

CHAPTER 10

BUILDING ON THE RELATIONSHIP

10.1 There is much cause for optimism when considering the future of the SADC countries into the next century. As noted earlier in this report, with peace in Angola and Mozambique, and democratically elected governments in most of the SADC countries, the Southern African region is one of the more stable parts of the African continent.

10.2 Central to the outlook of the region is South Africa. It faces enormous challenges, not only in continuing the political process set in train with the end of apartheid as it transforms itself into a genuinely multi-racial democratic society, but also in bringing about the economic and social development of much of its population. How South Africa manages the much-needed economic reforms while attempting to meet the heightened expectations of much of its black population, will be a crucial factor in determining its future stability and that of neighbouring countries.

10.3 It is against this background that Australia's involvement in Southern Africa should be seen. While Southern Africa will never replace Asia and the Pacific as the areas of greatest strategic or economic interest to Australia, nevertheless Australia can and should be playing a constructive role in Southern Africa, building on the relationship that already exists and expanding into new areas.

10.4 Many challenges for Southern Africa remain - improving the living standards of its people, economic development, and protection and extension of democracy which is still in its infancy. As noted throughout this report, there are a number of areas where Australia can make a contribution.

Correcting public perceptions

10.5 While ever the majority of Australians continue to have as their main source of information on Africa the seemingly endless appeals for emergency relief, and while the reporting is dominated by the latest outbreak of ethnic conflict or famine, the vast majority of Australians will be in danger of missing many of the changes that have or will occur in Southern Africa:

If we dwell too much on the problems of Africa which are so often in the press and think in terms of the disaster area which is Africa, which is how it looks politically, we forget that perhaps in five year, 10 years, the situation will look very different. There will be perhaps much more stable governments. There will be a recognition that the governments themselves are responsible for what is happening, very largely in their own societies....

So we really must plan for a positive future and if we are interested in our own future in Africa, we must do it through the training of

individuals who are well able to carry forward policies, whatever the policies happen to be that the government might wish to pursue.¹

10.6 The need for Australians with greater knowledge of Southern Africa was highlighted by Dr Hetherington who argued for more opportunities for the study of Africa in Australia:

...over the next 10 or 20 years, as Australia moves more into the Indian Ocean region and into contact with South Africa, the people who are going to be needed in business, in diplomacy, in government generally and at all sorts of levels including, for example, trade union activities, will actually be on the ground. At the moment, those people simply do not exist.²

10.7 The Committee was surprised to learn that the ABC is the only Australian broadcaster with a full time correspondent in Southern Africa.³ While decisions on where resources are placed are ultimately a decision for each media organisation to make, the lack of interest in Southern Africa from the commercial stations was quite surprising. The Committee itself, during the course of the inquiry, commented on the lack of media interest in the inquiry topic, in contrast to similar inquiries conducted by the Committee in the past.

10.8 In commenting about the often negative image of the Southern African region, and indeed the continent as a whole, Professor Alexander, President of the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) observed:

...it is the result of the news media focusing on what makes news, logically enough. If two people are in a procession and are fighting, the 98 who are not fighting do not get on to the television. But Africa has got a lot of success stories which Australians are not aware of. Countries like Malawi are virtually unknown to Australians, and yet Malawi has had real success in the last few years...A country like Botswana, which is now really quite wealthy in African terms and has been stable for 20 years or more, is virtually an unknown name to Australians.

So the success stories tend to be downplayed and the tragedies and the lurid disasters are the sorts of things that Australians get to know about. There is nothing that can be done about that; that is just the way the news media give images.⁴

Professor Alexander went on to suggest that the government and organisations such as the AFSAAP could try to bring the success stories in Africa more to the fore.

1 Hetherington, Transcript, 4 October 1995, p. 306.

2 Hetherington, Transcript, 4 October 1995, p. 305.

3 ABC, Submission, p. S712.

4 Alexander, Transcript, 6 September 1995, p. 123.

AFSAAP

10.9 The African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) is an organisation which 'tries to link Africanists throughout Australia and through New Zealand and Papua New Guinea and the Pacific generally'. The Association has some 350 members, about 30 per cent of whom are academics and the remainder are drawn from business, religious organisations, NGOs, or are people who have lived in Africa or who have an interest in Africa. The Association holds an annual conference and publishes a newsletter.⁵

10.10 Professor Alexander felt that the association was a resource that was not being used:

As far as I know, we have been very little called on by government in search of expertise, although I think we have a fair amount to offer...We have got a substantial database of Africanists across Australia...But as far as I know governments have never used it. AFSAAP is happy to make that available to any government or organisation that wanted it.⁶

10.11 The Committee believes that it is important that knowledge of Africa and particularly Southern Africa be available as widely as possible. To this end, the Committee believes it would be beneficial if government departments such as DFAT established some formal liaison links with the AFSAAP to make full use of the information available through that association.

