

FNF S4 Ep 1:

On the Wrong side of Right – counting the cost for Whistleblowers

Transcript

[00:00:00] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** A new year, another impactful season! We are back! I warmly welcome you once again to this brand new season of Let's Talk Human Rights. My name is Masechaba Masemola wa-Mdaka and I will continue to be your Host. Season 4 promises to be yet another compelling, thought-provoking and heartfelt one. Let's take a short reflective listen back to season 3 moments:

[00:00:43] **Clip 1:** One is sure that if you are called a front liner, uh, or a human rights uh, defender, then it means that, uh, you should be very careful. You should watch out your steps.

[00:00:54] **Clip 2:** I must say that this space where we operate as human rights defenders is it's quite, quite complicated. It is complex, and we always have to ask ourselves, why are we really [00:01:00] doing this? Why am I doing this?

[00:01:03] **Clip 3:** First, if we look at, uh, the main reason behind human trafficking, it's a commercial entity involving billions and billions of dollars. It's not a small, uh, business. It's run, uh, both locally and internationally and with very powerful people across the global.

[00:01:19] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** In season four of the podcast, we remain committed to bringing the stories of our human rights defenders and their quest for the pursuit of justice. We will also tackle topical issues, which speak broadly to rule of law and the not-so-typical stories that go unnoticed but impact human rights. Please join me as we speak to the issues that matter in the name and spirit of justice on the wrong side of rights, counting the cost for whistleblowers.

[00:01:53] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Today, we touch base right here in South Africa. Allow me to jump straight into it. As many of you may know, the first part of the Zondo Commissions report was published on 4 January 2022. The fifth and final part was published on 22 June 2022. This after four (4) years of an enquiry and investigation which was preceded by two (2) painstakingly long years and resources that cost taxpayers millions to uproot and uncover the plethora of ills that had been taking place in South Africa.

[00:02:23] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** For context, the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State, better known as the Zondo Commission or State Capture Commission, is a public inquiry established in January 2018 by former President Jacob Zuma to investigate allegations of state capture, corruption, and fraud in the public sector in South Africa.

[00:02:49] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** At the handover of the Zondo Commission Report, President Cyril Ramaphosa paid tribute to the commission's staff, the whistleblowers and journalists who exposed and uncovered corruption, as well as former public protector Advocate Thuli Madonsela, who set the process in motion by recommending the establishment of the commission. Since then, several allegations made by whistleblowers across various incidents have taken centre stage and exposed the depth of corruption in South Africa.

[00:03:47] **News Clip:** But one of the things we need to remember as we seek to ensure that we are ready to tackle any future state capture and corruption, is that the protection [00:04:00] of whistleblowers is paramount. The protection of whistleblowers is paramount.

[00:04:31] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Yet, with all this revealed, and acts of courage by whistleblowers being revered, why is it that whistleblowers bear the brunt of being crucified for the truth while the perpetrators enjoy the benefits of protection and impunity? In this episode journey, I am joined by Ms Mathapelo More and Ms Pusetso Morapedi. Mathapelo is an internal auditor by profession, having previously been employed at Daybreak Farms as the Head of the Risk and Internal Audit Department. Mathapelo started her career at Sithole Incorporated and served her auditing articles with the company. She also worked at the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants as a Project Manager of Legal and Governance and as Manager of Integrated Reporting Advisory at KPMG. She has a Bachelor of Accounting Sciences degree from the University of South Africa, a Postgraduate Diploma in Integrated Reporting from the University of Pretoria and a Postgraduate Diploma in Internal Audit from the University of South Africa. Mathapelo is a Whistle-blower.

[00:05:31] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Pusetso is the Southern Africa Director of the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa (PPLAFF). PPLAAF seeks to defend whistleblowers, as well as strategically litigate and advocate on their behalf where their disclosures speak to the public interest. She has studied for a Master's in Politics and International Relations,

[00:05:53] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** a Post Graduate Diploma in International Studies and a bachelor's degree in Humanities from Rhodes University and the University of Botswana respectively. Mathapelo and Pusetso, it's a pleasure to have you both in studio and more especially in person.

