

After a schoolgirl died in a shack dwellers' protest in Cato Crest, Nathi Olifant and Ayanda Mhlanga look at Abahlali baseMjondolo – its power base, funders, philosophy and leaders

The fight

TWO years from now Abahlali baseMjondolo – shack dwellers, loosely translated – will turn 10.

The movement has been waging a social war that has grabbed the attention of local and international media and boasts it represents about 500 000 homeless people.

The movement was started in early 2005 and its leader, S'bu Zikode, announced its arrival with a paper, "We are the Third Force".

The widely published paper described how the shack dwellers' movement had given hope to thousands in Durban while accused of being part of the Third Force, a label for those deemed to have betrayed the Struggle in the apartheid era – particularly in the years between 1990 and 1994.

Zikode's paper was published in November 2005, rapidly translated into Afrikaans, Xhosa and Zulu and widely republished in newspapers and popular magazines.

Abahlali claims it is probably the most widely republished piece of journalism in post-apartheid South Africa.

With most of its members in Durban, Abahlali says it's the largest organisation of the militant poor in post-1994 South Africa.

Its original event was a road blockade organised from the Kennedy Road settlement in protest against the sale of land to a local industrialist.

The local councillor had long promised the land would be developed for houses for shack dwellers.

The movement grew rapidly and now has tens of thousands of supporters from more than 30 settlements.

Since they're often at loggerheads with the municipality and law enforcement

agencies, arrests are common.

Abahlali says it has developed a sustained voice for shack dwellers in public spaces and occupied and marched to the offices of local councillors, police stations, municipal offices, newspaper offices and city hall in actions that have put thousands of people on the streets.

The movement refuses to engage in party politics and boycotts elections.

It has been attacked by both the ANC and the DA, with both trying to woo Abahlali into their ranks, to no avail.

City authorities have accused the movement of being ultra-leftist, a DA plot and being underwritten by foreign right-wingers.

Abahlali organised a highly contentious but successful boycott of the March 2006 local government elections under the slogan "no land, no house, no vote".

Among the victories notched up, it has democratised the governance of many settlements, stopped evictions in a number of them, won access to schools, stopped the industrial development of the land promised to Kennedy Road, forced officials, offices and projects to "come down to the people" and mounted vigorous social challenges.

The key demand is for "land and housing in the city" but it has also successfully politicised and fought for an end to forced removals and for access to education and the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, health care and refuse removal as well as bottom-up popular democracy.

