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ByIntro by Inkani, Text by Abahlali baseMjondolo

Since 2005 South Africa has been convulsed by sustained shack dweller militancy around the country. In some instances protests have flared up and quickly died away, in others they have generated or reignited major mass movements. But in all instances there has been a radical repoliticization of questions around the right to the city, access to housing and services and who plans for who and in whose interest. The primary response of the state has been illegal state repression - banning marches, police violence, arrests, intimidation, slander and so on. But recently a new strategy has emerged. The state has invested almost \$US 50 million in supporting a thoroughly embedded NGO that claims to represent shack dwellers - Shack Dwellers International (SDI). SDI is a World Bank approved and USAID funded NGO that sets up shack dwellers' organisations in countries around the world. They are then managed by SDI and remain resolutely non-political. Instead of engaging in politics shack dwellers are encouraged to save money so that they can one day pay for all or part of the cost of building their own houses. In South Africa SDI has official partnerships with local and national government - the same government that is subjecting democratic mass based shack dwellers' organisations to sustained repression. Now the Gates Foundation has injected another \$10 million into the project of giving SDI a war chest for them to be able to offer a carrot while the state continues to lash out at popular counter-power with its big stick (rubber bullets, water cannons, bulldozers, tear-gas etc.)

In the press release below Abahlali baseMjondolo, the largest shack dwellers' organisation in the country and the largest popular movement outside of the ANC alliance, tells the Gates Foundation where to get off.

Thursday, 22 November 2007

Abahlali baseMjondolo Press Release

12:02

Neither the March nor the Money are Ours

The phones of the Abahlali spokespeople have been ringing all day with calls from journalists wanting to know about the shack dweller's march that was meant to happen today and the 10 Million dollars from the Gates Foundation for Housing. We thank all the journalists for their interest. We always appreciate it. But we need to explain some things. The march is not ours and the money is not for us.

In eThekweni alone there are more than 500 shack settlements and the people living in these settlements are represented by many organisations. We speak only for our members in 34 settlements. We work with all organisations with which we can find or build some common ground but we don't speak for anyone else. The many other organisations all speak for themselves. This is how it should be. The march that was scheduled for today was organised by the South African Shack Dwellers' Organisation (SASDO) and not by Abahlali baseMjondolo. Like Abahlali the roots of their struggle are in a 2005 road blockade (Cato Manor) and they have faced state repression with members spending time at the University of Westville Prison. But unlike Abahlali they have chosen the route of party politics. That is their choice but Abahlali is not SASDO. We are finished with putting people above us and trusting them to speak for us only to be betrayed. We speak for ourselves. Today SADSO intended to march on the City with shack dwellers from 5 wards including people from Cato Manor, Chatsworth and Chesterville. At the time of writing this press release we are informed that SADSO

were persuaded to abandon the march by the National Intelligence Agency on the grounds that it would embarrass the country at the 2010 draw. They were promised a top level meeting instead. They accepted it but are still standing outside the City Hall, waiting.

There is also a big confusion between Shack Dwellers' International (SDI) and Abahlali baseMjondolo. Many journalists are phoning us and asking us how we are celebrating the \$10 million received by SDI from the Gates Foundation.

There is something that we need to explain. Late last year we finally got a meeting with the provincial Housing Department. We had high hopes for that meeting. It came after a huge march on Mike Mabuyakulu that was first (illegally) banned by Michael Sutcliffe and then unbanned by the court. We thought that we would be heard at last and that this meeting would mark the beginning of some progress. But when we got there they started by accusing us of working with an agent of a foreign intelligence agency paid to destabilize the country and threatening us with arrest. We were then told that if we wanted to be able to meet with the government regularly and to be able to get houses we must join SDI. The instruction was clear: stay on our own and keep thinking and speaking for ourselves and be arrested, or join SDI and be obedient and be rewarded. We refused to join SDI. We announced this on the radio. Within days the arrests and beatings started and they have not stopped since even though we are currently suing the Minister of Safety & Security and even though we have marched on the Sydenham Police. The money for SDI is not money for us.

Abahlali happened to meet up with SDI on 25 July 2007 on an American radio station called Radio Without Borders (the interview is on the internet). S'bu Zikode from our movement was explaining how the government is failing shack dwellers in South Africa. Then Jockin Arputham, the President of SDI, came on from India to defend the South African government and to tell the listeners that it had given SDI R280 million. He was challenged. He responded by promising that he would fly to South Africa and bring Lindiwe Sisulu from Pretoria to Durban to meet with Abahlali. We have still not seen Lindiwe Sisulu in our settlements. But she praises SDI and SDI praises her while she threatens the people of Joe Slovo for resisting forced removals and while we burn in relentless fires, are raped in the bush, illegally evicted from our homes, made homeless or forced out of the cities and beaten by the police.

We have a clear analysis on what the money that our government and the Gates Foundation have given SDI is for. It is true that some of it will go to build houses. But it is important to remember that there are two kinds of houses. Some houses are built in human dumping grounds outside of the cities and people are forced to go to these houses against their will. In these houses people sometimes just rot. These houses are often worse for people than shacks. They are a kind of oppression just like forced removal to townships outside the cities was a kind of oppression under apartheid. Other houses are planned with people and are built where people need them. In these houses people can grow. If Gate's \$10 millions builds some of the right kind of houses we will welcome them as fruits of the long struggles of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Landless People's Movement and all the communities that have been blockading roads and organising protests around the country for the last few years. These protests have created such a crisis that the government here, and its supporters outside, recognise that something has to be done. Therefore the houses built will be fruits of struggle even though they will not be given to the people who have struggled. They will be a reward for obedience. This is how things work. We therefore see the risk that these fruits of struggle will be used to try and persuade people in movements and organisations that struggle to give up their autonomy and to cease struggling which means to stop thinking and to stop demanding the right of ordinary people to also be able to plan the future of our cities.

It is clear to us that everyone wants to speak and act in the name of the poor but that very, very few organisations are willing to speak to the poor. At first the government wanted the councillors to speak for us. Most times this failed completely. Most times the councillors spoke for the rich in their wards. If the ratepayer's association wanted shack dwellers chased out of a ward and the shack dwellers wanted houses built in that ward the councillor would work with the ratepayers' association to chase the shack dwellers out. This is why we buried out councillors in 2005. This is why people have been protesting against their councillors all over the country. The councillors have failed the poor and they continue to fail the poor â right now in Motala Heights both the Ward Councillor (Dimba) and the PR Councillor (Naranjee) are working with the gangster businessman Ricky Govender to chase the poor out of Motala Heights.

But now that the councillors have lost all credibility the new strategy is to pretend that SDI represents shack dwellers. It does not. SDI is an international NGO that is embedded with local and national government and with the international organisations like the World Bank and USAid that give our government its anti-poor policies, policies that are imposed in the name of the poor. We do not want the councillors to speak for us and we do not want SDI to speak for us. The solution is clear. Every settlement in the country must be able to elect a committee and that committee must represent that settlement in its negotiations with the government. Then the housing plan for that settlement can be negotiated between the people of that settlement and the government. If settlements want to unite on a common agenda they can do so. That is democracy. We want to say very clearly that by pretending that SDI is the voice of shack dwellers and by giving them all this money our Housing Minister and the Gates Foundation are undermining the bottom up democracy, which is the real democracy, that shack dwellers are building and demanding recognition for.

Abahlali baseMjondolo was started by shack dwellers for shack dwellers when people in the Kennedy Road settlement decided to organise a road blockade after the complete failure of ten years of working through the official channels. This was 19 March 2005. We had realised that 'public participation' was just a way of bluffing us and making us weak by demobilizing us. Therefore we decided to go back to the mass politics, the politics of the street, the politics of whole communities thinking and discussing. We called this a living politics.

We have always been a democratic membership based organisation that reports to no one but our members. It is true that some NGOs tried to take control of our organisation. One NGO even tried to change the contact people on one of our press releases and to decide who should represent us at an international conference! But just as we refused the councillors we refused the NGOs and their money. We have no interest in any politics, even if it calls itself socialist, that demands to think and speak for us. We will not accept to be marginalized in our own struggles! For this the councillors and the NGOs united to call us criminals and to tell all kinds of lies about us. Our crime was to think and speak for ourselves. But we kept our dignity and our independence and we are now much bigger and much stronger than ever before. We do work with NGOs that want to speak to us and not for us but they do not lead us. They partner us on some of our projects that are projects that we have chosen and that are controlled by the discussions at our meetings. We have the same kind of relationship with progressive church leaders from all different kinds of churches. We are also asking the state to speak to us and not for us. We do not believe that planning is only for experts. We are saying that everyone can think. We believe in people's planning. We believe that that is real democracy.

We have created our own university and through our studies at our university we have discovered that the subsidy system that is used to build houses for the poor in South Africa comes from Chile where it was invented by academics at the University of Chicago. The reason why the academics in America were making the policy for Chile was because their government had united with the rich in Chile to get the army to murder the elected president and to take over the country (it's a bit like what America has

done in Haiti.) From there the World Bank took this system around the world. The number one problem with this system is that it results in ruralization. Houses are built outside of the cities because land is cheap there. What the poor actually need is for the government to expropriate land in the cities. We also discovered that the notorious and dreaded Slum Clearance program comes from the Cities Alliance and that the Cities Alliance is a project of the World Bank and USAID. These people want to sweep us out of the cities and into places without hope like Park Gate and Delft.

Now we find that SDI has the full support of the World Bank and USAID. We find that SDI has official partnerships with the eThekweni Municipality and the national Housing Department. We find that our government gives millions to SDI. We find that the Gates Foundation is giving millions to SDI. At the same time we find that independent mass based people's organisations like Abahlali, like the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and like the Landless People's Movement face police vandalism all the time. Innocent people are attacked by criminal police because they dare to think and speak about their situation themselves.

We find that while the peoples' organisations are speaking out against forced removals, shack fires, forced ruralization, the Slums Act, lack of toilets, rape, police violence and the new hell which is transit camps SDI says nothing about these evils and only sings the praises of the government. SDI remains silent when we are beaten but challenges us when we criticise the government! That is because they are part of the government and their money comes from the same people that gave our government its anti-poor policies and then gave them 'international recognition' for these polices.

Just as some of the NGOs wanted to force us into their structure so that they could control us it is clear that our government, and the people who decide their policy for them like the World Bank and USAID, want to force us into their structures so that they can control us.

The message is clear. We have two choices. (1) Think and speak and activise and plan for ourselves and have a chance of being beaten and arrested. (2) Be good girls and boys and join SDI and have a chance of getting a house.

This is no choice. We can't give up on the democracy we have built now. We have gone too far down the road. We have learnt too much on that road.

We have also learnt a lot from our comrades in other organisations and in Brazil and Haiti and Turkey. Our friends in Brazil tell us that in Argentina, the government succeeded in splitting the piquetero movement in two (against and for the government), largely on the basis of "economic seduction" in different ways. They tell us that in Brazil the very important movement of landless rural workers (MST) has been weakened by the massive distribution of tiny bits of money to organisations loyal to the Lula government. They tell us that this kind of policy has proved much more efficient in undermining mobilization towards land reform than other measures implemented in the last decades (including repression, of course). Our comrades in the LPM tell us that that when the movement became strong in Mpumalanga the government came with its own social movements to deliver small bits of land and made sure the LPM comrades didn't benefit with the result that the LPM was basically cancelled in those same communities and the struggle for land reform was set right back.

We did not plan a march for today and we are not celebrating the Gates Foundation's \$10 million today. Today we will be consulting our for God lawyer about the continued intimidation of shack dwellers in Motala Heights by the notorious Ricky Govender, today we will be strategising about how to defend the Sydenham 14, the Kennedy 6 and Philani Zungu in and out of court, today we will be organising against the threat of (illegal) evictions in Arnett Drive, today we will be talking about how to take our struggle against fires and for electricity forward, today we are rebuilding the four shacks that burnt down in Foreman Road last night, today we are planning our next graduation at the

University of Abahlali baseMjondolo, today we are planning our AGM, today we will be working on our book that will soon be published by Africa World Press, today we will be discussing strategies against the rapes that happen at night in the bush when there are no toilets for women, today we have planted flowers outside the Kennedy Road crÃ"che.

Today is just another ordinary day in our struggle.

The march is not ours. The money is not for us. Our struggle is ours. Our struggle continues. Our struggle is for land and housing in democratic cities.

For further information and comment please contact:

System Cele 0731033437
Mashumi Figland 0725274600

SDI Press release:

Embargoed until Thursday 22nd November 2007 at 00:01 GMT (UK time)

Gates Foundation gives SA-based shackdweller organization US\$10 million to help urban poor improve their living conditions

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will provide US\$10 million to the South African based nongovernmental organisation Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) to support the urban poor in Africa, Asia and Latin America to take action to improve their housing, water and sanitation.

It is the first time a major US foundation has made a significant investment to address urban poverty in these regions. The grant is also unusual in that it will go direct to grassroots groups that gather under the umbrella of SDI, enabling them to improve their living conditions and their capacity to negotiate with governments to secure rights to land.

The SDI Secretariat is based in Cape Town South Africa. Its local affiliate, the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP) has constructed over 13,000 housing units since 1995 and provided tenure security to an additional 20,000 families. SDI and FEDUP signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Housing in South Africa in May 2006. In terms of this agreement the Department has pledged R280 million worth of subsidies to the Federation.

Sheela Patel, chair of SDI's board says: "This grant is to build the capacity of poor communities to demonstrate to their municipalities, governments and international development agencies that self-organised communities of the poor are partners in addressing urban poverty. This assistance will help to build local dialogue and locally sustainable solutions."

To date, these grassroots groups have built or upgraded more than 200,000 homes. Worldwide, however, about a billion people live in slums or shacks, most of which lack safe water and toilets.

This work urgently needs to be scaled up. The urban poor are tired of waiting for governments to meet their needs. They are ready and willing to improve their living conditions but need financial support to do so.

"It is the poor who will change the city's living conditions," says Jockin Arputham, president of SDI and founder of the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India. "This grant to SDI from the Gates Foundation has enormous potential to show how cities can work for the poor as well as for the rich."

Funds from this grant will be used to support the activities of federations of informal savings groups formed by slum or shack dwellers to collectively save money and improve their neighbourhoods by securing tenure, installing toilets, improving water supplies and in some cases building houses.

Improving the physical infrastructure is half the battle. The urban poor need the security that comes with knowing they have the right to live where they do. It is easier to negotiate with governments to gain these rights if officials can see the improvements the federations have made, especially as they are usually cheaper and of better quality than anything local contractors can build.

"This fund is a breakthrough for slum dwellers to achieve their dreams and the opportunity to do things themselves," says Rose Molokoane, chair of the South African Federation of the Urban Poor and an SDI board member.

National and local governments in countries such as Brazil, Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Zambia have recognised the role of the federations and have worked with them as partners in urban development. But more often than not, governments see the urban poor as problems rather than part of the solution.

"Most governments and aid agencies still pay little attention to urban poverty," says Diana Mitlin of IIED's Human Settlements Group. "And when they do, it is to finance professionally designed programmes that struggle to address this problem at an appropriate scale."

"With this funding, the Gates Foundation is sending a much-needed signal to such agencies to rethink their approach. This funding will greatly increase the scale at which the national federations can operate and will support the growth of new federations."

The foundation's grant to SDI is part of the Special Initiatives portfolio of its Global Development Program, which works with motivated partners on focused strategies to increase opportunities for people in the developing world to lift themselves out of hunger and poverty.

Special Initiatives grants allow the foundation to fund compelling, specific opportunities to advance development and to learn about new approaches that can inform and improve the strategies and grant-making of the Global Development Program.