[00:06:12] **Mathapelo More:** Thank you for having me.

[00:06:13] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Thanks for inviting me.

[00:06:14] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Mathapelo, please take us through your ordeal and what you have had to overcome since blowing the whistle on the alleged incidents that were taking place at your former place of work.

[00:06:26] **Mathapelo More:** Uh, Masechaba, it has been very difficult. Uh, I must tell you, um, I was subjected to a lot of intimidation, uh, I'll say by the board because

every affidavit that we got. Every lawsuit that came was from the board and the company secretariat. Um, my house was searched. There was an Anton Piller, uh, that was, uh, instituted against me.

[00:06:55] **Mathapelo More:** They came to my house. Uh, my kids were at the house at the time. They [00:07:00] took their devices, they took their phones, they took my laptop, my sister's laptop. They imaged everything, all the information in, uh, in, in, in those devices. And, uh, within 90 days, because that's what the court order said, within 90 days, they were supposed to institute proceedings against me, you know, as a result of the, uh, as a result of the Anton Piller.

[00:07:29] **Mathapelo More:** That hasn't happened. Um, so my kids were traumatized for nothing. Um, it's, it's, you know, I've, I think we are all anxious if there's a car at the gate, you know, the kids will run around and hide their devices because of what they've, they've been through. Um, people were at my house from eight o'clock in the morning until four, so no privacy at [00:08:00] all. It's, uh, yeah, it's, um, sorry, I'm getting emotional.

[00:08:08] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Mathapelo I can see visibly also, and to hear from your tone that, um, you know, this is really, uh, a trigger and it is taking you back to relive those moments. Um, If I may ask, given all this experience and the ordeal, what are the channels of recourse which have been available to you to support your quest for the courage that you've displayed in blowing the whistle? Um, you know, given the, what you have now been on the receiving end of.

[00:08:39] **Mathapelo More:** Because of, uh, blowing the whistle, I lost my job. Um, I then approached the CCMA because, uh, the way I was terminated, I was terminated through WhatsApp. A WhatsApp message. You know, I woke up on the 25th of May 2021 to a WhatsApp from a service [00:09:00] provider who was not even an employee of the company, uh, telling me that my job has been terminated.

[00:09:07] **Mathapelo More:** Um, I obviously approached the CCMA as part of the recourse because there was never, um, a disciplinary hearing if there was a misconduct on my part so that I can tell my story. I won my case at the CCMA. Okay. They kept on dragging them, and they changed about, in my case, there were about four advocates. When this advocate advised saying, but this doesn't make sense.

[00:09:34] **Mathapelo More:** They will get rid of that advocate and get another one. And also it was a way of making sure that you know, as they frustrate you financially. They make sure that, because every time I had to go, I had to, there was supposed to be an attorney and an advocate, and when they appear, they charge.

[00:09:57] **Mathapelo More:** On their side, they have liberty, you know, to [00:10:00] do anything because the company is paying, you know, they've got public. But with me, I mean, my pockets went dry. Even if you can have a lot of savings with this kind of, um, intimidation. It was not going to last. Fortunately, I won my case at the CCMA. They approached the labour court for a stay of application, so it's an

application to interdict me from going back to work and even paying back my money because the CCMA ruling said I must be paid back my money and as I must be reinstated.

[00:10:39] **Mathapelo More:** On top of that, they approached the company, the provident fund, uh, company to not to pay for my pension fund. So they said, um, in one of the letters to the pension fund, they said I had stolen money from the [00:11:00] company and up to today, my pension fund is still withheld by that company. I was sued for 136 million for a transportation contract.

[00:11:20] **Mathapelo More:** that had absolutely nothing to do with me. That was a supply chain, um, project. Not my project, the only part that I played was just to assist with registering the company because I have a CIPC account and that's my participation in the whole matter. But also because it was a BEE thing, I was asked to be one of the directors because I'm black and I'm female.

