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THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXTENSION UNIT SAEU  
A CASE STUDY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL EXTENSION COLLEGE  
by Mathias J. Mutangi (SPDO: April 1990)  
. 1.0 BACKGROUND

The South African Extension Unit (SAEU) is a Commonwealth initiative focusing on the provision of educational opportunities to adult South African exiles in the frontline states of southern Africa. Its creation follows a proposal set out by the Commonwealth Committee on Southern Africa in October 1983 and endorsed at the Commonwealth Heads of Governments' summit in New Delhi the following month. The Committee was required to find out a mechanism for dealing with the educational needs of the rising numbers of South African school children and young adults fleeing to the frontline states following the 1976 students, uprisings in South Africa. The Committee proposed that the South African Extension Unit be established as a distance teaching institution, to address the educational needs of the adult South African exiles in the region. The Government of Tanzania accepted the request to set up the Unit in Dar es Salaam and to administer it. The SAEU was launched in 1984.

## 2.0 STRUCTURE AND OPERATION OF THE SAEU

The SAEU is administered through a Board of Trustees in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Government of Tanzania. The Board is responsible for policy formulation and the overall operation of the Unit. Membership of the SAEU Board of Trustees comprises representatives from COMSEC, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Government of Tanzania.

A Finance and Appointments Committee oversees financial and administrative operations of the Unit on behalf of the Board and a Technical Advisory Committee Figure 11 advises the SAEU Director on academic matters. To enable the Unit to function more smoothly, the Government of Tanzania has granted it legal status and some diplomatic privileges.

The SAEU Director is the chief executive of the Unit and is appointed by the Government of Tanzania. In her day-to-day operations the SAEU Director is currently supported by three academic staff and six general staff. The operations in the Unit are divided broadly under two departments. The Finance and Administration Department includes an accountant, a stores officer, a secretary, two drivers and an office attendant. On the other side, the Programmes Development Department comprises a Programmes Development Co-ordinator (as head of department), a Senior Programmes Development Officer (SPDO), 3 Programmes Development Officer, and a Course Secretary.

The SAEU staff work in close collaboration with the staff of the adult education

sections of both the liberation movements and the UNHCR. These sections are in direct contact with the learners in their respective study centres (settlements), through field co-ordinators. The linkage patterns between learners, study centres, co-ordinators, adult education staff and the SAEU office are illustrated by the representatives of the liberation movements.

Figure 1: Organisational structure of the SAEU

Board of Trustees

Finance and Appointments

Committee

SAEU Director

Technical Advisory

Committee 1:

Education Departments,

UNHCR, and Liberation '

Movements

Finance and Programmes Country Co-ordinators

Administration Development of Study Centres

Department Department '

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Study Centres

### 3.0 FUNDING

The SAEU is financed largely by COMSEC, through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, which channels funds to the Unit through its Fellowships and Training Programme. More recently, some donor agencies, notably the United Nations Educational and Training Programme for Southern Africa (UNETPSA) and the European Economic Community (EEC), have also provided financial support for the SAEU through COMSEC. Various other donors are currently being approached to support the rapidly expanding activities of the Unit. The SAEU Director is responsible for preparing a draft budget for her institution on the basis of goals and strategies planned for implementation. Other delicate

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considerations which have to be taken into account when the draft budget is being prepared include the fact that the SAEU is responsible for paying the costs of all the materials and services rendered to learners in five different countries. The draft budget is reviewed by the Finance and Appointments Committee before being submitted to the annual Board of Trustees meeting for further scrutiny and final approval.

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE UNIT

##### Geographical coverage

The services rendered by the South African Extension Unit have now reached South African exiles in 16 study centres located in five frontline states: Angola, Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (see Figure 2 (map))<sup>1</sup>. In all these countries the services are directed primarily at the adult population of the communities. By August 1989, about 1,350 comrades had been enrolled for the SAEU courses. It is projected that by July 1990 the enrolment will reach slightly over 2,000, and the geographical distribution of the study centres will be extended even further.

##### Courses and registration

A survey conducted by the SAEU, NEC consultants and representatives of the exile groups, shortly after the SAEU was launched, revealed two major areas of interest among the South African comrades. Firstly there was a need to enliven the comrades, educational states, which were worn out following long durations of out-of-school life. Secondly, the comrades had ambitions to embark on or complete their secondary education.

