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SOUTHERN AFRICAN ADVANCED EDUCATION PROJECT
TRAIN OF THOUGHT.
Report of series of meetings
held in South Africa in February/March 1993
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REPORT ON TRAIN OF THOUGHT MEETINGS HELD
IN SOUTH AFRICA IN FEBRUARY/MARCH 1993

V. INTRODUCTION

A series of meetings of SAAEP Fellows, entitled Train of Thought, was held in South Africa in February/March 1993. The purpose of this report is to explain the background to these meetings; to provide a summarised record of the discussions, comments and points made at the meetings, together with some associated reflections; and to indicate what follow-up action is proposed.

BACKGROUND

Fellows meetings have been a feature of SAAEP activity since 1989. The focus of meetings reflected the changing needs for information as the situation in South Africa developed. At first, the most important need was to bring Fellows together and to create a forum for discussion about South Africa's political and economic situation and their future role as trained professionals in a new South Africa.

Meetings gave Fellows an opportunity to voice doubts, complaints or worries about their programmes or future plans and gave SAAEP staff insight into their main concerns and the problems to which SAAEP could respond. Visitors from partner organisations, some of our funders, representatives of industry, and careers advisers attended meetings and made a contribution.

After 2 February 1990 questions about the organisation of returns were on the agenda. More recently, the Fellow' meetings have' included workshops to develop skills for job-search. The process of returning to South Africa has had several stages including preliminary visits for interviews before completion of programmes in the UK. Information from visits has been fed back at Fellows' meetings.

It soon became clear that Fellows were encouraged and supported by these weekend events as well as gaining useful information.

It became evident that a SAAEP network was growing up.

In the course of 1992 the idea of a SAAEP association in South Africa was put forward, both in the UK and at informal gatherings of SAAEP Fellows held in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

TRAIN OF THOUGHT MEETINGS

The aim of the Train of Thought meetings in February/March 1993 was to learn what Fellows experienced after return to South Africa and to find out what advice they could give SAAEP for the future, as well as to explore possibilities of an association for SAAEP Fellows in South Africa. It was prohibitively expensive to gather all Fellows at one centre and it was, therefore, decided to hold three regional meetings in Cape Town, Johannesburg and

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Durban. In addition, a further meeting specifically for ANC Public Sector Fellows together with members of the ANC Civil Service Unit was held in Johannesburg. These meetings were attended by a total of nearly 100 SAAEP Fellows. In addition, the regional meetings included participants from amongst our South African partners as well as the Fellows and representatives of our sister Canadian organisation, the Southern African Education Trust Fund (SAETF); the Chairman of the SAAEP Trustees and SAAEP staff.

A summary of points covered and comments made at these meetings by SAAEP Fellows and other participants is attached in the form of an Annex. Some of these points bring out a sharpness of perception about the current situation which would be lost in a blander form of summary.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

The Impact of Training Investment

Train of Thought enabled SAAEP to begin to assess the impact of the training investment made by SAAEP funders. Fellows had definite Views about the impact of training since their experiences following their return to South Africa were woven around their reception as trained individuals. Jobs, salaries, houses, social status, the welfare of their families are all affected, not only by the economic climate, but also by the climate of management within companies as well as by the view taken by black communities of highly trained returnees. Fellows said that training must make an impact. The impact of training is affected by the following:

- numbers trained and levels of training
- the recession in South Africa
- the willingness of employers to invest in the future
- the rigidity of views of some employers about qualifications obtained outside South Africa
- the rigidity of view which relies entirely on paper qualifications and is unwilling to assess standard of performance and practical achievements
- appropriateness of training
- in some cases, the welcome by the top management of companies and the coolness of the middle management
- proving yourself on the job
- conservative resistance to change.

It will take time for Fellows to evaluate the impact of their programmes effectively and to discover whether their skills are being used. The key question for new black managers may be how to co-exist successfully with white middle management.