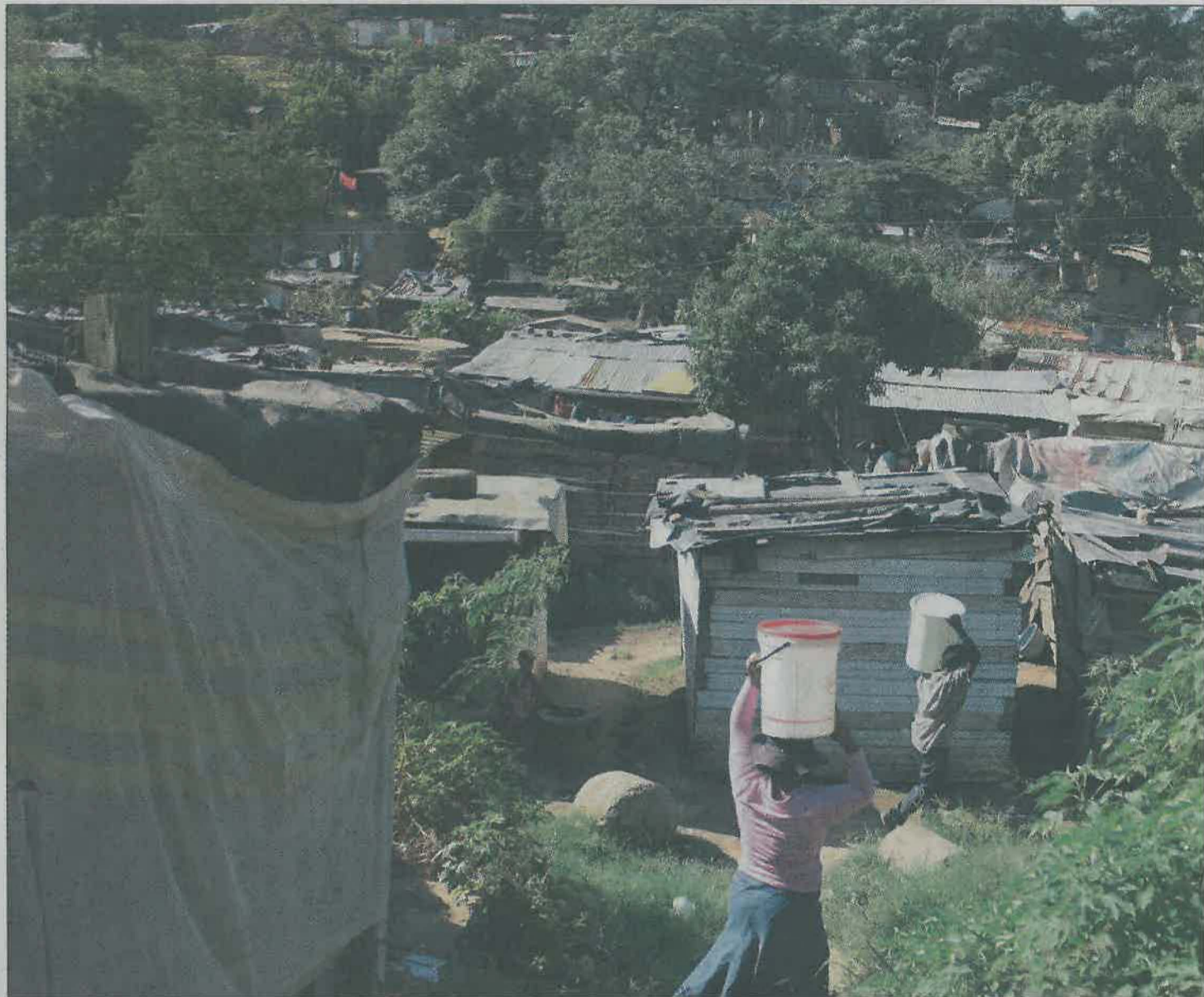
In some settlements, the movement has succeeded in establishing crèches, gardens, and sewing collectives.

It has also provided support for people living with or made orphans by Aids.

It has also organised a 16-team football league and puts on quarterly all-night multi-genre music competitions.



S'bu Zikode... leading the militant poor.



Cato Crest informal settlement. Some of the people living here say they have been waiting for an RDP house for up to 10 years.

WHAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES SAY

DA: Check on housing allocation

IN THE wake of unrest in the Cato Crest area, the DA said it had written to Premier Senzo Mchunu requesting the establishment of a commission of inquiry to look into all housing delivery matters within Durban's Cato Crest informal settlement.

Buoyed by Western Cape developments, where Premier Helen Zille got Police Minister Nathi Mthethwa to establish a commission of enquiry into alleged police inefficiency in Khayelitsha, the DA in KZN said the commission should cover ongoing allegations of unlawful evictions, illegal contractors, unfair allocations and any corrupt activity.

DA MPL George Mari said the request

comes after the fatal shooting of a teenage girl, Nqobile Nzuza, early this week during a violent protest at the informal settlement after a stand-off between police and protesters.

"Events at Cato Crest have gone beyond the control of the eThekweni Municipality and metro police. The premier must intervene if further unrest and death are to be prevented.

"The situation at Cato Crest is the result of the collapse of the municipality's housing department. The DA in eThekweni previously submitted two notices of motion to the council, calling for a new, transparent housing allocation policy."

Mari said the DA had requested investigations into allegedly dodgy housing allocations and had marched to city hall to call on the mayor to answer for illegal evictions.

ANC: Poor used to further

THE ANC has accused Abahlali baseMjondolo of "using the poor" to further its own agenda.

