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REPORT OF SOMAFECO RESEARCH PROJECT WORKSHOP HELD ON 16 JUNE
1992.

In October 1991, the Batlagae Trust was set up to coordinate activities related to education and repatriation in South Africa. The tasks identified for the Trust included the overseeing of the safe return of educational archives to South Africa and the research and recording of the exiled education experience as apart of the history of the struggle in this country. The first initiative with regard to the latter, was a research workshop on the SOMAFECO experience. This was held on 16/06/92 in Johannesburg.

Invitees

A large number of people were invited to the workshop. This included teachers, administrators, students, technical staff and other concerned members of the ANC in exile and relevant departments and leagues within the ANC. In addition internal educational structures were invited. This included the NECC, COSATU and EPU.

The date of the workshop was chosen as a commemorative event, which would serve as an extension of June 16th events. This however did result in a number of organisation and individuals not attending. This effect was exacerbated by the call for mass action which followed the tragedy at Boipotong and the breakdown of negotiations.

The workshop was attended by 40 of the people who had been invited.

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The workshop was opened by John Samuels, Head of the ANC Education Department.

Pethu Serote, a former teacher at SOMAFECO gave an input paper, the objective of which was to contextualise the day's 5 discussions (copy attached). Discussion after the input, raised some important issues.

It was noted that the dual role of compatriot and student often confused students and caused a number of problems. Tensions existed between expatriate teachers and students. It was also noted that SOMAFECO did enable many people to acquire and education and to become cadres and tried to correct the ills of "Bantu education" and that the curriculum was designed to developed an holistic person. It was also felt that SOMAFECO's emphasis on mathematics and natural sciences was also positive. It was noted that results were not uniform and that some years achieved better than others and that poor performance should not be attributed necessarily to the many diversions at SOMAFECO.

Problems of untrained teachers and language difficulties were mentioned. The school relied on expatriates and volunteers and little consideration was given to their remuneration.

The workshop broke into commissions to discuss the following:-

1. Curriculum eg content, materials development
2. Socio-political and cultural development of students
3. Democratisation of education in exile
4. Approaches to education eg education with production

1 Curriculum

SOMAFCO had offered 10 subjects over the years. This included history, mathematics, geography, social studies and literature. The curriculum was underwritten by the GEC in London. Not ideal in terms of the ANC's aims and objectives, a decision had been made to seek an alternative. This was not achieved before the process of repatriation.

The curriculum was often subjected to debate and was sometimes criticised for being too broad.

Availability of subjects, particularly compulsory subjects was dependent on available resources. Sometimes compulsory subjects were problematic eg maths which was often difficult for students who had a poor education background such as "Bantu education". Inability to cope sometimes led to the perpetuation of poor self image, experienced by some students. History was compulsory for a number years. When this changed, many students failed to take the subject.

Lack of personnel made the giving of much needed individualised learning very difficult.

Lack of resources also meant that SOMAFCO was unable to incorporate the vocational component in the curriculum. No proper links were set up between the VTC and SOMAFCO and VTC continued to be viewed as being the inferior option.

Materials development

In the early days, curriculum development was impeded by a lack of textbooks so teaching relied on the production of notes. Lack of expertise also prevented the production of video material.

Once sophisticated facilities, such as the library, were available, there was less incentive to produce materials.

Although materials development had not been properly structured, the job still got done.

Extra curricula activities such as the Maths Club and JETS complemented the learning process.

Assessments

There were successes in the continuous assessment by teachers at a 40:60 ratio. This had the effect of encouraging students to work and learn independently. Learning assessment by examinations remained the dominant form of assessment. Occasional evaluations were also done by UNESCO. Their terms of reference were however too conventional and were not linked to or in line with ANC objectives nor accounted for whether these objectives were being met.

Evaluation reports were not made available to teachers.

Teacher student participation?

There was significant participation by teachers in Mathematics, natural and social science curriculum development.

2. Socio-political and cultural development

This commission concerned itself with the question of their success with regard to changing perceptions, "producing a new person", a new type of SA to serve the people.

The commission outlined a number of obstacles to achieving this, namely;

students were an uprooted community in a "foreign" land

decisions were made at administrative level

comrades were not seen as individuals

people lived with fear and tension

peer pressure - comrades being pushed to conform, be a strong

cadre, conform with political ideology

children were often forced to be there and didn't want to be there

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People also talked about how people had responded when they came home. Regionalism and tribalism was brought to the fore as a response to their fear of the unknown, the political situation and their own insecurity. They also brought home the "Mpando culture" and had to adjust from a situation of having all needs catered for to one of survival back home.

The commission identified a number of successes. They said that very little racism had been evident in the settlements, with students and children being treated fairly and evenly. People retained strong identity as SA but also developed strong identity with SOMAFCO and the community.

Many developed a mature political awareness and cadre

consciousness. Cadres were exposed to broader experiences and educational processes which have strengthened and matured them. They were exposed to and were made aware of gender issues through

sharing of tasks and duties, but this still needed to be implemented.

Failures were also identified. In the latter years decisions and discipline were not linked to political goals. Authority couldn't be challenged and there was lack of support structures. People failed to understand individual needs within structures and the community.

Not enough was done to include those who appeared different eg those born in exile spoke different languages from the those who came from SA. Tanzanians and South AAfricans had. different status.

Their was also a failure to educate and confront people about tribalism racism and regionalism and religion was neglected in the revolutionary zeal.

4 A roaches to education

SOMAFCO tried to create a "whole", "holistic" person, tried to undo the damage of "bantu education", therefore experimented with and adopted different approaches to education. These included;
Education with production

Traditional forms of education had exposed students to elitist attitudes counterproductive to production, attitudes which imply differences between academic and other forms of education, a position exacerbated by "Bantu education" ideology.

This approach necessitated the participation of experts, local and foreign. people had different ideas about what should happen and there were tensions about what people saw as intervention or interference.

The first phase was developed and run mostly by SAs. This was a . very positive time, very motivated and socially cohesive.

The second phase involved families and many experts from other places eg Zambia,