"Training should make an impact." Some further analysis of what this means is necessary. It is a different way of saying that training should relate to transition and to the change and

transformation of institutions. Questions must be asked about the intensity of training, duration of programmes, strategic placement of those trained, continued support of those in position, replication of courses, and follow up and mentoring of trained people in post. t

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action may necessitate a longer look at the need to encourage top management to take on the responsibility of retraining middle management. Political change will clearly affect the speed of adaptation by white middle management. New structures to effect consultation and develop arrangements for change will be required.

Affirmative action remains a difficult term hedged about by all sorts of cautionary views, such as "does affirmative action within present structures mean that the structures themselves are acceptable?" Appointments which should be made on merit are sometimes treated as affirmative action. The danger of "tokenism" still exists. The impression made at meetings was that there was not a clarity of view or language to deal with the problems of advancement.

A number of Fellows indicated the need, as part of their continuing development, to become effective in challenging positions. Experience, rather than formal qualifications, should be regarded as the basis for affirmative action.

SAAEP - The Question of Dependency

The question was raised whether some Fellows may have become too dependent on SAAEP and were waiting for things to happen instead of addressing the issues themselves. For those who went back into jobs without too much delay, there was a great deal of learning to do, but there was a context and opportunity. Those who did not find jobs soon have suffered a loss of energy and some have become demoralised. Fortunately there are few SAAEP Fellows in this position and one of the effects of the Regional Meetings was to bring some of those jobless individuals into touch with Fellows who were already placed in jobs. A helpful network has already been established as a result of these encounters.

Training Continuation

An important question was raised about training continuation in South Africa and increasing the existing investment in individuals by a continuation of the process of training.

The question for SAAEP may be how to persuade South African organisations to take up individual training and invest in the career development of blacks by, say, providing opportunities and experience in different branches of a company or overseas. In some cases companies may be willing to help through in-service training.

The heart of the matter seems to be that Fellows are not necessarily convinced that the doors which have opened so far are taking them into the centre of the house - they may still find themselves in interlocking passages on the outskirts. The problems for incoming trained managers and also for the old management structures are different states of mind, particularly in regard to the speed of change and the colour of those taking main responsibilities.

"SAAEP might need to consider encouraging a support base (in South Africa) for many of our (disadvantaged dare I say!) people who will be returning to various organisations as managers, workers, administrators etc. In the probation service in the UK there is a black officer support system to enable people to off load, test ideas etc. In South Africa something similar may be needed to enable people to deal successfully with the hurdles ahead - whether it be racism, marginalisation or gender discrimination. I think bases like those build on one's strength." (Comment by Fellow.)

Training and Leadership in the Community

A further COHCGITI was around the need. to contribute at the community level. Some Fellows gave the impression of finding themselves in rather isolated positions because of the lack of trained individuals in communities. Their peak of achievement made them feel exposed. It was suggested that if trained Fellows had perceived themselves as the "Department of Eagles", it was now important to become the "Department of Ants." i
This remark seemed to sum up the experience of being dangerously isolated from what was happening at community level. It may point to the need to move towards in-country leadership training programmes at a much more basic level than SAAEP has been accustomed to take on. However, there is an example through the community sports administration programme of how to develop a leadership team which can then develop training in-country and spread the network of trained people into different communities.

External Training

On the question of external training, the consensus was that there was no substitute for external training and that it should certainly not be dropped from the agenda in favour of all training being carried out in South Africa. However, it was considered that selection for external training should be very carefully done and should involve fewer people in the current situation and that it might well be most appropriate for specialised areas of attachments and programmes.

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The question of recruitment came up a number of times. There is a general feeling that political recruitment is too narrow and, furthermore, that 'jobs for pals', patronage and training as reward for long political service should now be abandoned. This

raises the question of how the selection process should be carried out for the surge of activity around Civil service and local government training which is undoubtedly ahead.

SAAEP's practical interest in the process of recruitment may continue to be useful and networks established over the past years will provide guidance about priorities.

It is possible to advertise nationwide to start mustering individuals who are interested in moving into the public sector as opportunities are opened. This is a major task which would entail sifting through applications, making shortlists, consultation with regions about interviews, and the like; but this may be the only way ahead.