Although the ANC did not name Abahlali, merely because the party does not recognise the movement, provincial secretary Sihle Zikalala said this week they had noted the recent spate of so-called public protests.

The party said some organisations mobilised to create social instability so that they could emerge as community leaders.

"We are certain that the ANC government has delivered a lot for our people in creating a better life for all, but we are aware a backlog still needs to be addressed urgently," said Zikalala.

He said the challenges did not mean protesters were justified in undermining basic service delivery that had been achieved so far in their areas, resorting

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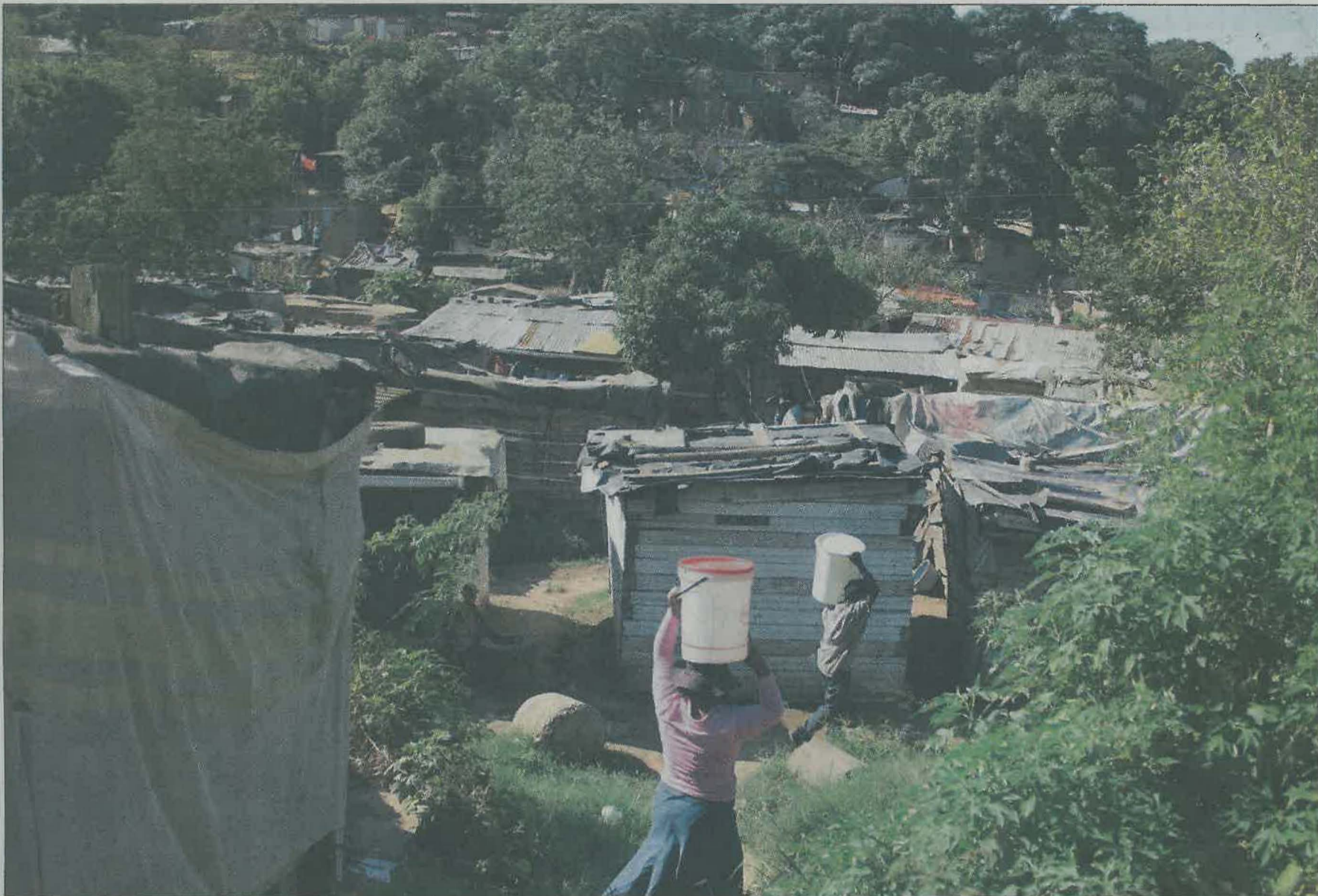
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The fight for

Who pays
the bills
and bailouts



IT'S not known how much the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement has in bank accounts or who audits the books, but a number of donors are listed on its website.

