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*Your vote counts! All South Africans can vote – illiterate, disabled, men, women and teenagers over 18 – provided you have an identity document. This poster is one of 10 in a new voter education package produced by Idasa and designed especially for rural voters. (See page 27)*

# Doing democracy

## A challenge before and after the elections

**S**ANDWICHED between the fiasco over the appointment of the SABC board and the announcement of an election date, Idasa's Education for Democracy conference held in Vanderbijlpark recently was nothing if not pertinent to the times.

It was also a great deal more. The three-day event brought together delegates from voter education agencies, human rights and teachers' organisations to exchange information and plans around the process of educating South Africans for democracy.

The presence of several foreign guests also offered opportunities to learn from the experiences of other emerging democracies such as Poland, the Philippines, Kenya, Eritrea and Chile – and a very stable European democracy such as Denmark.

"Creating and sustaining democracy in South

Africa" was the theme of the opening session. In a paper due to have been delivered by the rector of the Peninsula Technikon, Franklin Sonn, the director of the technikon's school of education, Brian O'Connell, emphasised the link between education and the struggle for democracy, adding that "context is everything".

Democracy was an intricate social process, he said, not a mechanical entity. Democracy was not inevitable in South Africa, nor was there any rule that guaranteed that "the people" would not abuse power.

A similar point was made by Idasa's Alex Boraine who spoke earlier in the same session. He said there was no guarantee that a future South African political dispensation would be any more democratic than the

By **SUE VALENTINE**

## Time to heal

WHEN three-year-old Mita Mdeti's home in Boipatong was attacked last year, she was injured and paralysed.

Later, in October, Canadian regional police chief, Jim Harding, attended an Idasa conference on policing and was taken on a visit to Boipatong.

He pledged to raise money for a wheelchair for her and last month it arrived – a gesture and example of what police-community relations can be. (Full story on page 25)

## Doing democracy

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present one. Quoting the American political scientist, Larry Diamond, Boraine said democracy could not survive with leaders only. It had to rest on a mass base which was poised to remove from power any politicians who abused their position.

Looking at the issues currently confronting South Africans, O'Connell said questions needed to be asked about those who had benefitted from apartheid, but who now used arguments of democracy to justify and defend their position.

"We need to ask what is democracy, because many people see it as being used to maintain injustice and certain people's positions," he said.

He added that democracy should not be seen only as an election process, but as a life process. For this reason it would be ill-advised to focus only on elections when talking about education for democracy. However, the next 18 months would be critical. Practical interventions were vital at every level to encourage people to become involved in civil society. In this regard, the public broadcast service had an important role to play.

