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Interviewee: Mary-Jane Morifi | Session #1 (video)

Interviewer: Len Morris | Cape Town, South Africa

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Q: When did you first meet Francis Wilson?

Morifi: I was still at University [of Cape Town], 1982, I think it was, while I was doing my second year of sociology, and I used to use the SALDRU [Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit] Library quite often, and that's how I met Francis Wilson.

Q: What was it like working as an intern at SALDRU? What kind of projects did you work on? What were you doing there?

Morifi: My arrival at SALDRU actually has a very interesting story in that I started working in a town called Philipstown in the Karoo before the second Carnegie [Corporation] Inquiry into Poverty [and Development], and what made me want to go and work there is I had a friend and I went to visit, and I saw the situation there and I thought it would be an interesting town to study for my third-year dissertation, which is what I did.

When the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty started, I went up to Francis and I said, "Well, I'm one step ahead of them," because I had already started

doing my work on Philipstown, and did he want me to extend it and make it part of the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. And he agreed.

That's how I started with SALDRU and looking more deeply into the poverty issue in Philipstown, which was sad, and challenging in a way, because sad in that I went and lived with those people. It's easy to come and write about people's situations when you come in and out of their lives, but when you actually become one of them and live the way that they live on a daily basis, you get to see the sadness, the desperation in people's lives when you do that. And that's what the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty afforded me the opportunity to do, to actually go in and live with the people.

Q: So you were a college student, essentially, and you took your -- you allied your studies with going to Philipstown to see what this area was like. It must have been really even quite different than how you were raised and what your background was. Were you shocked by what you saw?

Morifi: I was. I was shocked. When I saw it the first time, I had no intentions of studying it. I just went to visit my friend's family, and looking around and walking around, I was fascinated by the place.

In the 1980s, here was a little Karoo town, which we call Dorpshuis in South Africa, which has somewhat stayed stuck in the history before apartheid, where you didn't have people separated in terms of where they lived residentially, but they were separated by how much money they had. You had the people who lived on the middle-class side because they had

money, not because of the color of their skin. And then on the other side of the road you had this destitution, this poverty where people lived almost nomadic lives, nomadic lives in that they would -- most of the men there worked as sheep shearers, and they would move from farm to farm, shearing the sheep.

But also to look at the kind of housing that was provided for the people, and going in and finding out how long ago this housing was built, there was an area in Philipstown where people lived in what used to be stables for horses, and on probing a little bit more, and this through the town clerk, he said, well, it was used as temporary housing to house some of these people who moved from place to place shearing sheep, only to find that temporary was since 1959 and this was 1983. How temporary could they have been when people were still living in them? And to find that those people were actually happy because they were a lot better off than the ones who lived down the road in rickety shacks.

The contrasts were just very fascinating for me, to just go in and look and see how do they actually live on a day-to-day basis.

Q: What degree were you studying for and what specialization would the degree have been in that would have tied in with this work?

Morifi: I was doing social science, and this particular study I did for sociology, for my Sociology 3 dissertation paper, and really out of interest, not because anybody said, "This is the way you need to go," but I was fascinated by that. Just to look -- more not only to study the poverty, but fascinated by how the women in those areas managed to survive, because

the men went out and worked and the women had to cope with the little bit of income that the men brought, with looking after the children and really trying to make that area a home. That was, for me, the fascinating side of this area.

I changed direction when I went into the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and looked at it as a poverty issue rather than women and poverty.

Q: But initially it was a gender issue for you.

Morifi: Yes.

Q: When did you become aware of the second Inquiry?

Morifi: As I said, I studied at the University of Cape Town and I used the SALDRU Library quite often. And in my trying to do some research for my paper, I got to hear about the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. My lecturer at the time, Mike [Michael] Savage, said maybe I should speak to Francis , because they were looking at doing work like I was doing. And that's how I hooked up with him.

Q: What did Francis tell you about it? When you had that conversation, what did he say it was going to do? Did he say anything about whether or not Carnegie was going to, for instance, leave you alone to do the work?

Morifi: I questioned a little bit more about why was it called the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. What happened to the first? And the first Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty was in the 1929s, after the Depression, looking specifically at white poverty in South Africa.

I went and did a little bit more work on that to find out what were the results, how were the studies conducted, and it was fascinating to see that from the first Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty, we ended up with things like the Job Reservation Act, with things like, you know, there was preference given to the poor whites for jobs that would have helped them out of poverty. And I thought, well, if it managed to achieve that with the first Inquiry into Poverty, maybe there's hope for us with dealing with black poverty, because the second one focused specifically on black poverty, and I thought, well, here's a chance for us to go and do something about the poverty in places like Philipstown and other places like Philipstown in South Africa.

I must say it was rather disappointing four years into the study, and even looking back now to see did it result in some of those benefits that were enjoyed after the first Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty? No, it didn't, simply because it was a study that was located at the university, and the university was in the business of education and research, it was not in the business of development. The mistake that was made, maybe by the university or even by Carnegie, was that it didn't link it to any development programs after the studies. It was well and good. We all managed to write beautiful papers and put them on the shelves, but did the people in Philipstown benefit from that study? I don't know. I don't think so.

Q: Well, but there's quite a distinction between doing a study about the condition of Afrikaners that would fall on the ears of the Nationalist government, and doing a study at the height of apartheid. I mean, in some ways I'm surprised the study wasn't shut down.

Morifi: Maybe it's because the government of the day didn't see any threat in it, that you could go and you could find out about all these studies. There was some discomfort created for people who worked in these areas, either there was lack of cooperation, some of the researchers were harassed by the police. But had we done this a little bit more creatively, where Carnegie, as an American funding organization, maybe what it should have done is it should have brought other interested parties from the U.S. to say, "We are going to do this study just to show you how bad things really are. We need to find a strategy that will address some of these issues that will be brought out by the study." You know, you don't do the research for research's sake, but you do research because you are willing and hoping that it will direct further action from the information that you will have gathered.