[00:11:50] **Mathapelo More:** And it was not only myself, there were other colleagues who were black and female who were part of this company, but they were never sued because they [00:12:00] were not part of the whistle-blowing. Also, they went to the media, you know, with, you know, all sorts of allegations. So obviously the media will call you when they write a story, and I've been advised before because I've got friends who are journalists to say,

[00:12:22] **Mathapelo More:** "If you are approached by the media, do not keep quiet, because these people will defame you and they will tell you not to say anything." So when I was approached, I sang.

[00:12:33] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** And as you should, um, Mathapelo. Um, you know, as we think about the right to self and the right to freedom of expression, um, to this very topic of the fact that blowing the whistle seems to be so tabooed.

[00:12:47] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** It's revered on one end and on the other it's tabooed. If you'll allow me, um, you speak about the accused in terms of the place of employment where you were [00:13:00] having deep pockets, and this speaks broadly also to, uh, institutions who have had allegations, uh, made against them and counting the cost as it were.

[00:13:10] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Procedurally, as I think about what you've mentioned about, you know, the cost of lawyers and having to go through all these processes, has the system worked in your favour, having blown the whistle, or has it been rather to your detriment?

[00:13:24] **Mathapelo More:** It hasn't worked to my favor at all because I'm sitting here. It's been almost, uh, on, at the end of April, it'll be two years without any salary. They opened a criminal case against me on top of all the civil claims that I have and they relied on a forensic report that was conducted by a company. It purported to be a division of an international company in South Africa [00:14:00] only to find that it is a bogus company based in Limpopo. The managing director and the sole director of that company was a student, uh, at the University of Venda.

[00:14:16] **Mathapelo More:** I think doing a master's and that company only got one contract and that was to do that investigation. That company has ceased to exist. It's no longer in existence today. They changed their name from the Salon to Shafer, conducted that, uh, two months investigation and they are no more. So it was solely not to get, you know, one of the reputable companies to do an investigation because they knew. They knew that, uh, the allegations that they, they were putting against myself and, you know, the other executives who were part of the whistle-blowing were false.

[00:14:54] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Mathapeol, you're speaking very openly to the difficulties and [00:15:00] the barriers which you faced. You know, in terms of these intentional torments, I mean, you, you've given a summary of what you've been on the receiving end of.

[00:15:10] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** In terms of this two-year ordeal, which obviously was preceded by the actual process before the act of you unfortunately, um, losing, you know, your job and your livelihood, um, both personally and professionally. I mean, in terms of counting the cost, you've really been the receiver in terms of the brunt of the loss. I think on that note, I would like to share a voice note from another whistleblower, and then I'll get each of you, Pusetso and, uh, Mathapelo to, uh, comment on it.

[00:15:43] **Voice clip:** My name is Mthabisi Moyo and I work for the Gauteng Enterprise, Propeller, which is an economic development agency of the Gauteng Provincial government. The agency provides financial and non-financial support to small and medium enterprises within the province. Between [00:16:00] 2016 and 2017, I was at the forefront of whistle-blowing by way of making protected disclosures pertaining to maladministration and corruption. These disclosures were sequentially made internally to the executive management and the board of directors who both did not investigate the allegations made. The disclosures were then escalated externally to the economic development portfolio committee of the Gauteng Provincial Government through which the agency accounts. The provincial, uh, portfolio committee instituted a forensic investigation against the CEO and the board.

[00:16:39] **Voice clip:** In between disclosures and the investigation, the employer retaliated on me as follows: the disclosures that were made were initially nullified as false, and there were sweeteners initially in the form of paid holidays disguised as performance incentives which I rejected as I could see through them.

[00:16:59] **Voice clip:** When that [00:17:00] failed, I was transferred without consultation from my unit, which was a technical demotion. I had to invoke legal steps to get the illegal transfer reversed. Thirdly I then became defamed as having been involved in fresh land activities, and they distorted my involvement in a project which had been previously identified as a flagship project.

[00:17:22] **Voice clip:** As a result, I was suspended without following the internal policies and prescripts contained within the code of good practice related to suspending an employee who is a union official. This too was reversed when I was

involved in legal steps. Fourthly, as a result of the frivolous charges, my contract was terminated and witnesses supposed to testify on my behalf were too scared to do so.

