

South Africa — Organising against coronavirus: Campaign demands

Thursday 9 April 2020, by [Khanya Forum](#) (Date first published: 20 March 2020).

A meeting was held on 14 March by Khanya College at the House of Movements to discuss the coming pandemic of coronavirus. In attendance at this meeting were health care worker activists from the Gauteng Community Health Care Forum, waste picker activists from African Reclaimers Organisation and other social movement activists. Discussions covered the context of the South African health system, COVID-19, how the government has responded to it, and most importantly, how working class communities must respond to the coming disaster.

Out of these discussions, activists present agreed upon a campaign strategy to raise awareness and begin to build strong community structures in each and every working class community. The meeting also identified a number of key demands that these community structures must organise around, fight for and force the government to provide if we are to survive.

Access to water and sanitation:

Thousands of temporary handwashing facilities must be set up across every area and adequate soap and water must be made available in every township in South Africa. All places of employment must install handwashing/ sanitiser points. The armed forces should be available to deliver water to areas experiencing lack of clean, safe water supply. Any actions of forced installation of water meters in working class households must be suspended. Unemployed youth must be hired at the minimum wage to operate these installations.

Free testing and healthcare access for all at all facilities:

Testing must be free for all, regardless of nationality, including those with medical aid, and must be made available anywhere, especially private facilities. Mobile testing stations must be rolled out and follow patterns of the movement and evolution of the virus. All sick patients must be provided with access to all and any healthcare facility (public or private) if necessary, regardless of their medical aid status. As in other countries, the government must conduct random testing at taxi ranks, train station and other key points.

Production, free distribution and public access of necessary medical resources and equipment:

This includes face masks, gloves, drips, protective clothing, oxygen tanks, etc. The state must temporarily expropriate companies and facilities that produce/provide these resources and ensure working class communities have access to these resources. Prices controls and rationing systems must be enforced.

Quarantine facilities within local communities must be provided where possible and resourced with necessary infrastructures:

Local community structures may have to identify these local spaces like churches, and community halls that can be used as quarantine facilities. Medical equipment, staff, heating, food and other support must be provided by the state.

Secured employment of sick members of the working class:

Because many working class people cannot afford to 'work from home', the state needs to protect these workers against dismissal. The UIF must not be used to fund sick workers. Time taken off to recover from the virus must not be included as part of workers' sick leave.

Feeding schemes in townships:

The state needs to set up feeding points of any member of the community who needs food at key points in the townships, community halls, churches and other spaces. The state needs to give a food voucher of at least R2 000 per unemployed family.

Make working class transport safer:

Taxi associations must be compelled to enforce lawful passenger loads. Sanitiser facilities must be provided for every single taxi, bus, plane and train in operation and at all transport centres in South Africa. The state must upscale maintenance on the railway network immediately and provide more trains to service the public to avoid overcrowding.

Unemployed people must be employed by the state to respond to pandemic:

In order to respond to coronavirus we will need thousands if not millions of people to perform numerous tasks and actions in service of the public. South Africa currently has a large pool of unemployed people (and volunteers that the state refuses to employ), and especially youth who must be employed by the state to perform these functions. This will also offset the deteriorating conditions of working class communities as the pandemic worsens. The workers must be paid the minimum wage and work in shifts.

Khanya Forum

P.S.

• KHANYA FORUM 20/03/2020:

<https://karibu.org.za/organising-against-coronavirus-campaign-demands/>