The first study was commissioned maybe with the support of the government, and that is why the benefits were had. We didn't have that luxury. We didn't have the support of the government, but we had the support of other international donor agencies who could have played the role that the South African government played then, in terms of creating some development programs out of the poverty studies.

Q: So really, if I understand you correctly, you seem to be saying what was needed here was more money, more commitment to take the recommendations and act on them straight away.

Morifi: Yes.

Q: Is that fair?

Morifi: That's it, yes, because then it would have been of benefit not just for the researchers and the university and for Carnegie, but we would have been able to go out to Philipstown and say, "We are doing this. I'm coming here and interfering in your lives and really asking you to give up your privacy and let me into the most intimate parts of your lives, not because I'm interested in getting my degree, but because somewhere somebody cares enough to want to know what is happening in Philipstown and they care enough to be able to come back and address some of the issues that you have raised." We couldn't do that. All we could say is that there was an interest, we wanted to expose this, but to what end?

Q: Jumping forward to today, do you feel now that South Africa has elected its second democratically elected president, that you are beginning to see movement, though, in some of these areas? These problems are big and intractable problems, and while I appreciate what you said, it seems to me they need the government's --

Morifi: Yes.

Q: -- active involvement, and you really, before 1990, didn't have a government that was going to pay much attention to black people and poverty. I mean, quite clearly, if history is

a measure of that. Do you see change today that suggests that some of these recommendations are, some of this work is being used?

Morifi: I see the changes, but if I can just go back maybe to comment and say maybe the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty was ahead of its time, that it happened too early. It should have happened now, when it had a government that would have supported it. Because not only does the second Inquiry into Poverty need the government support, but the government, if it's interested in finding out about its people and the living conditions, would need a study like the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty, because the government is not all-seeing and all-hearing.

Probably most of the people in government don't even know where Philipstown is, because they concentrate more on the urban areas. For some of the outlying areas, they would need outside intervention to really take them and almost turn their heads and say, "Look at this area," and using the information that will be gathered from that, then put their development programs in place.

I don't know how extensively the government currently is using some of the work that was done in the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. I would like to believe that they have paid attention and looked at some of those issues that were raised in Philipstown and in Msinga, because the development programs feel and look like they're coming from those studies.

Q: One of the -- well, Francis made the point, for instance, that the summary report, the book, *Uprooting Poverty*, took five years to come out, and he made the point in his conversation that had it come out sooner, it probably would have been -probably would have sunk like a stone because of the political climate at the time, that when it came out, which I believe was '89, it actually, as a consequence, with all of the attendant press, was able to reach Mr. [Nelson] Mandela, was actually able to galvanize attention. It was written about extensively, reported on extensively. Earlier, the political climate would have been far more hostile. The work could have potentially been lost. He attributed that just to fate, to --

Morifi: Good timing.

Q: To good timing. But it does underscore what you said. It suggests that maybe the actual research work was a little early.

Morifi: I believe, and I agree with him, if the book had come out a lot earlier -- you have to understand the South Africa of the eighties, where every little thing was politicized. It was even more politicized if it came out of universities like the University of Cape Town or Wits University [University of Witwatersrand]. And we just so happened that the headquarters of the second Carnegie Inquiry was at the University of Cape Town, located in a department that was very well known to have people who were very critical of the government. They're researchers themselves. I mean, we probably -- none of us probably went out and threw stones and marched, but we marched with the kind of work that we

did, to really expose the South African government of the past in terms of how they handled rural problems, how they handled even urban problems.

If you looked at how they arranged education, how expensive it was to maintain these three Departments of Education, how expensive it was to maintain a school in Philipstown that could quite easily accommodate five hundred students, and there were only fifteen students, when across the road there were students who had to travel about 100 kilometers to be able to go to a high school. And because of the rules and the regulations that existed, they couldn't even open the doors of that school to accommodate the kids from the other side of the line.

It's not good things to hear when you are sitting in government and you are publicly telling the nation and the international audience that things are not as bad as everybody says they are. And here comes out a study that says, "Hang on. Let's tell you how bad they are. Let me not even tell you with my own words. I will let the people of Philipstown speak." [Interruption]

Q: So does this explain in part your own motivation for wanting to get involved, that this was an expression of your political feelings? Could you speak a little bit about that?

Morifi: Yes. I didn't see myself as the kind of activist that would just be satisfied with going and marching during lunch hour, which is what was happening at the University of Cape Town, and doing protest marches. Yes, we participated in that, but we kind of felt that there was a little bit more that we could do.

And the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty offered us the opportunity to do that, and that little bit more was just to go out and really -- unfortunately, the government wasn't listening -- get the people who lived these lives daily to use their own words to tell the government how bad things were, what the kinds of changes that they wanted could be, and how the government -- what it can do to make their lives a lot easier.

Because universities, with the students, it becomes very emotional. You get taken up by the mood of the crowd. But not so when you are sitting as a researcher across a person who's telling you their daily toils and the difficulties that they have living with a kind of pension system, living in a community where there isn't any health care facilities, living in a community where if a student goes past standard five, they have done well because there is no way of the family paying for the kids to carry on further, and if they do leave Philipstown, they never come back. You get the brain drain. The good ones leave, the bad ones stay, and the alcoholism cycle just continues.

Because they only had two things that held that community together, if you can call it that: the church and the bottle. If you didn't belong to the church, you were sure held together with your friends by the bottle. So you had a lot of alcoholism, and it was a concern for us, as political activists, to say, "What role do we play in this?" Unfortunately, yes, we brought out the issues, but there weren't any development programs that followed hot on the heels of the studies.

Q: Getting back to the Poor White Study for just a moment, one of our interview subjects, who will remain nameless, made the comment that Carnegie had been there, something

along the lines of it took them fifty years to decide to come back and clean up the mess they'd made. Did you have any sense of that?