[00:17:46] **Voice clip:** Lastly, they subjected me to financial ruin by instituting a frivolous civil lawsuit burning into millions of rands thereby justifying withholding my pension. This too was reversed when I [00:18:00] challenged it at court. Suffice to say the forensic investigation did prove the validity of the allegations and disclosures made resulting in the recovery of public funds. No steps were taken against those who retaliated against me.

[00:18:15] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** My goodness. Listening to this, you know, Mathapelo, you were saying earlier that there seems to be a script in terms of how whistleblowers are dealt with because there's no other way of actually expressing this. Um, the retaliation tactics are intense.

[00:18:31] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** I mean, it's completely. You know, it actually leaves you gobsmacked - the search and seizure you're talking about, you know. Things like pension funds being withheld while you're being taken through a rigorous financial process of having to plead your innocence or for your case. I mean, you're talking about, um, you know, privacy, your privacy being invaded, you know, false allegations also, which are attached. Completely frivolous charges are made.

[00:18:59] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** And I think on that [00:19:00] note from, Mthabisi's story, um, Mathapelo, I'd like to just maybe get a take from you just to respond to, to this voice note shared by Mthabisi. And then, um, Pusetso, I'd like you to do the same straight after.

[00:19:14] **Mathapelo More:** You know, I'm listening to the voice note and I can draw a lot of similarities. It looks like these people, you know, using the same operating model. One of, I think it was the Sunday Times that reported that, uh, the people that we reported were charged the company for reading a state capture report. So it looks like they go and they read anything that's out there on corruption so that they can perfect how to steal, you know, and also how to deal with whistleblowers because I mean, what Mthabisi is saying is exactly what I went through.

[00:19:56] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Yeah, I mean the, you know, it, it [00:20:00] actually shows how the whistle-blowing ecosystem, how dangerous it is. Um, because we are, we are actually asking people to fight corruption by putting themselves in the forefront as shields.

[00:20:12] **Pusetso Morapedi:** But we don't have a system that actually can catch them when the system actually, you know, spits them out. If you look at what Mathapelo went through with, um, I mean the unfortunate thing, or maybe the fortunate thing, which is unfortunate because it's an issue of interpretation, is that the PDA actually provides for protection.

[00:20:32] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Normally when you report. And you make a protected disclosure. Or maybe actually maybe there's a gap in that because you are not

going to report and say, I am making a protected disclosure and therefore I must be protected in this manner. One, the PDA provides for immunity against civil and criminal liability, for example,

[00:20:57] **Pusetso Morapedi:** But you've gone through criminal and civil [00:21:00] liabilities, or you're going through it like Mthabisi as well. The PDA provides for duty to inform the employee who actually has reported and even gives a timeline on when you are supposed to get, uh, feedback or whether or not your employer is going, to, to investigate. Um, if they don't, which body or person they've taken the investigation to or, or dealing with your case?

[00:21:26] **Pusetso Morapedi:** So the unfortunate thing is that we don't apply the PDA in our protected disclosures, so people then get punished this way. So it's like you're literally standing over a mountain on the edge the moment you start blowing the whistle and then the system just pushes you down, and then all these other liabilities.

[00:21:47] **Pusetso Morapedi:** That's what you meet. You know, them trumping up charges against you, losing your job, suspending, even though the PDA is supposed to protect whistleblowers from any kind of occupational detriment, but you've gone [00:22:00] through all of them and Mthabisi has gone through all of them. So there's a gap there that needs to be fixed because the law does provide for protection. But I think it's just the how and the interpretation of how it's done.

[00:22:11] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** You know, the question I keep asking myself is, Since when did doing the right thing become so difficult? Um, is there an idealistic mindset or approach to dealing with whistle-blowing? Is that what we're, we're facing right now?

[00:22:27] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Um, were we never ready? And it's evidently showing itself up in the fact that, um, Pusetso, you've just spoken to this. The legal framework to adjudicate cases doesn't exist because there seems to be what one can only describe as a systematic effort to not follow through on the enactment of laws.