Development of Work Experience in South Africa

A number of questions on the development of work experience in South Africa cannot yet be answered. Through the UWC, the Institute for Local Governance and the UDW, initiatives for work placement are being tried out. There seems a long way to go to make the idea and practice of work experience acceptable and for it to be regarded as a serious way of furthering skilled development, both for companies and organisations and for the country as a whole. Possibly the offer of jobs after satisfactory work experience will prove the most positive way forward.

NEXT STEPS

SAAEP undertook:

- 1) to circulate a record of the meetings
- 2) to explore the possibilities of an association
- 3) to explore the possibilities of a newsletter
- 4) to consult further about the possibility of association with other bodies, such as The Black Management Forum.

ANNEX

SUMMARY OF POINTS AND COMMENTS MADE AT TRAIN OF THOUGHT MEETINGS

Summary of Points and Comments made by Participants

The development of human resources for the transition to a democratic South Africa requires affirmative action in both the public and private sector and NGOs. Gender issues need to be addressed.

Questions of how training can relate to the problems of transition need to be answered. It is necessary to draw on experience in both the public or private sector and to study the interaction of sectors.

Questions to be discussed are:

What is affirmative action?

What can the public sector learn from the private sector?

What can the private sector contribute to training?

Can "work experience" be developed in South Africa?

What should be the balance between internal and external training programmes?

What periods of training should be offered - short and intense or longer?

What training is required for policy research?

What are the priority areas for training?

What is the outcome of SAAEP investment?

Is the best use being made of this investment?

Human resource needs and training priorities

This requires more integration between organisations in South Africa and decisions about who should go abroad.

Government and business should jointly assess long-term needs.

There is not accurate information on what the country needs and what skills it has. Skills may not be certificated.

NOTE "Beyond Apartheid" Commonwealth Secretariat report which assesses priority needs for sectors. '

The questions: "Who are we training?", "What are we training for?" are not clearly answered.

Priorities

The difficulty of defining priorities is partly because of the different emphasis on short, middle and long term needs.

They tend to be spoken about in one breath. It is dangerous to focus solely on the short term.

"Training should make an impact.h

In South Africa there is confusion about objectives and there is competition for resources.

Transitional Executive Council proposals indicate the immediate need for development of staff. The Executive Council and Sub-Councils in Foreign Affairs, Defence, Media, Finance, Local and Regional Governments will require a core of individuals'

knowledge all about our policy and problems of implementation.

Some argue what is required is a culture of management

A smaller number of people should be trained at very high level.

Increasing numbers trained at middle level will begin to produce a culture of management.

There is also the need for more high level training with broad functional skills for management.

There is a lot of poor training, curriculum of public administration courses should be reviewed. It is a soft option and the qualification produces 'machines'. Skills development is required by the economy and flexibility. There should be networking to change attitudes.

Programmes of training and work experience need to be organised and evaluated

Students/trainees on attachment require a mentor.

Organisations should be encouraged to train employees and to take affirmative action.

Selection of Candidates and Trainers

People who have been trained should begin to set up a recruitment system; defining the type of training and area of expertise.'

Non-partisan recruitment is necessary.

NGOs could organise selection and recruitment.

Direct training is necessary and so is training of trainers who will have to change the colour, structure and gender of institutions.

The emphasis must be on black trainers.

A register from which individuals could be drawn should be compiled.

Internal and External Trainings

Broadening of skills training can be done in-country.

Specialised training should be done externally.

Reflection on external programmes indicated, their range and usefulness. They had offered experience which could not be acquired in South Africa. Experience in Southern Africa and other developing countries would be valuable. Southern Africa will be particularly important.

There is nothing to replace external experience.

Accreditation

"We are not reinforcing the diploma disease, but returned individuals need accreditation for training. They may need to transfer from one job to another."

The value of work experience has to be spelt out.

A national skills audit is required.