Morifi: [Laughter] I think we shared those sentiments, and that maybe it's arrogant to say that Carnegie was the father of Afrikaner affirmative action. They left the legacy in South Africa of the job reservations.

Q: Mary-Jane, let's start over with that, because I'm conscious of that cup. [Interruption]

I think it's an important point, the byproducts of that first Poor White Study was not good for black South Africans. Can we --

Morifi: It wasn't, because from the studies, in terms of looking at solutions of how do you then handle the poor white problem came the Job Reservation Act, where uneducated whites who had the problem with poverty were given jobs to be able to earn an income. The welfare system was organized to be able to sort that out. So you had government funds used for -- to create, really, separation, to create the division based on race in an area that allowed people to earn an income. And it took Carnegie, yes, fifty years to come back and sort that out.

In the Western Cape, you ended up with black people not being able to go into certain jobs because they were reserved for whites. Like they couldn't ever become trained drivers. They couldn't ever have blasting licenses. They couldn't ever become bus drivers or any of these other low level jobs, as the government called it. They were low level, but they were

important jobs in that they allowed those poor whites to be able to get themselves out of that poverty. That is what Carnegie left for us with their first study.

Unfortunately, the second one didn't come and clean it up, as I said. It was just a study. It wasn't followed by development programs, and I think that is where they failed.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the group that Francis put together, the group of people that you worked with on the Inquiry. Who was around? Who did you deal with on a fairly regular basis?

Morifi: There was the core group that stayed for a while -- Wilfred Wentzel, who ended up working for the Rural Development Foundation, and Andre Kriel and some of those people, Ebrahim Patel, myself. It's amazing to look back and see where those people have ended up. I have said to Francis that he needs to look and do a study to see where all of us have ended up.

For a while we all followed this developmental route where we worked for non-governmental organizations in the field of development, be it in unionism or education or welfare, but all of us almost went to that -- followed that route. Mamphela Ramphele and some of the other people who, even today, still focus and are still driven by wanting to make South Africa a better place for the people of Philipstown that we have managed to fail because we didn't deliver on a promise. Even though we might not have said, "After the study, this is what is going to happen," the fact that for the first time in their lives they had people from the big towns, from a big

university, white university, be interested in their plight, gave them hope that something was going to be done.

Q: You used questionnaires in your work in Philipstown. Was there training and work behind the preparation and use of the questionnaires?

Morifi: SALDRU itself ran workshops in terms of how to first draw up the questionnaire, because we designed the questionnaires ourselves, how to conduct one-on-one research and then follow up from in the questionnaire. We used quite a lot of tapes as well, because it's not always easy, when somebody starts telling you their life story, for you to stick to the questionnaire. The questionnaire gave us the tool with which to capture some of the basic information, but the value of those interviews lay in the stories that the people told and in observing what else goes on around you.

If I may use Philipstown as an example, it was always interesting that when I drove around or walked around from house to house, talking to people, you know, they were all anxious to have me come to their home, and I couldn't understand why. I thought, "They can't possibly have that much to tell me. They spoke to me yesterday." Until I realized that the reason why they wanted me to come to their homes is that if I had done it at twilight or at night, I would walk around with a boot full of candles, and I'd light five candles, and when the interview was finished, I would leave. And for them, that offered them the opportunity to then get candles for the week. And that's why they wanted me to come.

But also the hospitality that people had that, you know, even if the house wasn't that clean, you couldn't dare refuse a cup of tea that was offered to you, because that's the hospitality they showed. And the questionnaire would never ever capture something like that. You needed to be observant and listen and look around you, to be able to get the feel of the town.

But the training was done and there were refresher courses when we came back from our first research stint, that we would go back and do a debriefing, look at some of the difficult areas and see if we could find, using Francis and Dudley [Horner] and other researchers, as people who would be able to assist in some of the areas that we had found difficulty in. You know, for example, it wasn't easy for me, as a black woman, to go to Philipstown and demand to talk to the town clerk, but Francis could pick up the phone and say, "I'm having one of my researchers come. Do you mind talking to her, please?" He could do that as a white man. I could never do that in the eighties as a black woman, ask for an appointment with a town clerk in a rural area. Unheard of.

Q: I see. Why did you include -- you may have answered this, but I'm thinking of some of the case histories that are in the study -- Aunt Bettie and Oom Anna. Am I pronouncing the name correctly?

Morifi: Oom Anna, yes.

Q: Which is the more typical face of poverty between those two case studies?

Morifi: Both. Both are.

Q: Could you tell us a little bit? Our audience more than likely will not have read the study. Can you describe something of those characters, what they embody and why you included them?

Morifi: Oom Anna was the kind of man that I kind of felt that had he been born in a different time -- you know, this was 1984 and we're talking in 1999. I, unfortunately, haven't gone back and read the study to refresh my memory. But he was very articulate in that he was able to tell me what it was like to live in a place like Philipstown. Without even being prompted too much, he was able to say things like, "Poverty is very expensive."

And I said, "Why is poverty very expensive?"

He said, "When you are poor, you buy cheap clothes which are not necessarily strong clothes. You wash them three times, they're broken. You have to buy new ones. If you had the money, you would buy a jacket that you would only probably replace in ten years' time. That's where the expensive part comes in."

Poverty is also expensive in that they lived in a town where there wasn't a high school, and for his child to go to high school, he had to go to De Aar, which was eighty kilometers away. The expensive part of it came in that he would have to board with some people and pay money. He would have to travel to that place and pay money. He

would have to study in a big school which cost a lot more, and might have cost less had it been located in Philipstown. That is why poverty is expensive.

Poverty was expensive for him because he lived in a house where the roof blew off every so now and then, and every so now and then he had to replace the roof. If he had a strongly built house, he wouldn't have to have that expense. And I was struck by how he really analyzed his situation, and I think that is why I included him in the study. The way he was, without anger, without frustration, but almost matter-of-factly tell you what it was like to be poor.