[00:22:47] **Pusetso Morapedi:** So you know, when you fight corruption, it fights back. and corruption has long existed. And it fights hard. It fights dirty. And I mean, corruption has existed way, way before, [00:23:00] right? Like it's time immemorial. I think it is a culture that we've cultivated as a society, a culture of corruption, blatant corruption, um, a culture in business, doing business and making money.

[00:23:14] **Pusetso Morapedi:** All means necessary, including corruption and a culture of punishing those who want to hold those in power accountable. A culture of lack of accountability for those who misuse and abuse power, and those who misuse public, uh, funds and public, um, assets. I mean if normally an employer must applaud a whistleblower for trying to protect the company's interest or the public interest.

[00:23:43] **Pusetso Morapedi:** But now we have a culture where that is in a way, perverted, where the one who reports is the one who's actually investigated. Where

is that culture coming from? It must come from somewhere, even at homes in our homes where we cannot hold those [00:24:00] who do wrong accountable. And when you do, you are called a snitch.

[00:24:04] **Pusetso Morapedi:** You, you get a slap from, you know from your, a sibling or your cousin because you reported them for doing something wrong. So it stems from somewhere and it's now in our public administration, it's in the public sector. The snitch culture is almost the snitch culture. So if we can deal with that snitch culture maybe we then we can have a whistleblowing ecosystem that really, really, uh, looks at whistleblowers as those who have the public interest at heart and not the corrupt.

[00:24:33] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Most definitely, you know let's call it what it is. The profitability of corruption as an industry is seemingly very attractive. Um, That it's even overpowering the very mechanism set up in place to curb and punish perpetrators because the impunity really lies on the perpetrators and it's now transferred to the victim in this case, who is the whistleblower.

[00:24:59] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Do you think, Pusetso, um, and I, I'd like to get your take as well here, Mathapelo? Um, do you think the independence of these so-called investigative and oversight agencies has any merit to them? Is it not time for something more aggressive to match what you're actually facing as a whistleblower?

[00:25:20] **Pusetso Morapedi:** You know, you, you, can create, um, as many institutions as you'd like but if the system and the culture is the same, we can have many Zondo commissions. You can have the perfect, I mean we, we say in Africa, I'm from Botswana, so we say in Africa that, you know, South Africa has the most progressive and beautiful, and we hide love letter in a constitution that you can ever have.

[00:25:43] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Right. But it is the people who implement and who use that constitution, who interpret it. So you can have, you know, your public protection and the auditor general and all the oversight bodies, the public service commissions, all the committees that are, that are meant for [00:26:00] good, but if the people who use them use them in an evil manner, they won't work.

[00:26:06] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Which again speaks to, are they independent? Their very independence is questioned. Mathapelo?

[00:26:13] **Mathapelo More:** You know, you, you talk about institutions, I'll, I'll give you an example. Um, I spoke about the Bogas forensic report from this Bogas company. Remember, there's, there's a duty for us to report corruption in terms of section 34 of the Preca Act.

[00:26:34] **Mathapelo More:** You must report corruption. When we informed the shareholder, they had a duty to report. When we saw that they failed to take action, we took it upon ourselves to go and open a criminal case. So we've got an office of

the Hawks that are dealing, they're investigating us. They're also investigating the people that we [00:27:00] reported.

[00:27:00] **Mathapelo More:** So there's this investigating officer who's got the file with exhibits from the forensic report. Then we've got another investigating officer from the same division who is now looking at our case. We are giving him information. We are giving him this. We are giving him that. You'll think at some point they will sit together and say, what is going on?

[00:27:28] **Mathapelo More:** Because we are investigating the same company. Can we see what's going on? And that has not happened. We were, uh, served with summons on the 15th of February for fraud, theft, money laundering, for me, obtaining an acting allowance for the position that I was actually acting in. It's not as if I was not acting.

[00:27:50] **Mathapelo More:** Then HR decided, oh, let, let us give her an acting allowance. There was a letter appointing me to that acting position. I [00:28:00] acted in that position and I was paid for acting in that position. But there is someone, there's a prosecutor who saw it fit that, oh, this case can be prosecutable. Then you ask yourself, these are institutions that we think are independent and they will go through everything, you know, with a fine tooth comb, because this is our lives.

[00:28:26] **Mathapelo More:** I mean, it's my life. The case was withdrawn. He has moved on with his life. I'm flagged because when you go to the criminal records centre, my fingerprints are still there, and it says awaiting trial for fraud. I'm a finance person. Who's going to employ me if I've got a fraud charge in my name?

[00:28:49] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** So the livelihood of being robbed now even extends to your future because what does the future hold at this point?

[00:28:56] **Mathapelo More:** They stop you from, they like, you know what? They deal with you. They [00:29:00] want you to see you down,

[00:29:03] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Pusetso, you know, just as we, we think about the experiences and we speak to retaliation tactics and what this world of being a whistleblower looks like. You know, I've, I've been so fortunate to take part in a lot of the workshops, um, that PPLAFF is actually partnering with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, um, sub-Saharan Africa project. And you know, there was a time when we were exploring or having a discussion about the definition of whistleblowing and I suppose this is probably where we should have started.

[00:29:37] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Not just in South Africa, but around the African continent we've debated the word itself and what connotations it has. Whistleblower, you know, the snitch culture. Um, is it a deterrent? Um, or is there really a need for us at this point really to be euphemizing the language, to you know, to mask this rot that corruption yields in many of our public and private sectors? [00:30:00]

[00:30:00] **Pusetso Morapedi:** I remember that especially in Malawi we went back and forth, even in Namibia, um, and Zim where we are like, but why is whistleblowing you know, have, why does it have so many negative connotations? It goes back to the culture. What does, what does it say to us at the family level or at the individual level as friends, when we tell on each other?

[00:30:23] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Because then that is telling, uh, to why it's viewed negatively. Um, if when someone did wrong and they reported to their parents and then they got, you know, uh, a beating of course there's going to be some dislike or detested from the one who got the beating. I think tracing it back to the family level, then we can then bring it in into, now in the schools, when the prefect actually writes on your name for, for noise making and you get punished for it, you're gonna the class monitor.

[00:30:59] **Pusetso Morapedi:** The [00:31:00] class monitor gets hated for it. But, and I think because we never dealt with the hate to, I guess, make young people, and even us when we were young, that this person has a duty to make sure that you pay, uh, or you face the consequences for making noise for others who are trying to study, therefore actually disrupting common.

[00:31:22] **Pusetso Morapedi:** I guess public interest or common interest in, in, in the classroom. And then it goes to university, those who plagiarize and then they're not reported or those who report, you know, get punished for it or hated. And then it goes into, now the work, the workplace, because it starts from way back and how we view it, it becomes difficult to then view it positively even when it is for good.

[00:31:46] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Uh, but definitions are always needed for us to have a common understanding. So if, if the four of us or the five of us here view whistleblower differently, how we treat a whistleblower is also going [00:32:00] to be different. How we view a whistleblower is going to be different. How we appreciate one is going to be different, which is why the systems in the different countries can actually allow what Mathapelo is going through, what Mthabisi is going through, and all the other whistleblowers because somewhere inside of us, as a society in our psyche, we actually do not like whistleblowers.

[00:32:23] **Pusetso Morapedi:** We attach something negative to whistle-blowing. These are businessmen and women who want to make money and want to become millionaires, and you want to actually stop that, um, that operation? What do you think? How dare you think? The audacity, you know, to disrupt that process for them. Actually, even people whose children are suffering because of this stealing, they'll actually protect their thief and say, but he is our thief and he only wants to make money.

[00:32:54] **Pusetso Morapedi:** So you see, because we don't have a common understanding of what [00:33:00] whistleblowing is and what it does as an anti-corruption tool, we also do not support accordingly those who actually report wrong. So it is entirely up to society to determine its definition and maybe change the word to what? I don't know.

[00:33:16] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Corruption fighter. Will that work? No, it will not work. It's, it's even worse. Maybe Integrity Knights? Integrity Champions? Right? So, the thing is, whistleblowing though historically actually happened even back in the bush when we lived in the villages and caves. How do you alert of danger?

[00:33:39] **Pusetso Morapedi:** You blow the whistle. You blew the whistle. But because some people are benefiting from a corrupt system, they are going to find, you know, something problematic with the term. And instead of actually looking at what that can do, they're like mm-hmm. We don't like that term. Yeah. You're a snitch. You know, you, you cannot be [00:34:00] trusted amongst us, our, our, amongst our coming to our people.

[00:34:02] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Because when you know you think you have higher standards, and I mean, those who blow the whistle actually put up the mirror to those who do wrong, to show them how low they've gone actually done in, in society in terms of the standards, the good norms and the good shared values that, that they're supposed to espouse. And that, in a way, it's like pointing a finger at someone saying, you are, you're doing wrong and you, you're derailing society. Of course, some will turn around and, and, and bring in some hate and, and, and even kill you for it.

[00:34:38] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** And they do. And they do. And that is the unfortunate, um, you know, the fatalities that have been a result of somebody blowing the whistle. I mean, I know at PPLAFF, um, you do a lot of work also in terms of supporting moving people around once they've done this. I mean, again, just speaking to what happens after somebody blows the whistle? [00:35:00] This takes us, um, right to sort of our concluding thoughts and, um, closing remarks. Mathapelo, having gone through what you have experienced and what you're still enduring, would you do it again? Is there anything you would do differently or hope to see done for others that have dared to brave and take the stand for justice?

[00:35:24] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Because that's what you've done. You've, you've stood for justice, you've done the right thing, and simply put, you know, you are a champion for the cause.

[00:35:33] **Mathapelo More:** You know, I get asked that question a lot. Um, to be honest, I don't know. I, I really don't know because one day I wake up knowing the person that I am. I mean, it drives me crazy to see people stealing. You know, you just ask yourself that a grown man or a grown woman wakes up, kisses the husband or the wife goodbye going to [00:36:00] work. Do you tell them that I'm going to steal? What do you say? And when you bring money home, then when you buy those, eh, expensive BMWs cash with workers money, what does it say?

[00:36:14] **Mathapelo More:** What does it say to you? So those things, I know that they really get to me and it'll be very hard for me to keep quiet. But on the other hand, looking at what I've been through, what I've put me, you know, I see what I've been through, but what I've put my kids through. You know, when, when someone, and I think that's where they got me because I put the worst fight of my life.

[00:36:38] **Mathapelo More:** Like, I was like, if you want a fight, I will give you war. But when they came to my house and they invaded my space and I could see, you know, the trauma in my kids' eyes, I think that's where they got me. That's, that's where they got me. So I don't know. My response to that, it's, it'll, it'll be nice if maybe the system works or the system works faster. Let's, let's not say it doesn't work because it won't be fair for other people who are trying to do the most, you know, but if the system works faster, then yeah, I will do it again.

[00:37:21] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** You know, Mathapelo, as you're speaking, um, I'm just thinking, you know, Pusetso, you just said something to, um, speaking about the values of where does this start, you know, it is a mindset, um, the fact that where's the teaching coming from to actually get away with such behaviour? Maybe launching a campaign. You said something just now that um, do you say to somebody, I'm going to work to steal? Maybe doing an advert where we have children in there saying, oh, hi mommy. Hi daddy. Are you back from stealing today? Maybe, but realistically speaking, yeah, let's actually challenge the mindset because maybe when we start doing that, maybe even my [00:38:00] six-year-old will start saying, what is that about?

[00:38:02] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** And she'll question it. And that then becomes a value system in terms of where we are going as people. Just thinking about, you know, um, Pusetso, you know, the work that you know we do, uh, together with you FNF and PPLAFF you know. I've watched also with great admiration and zeal, um, the tenacity with which you also have braved and still continue to brave and overcome your own onslaught after being openly courageous and challenged, um, a system, uh, of an institution in your professional life.

[00:38:35] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** This has also resulted, um, I think in a bit of, Um, you know, as we've been speaking over the months, uh, in our working and personal relationship, in terms of what you've gone through, what gives you the motivation to continue doing the work and supporting others in the way that you do?

