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 delegates 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 different, 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. Gravititational studies weren't enough. Boundary disputes were serious enough to break metropolitan authorities like Johannesburg.

Delegates at the Port Alfred seminar

Different priorities

If the serminar was short on solutions it was because the legacy of the apartheid city had left deep scars and big gaps and not entirely for want of ideas: the functions and powers of local authorities and the provision of new legal structures were all contentious matters still to be settled, as were the provision of health, policing and transport.

What system of local authority government was appropriate to our politics? Should we conceive of a local authority structure in the British mould? How is the executive constitututed? Do we want a mayor, indirectly elected by councillors or by the people? Should we have a ward system that is racially divisive?

Then there was the whole question of staffing and training: affirmative action to overcome the 100 percent shortage of treasurers and double that shortage of town clerks. These questions were put by Mark Swilling of Planact in his keynote address. But others took them up too. Swilling also spelt out the strengths and weaknesses of the local government negotiation process: on the one hand there was substantial reconciliation of people previously kept apart, "bottom-up" change, community involvement, representative democracy and mandates. On the other hand there was the serious problem of the whole service system, the "culture of boycott" (a "weakness" not necessarily shared) and the incapacity of the civics to match the resources of established bodies to manage the process of change. This was a theme taken up again and again by the representatives of the civics.

On the subject of human resource development, basic training, professional public management training and affirmative action was needed – not only in local government but to develop people for the professions.

Workshops on negotiations, local dynamics, city boundaries and human resource development extended the discussion on these matters. But ultimately there remained more questions and a need to talk again. This was the view of one of the Grahamstown town councillors: "We don't discuss things of common interest. Since 1988 (when he was elected) there had never been a joint discussion with civics. There was a need to set up a communications forum in the region and this was a good start." I agree. ❏

Interim structures urgent for Pretoria groups

Idasa and the Community Law Centre (of the Institute for Public Interest Law and Research) held a very successful local government conference for greater Pretoria at the end of May.

We called this conference to give all political groupings, communities and individuals the opportunity to air their views, be informed and start preparing themselves for local level negotiations on future local government structures in the area. An equally important objective was the bringing together of people on an equal footing by independent and neutral facilitators.

We were delighted to have participation from the full political spectrum, including the civics and government institutions such as the Department of Planning and Provincial Affairs and other groups such as Planact, Groundswell, the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the National Energy Council.

Helen Zille, a consultant to the Cape Town City Council, and someone with many years of experience in facilitation, chaired the conference. The two main inputs were provided by academics Khehla Shubane (Centre for Policy Studies, Wits) and Chris Heymans (Development Bank). Responses and political input were given by Pretoria-based "major players" representing the ANC, Democratic Party, Pretoria City Council (NP) and the Civic Association of the Southern Transvaal. The CP, Inkatha, the PAC and the SA Communist Party were also invited to give input, but for a number of reasons, did not do so.

Contributions were also

Chris Heymans of the Development Bank speaks at the Pretoria conference.

made by major players from other regions, who outlined the paths taken towards local government negotiations in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town.

Themes which emerged strongly throughout the conference included that the present system(s) of local government cannot continue, and must be transformed; this negotiation process would have to take place concurrently with, and be informed by, negotiations on the national level. Each region would have to find a structure suitable for its particular needs, and each may undergo a process which develops quite differently from any other.

The process (as an interim measure), rather than the product, is where the stress should be laid until such time as national negotiations give clearer direction to the debate; and it is imperative that players are on an equal footing in all deliberations.

During group discussions and the ensuing plenary – eight small groups met to focus on the implications of input for Pretoria – there was consensus that negotiations on interim structures dealing with immediate issues should proceed as a matter of urgency. A specific proposal emerged in the plenary and was unanimously accepted – Idasa and the CLC were requested to take the negotiation process a step further through canvassing the establishment of a Pretoria Forum. The objective of this forum would be to attempt to create an acceptable process in which all players and interested parties may freely participate. This forum should not be seen as a counter action of any sort, but rather as complementary to any initiatives already undertaken by the Pretoria City Council and the civic associations of greater Pretoria. ❏

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