Q: And what was his work?

Morifi: He was also a sheep shearer moving from place to place, shearing sheep, and that's how they made their livelihood, which meant it was seasonal work, so when the shearing season was on, the family could eat and they lived very well, but when the shearing season was off, there was no work. Philipstown is semi-desert. Nothing grows there. There is no agricultural activity except for sheep farming.

Q: Could he, in fact then, live with his family, or is he essentially migrant?

Morifi: He's a migrant. He was essentially a migrant. And sheep shearing seemed to be a very hard kind of life. You can see it in the people's outward appearance, that it takes a toll on them having to move in a donkey cart for miles on end, from farm to farm, not knowing that you will find work in the next farm. And when you

retired, there was very little. It took something like three, four years before they got a state pension. So, a very, very hard life indeed.

And most of the people who find themselves caught up in that in Philipstown, there was only one form of crime that they had in Philipstown, which I thought was -- I chuckled when I heard what it was, and this I was told by the town clerk, that they had something called slaskaap. Translated in English, it would be they would steal sheep and go and slaughter it in the field and cook it and eat it in the field. And that was the extent of the crime in Philipstown. And I thought, "I could live in this town, you know." [Laughter]

Q: Completely eliminate the evidence.

Morifi: Eat the evidence. [Laughter]

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Q: Individuals like Oom Anna, Aunt Bettie, the people of Philipstown, how would you characterize their attitude? What was their attitude towards their poverty and their circumstance? Did they feel they could change it? Were they --

Morifi: Helplessness. That -- I don't think they knew how they could change it.

Q: Could you actually -- my questions are not going to be in the tape, so if you could answer my question in a complete -- or somehow refer to my question in your answer, it would be helpful. Okay?

Morifi: Their attitudes towards their situation, towards poverty, I think when you have tried for years and years to get yourself out of that situation, you end up being helpless, where you begin to believe that it is out of your hands. There is no way out of that. They understood what the way out for their children might be, but they had no control over that. They knew in their hearts that if their children got educated, they had a chance to get out of Philipstown. But I don't think they saw themselves getting out of Philipstown. They saw that they needed some other external intervention to be able to deal with their poverty. As a community, I think they had given up. It didn't make them unhappy, it didn't make them bitter. They became comfortable. I wouldn't say comfortable, but accepted their lot.

Q: Do you think that they were surprised to see you show up, a young black woman show up wanting to --

Morifi: They were very surprised. Nobody had ever paid attention to them. They had had some people come and do some health studies or this and that study, but never really to ask them about their daily lives. Because this is what the Carnegie Inquiry was about, asking people about how did they manage to survive on a day-to-day basis.

It surprised them even more that -- in their community there wasn't a black woman who

drove a car. Here I walked up with a shiny new car from the urban areas and surprised them by saying that I was a university student. They didn't think it was possible for black people to get that far. So for the time that I was there, it was nice for me and for them, so they were able to say, "You must all be like your friend Morifi. You must all be like Miss Morifi. Look at her. If you study hard, you can be like her." And I guess it gave them hope. It gave them hope for their children, but it also gave them hope for themselves that if somebody was prepared, if an organization was prepared to pay for somebody to come and live with them for four months, to find out about their lives, then they must be looking to come and do something wonderful in Philipstown.

Q: So even though you lived with them, you still were slightly apart. I mean, in terms of fitting in, did you ever feel like you actually completely penetrated? You'd have issues of gender, age, class, if you will.

Morifi: I don't think I completely fitted in. I was seen as an anomaly. I think the mistake that I made was that the family that I stayed in lived in what they called the economic residential area, which was really the only area that had electricity, the only area that had running water, and this is the area where the school principal and the teachers and the policemen -- you know, the people who had some kind of standing in the community lived. So already that said, "You are different from us. You don't live in our community. You live in an area where we respect the people who live there."

So it created this unequal relationship between me and them. They were all much older than I was. I was a lot younger. And in that kind of culture, the respect would be the

other way, where the younger person would be the one that's showing respect in the way that you address people, in the way that you talk to them. The uncomfortable feeling was that it was the other way around, that they were the ones who were showing their respect to me simply because I had the car, I lived in the area, I was at university. For them, they saw me as being better than they were.

I don't think I had the courage and the strength that those people had. I don't know if I would have been able to survive on a daily basis. It was difficult living there for four months. Can't imagine living there for the rest of your life.

Q: How did they address you?

Morifi: Yefrow, which is "Miss."

Q: And that's deferential?

Morifi: Yes, it is. If it was on an equal basis, they would have called me Mary-Jane, my first name, but the fact that they prefaced that with a yefrow or bay yefrow, which is "Miss" or "Ms.," showed the respect. And in their body language, the way that they would look or how they would behave when you were out there, showed a lot of respect. And spoken language in terms of the way they behaved and held themselves around you.

Q: Do you remember Aunt Bettie?

Morifi: Yes, I do.

Q: Can you tell us about Aunt Bettie and how -- what it was about her living circumstances that typified what you found?

Morifi: Aunt Bettie was a fascinating woman in that when I arrived at her homestead -- she lived in the part of Philipstown that I wish I had visuals to show you the different houses that they had, where they had rondovols, which was really one room, a round building, with one tiny little window and a door that didn't close. And in finding out from her how many people lived there, she lived there with her mother, there were a whole lot of other uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters who lived in the same little house, and I was fascinated to see how do they actually sleep at night with all these people in this one home. Because that hut was where they cooked, where they entertained, where they studied, where they slept, where they did everything.

And she invited me to come one evening, to come and see what it looked like when everybody was home, because I talked to her during the day when it was just her, her elderly mother, and some of the younger kids. Some of the older kids had gone off to school and the others had gone off begging and doing whatever, working in the white people's kitchens. And she said, "Come and see in the evening what it looks like and how we manage this."

