who-- you know, I think in terms of replication, that's-- it's very difficult.

I think when we've had-- what we've tried to do and what we continue to try to do is not reinvent the wheel, you know, people always say to us, especially funders-- when you gonna go open a branch in Jarvig (PH) and Durban (PH) and, you know, Nairobi and all-- wherever. (LAUGH) And-- toilets here are pretty terrible in New York. Maybe there's a call for it. SJC (UNINTEL) but--

AKWE AMOSU:

We don't even have public toilets.

GAVIN SILBER:

There we go. (LAUGH) So yeah, I mean, (UNINTEL) is broaden existing networks. And again, this is where the religious communities become very useful. You know, I think the religious community in South Africa and across the continent remains the most organized-- civil society tool. In South Africa and Apartheid, political gatherings were banned. You couldn't meet more than 15-- with more than 10 people anywhere. So the only place people could meet was in churches.

And that network has stayed very much intact. So what we've tried to do is partner with religious formations and community organizations. Not traditional kind of social movements-- in various-- cities across the country to try to see if we can get a sense of what works there.

But then again, what works in Cape Town won't necessarily work in a community--

100 miles away, let alone on the other side of the city. So like I said, this is something that we're still kind of grappling with and trying to get our heads around. And it's a slow process, but I think, like I said, it's-- it's-- through kind of those incremental improvements, I think you start slowly chipping away at some of the broader-- some of the broader problems.

AKWE AMOSU:

Thank you very much. I think we are probably just exactly at time, so it just remains for me to say thank you very much, Gavin--

GAVIN SILBER:

Certainly.

AKWE AMOSU:

That was extremely valuable. Thanks-- for coming (APPLAUSE).

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *