

# TOWNSHIP ECONOMY IN 2020

An Interview with Anthony Muteti, SLF's Project Officer



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Anthony Muteti, The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation's Project Officer, has created a podcast series. In this series, he shares his experiences about what happens in the field while doing research. This series will cover topics such as the pressures field researchers face, the skills required to do field research well, specific experiences of the Delft Third Wave Resurvey and crime and gangsterism in Delft.

In the first podcast in this series, Muteti talks about Delft in Cape Town. He speaks about the experiences he had during the research



FIGURE 1

Anthony Muteti, SLF's Project Officer

process, the encounters the team had with gangs and his own views on racial integration and issues that attract immigrants to Delft. In this podcast, you can find out about Delft's location and history, as well as gain insights into what is going on in Delft in relation to crime issues. Crime in this area ranges from general crime such as petty theft to the biggest threat to business development - gangsterism. He also talks about racial issues and how this affects relationships in general. There are also positive things happening in Delft, such as housing development by government. More importantly on this topic, individual home owners in Delft are making great efforts to make their houses look beautiful, but this also highlights the gap between the rich and poor in the same area. Listen to the first episode in the series [here](#).

We interviewed Muteti, to introduce his podcast and the work that he does.

**Please introduce yourself, the work that you do and how long you have been doing this work.**

**AM:** My name is Anthony Muteti, I work for the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation. I usually work in the townships collecting data and doing research. I am a team leader and I've been doing this since 2006. It has been an interesting experience over the years doing this kind of work. You meet different people, good people and bad people. We have had some terrible experiences as well and very good experiences, so it is a mixed bag of experiences. One of the most interesting experiences I've had was the National Study which happened in 2017, where we toured the whole of the country doing research for

the Competition Commission and it was an eye opener in that each and every township we visited there was something different that we learned. It was one of the greatest experiences I have ever had in my life.

### **What are some of the key findings or insights from the Third Wave of Surveys done in Delft South earlier this year?**

**AM:** Delft was quite an interesting site, this was not the first time I was doing research in Delft, I was there in 2015. So, I would say I was the only remaining [SLF] team member that went into Delft in 2015. The rest did not come back, they have either gotten somewhere else or have moved out of Cape Town. So, I was the only one who was involved in 2020. So, for me noting these differences between 2015 and 2020 was one of the most important things. In 2015 when we went into Delft, for me, there were lots of spazas and lots of house shops. House shops were quite dominant. Of course, we could see then that they were not going to survive for long - there were survivalist shops selling smaller items costing around R1 and R2, it is expected that a business such as this one cannot survive for too long. Going back in 2020 and finding out these survivalist businesses had disappeared confirmed this. But there were also other businesses that we found in 2015 that were still going strong in 2020 and for me this was an important finding.

In 2015, Delft did not have so many high-rise buildings, there were a few high-rise buildings. However, when we went back in 2020 there were so many high-rise buildings. This was very interesting that we needed to look at rental housing in Delft in the 2020 resurvey - it became part of the study in 2020 because of the increasing number of double storeys sometimes triple storeys in the area. Some of the new developments that we found in Delft were guesthouses, sleep-and-go's along the Main Road, and this is something we didn't see in 2015. For me this means that people are investing

some serious money into property and people are aware that there is money in property.

In 2015 again, there were no serious threats of gangsterism... we did not experience as much threats of gangsterism as much as we did in 2020. It was a defining moment for me that everywhere we went, we were warned that we should be careful. The increase in poverty and hunger contributes to such developments. It was also a learning curve for me. The Main Road in particular is now congested with businesses, there are some businesses that have real potential to grow into bigger businesses. For example, there are lots of businesses that are related to housing such as hardware shops that sell building material in Delft. These businesses have potential to grow into something bigger. Then you have people who do technical things such as welding and metal works. Such businesses also have potential to grow into bigger businesses. These businesses had a lot of machinery and a lot of orders from customers even from companies that are well established. From the growth of these businesses, you can tell that Delft has potential to have an established sector in light manufacturing.

### **Why was Delft South chosen as the field of study?**

**AM:** This was not the first time that we went into Delft. The first time the SLF went to Delft was in 2010-2011. In 2015, we went there to do a resurvey and it was important to go again in 2015 for comparative data and to study trends. This can be used to see whether the businesses in 2011 still existed in 2015 and in 2020. So, taking a 10 -year period to study a single township gives you a complete view of what is happening in that township. For me it was important because you also get to establish a good working relationship with the community, so when you go there you are not new, people trust you because they can actually relate with your past work. This also calls for being honest with the people that you speak to, don't promise anything

when you speak to people because when you go back, they will always ask you about the promises you previously made. I always tell researchers not to promise anything, just go there and collect data. Do not make any commitments, such things will come back to bite you. It is a good thing because you are moving into a community where you have already established a foot hold, people know you and people trust you. You also have data that you can compare over a certain period and you cannot be wrong. This is data that has been collected 3 times over 10 years in a single township, so you can see the changes.

**What are some of the interesting things that you have observed while doing this research in Delft?**

**AM:** I am always wanting to compare with 2015, and in 2015 there was no mall in Delft. There was the Airport mall, but this is right at the end of the township. In 2020, there is a new mall that is quite big - the Shoprite Mall - and it has become the centre of attraction for traders as well. One of the things I learnt was that traders seem to follow where the foot falls are, and this could also explain why we found fewer house shops in residential areas. Maybe some of these moved close to the mall and are trading there. These were not there before but now it is congested with lots of people who are selling different items. This could explain that street traders tend to follow foot falls, so they are congested around the mall where a lot of people are coming and going out of the mall. There is a symbiotic relationship between established businesses and informal businesses. They are not competing

against each other, they are working to benefit each other. Whoever comes out of the mall and has some change to spare, would then buy from the street trader who is right at the entrance. You wonder why they would not buy from the shop but the street trader. The reason for this might be because the mall is selling things in bulk and the street traders will sell single items which fits well with the change that a person would have from the mall. Lots of people are coming up with initiatives to survive, and it was interesting to find old people coming up with their own designs of products like *bompies*. One of our fieldwork researchers spoke to an old lady who is using recycling bottles and making *bompies* from the bottom of the recycled bottles and using a stick so the kids would have a sucker of some kind. It is an innovative way of thinking about selling *bompies*.

Educares, a lot of them are closed, but a lot of them were present in 2015. I went to look for some of the educares I had interviewed in 2015 and I was only able to locate two out of the many that I have interviewed in 2015. It is one of the businesses that have been very much affected by the economic downturn or maybe it is because of the registration process, or could be because some of the people running the educare businesses do not have the financial skills to run the business.

**FIGURE 2**

The field research team who conducted the third wave of surveys in Delft South earlier this year



One of the biggest taverns we found in 2015 is now closed. When I asked why the tavern had closed, I discovered that the owner of the tavern had passed on and the children could not sustain the business. They were fighting over the ownership of the tavern and could not re-register the tavern, resulting in the permit expiring.

### **What were some of the challenges you faced when doing the data collection?**

**AM:** The biggest threat was crime. Gangs targeted us every now and then. I had one of the worst experiences where an interviewee was approached by a gangster at knifepoint. I will always remember this experience of this gangster who came around carrying his knife, stabbing it against the ground and demanded a protection fee. This is his modus operandi; he goes around targeting foreign informal traders and collects a protection fee of R10 sometimes R20 from each of them. The informal traders seem to be okay with it now because they cannot report this guy because he has so much influence and they (informal traders) are afraid of him. When he came, I knew he wanted to instil fear in me as well with his actions and the way he carried his knife. It was a tactic to scare me and the team of researchers. But we had not gone there to ruffle their feathers, we went there to do our work, so I did not pay attention to what he was doing. When you experience such things, sometimes it shakes up your mind, it makes you feel very uncomfortable. It was also not the first time something like this happened. In another incident in Delft, we were targeted by the gangsters who wanted the gadgets (tablets) we were using to conduct interviews. Such as experiences sometimes require courage, you always have to be alert and think on your feet about the best way to deal with the situation. Fortunately, we had fieldworkers who were experienced in dealing with such encounters. There is so much anxiety when you are out there in the field, and this was one of the biggest threats to collecting data. There were also

funny moments during the data collection. For example, one of the fieldworkers was targeted by a gangster in a wheelchair. The gangster that approached the field worker wanted the tablet that the fieldworker was using. The fieldworker was alert and quickly read the situation and prepared himself. When the gangster in the wheelchair realised that the field worker noticed, he quickly stood up from the wheelchair and ran away. We always joke about this. There was also an attempt from other gangsters to stop us from doing the research. It was a very clever tactic that they used. They circulated a rumour that if anyone took the flyers we were distributing, and that if you read the flyer you were going to lose your mind and the people distributing the flyers will come in and steal possessions in your house. It was an attempt from the gangsters to stop us from moving around because they thought that we were targeting them. They saw us as threats, and yet we were not a threat to them, we were just doing our work. Such events disturb the work and the way you see things, you begin to not trust anyone. On several occasions we were followed by particular people, but we still managed to do our work without any significant challenges.

One of the things we learnt, is that in Delft, it is not surprising that we come across sections that very rich people live. You can see this by the way they have designed their houses, the way they have restructured their houses. There are sections where you would forget that you are in Delft, you would think you are out somewhere in suburban areas. Then you get a few streets down the section, where there is poverty. It is difficult to comprehend why there is a such a huge gap between the rich and the poor in the same neighbourhood.

### **What are some of the changes you have observed over the years of doing this research?**

**AM:** One of the things I have observed over the years is that in research, when you are assembling your team, you always think that

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you have the best, but sometimes you come across situations that tell you there's a lot that the team lacks. We did not have anyone in the team that can read and understand sign language. Imagine coming across a person who can only communicate using sign language - it becomes difficult. This person could be someone you want to interview because this person is running a serious business. It is a challenge that I thought perhaps I could look into this. It was not one person that we met, we met about two or three people that required sign language interpretation. For me, this was an eye opener for real, it is one of the things we could perhaps think about.