I had gone camping, and we'd never been in such close proximity. And I asked her what must have been a very personal question, in that they were able to bear children and have

the space and the time to be able to do that. How did they do that? Which I felt embarrassed that as a young woman I was asking this older woman how they did this. And she said, "Well, we wait until the children have slept, they have gone to sleep, and you just assume that you have the privacy to be able to do that. You draw the curtain and that's what separates you from the rest of the family."

I said, "But what about all the other adults who are here?"

And she said, "We've developed the kind of barrier where once you've closed your eyes and you've covered yourself with a blanket, you have built a wall around yourself, and that's where your privacy is." Which was fascinating for me. I mean, I came from a home where I had to, for a while, share a room with my sister, and that in itself was crowded. And for more than eighteen, fifteen people to be living in this tiny little hut, how they did that on a daily basis that they did that, they managed to become creative in how they organized their lives.

They cooked outside on a little tin stove, so they didn't have to bring the stove inside. But in winter it gets very cold. Remember I said it's semi-desert, so it's freezing cold at night. So they'd have to bring that inside to be able to warm the house. No door that closes. No window that closes. A roof, again, that blows in the wind every so now and then.

Q: No toilet.

Morifi: No toilet. No, they didn't have -- Philipstown had the pit system, or for the economic residential area they had the bucket system, where they came to collect the buckets. But for the rest of the people they had to dig a pit to be able to have some toilet facilities.

And the water, they would have a tap that they would share with fifteen or twenty other families. They would strategically locate the taps. Nobody had their own running water in their yards.

Q: And how hygienic would the conditions be around the tap?

Morifi: Whew. Muddy, with dogs and other pets drinking from the same place, because there was really nobody -- it was nobody's responsibility. When there's twenty-five people using it, even if you're the hygienic one, you tend to kind of give up when you are the only one who is doing this. Even within the homes, living on a dirt floor, a lot of tuberculosis, which means if one person gets it, all twenty-five of the people who live in the same room, because they live and sleep in the same room, would get it.

And the saddest thing was that they didn't really have a permanent clinic. They had a clinic where the nurses came once a month, and the doctor, if he came once every two months, it was a lot. It was not very well equipped. They went there to get -- all get given what they call dimengsel, the mixture. They all got this pink medicine. To this day I don't know what it was.

Q: You've already really spoken to housing privacy, overcrowding, sanitation. You did mention in the study that they also shared the space with their animals.

Morifi: Yes, they did. The dogs and the goats, if they had goats, they stayed in the same place. Because, remember, if they had any livestock, with the crime that they had in Philipstown of slaskaap, they couldn't risk the goats being taken off in the middle of the night and eaten out in the bush.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the diet and the adequacy or lack of -- what did people eat?

Morifi: Those who worked in the white people's homes would manage to bring home in the evening with them some leftovers if they managed to get that, but a lot of the people lived on mealie-meal porridge and some kind of vegetable, mainly cabbage. Very little milk. It was very, very -- basic kind of diet. I worried more about the babies, because if the mother couldn't breastfeed the child, that meant what did that child eat. They would cook the mealie-meal porridge and make it very, very soft, put it in a bottle, and that's what the child would have, carbohydrate after carbohydrate every day. If the family had money and they bought enough condensed milk, maybe the condensed milk would go in there.

But people lived very basic lives. They didn't grow anything because nothing grows in Philipstown. It's all dry. They would have to beg, go to the supermarket, which a lot of them did, if you knew when the delivery vehicle was going to come and the shopkeeper was going to throw out all the old cabbages and onions and potatoes, that they could go to the

dump and be able to get that. But mostly lived from handouts from the white people in the town.

It was good when it was shearing season, because the shearers would be given a sheep to slaughter and they would then have meat to be able to eat at home as well.

Q: So basically we're talking about chronic malnutrition.

Morifi: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Almost every single child that I came across in Philipstown was malnourished. A lot of kwashiorkor kids. And the parents didn't even understand that it was malnourishment. You know, they'd say that this one is so fat because the stomach would have blown up. Very little -- no education at all in terms of nutrition or health, which is where the clinics failed. They came in to do basic stuff. If the runny nose, then they all get the mixture. For something, the dentist came once every three months. No filling of teeth; he just pulled. So very few people had teeth in Philipstown, because no repair work was done on the dentures of both adults and children. Very few adults had any teeth left in their mouths.

Q: What about maternal care for expectant mothers, deliveries? You mentioned infants. But coverage for complications during birth, provisions for premature birth?

Morifi: For prenatal care they had the clinic that came and did the prenatal care. The deliveries were mainly done by the midwife, who was the person that I stayed with when I lived in Philipstown, or the local who was a retired nurse and she did all the deliveries.

And it was easy if it was normal birth. There was no ambulance in Philipstown, so if there were any complications in the night, if they couldn't find a car from the economic residential area, either the policeman or the school principal to drive them into De Aar, which took about forty-five to fifty minutes, sometimes that is too long for a breech baby, or whatever. So you had a lot of mothers dying during childbirth or even breech babies not surviving.

Simple things that, had they been in the urban area, they could have been sorted out. They couldn't always rely on the midwife, because she could only do the natural ones. There wasn't any support system except the one that they provided for themselves, and that was the sadness of Philipstown. Unfortunately, with complications in birth, you don't know those until they happen, and when they do happen, it is too late if you are not close to medical facilities that can handle those kinds of complications.

Q: What about, and we've discussed this a bit, but education? You mentioned that available education was limited, travel was involved if one was going to go further, but basically that was rare. Is that true?

Morifi: It was very rare. They only had -- education was rare in that they only had one high school in the black area. Not a high school; it only went up to about standard five, I think it was. The white area had a beautiful school, as I said, that could house about five hundred kids, but they only had something like fifteen or seventeen children at that time.

