

Civic forum to back up democratic Durban

At a recent conference in Durban 260 representatives from some 40 organisations agreed to go ahead with a civic campaign to create a democratic city in the greater Durban area

The DFR (Durban functional area), as it has become known, has as its core the city of Durban but stretches north, south and west to encompass some 3,5 million people and numerous municipalities and local authorities. Parts of it fall within KwaZulu.

The representatives, all dele-

gates to a Conference for a Democratic City, heard Khehla Shubane of the Soweto People's Delegation outline the formation of the Wits Metropolitan Chamber. Spelling out the challenges of the Chamber, he also pointed out the way that civic groups had been stretched to match the resources of the existing municipalities in expertise and staff resources.

In Durban, delegates were cautious about such a broad negotiating forum. They determined, through plenary discussion and a series of commissions

and task forces, on a set of demands and responses to existing initiatives within the city.

The major agreement, however, was to call on organisations with an interest in civic affairs to become subscribers to a "Campaign for a Democratic City" document which is circulating at present. Subscription to this document, which spells out principles and objectives, will entitle organisations to a seat in a civic forum. This forum will steer the campaign and give greater strength to civic groups.

Amongst the demands made by delegates at the conference was a call for training in local government administration. This is a relatively new demand but is becoming increasingly important as more and more cities and towns establish negotiating forums and local arrangements for governing their areas.

A report on the conference and copies of the "Campaign for a Democratic City" document are available from the Idasa office in Durban.

Paul Graham
Regional Director

Different priorities at Port Alfred

My overall impression was the extent of the "local government debate" that the seminar took on board. Inevitably there were more questions than answers. That the seminar fell short on "solutions" was not necessarily a criterion for its "success".

Discussion, debate, dialogue between as many people as possible at grassroots level to inform the political strategies of the different organisations, more modestly, were Idasa's stated objectives.

Idasa regional director Max Mamase put matters frankly: "Fundamental restructuring is not merely deracialising and democratising. That would simply be Africanising (as in Zimbabwe). Fundamental restructuring addresses the question of the legitimacy of the negotiating process." His remarks could well have summed up the view of the civics - but did it find any resonance among

In June Idasa's Eastern Cape office hosted a local government seminar in Port Alfred which attracted municipal officials and civics from Grahamstown, Bathurst and Kenton-on-Sea. Civics' representatives also came from Alexandria, Alicedale, Paterson and Riebeeck-East.

Speakers at the event tackled issues such as local government negotiations, delimitation, the autonomy of local government, housing policy and training and administration. One of the participants, DR NORMAN LEVY, who is currently setting up a local government institute at the University of Natal, gives his impressions of the event.

the spokespersons for the (white) municipalities? It would be wrong to suggest that they did not, but priorities were different. The civic representatives stressed the need for legitimacy, the spokespersons for the municipal authorities, financial viability.

More questions were asked than answered and because priorities were dif-

ferent, it was not always clear to the civics that sufficient focus was being given to the need to redress the inequalities of the apartheid city. All parties showed a willingness to talk but the framework of understanding was heavily divergent. That is not to say that tough questions were avoided or that exchanges weren't frank. How to determine a capacity or a tax base to pay for needed services? Providing the basic services of electricity, sewerage, water and refuse removal was elementary enough but how and who was to ensure this?

Boundaries were likewise a major problem; where did a town begin and end?

Commuter patterns, class factors, political and social factors all needed to be addressed. Gravitational studies weren't enough. Boundary disputes were serious enough to break metropolitan authorities like Johannesburg.



Delegates at the Port Alfred seminar