

SHIREEN BADAT set off in search of solidarity of African women in Dakar. Instead she found chaos and confusion.

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overseas visits.

"The public is entitled to know what interests motivate MPs and the speeches they make. We need to learn to deal with the interests of MPs, because every one of those 490 individuals can have an impact on government policies and procedures. Lobby groups can shape the way any political party sees certain issues."

Although the workshop perhaps produced more questions than answers, it did serve to focus attention on the key issues which need to be addressed. Among the most important of these is the question of how to facilitate parliamentary lobbying for NGOs and other groups who are not among the "insiders", who lack both know-how and the resources for effective intervention. Another is how to produce – and pay for – accessible information about the parliamentary process.

The need for such information was emphasised by Idasa executive director Wilmot James in his concluding remarks. He said public education was essential so that people could react to legislation which affected their lives.

A variety of institutions should take responsibility for this task, he said. It should not be regulated or centrally controlled. "There should be competition between different groups but we also need some co-operation and co-ordination and must decide how to spend scarce resources on the best use of information to the public."

A DELEGATION of 151 South African women who visited Dakar, Senegal, in November were enthusiastic about having an opportunity at last to take part in shaping the continent's future. The event was a forum for African non-governmental organisations on the status of women in Africa. The aim – to draft a Platform for Action to be presented at the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in September next year.

The delegation mirrored South Africa's rainbow nation, in that it included women from across the spectrum: rural and urban, disabled, young and old, IFP, ANC and NP. We proudly took our place among the more than 2 000 women from 35 African countries.

Confident in the knowledge that our new Interim Constitution and Bill of Rights guaranteed gender equality, we felt sure that the rest of Africa would be looking to us for interventions on sensitive issues at the conference such as abortion and the political participation of women.

But this enthusiasm was soon dampened by the organisational nightmare we encountered in Dakar. Hours before the start of the conference the organisers ran out of conference programmes (these were never reprinted). There was not one telephone or fax machine, and although there was a bank of computers they were all infected with a virus.

In addition, there were only two public toilets for the use of the almost 3 000 delegates and the venue allocated to disabled participants was located on the second floor. Delegates spent most of the three days wandering about hopelessly in search of

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*Some of our biggest reasons
for believing in big business
are some of our smallest*

If our children are to inherit a country worth inheriting, a financially strong country, big business becomes more important than ever before.

For one thing, like other small countries with big business, it is big business that enables South Africa to compete in the international markets and be a big earner of foreign exchange.

For another, it is big business that



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