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Policy Dialogue Report

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# SALO Community and Youth Dialogue: A Youth Reflection on Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in South Africa



## Executive Summary

In partnership with Norwegian People Aid, SALO hosted a public multi-stakeholder dialogue titled “SALO Community and Youth Dialogue: A Youth Reflection on Hate Crimes and Hate Speech in South Africa” on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2022. There were contributions from *Dineo Sitole*, NEHAWU; *Lwazi Somya*, SALO; *Munjodzi Mutandiri*, SALO; and *Julia Mtsweni*. The dialogue was chaired by SALO members Milisu’thando Mbete and Louis Whaley. The dialogue aimed to facilitate an exchange of views among young people about migration, specifically the rhetoric used by those in political leadership and those aspiring to political leadership in exacerbating the lack of peace and stability in the country. It is important to note that issues such as afrophobic and xenophobic attacks against African migrants adversely affect South Africa's diplomatic capacity, including its soft power in the region and on the continent. The recent ANC Policy Conference pointed out that South Africa's soft power within the continent is waning and that this is in part due to the lack of liberal legislation and appropriate government action against xenophobia and Afrophobia.

## Summary of Presentations

### **Dineo Sitole, NEHAWU**

In her opening remarks, Dineo Sitole stated that young people are not utilising Marxism as much as they used to and that existing organisations need to look at Marxism as an entry point. This is important because Marxism was used to anchor the liberation movements and make sure that countries moved together - liberation movements worked together and that there was synergy. Young people are in a different position than in the past, where Marxism was used to propagate migration and solidarity and break down borders.

#### *Fighting Capitalism*

In her view, young people are not dealing with the historical underpinnings of the issues they are fighting against, such as unemployment, gender-based violence crime, and a lack of opportunities. Young people are in a difficult space; they are fighting against capitalism.

#### *Current Leadership*

Dineo explained how young people are not receiving answers to their questions and concerns from the government, leading to an attitude of despondency and anger towards

the current leadership. They also compare the current government to the anti-apartheid and independence movements in other countries.

### *Migration*

Dineo highlighted how migration has impacted the exploitation of migrant workers in particular, how it has impacted society, and how young people have not been able to relate to migration as a thing that happens and exists within society. Additionally, government and legislation have fuelled xenophobia, but it has not increased the level of young people not being despondent and angry about the situation:

*“The working class and working young people are in a difficult position due to the bill that has been passed, which has made it seem as if skills exist in our country and are not needed from [elsewhere]. This has led to hate speech and hate crimes, and the youth voice in South Africa is coming together without theoretical backing. To fight against this, capitalism must ensure that there is a pitting between workers and young people, and the discourse of legislation must not be used to fuel xenophobic attacks.”*

### *Lack Consciousness*

She spoke on how there is no widely accepted consciousness in our society, leading to hate crimes and hate speech being normalised. Moreover, the issue is compounded by the fact that the fight against hate crimes and hate speech often neglects the involvement of certain individuals, resulting in their exclusion from the process. Marxism and liberation movements have also fallen short in adequately addressing this issue:

*“The African community has a culture of allowing hate speech and hate crimes to be seen as revolutionary or progress. This is due to a lack of ideological posture and understanding of historical materialism and the lived experiences of people.”*

To tackle this problem, Dineo suggests that developing a shared consciousness among young people entails more than just joining organisations and fighting for causes that unite people. It also involves gaining an awareness of everyday experiences through regular readings or consciousness-raising activities. Moreover, if the bill is intended to foster unity, it must not only safeguard the rights of those who speak but also those who are spoken to.

She says that in African culture, people hate each other and that capitalism has made workers compete against each other. This has made it hard for people to understand the problems that exist in societies. Instead of addressing them, society is focusing on simple individual issues rather than systemic issues:

*“I believe that once we have a cultural revolution amongst ourselves, we can move forward and address the issues that are a problem.”*

### *Inability to deal with crime*

The failure to effectively address crime within communities is often attributed to individuals rather than law enforcement agencies. Government officials are not addressing internal conflicts and inconsistencies within the government, instead, they assign blame to workers, trade unionists, and. As a result, inefficiencies arise, putting a strain on individuals and ultimately leading to negative experiences. She highlighted that African media has published xenophobic headlines for a long time, and it is important for young people to hold their governments accountable.