And in talking to the youngsters, it was fascinating to hear what their aspirations were.

Their aspirations, they wanted to be the minister, the policeman, the schoolteacher, or a nurse, because that's all that they were exposed to. These were the people who lived in the area that had electricity, that had running water, and that's where they wanted to be. They couldn't see beyond that. For them, if they could reach that, they would have arrived. I don't think, in my time that I was there, there were any kids who had gone beyond standard five, as I said. Those who went beyond standard five were the kids of the parents who lived in the economic residential area.

Some managed to get through the net from the poor side of town and go to places like De Aar for education, but again, they were only able to do that if they had relatives living in those towns, because if they didn't, they would have to pay for the boarding and lodging while they studied, and the parents couldn't afford that. But if they had relatives, they could live there with their relatives, without having to pay.

So although people like Oom Anna understood that for the kids to be able to escape this, they would need to have the education, what he didn't have a conception of was for him, a child who had reached standard five and could go into the police force or go and train to be a primary school teacher, who is an unqualified school teacher, then they would have arrived, because that's all that they were exposed to.

Then comes Mary-Jane Morifi, who's at university, and they didn't think that black people could manage to go to university. I hope that by seeing that, that it motivated some of the youngsters to be able to aspire to more than wanting to be a policeman or the local minister.

Q: Can you remember what the impact of this experience was on you when that -- I mean, it sounds like you had a very powerful personal experience.

Morifi: It was a powerful personal experience that I think has, for me, determined how I live my life and what I did with my life post the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty, in that I worked in non-governmental organizations mainly in the field of education. Even when I did join a big corporate like BP [British Petroleum (BP) Amoco Corporation], I joined in a department where I could make a difference. I joined BP because of frustration that I had had in Philipstown. The chairman still has the letter today when I wrote to him and I said BP was using its corporate social investment money in an irresponsible way because they were not paying attention to places like Philipstown or Natal, where the violence was so bad, and there was really just destitution and poverty there. And he gave me a challenge and he said, "Well, if you know how to spend this money, why don't you come and do it."

So I joined an oil company, not to market and sell oil, but to take some of their money and use within communities. And I hope that it has shown in the kinds of things that I used BP's money on, that Philipstown was always at the back of my mind. How do we deal with poverty? How do we make sure that youngsters get educated so that we break the cycle of poverty?

And even with the company now that we have formed, that is all about black economic empowerment. How do we economically empower the person in the street who doesn't necessarily have a lot of money? We run our company very different from the big white

corporates that operate in South Africa. I have as shareholders in my company women who are domestic workers, but they can show you share certificates and say, "This is what we own in this company." And I hope that Carnegie has done that for me, that it has determined how I was going to spend my life, what I was going to do with the energy, not just looking at Philipstown, but on a more global -- how do we bring about the economic miracle that needed to come after the political miracle? And I hope Sekunjalo and our efforts in that company will bring about that or will help to bring about that.

Q: Now you complete your study and your work in Philipstown, and you pull your monograph together. And you join -- there were 300 papers and probably 400 to 450 people at the conference.

Morifi: Yes.

Q: Isn't there a feeling -- what was the feeling at that conference? This must have been a remarkable --

Morifi: The first day of the conference -- we had the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty conference at the University of Cape Town, and this was during the university vacation, so there were supposed to be no students around campus, and we had people coming from all corners of South Africa. And the buzz around that, the anticipation of -- you know, we wanted to hear what the other people had been doing, because we were only exposed to the Cape Town crowd, and we didn't have an understanding of how many other people across South Africa were doing what we were doing.

Listening to some of those papers that were delivered, being able to go down and collect -- I think we were each given about 100 papers that we could get free, just to go and page through and see did they have the same kind of experiences that they had. I will always remember the paper that was done on Msinga, and I look now at the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] and it brings back those kinds of memories of the conference, to say, "This is almost like it was at the conference when we heard people who had lived and experienced, that tell us what it was like to be in an area like that." The TRC maybe should say, "Episode one is what happened and some of the things that were discovered during the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty," and now just add on and bring individuals who had experienced it to tell you what it was like, what it was that they had experienced. But the buzz, it was just electrical to be in that conference.

Q: Francis described the conference as sort of putting the pieces of the puzzle out there for the first time, not necessarily assembling them in the right order yet that would take -- and sorting them and evaluating them, but just getting it there. Would you agree with that?

Morifi: Yes, I would agree with that. As I said that, you know, we only were exposed to the researchers in Cape Town. We had never come across the researchers in Natal as a group. Maybe as individuals. So we had no understanding and realization that it was bigger than Cape Town, it was bigger than Philipstown. And to see all that work on not just poverty, but on education and poverty, gender and poverty, the legal aspects and poverty, to see it all come together and say it is actually a big study, that Carnegie was just

bigger than just this Cape Town, it was more than that, it was actually the whole of South Africa involved in the study.

Q: I've read press clippings about the conference, and the prime minister took the floor at Parliament and dismissed the efforts of the conference as, for one thing, being closed to the government. He made the point that there wasn't one government minister from any relevant department in attendance at the conference, and that they weren't welcome. Francis, on the other hand, made the point that the process was completely open, and anyone who wanted to submit or participate could submit or participate. Who's correct? Which point of view?

Morifi: The conference was completely open. We were all surprised that they wanted to make that kind of comment when, in the process of us doing the work for the research that culminated in that conference, that there wasn't any support. How could we expect them to then come and support us when the whole thing was being presented? I don't think they wanted to hear that. I don't think they wanted to be associated with that lest it comes out that they're not doing their job or that they were wrong in going out to the external audience and saying, "Things are not really that bad." Can you imagine Piet Koornhof, who was then, I think, the Minister of Constitutional Development, who had done all these forced removals, coming out and listening to people say what damage those forced removals had done? And yet he was saying, "We're doing this for their own good." He wouldn't want to be associated with a study that would have proved him wrong.