As a consequence of this, two broad categories of distance education courses have been initiated by the SAEU:

i) Basic courses are offered mainly to comrades who have completed primary level education. These courses are largely remedial, equipping the learners with some basic knowledge to help them cope with life in exile and preparing them for vocational and secondary level studies.

Three courses are offered at the basic level, these being Basic Mathematics, Basic English and Basic Agriculture.

ii) Secondary level courses are offered to comrades who have completed primary and basic level education, and to those who have been unable to either embark on or complete their secondary education through the formal education system. Secondary level courses include both the GCSE Ordinary and Advanced level subjects and the most popular subjects selected by learners are Mathematics, English, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Sociology, Principles of Accounts, and Economics.

Recruitment of learners into the SAEU courses is done through the field co-ordinators. After filling in registration forms, the learners are given a short induction course on distance education study skills before being issued with

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study materials. Once they begin their studies, learners are entitled to free tutorial and other support services. Co-ordinators submit lists of candidates recruited, together with their registration forms, to the SAEU. The SAEU has recently completed an exercise on allocating formal registration numbers to all the comrades recruited since 1985.

##### Study materials

###### i) Basic courses

Study materials for the basic courses consist of course books and audio-cassette programmes. The learners are also provided with stationery items, and English language dictionaries. For each of the three basic courses there are cassette programmes to support the printed materials. There are no textbooks prescribed for these courses.

Course books and cassette programmes for the basic courses are produced locally by The SAEU staff through collaboration with competent South African subject tutors, and tutors drawn from distance or other educational institutions. One of the crucial roles of the South African tutors in the course-writers' workshops is to ensure the relevance and suitability of both the course materials and the activities proposed.

The first sets of course books and cassette programmes for the basic courses were produced in 1985. They consisted of 16 units on Basic English, 14 units on Basic Mathematics, and 14 units on Basic Agriculture. Learners were expected to study these materials mainly independently, although participation in subject group discussions was also an important part of the learning process. Following recommendations made by tutors and learners who had been using them, the original course books and cassette programmes have now been revised. The first set of eight revised units of Basic English and seven revised units of Basic Mathematics were printed in 1988. All the basic course books contain self-check exercises and tutor-marked assignments (samples of the course books are available). There is no time limit set for the learners to complete any of these courses.

###### ii) Secondary courses

Secondary level course books are imported from the Wolsey Hall College, UK. Although these course books are meant to be self-contained, additional textbooks are prescribed to supplement them. These textbooks are also imported, mainly from the UK. As in the basic level course books, all secondary level course books contain self-check exercises and assignments to be marked by tutors. In addition to these activities, Advanced level science courses have compulsory practical exercises for the learners. Although there is no time limit set for completion of the courses, all learners are encouraged to attend regular face-to-face tutorials and are expected to register for examinations set by the University of London School Examinations Boards on completion of their courses.

Locally produced materials are distributed to study centres by road, particularly during monitoring visits made by SAEU staff or the field co-ordinators. Materials

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from overseas are air-freighted to the capital cities of the respective study centres. Generally, the demand for secondary level course books exceeds supplies sent to most of the study centres, and complicated modes of sharing are expected to be operated by the co-ordinators.

Support services and motivation

The formal support services rendered to the learners take four forms: tutorials, supervised group activities, counselling, and examinations assistance.

i) Tutorial support to the learners consists of face-to-face tutorials and the guidance remarks given by tutors when marking their assignments.

Secondary level learners can meet their tutors for classroom sessions twice a month under are referred to as iweek-end schoolst. Additional week-end school sessions may be made available to the learners about one to two months before they sit for their external examinations.

ii) Most supervised group activities, such as group discussions, are conducted during week-end schools. HoweVer, oo-ordinators can facilitate more group activities at the requeSt of the learners.

iii) Counselling of learners is undertaken by tutors, field co-ordinators and SAEU staff, whenever they are approached or if they notice problems affecting learners' progress.

iv) As assistance to the learners during their examinations, the SAEU meets the cost of all fees charged by the external and local examinations boards. The SAEU also pays for most of the candidates' boarding costs during their examinations. The liberation movements probably have their own internal systems for assisting and motivating the learners attending their various adult education programmes.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Record-keeping

The SAEU keeps records showing names of candidates recruited for the various courses at each study centre. As indicated above, registration numbers are allocated to the learners centrally. These numbers reflect the year of admission of each learner, the location of study centres and the serial positions of the individual learners. Records of names of subject tutors, assignments marked by them and a summary of the topics they cover during face-to-face tutorials, are expected to be submitted to the SAEU by the co-ordinators in their monthly progress reports. Tutors maintain copies of the learners' progress in the assignments.