The main source of funding is the South African Development Fund: contributors include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Broadway Cares, Equity Fights Aids, Calamus Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Cobble Creek Foundation and European Climate Foundation.

Abahlali says it has "gratefully" accepted small donations for projects from Entraide et Fraternité, The Church Land Programme, X-Y, Anarchist Black Cross, ecumenical church organisations and War on Want.

Amnesty International has helped with legal costs and Mute Magazine, People's House and the Onyx Foundation have invested books, journals and films in the University of Abahlali baseMjondolo library.

Friends of Workers' Education in South Africa have also made literary donations.

Other known donors include Pietermaritzburg's Gift of the Givers, St Elizabeth's Church in New Jersey, the US, Bishop Rubin Phillip and the Ota Benga Alliance.

Anonymous donations from Italy and San Francisco have helped with the aftermath of fires.

The website says it has rejected "breyani money" – intended to co-opt or with strings attached.

Abahlali claims its annual budget has always been significantly less than the modest annual salary of one NGO employee.

"The movement has been careful to organise in a way that is not dependent on donor support. It remains entirely unprofessionalised."

Abahlali says all decisions about money are taken collectively, publicly and democratically in open weekly meetings and all donations should be channelled through its official structures.

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Picture: DOCTOR NGCOBO

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"We are certain that the ANC government has delivered a lot for our people in creating a better life for all, but we are aware a backlog still needs to be addressed urgently," said Zikalala.

He said the challenges did not mean protesters were justified in undermining basic service delivery that had been achieved so far in their areas, resorting

to violent protests that sometimes compromised the lives of others.

"It is the government's responsibility to maintain law and order without taking the lives of protesters. Two wrongs do not make a right. The ANC provincial executive committee welcomes the investigation by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate into the Cato Crest killing of a 17-year-old girl. Trigger-happy police undermine the integrity of the service and need to be isolated."

Zikalala said the ANC wanted to warn opportunistic individuals who used bread and butter issues to manipulate people's emotions.

"We also call on eThekweni Municipality and other municipal leaders to speedily resolve issues of service delivery as they become a rallying point for social upheaval," he said.

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Durban's homeless

Leader 'knows pain' in shacks

NATHI OLIFANT and AYANDA MHLANGA

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The leader of Abahlali baseMjondolo sees nothing wrong with this. Zikode, 38, said he and his family were able to move into the house in Clare Estate because of a "slight improvement" in his life. He would not be drawn on how much rent he pays.

"It's true I no longer live in a shack, but what they forgot to tell you is how I was chased from Kennedy Road in 2009 and escaped an assassination by the ANC in 2009 that resulted in the death of two people."

The man behind one of the biggest social movements in southern Africa said his detractors would stop at nothing to discredit him.

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Qasha came from the Eastern Cape in search of a better life and moved to Cato Crest informal settlement in 2007.

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"We still go into her classroom and expect to see her there," said Tati.

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The flashpoints

WHILE both the eThekweni Municipality and Abahlali baseMjondolo have found themselves on the wrong side of the law, the struggle to get rid of informal settlements and land grabs has been fuelled by several factors.

Police officers and municipal law enforcement officials have also been accused of causing tension.

Because many of the Abahlali members are recent settlers especially in eThekweni, disregard for regulations is often the cause of friction between shack dwellers and the authorities.