She concluded that the impacts of poverty and capitalism will always lead to migration. If society cannot come together and have a consciousness that builds toward revolutionising the thinking of young people, they will be the first ones to migrate. The lack of people-to-people solidarity lends more power to imperialism. In order to shift this narrative, society must take responsibility and actively assess the narratives being propagated in the media and how they affect their daily lives. It is crucial to be mindful of the messages being disseminated and to hold the media accountable for promoting accurate and unbiased perspectives.

## **Contributions from Participants**

### **Lwazi Somya, SALO**

Lwazi Somya began his input by emphasising that the ideological stance of young people in the country and on the continent, as well as the establishment of mobilisation platforms outside the formal political sphere, are problematic. This situation results in individuals engaging in activism without proper organisational guidance, leading to a lack of clear ideological direction.

He mentioned that the voices of trade unions, youth organisations and movements need to be included in the public discourse to counter the reactionary right-wing discourse that is promulgated by political parties such as Put South Africans First and the Patriotic Alliance, as well as vigilante groups such as Operation Dudula:

*“Some youth leaders have been part and parcel of these issues, as they see them as new grounds for mobilisation”.*

However, the narrative itself remains stagnant, creating greater tensions between the working class and the black working class. Young people must now find a way to counteract this discourse and change the narrative to align with progressive internationalists and people-to-people solidarity.

### *Lack of ideological clarity*

Somya explains that the lack of ideological clarity has resulted in criminality and that it is important to create a common consensus among societies on the terms of engagement and how they are supposed to treat one another. Also at stake are deeper questions like *"Is legislation enough to change social consciousness?"* and *"How do we now change social consciousness to move toward a more progressive, democratic future?"*

He concluded by talking about how persistent progressive internationalism is and how people need to understand how South African society fits into the bigger picture of Africa. This is because colonial thinking has supported colonial borders and institutions.

### **Munjondzi Muntandiri, SALO**

Munjodzi started his address by saying that the bill will be scrutinised for its ability to propel us forward as a people and as a community. As societies, it is important to evaluate what they are becoming, who they are, and what kind of societies they want to build moving forward. It is also important to understand the socialisation of young people today, how they view today's society, and what tomorrow might be like:

*"Ideology plays a critical role in shaping our thinking about how to shape the future. It is important to consider the pressures that people are experiencing, be it economic or social, the lack of opportunities for young people, and what it is turning people into without a clear ideological education."*

### *Leadership Culture*

In Mutandiri's view, the culture of thought leadership needs to be encouraged in society—a culture of understanding where people are coming from, what has happened, and what has changed the course of history to end up with the contemporary issues they experience today. These issues also include the inadequate education of young people, migration problems, and the reactionary attitudes of those who hold leadership positions in the education sector. Without a comprehensive educational system that provides a thorough understanding of the forces at play in society and how to build an inclusive and progressive future for all, it will be challenging to address contentious and emotionally charged issues. It is essential to take a holistic approach that fosters an inclusive and informed society that is equipped to tackle these complex problems.

## **Julia Mtsweni**

### *Lack of understanding*

According to Julia Mtsweni, the main issue is the lack of understanding in society regarding Afrophobia, which is a form of direct racial tension directed towards a specific group based on their race. This problem is not limited to all foreign nationalities but is typically directed towards individuals from SADC countries and other African nations. It is a form of hate crime, and the government must educate the public about it to address the issue.

### *Identity Crisis*

Mtsweni believes that in South Africa, there is an identity crisis where South Africans are trying to figure out who they are. As a result, opportunistic organisations like "Put South Africa First" attempt to make people feel like they are not a part of the group, which can cause young people to fall prey to populism. This is because populism is a popular front that feeds off of people's fears:

*“This is reminiscent of the time when Hitler tried to eliminate anything not of the Aryan race. South Africans have the mentality that they need to remove everyone [who is not] South African.”*

She explains that the younger generation—not the older generation—runs Operation Dudula. This is because the government has no plans or strategies in place to support and develop young people, and it is believed that foreigners are taking jobs. This has led to young people joining groups such as Operation Dudula without asking whether it is immoral or moral. This is because they are too scared to hold their government to account. She highlighted:

*“We need to start holding our government accountable for things that foreign nationals cannot be held accountable for, such as creating jobs for South Africans. We also need to be careful about the media, as there is a pattern of populism among journalists. We do not even read the articles that [are] posted [on social media], and we do not verify the stats.”*

She concluded that young people have a responsibility to speak with their peers and understand the deeper purpose of groups. They should be aware of the political system that is funding these groups, which is not even an inch close to addressing the issues of young people.