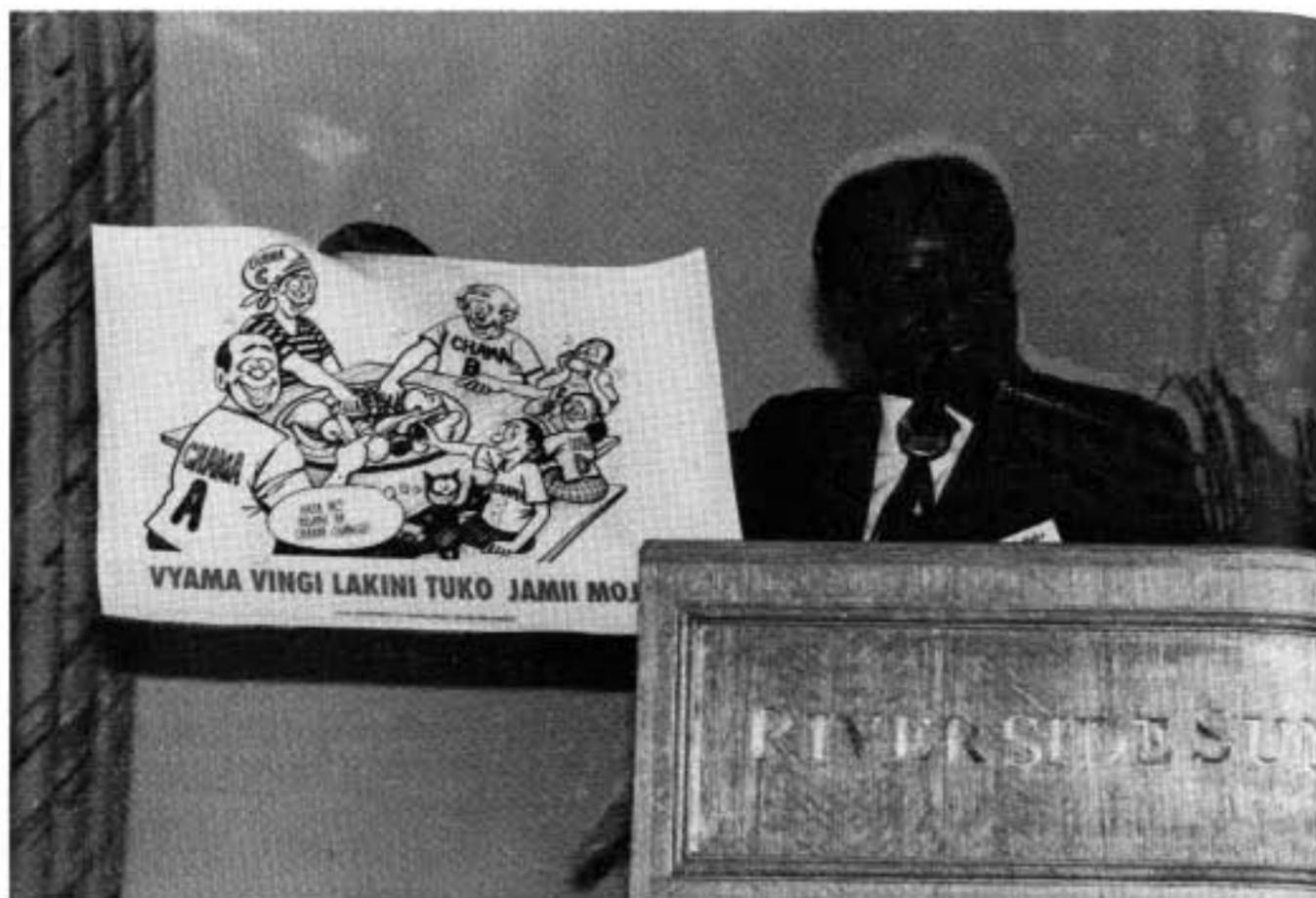
Much of the conference activity took place in four separate workshops or commissions which focused on education for democracy and how it related to: human rights education; formal education; organised civil society; and the mass media.

The report-back session from the commissions at the conclusion of the conference highlighted a number of short- and long-term issues which needed attention. Distinctions were once again drawn between the more immediate and specific needs of voter education and the long-term process of education for democracy which was needed throughout South African society.

Within formal education there was a need for voter education and education for democracy to be conducted by non-controversial organisations (possibly churches); it was agreed that education authorities should be urged to allow time in schools for these activities.

In the realm of civil society – and within the non-government organisation sector in particular – it was stressed that because people learnt most effectively by *doing* rather than being told what to do, internal democracy within organisations was essential.

This included participation and transparency in decision-making, accountability, gender/race equality, the development of leadership and transferring skills from white to black, men to women, and rural to urban.



*Tolerance prevails...Director for Civic Education in the Kenyan Council of Churches, Jephthah Gathaka, holds up a poster produced in the run-up to Kenyan elections encouraging political tolerance. Members of a family each support different political parties, but are still able to eat together.*

Education for democracy needed to take place in a variety of areas – adult education and literacy groups, student bodies, churches, civics, sports groups, taxis and industry. Methods should include meetings/seminars, workshops; publications; posters; electronic media (tapes for taxis, public and community radio); drama; music and advertising strategies.

Before embarking on education for democracy it was important that such education could be sustained and measured. The message that was delivered should respond to people's fears and address their needs. It should avoid building unrealistic expectations.

The commission stressed that civil society did not embody democracy, but that without a vibrant civil society promoting and sustaining democratic values, there could be no democracy.

***'Democracy cannot triumph on the actions of a few brave leaders, it needs an active, living base built on South African traditions and history.'***

The mass media were identified as an important tool for the development of democracy rather than the "luxury" consequence of a democratic dispensation. In particular, the potential of community radio was identified as a means of allowing ordinary people the opportunity to express themselves

and to be active members of a community.

Public radio and television were key means for extending the messages of voter education and education for democracy to the broadest possible audience. It was vital that such programming be credible and be presented by impartial agencies. However, equally important was that education for democracy programming should be entertaining and should reach people in their own languages.