The tensions are fuelled mostly by the following:

- Illegal erection of shacks.
- Illegal water and electricity theft or connections.
- Evictions.
- Illegal sale of RDP houses.
- Perceived unfair allocation of houses.
- Demolition of shacks.
- Vandalism of municipal infrastructure.
- Land grabs.
- Political tensions.
- Police.
- Unauthorised marches and protests.
- Illegal road blockades.
- Resentment of councillors.

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Nzuza's life orientation teacher, Thobile Biyela, described her as a pleasant pupil. "She always had a smile on her face. Even though she had problems, she came to school and was always positive. I never saw her sad or depressed. She was never rude to her educators."

ayanda.mhlanga@inl.co.za

The links

AB AHLALI baseMjondolo has a few organisations that fall under its umbrella.

According to its website, the movement is in solidarity with the Rural Network, Unemployed People's Movement, Church Land Programme and Landless People's Movement.

These groups all advocate rights for the poor, including access to housing, accommodation, land, basic and social services.

Almost all claim not to be politically aligned.

In December 2006 Abahlali severed ties with the Centre for Civil Society, an entity of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

The reason for this, S'bu Zikode said, was due to exclusion from the Social Movement Indaba.

"We felt we were being undermined because the centre wanted to represent us, instead of allowing us to participate, so we cut ties with them," said Zikode.

Ishmael Semanya SC
Chairman of the Bar

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Pithouse said Abahlali had a lot of support from communities and achieved its aims by preventing many forced evictions from shack settlements around the city and stopping the Slums Act in 2009.

He said Abahlali only recently started moving into the sphere of protests, using roadblocks because its right to protest had been stifled. "They started to do the roadblocks because they are disruptive and it enables the movement to negotiate."

He said the provincial MEC wanted to negotiate only when the roadblocks started. He said the violence came from the police, but seemed to have normalised.

Advocate Ishmael Semenya SC General Council of the Bar

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While the chairman, advocate Ishmael Semenya SC, would not say if the Bar considered any legal action against those seen to be persecuting Cato Crest residents, the council stressed section 26 of the constitution entrenches the right of access to adequate housing and the right of protection from arbitrary eviction.

"It is a matter of grave concern that, despite their repeated attempts to follow due process of law in enforcing their constitutional rights, the residents, including many women and children, have been left homeless and destitute," said Semenya.

He said the council noted with concern "reports that 100 residents were driven to occupy land at Cato Crest earlier this year after being excluded from a project intended to provide housing for them".

Mary de Haas violence monitor, sociologist

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What drives the unrest is the lack of transparency on the allocation of houses, said Mary de Haas, adding that political interference was a big agitator.

"Abahlali is getting more and more militant because it's getting nowhere - things become more polarised."

De Haas said she hoped the situation would not escalate to a Marikana-type incident of mass violence. "I hope the police are more restrained. Right now policing is reactive, not proactive."

Blue Bullet cc and Enrico cc t/a

SEACO CASH & CARRY

NEW STORE OPENING SPECIALS Monday 7th Oct to 12th Oct or until stocks

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NIK NAKS BAILER 50 X 20G	29⁵⁰ bale	SPARLETTA /CREME SODA 2LT	9⁹⁵ each	ENERGADE ASSTD 6 X 500ML	38
BEACON SLABS 12 X 90G	77⁹⁹ each	LIQUI-FRUIT ASSTD 12 x 1lt	139⁹⁵ case	SUPREME FLOUR 10kg	63
NYALA 10kg	44⁹⁵ each	LUX SOAP 6 X 200G	35⁹⁴ pk - eq R 5.99	WILLARDS CHEESE CURLS 150g	6
8 x 2.5kg	107⁹⁵ bale	10 x 1kg	49⁹⁵ bale	SUNLIGHT 2In1 W/PWD 2kg	37⁹⁵ each
HANDY ANDY ASSTD 5x750ml	62⁵⁰ pk eq R12.50	SUNFOIL OIL 12 x 375ml	71⁹⁵ pk	RAYYAN RICE 10kg	58
COKE ONLY 24x330ml	126⁹⁹ case	5lt	69⁹⁵ each	CLASSIC 10x2g	14
TOMCO		KELLOGGS CORN		CLASSIC	

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