So even if it was open to them, anybody could come and listen. It wasn't one of those where we had closed doors and you could only come if you produced a ticket or an admission card. Even if they wanted to come incognito, they could have. They could have done that. But as a government, they chose not to support us because it was not in their interest to support us.

Q: Do you think that Francis made the right decision in not structuring the Inquiry around the idea of a commission? Carnegie is famous for its commissions, where it brings the brightest experts to bear, and they study something and then they issue a report, and they sort of make pronouncements or recommendations, if you will. And Francis went a different way, I think on Mamphela [Ramphele]'s recommendation, in part, to try and get people who were really engaged, to try and get black Africans involved and people from all elements of society. Do you think the conference demonstrated the soundness of that?

Morifi: I think Francis made the right decision by not doing it the commission route, because he didn't want the results to come out and then people to say, "Well, it's people who consider themselves to be experts who are saying this, and they're overanalyzing this." It wasn't conducted as really an intellectual study. It was more a study of "Let's go out, let's hear, using ordinary people who have the basic skills to go out and do the studies, and let them come back. Let's not overanalyze it and make almost a Ph.D. thesis out of it, but take it as it comes, and don't leave it to the experts to come and analyze this situation to death. Just almost as an oral history, hear what the people had to say. Bring the people who had gone and done those studies and let them speak about this.

They might not be the most eloquent of speakers, but they will bring the message across." And I think that paid dividends, in that people felt a part of the study. They were not removed from it. They studied and they lived with these communities, communities that were very much like the communities that they probably came from.

Q: What contact did you have with Carnegie while you were working, the Carnegie staff?

Morifi: Some Carnegie staff came to South Africa to hear how the study was going. They came out and we raised some of these frustrations that we were having, that we kind of felt like it needed -- more needed to be done. But one of the frustrations, as I said, that we had was that it was a study that wasn't accompanied by development projects, and we wanted Carnegie to take on that role. They didn't see themselves, you know, assuming that role. That was not the reason why they had done the study. And we kind of felt it was very short-sighted, that they were not willing to do that. They came out to South Africa. We wanted to take them out to these areas so they can see, look, and feel what it feels like to be there, and maybe that would motivate them to go and do more. But that wasn't to be. [Interruption]

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: Do you think that at a time politically of violence and bannings and imprisonment, that this kind of work -- did this work seem relevant to you?

Morifi: Yes, this work was relevant for South Africa of the 1980s, because we had to really locate, almost explain why the violence, almost explain why people had decided to have the political uprisings, because otherwise it happens in a vacuum, to say, "They have got nothing to do," but understand where they lived, understand how they lived, and why it was important for them to believe that if the political change happened, then they would be able to deal with some of their social problems that they were experiencing. It had to be located in that, and we hoped that the government would see the reason why there was this political uprising and recognize that it was something that could have been sorted out by some of the programs that were happening.

Some of the political activists criticized us and said that we were taking the easy way out in terms of showing protest. They saw this as Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty also as a means of protest, that we should have been up front and concentrated and used our energies on the political protest rather than exposing what was the root of this political protest.

Q: Do you think that the Carnegie name provided some political cover for your activities also?

Morifi: I think the Carnegie name did provide us cover for some of our activities. We will not talk about some of the things that we did when we did go into those communities in terms of conscientization, and all very nicely covered by the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty, but also because it wasn't an organization that existed in South Africa, but one that existed in the U.S., but also one that had relations with the government of the 1920s

when they did do the first Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty. So the government wasn't too keen to be seen to be criticizing Carnegie. They could criticize the way some of the researchers who were doing this work were going about doing the research. They would criticize -- they felt comfortable to criticize the university and, in particular, Francis Wilson and his department in terms of how they were behaving and conducting themselves.

Q: But basically then it sounds like the one benefit of that Poor White Study was since they had already done the whites, the government needed to leave them alone to do the blacks. Is that what you're saying?

Morifi: If it's going to make them feel better and if it's going to buy accolades with the blacks, and if it's going to give them the comfort of saying, well, they're not being racist, then let them carry on and do the black poverty issue. But the government knew that they were not going to support that with action after the research, and they had the power to be able to do that. We didn't have the organizations behind us to be able to help us with that.

So they knew that Carnegie wasn't going to succeed in terms of putting in programs in place to address the problems that were brought out. Somehow I cynically think that they were hoping that knowing would frustrate us even more in that you know and you are helpless to do anything about it, so maybe you should have just rather let it be and not know about it.

Q: You have, in fact, expressed frustration about not being able to do more about it with Carnegie's funds or other foundation funds. What, in your opinion, needed to be done? What would be some examples of programs that you would have jumped at the opportunity to --

Morifi: What needed to be done to be able to address some of these issues, I would have first approached it in the African way, in the African way in that you educate the mother, you educate the nation. You get the women to take this on, you would be able to sort out the problems. I would focus on development programs that had very much to do with gender. Mothers are the ones that are going to break that cycle. If we can get them to instill and drum into their children's heads that they have an opportunity to be able to escape this through education, if we could put money into education programs, if we could put money into health programs, if we could put money into the upliftment of women, we might beat this poverty thing.

Because we really at that time, maybe we were young and rosy-cheeked, but we didn't believe that poverty was here to stay, that it was something that could be dealt with, it was something that could be addressed, but addressed in such a way that you really gave the people the tools with which to help themselves, rather than go in and set up feeding schemes or set up schemes that will give and not empower. It was all about empowering the people to be able to help themselves. Those are the kinds of programs that I would have put in place.

As I say, I was lucky that I had the opportunity to do that in using BP's money to demonstrate that it is possible and it does work.

Q: Give me an example.