Feedback

The progress, problems, and overall situation of the study centres are monitored through visits and correspondence. The academic staff from the SAEU office and

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the SAEU Director visit study centres on monitoring missions, or to conduct training workshops for new learners and tutors, or to make follow-ups on specific matters. During such visits they collect information on course progress and the problems facing the learners and the centres. They also conduct discussions with various groups in order to find out ways to promote success in the study centres.

Co-ordinators of study centres (and, to a lesser extent, the tutors) are also expected to make visits to the SAEU office to report on the progress and problems of their centres. In addition to such visits, co-ordinators maintain a close contact with the SAEU through routine progress reports and normal correspondence.

The SAEU gives reports of its activities and the situation in the study centres during the quarterly meetings of the Finance and Appointments Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee.

A comprehensive evaluation exercise, to assess the achievements and failures of the SAEU from an objective viewpoint and to give hints for further improvements, is expected to be undertaken this year.

### ACCREDITATION AND CERTIFICATION

The assessment of students, progress is conducted in two stages. Achievement in tutor-marked assignments forms the basis for continuous assessments. These assignments act as a check on the students' pace and mastery of the course, because students should score a pass mark (50% or more) before they can move to the next unit. Pass scores in at least two-thirds of the tutor-marked assignments in a course entitle a learner studying secondary level courses to be registered for the second stage of their assessment: the GCSE 10' and W level examinations set by the University of London Schools Board. Candidates who pass these external examinations are awarded certificates by that Board. Students attending the basic level courses are entitled to receive a certificate of attendance issued by the SAEU. No such certificates have been given to learners yet, but it is known that students have been able to follow competently the secondary level courses even before completing the basic courses.

Therefore it is unlikely that completion of the basic courses will be set as an obligation for students to be transferred from basic to secondary level courses. Rates of completion of the various courses have not yet been worked out. This exercise is complicated by several facts. Some candidates register and study some subjects at basic level and other subjects at secondary level. Other candidates take up new subjects at secondary level after passing their first set of subjects. Still others may opt to re-sit subjects in which they have scored low grades. in the hope that they will score higher marks in subsequent examinations. This tendency of positive stagnation is also reflected in the apparent willingness of basic level learners to accept a switch-over to the revised basic course books, starting at the initial units, no matter which stage they were at in the original course books.

## 7.0 THE FUTURE

The future of the South African Extension Unit appears bright on both short and long term perspectives. The Unit has so far made quite significant achievements: the number of new learners registered for the various courses under this programme has almost tripled over the past two years, from about 600 before June 1988 to about 1,700 in April/May 1990; the number of candidate registering for the GCSE 'O' and 1A' level examinations in all the study centres has risen from less than 20 candidates per sitting in May 1987 to over 80 in the May 1990 examinations (figures available because registration takes place about four months before the examination date); on average, about 60% of candidates have passed their GCSE examinations between 1987 and 1989.

. In general, the SAEU courses have made a significant contribution to raising the confidence and aspirations of the learners, extending their horizons, and opening up new opportunities for them. This impact is creating a chain reaction in the rest of the comrades. Inevitably, there is a rapidly growing demand for the SAEU courses almost everywhere.

As more and more people complete their basic and secondary level courses, new demands have surfaced. There is a rising demand for job-oriented training, such as vocational skills, technical skills and skills in business and social services, and for tertiary academic education. The time is already overdue for the SAEU research study to:

determine more objectively the Unit's achievements and the size of the training task ahead;

find out in more precise terms the exact needs of learners completing basic and secondary level courses.

In the meantime, the Unit has established links with the Commonwealth of Learning, to seek assistance and to learn from the experiences of other distance education institutions.

On a longer perspective, in the future democratic South Africa, the educational opportunities currently rendered to the exile community are expected to make a positive contribution to individual and community advancement, particularly if more learners can acquire higher levels of education and relevant work skills. Furthermore, judging from the massive proportion of the population currently receiving an inadequate formal education under the apartheid regime, the SAEU is expected to continue to provide, during the transition period, a means of acquiring a non-discriminatory education for some part of this oppressed group. At a later stage, the SAEU could continue as an expanded, semi-autonomous, designated distance education institution, or merge with the existing national distance education institutions.