[00:38:52] **Pusetso Morapedi:** The motivation really comes from being taught that I'm part of a collective. I grew up in a [00:39:00] small, small village, uh, in Botswana, um, and the people, most of the people that live there are indigenous people, as we call them, uh, in Bots. And, and my, my grandparents who had a farm there, um, taught us that, you know, we were one, but as I, as I grew and went to school and, you know, studied abroad,

[00:39:25] **Pusetso Morapedi:** I always had. sense of duty to the people that I've left behind in my home village. So it comes from that. And then understanding the political system, how those in power will always, always do whatever they want. It is our responsibility, those who can do something and speak up and amplify the voices of those who are not heard, those who are in the far, far away rural areas, you know, to speak up on their behalf.

[00:39:51] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Um, and fighting corruption actually is really, is really that because corruption is so, is done in the dark and [00:40:00] anti-corruption movements really try to shine the light in the dark places by holding leaders

accountable that maybe, maybe instead of 10% of services going to the people, maybe 50% will go to the rural areas.

[00:40:15] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Just maybe, just maybe, and if it doesn't happen now, maybe it'll happen in 20 years when, when I'm no longer there, but it has to start somewhere. We have to start somewhere. So that motivates me to do the work that I do.

[00:40:31] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** What a wonderful, wholesome, uh, way to go into the conclusion of our conversation. Mathapelo, as we think about blowing the whistle in the context of freedom and the right to freedom of expression. Are you free?

[00:40:54] **Mathapelo More:** No. Let me say not yet. Hopefully one day. [00:41:00] I'll get there but not yet.

[00:41:07] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Mathapelo, Pusetso, On that note, thank you so much. This has been a powerful way to start the season - bittersweet. And I think moving beyond, you know, we always hope, we love to leave with an encouraging note in the podcast. I know that in the slide there's still this bigger task and a bigger fight, as it were, to address what this means to people, what it means to be a whistleblower, and the accountability and the call to action. I think that everybody needs to know that we all play a part and it's all our responsibility.

[00:41:52] **Mathapelo More:** Thank you. Thank you. Masechaba.

[00:41:53] **Pusetso Morapedi:** Thank you for having us.

[00:41:56] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** What a conversation. There are some [00:42:00] hard things to grapple with here, and no doubt you've been left with some thoughts and questions yourselves. There are a number of things that stood out for me and I'll mention a few. It's helpful to think about a culture of corruption. It's deep and pervasive and held up or supported by a value system of corrupt actions. Whistle-blowing is a dangerous pursuit in this kind of culture, and we need to think about that when encouraging people to blow the whistle on corruption.

[00:42:35] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** Pusetso also outlined so well, the gap between the letter of the law and the experience of it. The law is only as powerful as the individual's experience of it. I'm left with a number of questions. How do we as a society, hold people in power to account, and how do we make sure not to [00:43:00] participate in this culture of corruption at any level? Because people's lives are being shattered and surely this is an injustice, to say the least.

[00:43:08] **Masechaba wa-Mdaka:** My right, Your right, Our right, humanity should and continues to be for us All ... This has been the first episode, Season 4 of "Let's Talk Human Rights – the FNF Africa podcast exploring various human rights issues". We trust you have been informed, enlightened, and dare I say encouraged to take action. We appreciate and look forward to your continued listenership as we once

again journey through Africa, sharing stories of interest, expertise and looking ahead to safeguarding and protecting our Freedoms and Rights in our time and beyond.

[00:44:04] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** The Friedrich Naumann Foundation sub-Saharan Africa (FNF) is an independent German organisation that is committed to promoting liberal ideals and politics in Africa such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, innovation, digitization and free trade. By conducting campaigns, media events, seminars, workshops, study tours, cultural happenings and training courses the foundation promotes human rights including freedom of expression, freedom of the press, children's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights and engages against violence targeting women and capital punishment.

[00:44:44] **Masehaba wa-Mdaka:** If you are interested in our activities, follow us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Simply check for "Friedrich Naumann Foundation Africa", the links are in the show notes.