Morifi: One of the projects that I funded, and it was the biggest grant ever given by BP to one single organization, a grant of one million rand, was to fund a program called Soul City, which is an entertainment program that is on television and radio. What Soul City does is they do education in an entertaining way and they focus on issues such as poverty, child abuse, on education, alcohol abuse, and the effects of that, the banking system. So where they give people the skills to be able to do these things, to recognize when abuse is happening, give them the skills to be able to deal with it. So it's very empowering.

And I must say, I left BP -- we started with this about four years ago, and to this day it's the most popular television series that we have on the networks right now, you know. And by looking and going back and doing this study to see whether this has had an effect in both the urban and the rural areas, because it assumed that there were people who didn't have television. And how did you reach them? You reached them through radio. You reached them through newspapers. You reached them through magazines. Whatever form you could, you got the message to the people. And to see the groupings that have set up in terms of groupings addressing child abuse, groupings addressing mother and child, prenatal and postnatal health care, and all that, it is comforting to know that it was not in vain, and I'm proud to say that BP, to this day, is still spending millions on this program because it works.

Q: Now simultaneous with the second Inquiry, Carnegie was funding the Legal Resources Centre, which is the first public assistance legal aid firm for litigation for blacks in South Africa. You had some dealings with the Legal Resource Centre. Would that qualify, in your view, as putting money into an activist on-the-ground program that would make a difference?

Morifi: Yes, the Legal Resources Centre would be an example of that, because you have to -- the initial work that the Legal Resources Centre did, they were a thorn on the side of the farmers, and farmers who were exposed through the Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty of abusing their farm laborers, promoting the tort system, using alcohol as a means of reward and punishment. Because the people became alcoholics. If the farmer withheld the alcohol, it was used as punishment. If they did good, they got given the alcohol and there they got back into their comfort zone.

And it was the Legal Resources Centre that took these farmers to court and defended these farm workers, that went into these farms and taught the farm workers about their legal rights. They were really a thorn on the side of, in particular, the farmers, but other employers who were abusive towards their staff members, because although legally they say we are all equal in front of the law, I'm sorry to say in South Africa it wasn't so. Some were more equal than others, and you were more equal than others if you could afford the kind of legal assistance that would make sure that you got off.

But the minute we had the Legal Resources Centre, staffed by very competent lawyers and attorneys, the poor had a mechanism that allowed them to be equal to the boss when they

appeared in front of the law. So they did great work, and they still continue to do great work. I hope that some way they get the continued funding both from externally and internally to be able to do that, because there is still the situation where others who are not able to afford legal assistance.

Q: Those clinics and those advice centers really made legal services available to the poor on a broad-scale basis for the first time.

Morifi: The advice centers did more than just bring the legal services to the people, but for the first time people knew what their legal rights were, because you had to understand your rights first before you could go and seek the help. There was this whole assumption that if you were black and you had a disagreement with a white person, the black person was always wrong, so you never really did bother to go and look for a lawyer, and if you did, it was a white lawyer who was not going to be very sympathetic to your cause. The legal aid clinics did the education part of it to say that you have these rights, and it doesn't matter that you don't have the money, there is an organization that is able to help. The value of it was in the education, because that can never be taken away from the people.

Q: Let's stop for just a moment, please. [Interruption]

Morifi: I think the success of projects like the second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty would come if partnerships were formed and partnerships between Carnegie, which might be a donor agency that allows and provides the finances for the studies to happen, the researchers who will go out and do the work with the communities, the communities who

will really open their homes and their communities to these researchers. And the university that should hold the whole thing together, but the university needs to get itself to understand that they are not just in the business of education. They are members of communities, that should have a responsibility beyond just education. It is not good enough just to give the people education and not get involved in the upliftment of the community.

And I'm hoping that the University of Cape Town has seen that as their role beyond just providing tertiary education, and going and getting involved with what is happening in the communities. There is evidence of that happening in SHAWCO [Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation], which is a student organization that runs these clinics. The university has got excellent facilities that they could open to other organizations within the Cape Town area. They have got trained personnel who have got the energy and the intellect to be able to drive or assist in driving some of these development organizations or development programs within the communities. But they also have the respect in that they're seen as an important institution by these communities, who will come with some kind of authority and neutrality in that they would not necessarily be associated with one particular community, but able to hold the communities together and drive and participate in the transformation or the upliftment of those communities. I am hoping that Mamphela has taken this on as a role for herself as an individual, but a role for her institution as well.

Q: And then the private philanthropies, the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and what have you, they should continue to play their role in that phase as well, with additional funding, should they not?

Morifi: Yes, they should continue to play their role with additional funding, which, by the way, the university might even have the ability to be able to access on their behalf, because they have wonderful, excellent relationships with private companies both within South Africa and outside of South Africa, and if these companies knew that there was a body that was responsible not just for the funds but for making sure that the work is done, they would give even more, because there will be accountability for these funds.

And I have seen that happen recently within the University of Cape Town, where they're looking at gender issues and they're looking at education, not just tertiary, but primary and secondary education, where they're looking at community outreach programs. And it's wonderful. It should have happened in the eighties and not just in 1999.

Q: And if need be, if it does stretch the boundaries of the university's role, they always have the option of establishing another entity, don't they?

Morifi: Yes, they do. They don't have to themselves actively go out and do this. I don't think they should narrowly define education, you know, tertiary education. It should go beyond that. They can set up the SALDRU, which will focus more on development than just the research. They can set up gender institutes which will do work not just for the university, but externally as well. They have the personnel to be able to do that.

Q: Mary-Jane, you sound impatient. I mean, like enough talk already, let's -- you sound like you're ready to do it.

Morifi: My mother used to say that I swim the ocean in one breath. [Laughter] I should stop and take some other -- you know, breathe some more. But, yes, I'm impatient. I've got the energy, and I think if enough of us were impatient and were passionate about these issues, we would be able to beat it.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

Morifi: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]