The task of summarising conference proceedings was left to the head of the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education at the University of the Western Cape, Shirley Walters.

In the words of one delegate, her conclusion was one of "thoughtful passion", as she illuminated the task confronting those committed to education for democracy.

"Democracy cannot triumph on the actions of a few brave leaders, it needs an active, living base built on South African traditions and history," said Walters.

She said who exactly were "the people" and who "the educators" in the process of education for democracy needed to be teased out. It was not enough to identify men and women, white and black, rural and urban. There were any number of other categories such as old, young, rich, poor, literate, illiterate, working class people, peasants, intellectuals, prisoners, disabled and able-bodied etc.

How the process of education took place also needed to be examined. The whole person should be considered – head, heart and feet. Music, laughter, interaction and enter-

# From 'struggle' to empowerment

ONE of the visiting speakers who made a strong impact on the conference was the deputy director of the Institute for Popular Democracy in the Philippines, Clarke Soriano.

In an entertaining and engaging presentation, he sketched a brief history of the different periods and methods of struggle against colonial domination and repressive regimes in the Philippines during the past century.

He said the changes that had occurred in Philippino politics had prompted educators and activists seeking to resist oppressive and elitist regimes to examine the context carefully to find the most appropriate means of opposition. In recent years this meant a shift from education for struggle towards education for empowerment and governance.

"Education can be a very romantic notion," he warned, "but it's not so easy to be romantic about the details of voting, community services, garbage removal and so on."

Soriano said that in the early 1900s, education had been linked to popular culture: religious themes, literary tracts and even love songs had formed part of educating citizens.

By contrast, the 1960s had witnessed "days of disquiet and nights of rage" as students had led the protests against the Vietnam war and an elitist government representing only those with "guns, goons or gold".

Education had taken the form of teach-ins and small discussion groups and to many, the way forward for society was to be found in structural change.

The 1970s saw the declaration of martial law by Ferdinand Marcos and a period of repression and resistance. Education for democracy went underground and most calls were for revolutionary action and armed struggle.

However, it was as people began to organise around labour rights and mini-

mum wages that the movement really began to grow and the seeds of democracy began sprouting at the grassroots.

"Education must not look only at structural issues, but at the situations which confront people daily. The question for those of us in education for democracy, was how to find the link," said Soriano.

popular confidence slumped."

Soriano said educators identified the need for a new approach, one which shifted the emphasis from education for struggle to education for governance. Tough questions that addressed the complexities of the day had to be asked: who is the enemy? What do we do about burn-out? What about gen-



*'We must educate for governance'... Clarke Soriano of the Philippines.*

He said the fall of the Marcos regime in 1986 ushered in euphoria, but also confusion. Although elections were held and a bill of rights and new constitution introduced, violence remained and social inequality worsened. Instead of a dictatorship, there was a regime of the elite, greater instability and a crisis of governance.

## ***'It is essential to locate, link and understand the limitations of politics'***

"It was a new situation and educators were hard put to deal with the complexities brought about by the transition. From 1986 to 1993 we had seven coup attempts, corruption again reached high levels and

der issues? What about the advancing age of activists!

The importance of *context* was emphasised. In a process of transition, education for democracy had to consider the context in which people found themselves.

"It is essential to locate, link and understand the limitations of politics. An empowerment process is vital, we need to understand how to transform power relationships now. We must understand who we are and where we are," said Soriano. "How do we link the issues of voting and elections to people's position in society now?"

Approaches included popular participation, two-way communication and an holistic approach in which people's feelings and emotions as well as their material and cerebral concerns were considered.

ainment should be integral to the process.

Walters said the long history of activism and anti-intellectualism which prevailed in South Africa needed to be confronted. What outcome was wanted from the process of education for democracy needed to be considered.

The short-term need was for voter education to meet the proposed polling date of

April 27. However, she suggested that short-term practices should be integrated with long-term principles.

Key elements related to the elections included: a free and fair process; an atmosphere of tolerance; the curbing of violence; maximum turnout - including all women and youths, those in rural areas, those unable to read or write.

"What is our goal," she asked. "A 98 percent turnout at the polls? Are we all committed to all of these things?"

Crucial to the entire process, suggested Walters, was the need "to educate ourselves and to motivate others". Education for democracy must inspire optimism and enthusiasm if it is to hope to have any success.

Sue Valentine is Idasa's media director.