## Questions from Participants

**Tapiwa Lekutu:** *"The bill is a progressive one. It would work well if supplemented with "awareness," meaning awareness among the public. I think that is something that came up quite strongly in Wednesday's meeting with the Deputy Minister—that these sorts of pieces of legislation are good and progressive but there also needs to be some input from civil society and other stakeholders to bring awareness to these bills, what they mean, and how they change the reality of people on the ground. What can we do to make the most of these progressive pieces of legislation?"*

*"There's a lot of exaggeration...by the media, and for us following these news stories and social media, we start to get the idea that movements like Operation Dudula are getting a lot of traction. Looking at Twitter, for example, and in so many (Twitter) spaces that I've been a part of, you see that, and also just general comments, you see a lot of South Africans being so quick to defend Operation Dudula and to justify it. From a documentary I watched, it turns out they had a rally, a physical rally, some time ago, and the turnout was very low. Is the movement gaining traction, or is it being exaggerated through social media?"*

**Ineke Stemmet:** *"I am wondering if the bill is a good tool for criminalising hate crimes, but the attitudes will remain, and if there is any role for the youth to counter some of the pervasive attitudes in our country. Lastly, could Dineo clarify what she means by a cultural revolution?"*

**Another question in the chat from Ineke:** *"I saw Operation Dudula responding to the [ISS's] findings and rejecting it immediately, saying they see what is happening in the townships, and it is not what is in the report. How do we overcome this? How can we challenge the narratives when they cannot be used as evidence? Are there any opportunities to dialogue with Dudula to change these attitudes?"*

**Noluvuyo Mjoli:** *"This question is related to what you just talked about, which is that the liberation movements used Marxism as a way to fight against the powers that be at the time. You also said today's youth don't have that connection to the past; it seems broken. However, wouldn't you agree that it's still along those lines regarding capitalism? You have also mentioned that most youths are fighting for unemployment, even though they need to be better informed and conscientious about migration issues. But wouldn't you say that cord is still relevant to the past? "*

*“If the youth lack education about ideologies of the past that encouraged nationalism, then who raised or groomed them to become so? Who is socialising them? The blame must also fall on those who bring them up.”*

**Fowzia Davids:** *“It's about the sort of cults on the ground, like you said, about what you see on social media, and you get this narrative that maybe the whole of South Africa is just a xenophobic lot that has a strong anti-immigrant sentiment. I wanted to know what some of the youth groups that reside in these respective communities are. What's the atmosphere like on the ground, and what's the sentiment around foreign nationals? Is it as pervasive as what you see online?”*

### **Comments from the chat**

**Luke:** *“Police in South Africa only target black people by arresting them in Johannesburg and Pretoria and not checking for documentation from white and Indian people. “Operation Dudula” is chasing away black employees from Shoprite and not checking the documentation of owners, who are mostly white people.”*

**Tapiwa:** *“As Africans, our governments suffer from policy fatigue. We have a lot of written commitments from our leaders, but most are not realised. The efforts have to be collective, not for us without us. People must be involved in processes.”*

**Alistar:** *“The biggest challenge is the rise of populist politics, and as a result, opportunistic leadership emerges in such a political environment. Opportunistic leaders follow the most popular agenda on the streets; hence, this affects even policies.”*

### **Responses from the Panel**

Dineo Sitole answered a question about Marxism and Capitalism

*“The issue with Marxism, in particular, is that there is a different posture to an anti-capitalist fight. It is not necessarily fighting against the system of capitalism but rather fighting against the class war. This is not necessarily the Marxist posturing of young people. There is a fight against capitalism, but it is not necessarily Marxist posturing. For instance, the Soweto Youth Parliament is fighting against “uncleanliness” and workers fighting or looting. Still, they are not necessarily fighting against the issues that put people in the positions that they are in. Marxism introduces us to understanding the system and makes us understand our position within it.”*



She answered a question about the cultural revolution.

*“I think the culture within society accommodates hate speech and hate crimes and that it allows for inconsistencies within the implementation of laws. Additionally, there is no link between the laws and the actions of the leaders. What I’m saying about a cultural revolution is that young people should start thinking about a cultural revolution to deal with issues of hate speech and hate crime. This includes changing the kinds of people who...lead us, holding governments accountable, and changing the culture within our societies. Revolutionary speaking must be seen as something that does not degrade the life of another human and must not be something that deprives another community of life. The cultural revolution has many aspects, and it is important to discuss what exactly can be a cultural revolution for the kind of future that we want as young people.”*

She answered a question about what the atmosphere is like on the ground and what the sentiment is around foreign nationals.