Some skills have been acquired by "a process of experience" not by qualification. Lack of accreditation should not create a barrier to the use of these skills.

Making use of training

There is poor use of existing skills.

What enables individuals to make use of training?

Political changes are needed to enable individuals to use what they have.

The use of human resources and skills within organisations needs to be critically examined.

Possibilities for using skills on completion of training programmes cannot always be found within organisations.

It is not easy to make an input on return from training.

"How do you get over being hostage to organisations which do not welcome new ideas?"

Innovations and transforming of skills in South Africa should follow on external training.

"External and internal training should be combined. They should bring about cross fertilisation."

Training of trainers is necessary.

Selection of candidates for jobs

An old fashioned qualification base is often still required.

Candidates for public jobs may be in universities or NGOs.

Jobs for pals should be stopped.

A modern agenda should be created to prioritise administration requirements and selection of candidates.

Need to consult with Professional Associations and similar bodies.

What kind of radical Change in associations and institutions is necessary to get them to open doors?

Affirmative action - caution is necessary

The plea for this is sometimes based on the supposition that the 'system' is fine.

But the system has to be changed. Training and re-training of individuals already in the system has to take place.

Affirmative action is sometimes used for individuals who can compete on merit.

South Africa is not a normal society.

Blacks should be drawn in as trainees for management.

Training should be continuous process for individuals

The responsibility of those trained is to train others. This should be a common objective. -

Training is the bedrock for creating resources and wealth.

Training is not only for the period of transition, but is a long-term commitment for nation building.

There must be a "critical mass" of skills. Note that some African countries have become dependent on external skills.

There is too much of ad hoc unco-ordinated initiatives. Some organisations are flooded by offers of training.

"There are teachers and nurses - but you can't run a country on them alone."

COMMENTS ON SAAEP PROGRAMMES
SUMMARY

Training is needed to develop skills for both the public and private sector and NGOs.

Gender issues should be addressed as a part of training programmes.

External programmes, attachments and work-experience should be continued on a selective basis.

Return should not be the end of training. Continuation of empowerment training should take place in-country.

Training programmes should be developed in South Africa.

Comments on particular difficulties on Return

Structure on return and report-back systems are needed.

Finding jobs in specialist technical fields.

There is still "tokenism" and affirmative action is needed.

Tokenism is sometimes seen as affirmative action.

A number of Fellows are not working in their own fields.

Some trained people have nowhere to go.

There is not effective co-ordination between SAAEP employment openings.

While Fellows are unemployed, some could assist in training and policy research. This could assist Fellows and make them more marketable.,

Advancement prospects are open to question.

Further training of SAAEP Fellows may be required.

The job market shows there is protectionism in South Africa. The view that local training is best can exclude individuals trained outside South Africa.

There is suspicion of external qualifications and conservatism in companies.

Pressure should be on companies and also on professional associations and Human Resource Organisations to open up opportunities.

Training overseas is in a different culture and on return racism and other obstacles are encountered. There is also the

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difficulty of black perceptions. Some black see those qualified abroad as a threat.

Opportunities for jobs in small companies as well as corporations should be explored. '

There is no formalised structure of what happens after training.

Returning Fellows find that practical experience in another country does not necessarily equip them for South Africa.

Returnees are rejected despite good certification.

SAAEP and SAETF should network with more companies.

Broadening of Training Initiatives

Training opportunities must be broadened.

"Department of Eagles must be succeeded by Department of Ants."

What is the responsibility of SAAEP for grassroots training.

it is necessary to "go deeper and deeper into the community."

Experience should be the basis for affirmative action.

SAAEP Association

SAAEP Fellows in South Africa should meet more often and branch offices should be opened.

A network should be developed.

SAAEP might become a chapter of taaaBMFtsaa. Contact should be established with other organisations. Individual Fellows should convey information about companies to SAAEP.

SAAEP Fellows may need to compare notes on return experiences related to management problems and the entrenched culture as well as to cope with unemployment and problems of the recession.

There is not a network for those qualified abroad. Networking with professional colleagues is necessary.

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