The foundation will also share results and lessons learned with a wide variety of institutions—including municipalities and national governments responsible for urban poor communities—in order to showcase how the poor can become active partners rather than beneficiaries of aid.

"We are pleased to support Slum/Shack Dwellers International and the Urban Poor Fund," said Charles Lyons, director of special initiatives at the Gates Foundation's Global Development Program.

"This grant will allow SDI to expand on its proven track record and demand-driven model and develop new, innovative ways to give the urban poor effective voices in their communities and nations."

SDI has slumdweller affiliates in 33 countries in the global South, including 17 countries in Africa.

A photo gallery with images from Brazil, Cambodia, Ghana, India, Kenya and South Africa is available online at:

<http://www.sdinet.org/galleries/gallery.htm>

ENDS

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

Jockin Arputham, president of SDI and founder of the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India
+91 982 160 4070/ jockina@yahoo.co.in

Sheela Patel, Chair of the Board of SDI and Director of SPARC (Society for the Protection of Area Resource Centres), India
+91 982 113 9294/ sheela@sparcindia.org

Rose Molokoane, chair of the South African Federation of the Urban Poor and an SDI board member
+2782 9003187 / rose@utshani.org.za

Joel Bolnick, secretary of SDI
+2721 6899408 / +27829035545 / bolnick@courc.co.za

Mike Shanahan
Press Officer
International Institute for Environment and Development
Email: mike.shanahan@iied.org
Tel: +44 (0)20 7872 7308
Fax: +44 (0)20 7388 2826
<http://www.iied.org>

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Slum/Shack Dwellers International

Slum/Shack Dwellers International is an alliance of people's organizations and NGOs seeking new and different ways of seeking to eradicate homelessness, landlessness and poverty. (see: <http://www.sdinet.org>) The network was launched in 1996, building on existing relationships between federations in Cambodia, India, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Thailand and Zimbabwe. It now includes eighteen federation affiliates with emerging processes of grassroots savings groups in fifteen further countries.

The International Urban Poor Fund was created by IIED and SDI in 2001 with support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust, and has received additional support from the Big Lottery Fund and the Allachy Trust.

One purpose of the new grant is to 'grow' the International Urban Poor Fund. SDI will shortly launch an independent fund with some initial funding from Sida and USAID through a multilateral aid programme called Cities Alliance. The fund's international board will include government ministers from Brazil, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

To date, no other significant US foundations have had funding programmes to address urban poverty in the global South. Some, such as the Ford Foundation, fund such work indirectly through governance programmes. Others, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, are considering launching an urban programme.

About the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people -- especially those with the fewest resources -- have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Patty Stonesifer and co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett (see: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/default.htm>).

About the International Institute for Environment and Development

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an independent, non-profit research institute. Set up in 1971 and based in London, IIED provides expertise and leadership in researching and achieving sustainable development (see: <http://www.iied.org>).

Table: Details of some of the federations (for more info see: <http://www.sdinet.org>)

Date founded Active savers Savings Houses Built Tenure Secured
(No of families)

Brazil	2005	100	\$4000	150		
Cambodia	1993	11,300	\$145,000	700	5,000	
Colombia	1999	60	\$10,000	60		
Ghana	2003	12,000	- 0	5075		
India	1986	100,000	\$1.2 million	35,000	35,000	
Kenya	2000	20,000	\$50,000	100	1,000	
Malawi	2004	20,000	\$50,000	800	3,000	
Namibia	1992	15,000	\$0.6 million	1,500	3,500	
Nepal	1998	3,147	\$173,402	44	44	
Philippines	1994	42,727	\$631,830	547	26,166	
South Africa	1991	50,000	\$1.5 million	13,100	20,000	
Sri Lanka	1998	21,506	\$29,469	50	120	
Tanzania	2004	1,000	\$2,000	250		
Thailand	1992	5 million	\$206 million	42,111	42,111	
Uganda	2003	500	\$2,000	109		
Zambia	2002	14,000	\$18,000	1,000		
Zimbabwe	1995	45,000	Z\$280 million	1,000	8,500	