*“Looking at Gauteng in particular, where Operation Dudula has been dominant, both the East Rand and the West Rand have not seen much of Operation Dudula. There were only a few people who attempted to enter some areas, but locals stopped them. In other instances, they were permitted entry, but the situation did not last long. This is because it is based on reactionary events, such as an incident in the media.”*

Munjodzi Mutandiri answered a question about ideologies of the past and a lack of education.

*“I agree that we are shaped by what is around us, that intergenerational mixing is an important part of ensuring that we keep the good things that each generation has and pass them on to the next, and that societies are evolving, and we need to appreciate how to get our young people to be in conversations that matter. This is not to say that young people today are bad, but rather that society is evolving. Young people in leadership have a responsibility to educate their peers, interact at an ideological and thought leadership level, and question what is happening to society and what it means for the future. It is important to be able to do this to build a better society.”*

*“While the older generation bears a greater share of the blame for societal changes, some believe it is important to interact with these changes and shape our thinking around a progressive agenda. We see a disdain for these kinds of*

*interactions from young people, but they are critical for the liberation of people and the setting of a more progressive future.”*

*“I believe that we need to invest in educating young people, particularly those in leadership, to show them historical narratives of how leadership has traditionally been developed and how they can influence society and stop it from being reactionary. I suggest interventions should be based on a solid foundation, informed by proper analysis tools, and take on things on the ground.”*

He answered a question on what can be done to make the most of these progressive pieces of legislation.

*“I think we must continue to interact with [the bill] through questioning some of the things that are in the bill, but also maybe shaping it—because I am sure that there will be cases that will be brought to the Judiciary, and even when it passes, [the bill] will become an important tool in terms of how we build a progressive society. The manner in which the courts interpret certain bill provisions will also be crucial and essential. Even after the measure has been passed, we must continue communicating with the Judiciary to help shape a progressive interpretation of the bill.”*

He also answered the question about what the atmosphere is like on the ground and what the sentiment is around foreign nationals.

*“Afrobarometer conducted research in February of this year. I was merely gauging the sentiments of locals regarding the issues of migrants and the general difficulties that the migration issue brings to the forefront. It is interesting to note that, contrary to what is commonly believed, most people did not want foreigners to leave the country. However, I agree with Dineo that the numbers don't matter; what matters are the spaces occupied by the very few who are vociferous in expressing their opinions on what should occur.”*

Louis Whaley answered the question of whether Operation Dudula's movements in social media are gaining traction or are being exaggerated.

*I believe it is very simple to fabricate such things and turn them into a common narrative. It's easy to spend a few thousand Rands and have something trending on Twitter. The problem arises when it manifests itself in violence and hate speech on the ground. As we've seen in hospitals and other places, people become emboldened due to this action.”*

Tapiwa Lukuta also answered the question of whether Operation Dudula's movements in social media are gaining traction or are being exaggerated.

*"I want to narrate from my favourite book, Animal Farm: Napoleon is the face of oppression, but the pigs like his ideas and values because of Squealer, his propaganda machine. I'm trying to give the idea that in every revolution, the people join because the ideas presented to them seek salvation and that if we allow "Operation Dudula" to die a natural death, it will not. There are people in our communities who have been burning down shacks and spaza shops that belong to foreign nationals, and it's just that right now, there's a name behind it, and they are brave enough now to come out because of our silence."*

## Conclusion

The dialogue sheds light on the progress of hate speech and hates crime legislation. To improve the understanding of the current situation, speakers from civil society participated in this dialogue. All speakers emphasised the need to be more provocative when dealing with oppressive situations that still affect communities and migrants. Managing hate speech and hate crimes requires a comprehensive understanding of migration as a whole. The government has a responsibility to raise public awareness about hate speech and hate crimes within the communities, as well as to hold SADC accountable for these acts. This is important because society becomes aware of the negative impacts of capitalism after a cultural revolution. The government and society must become involved in fighting societal ills such as racism and xenophobia to combat them. SALO will continue to facilitate dialogues such as these in the future.

*The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.*

**About the Southern African Liaison Office:**



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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**Norwegian People's Aid**