10.12 The AFSAAP noted that it saw itself as having an educative role in relation to the general community:

[In] ...trying to change attitudes towards Africa...[we]...have a large annual conference...I got a certain amount of money to bring Africans in, from the research centre in Canberra. But when I tried AusAID for some of the poorest people, who really wanted to give papers and would have given interesting papers, I think, on things like the tragedy in Rwanda, I got absolutely nowhere; I was turned down flat on it.

There is a feeling that some government money, I think, really should be targeted towards changing Australian perceptions. One way of doing it would be have more interchange, not necessarily of academics...but a general interchange of people who have something to say to each other's country.⁷

10.13 The Committee believes there is great merit in some form of interchange program developing, involving such associations as the AFSAAP. While it may be that the funding might not best be provided by AusAID, but perhaps DFAT under its visits program, there should be a mechanism by which such interchange is facilitated.

10.14 The Committee recommends that:

5 Alexander, Transcript, 6 September 1995, p. 121.

6 Alexander, Transcript, 6 September 1995, pp. 121-122.

7 Alexander, Transcript, 6 September 1995, p. 124.

- 40. Australia establish a mechanism to assist associations such as the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific, but more broadly NGOs, develop an interchange program with the countries of Southern Africa.**

Africans in Australia

10.15 A significant number of Africans are residing permanently in Australia, with the largest number having been born in South Africa. In the 1991 Census, some 49,421 or 0.29 per cent of the total population of Australians were born in South Africa. In terms of total numbers, the largest number have settled in New South Wales, followed by Victoria and then Western Australia. As noted in Chapter 6, however, Western Australia has the largest proportion of the total population that was born in South Africa of all the States and Territories in Australia.⁸ In addition to permanent settlers, there are also numbers of African students studying in Australia, primarily under AusAID programs.

10.16 Migration from Southern Africa has traditionally been from South Africa. Since 1976, the number of South Africans in Australia has increased by an average 2,500 per year. The labour force participation rate of South African born migrants is 70.7 per cent, compared to a national average of 63 per cent. In addition to South Africa, in recent years the Migration and Humanitarian programs have sourced migrants from all of the other SADC countries. South Africa, however, accounts for around 80 per cent of applications. The number of migrants from Southern Africa has remained low in comparison to total arrivals. In 1995-96 they made up only 3.9 per cent of total arrivals to Australia, the same proportion as in 1994-95.⁹

10.17 There is a growing Mauritian community in Australia (in the 1986 census, approximately 13,000 Mauritians were resident in Australia). The Mauritian community, as do other African groups, conduct cultural activities centred around various community organisations.

10.18 ACFOA noted that, in regard to the African population in Australia:

In the major cities, they are contributing to the cultural life of this country particularly through music, dance and restaurants specialising in African food. They retain linkages with the countries from which they have come and have their own organisations to assist Africans settling in Australia. The Australian public has demonstrated its interest in African films, music and dance on many occasions.¹⁰

8 WA Chamber of Commerce and Trade, Submission, p. S1006.

9 DIMA, Submission, p. S1243

10 ACFOA, Submission, p. S736.

African Studies in Australia

10.19 The study of Africa at Australian tertiary institutions was described by Dr Hetherington in these terms:

At present there are no courses in Australia offering a university education in the history, economics and politics of South Africa in a coordinated way. The recently established Centre for Indian Ocean Studies in Perth will provide opportunities for research in this region but there is a need for an integrated course structure for undergraduate and graduate teaching. For comparison I would refer you to the expansion of African studies in the USA during the Cold War and the more recent, and arguably, rather belated recognition of the need for Asian Studies Centres offering undergraduate and postgraduate work. There is no possibility of this kind of focussed undergraduate study programme developing within the present departmental and studies programmes unless it is specifically funded.¹¹

10.20 Dr Hetherington advocated that an African Studies Centre be established at either UWA or Curtin University, with the aim of producing graduate and post-graduate students majoring in African studies, including history, politics and economics. Professor Hetherington also proposed that a scholarship scheme be established which would bring African students to Australia to undertake African or Australian studies and would fund postgraduate studies of selected Australians at South African Universities.¹²

10.21 Professor Gertzel noted that there had been a 'reduction of interest in, and teaching and research in, Africa. I do think that we need to ensure that it remains possible for Australians to acquire a specialisation in this area...it is vital in our universities that we keep a specialisation in African studies'¹³

10.22 Comparison was made between the resources available to Asian and Pacific studies, compared to that for African studies:

[For]...the Pacific, what happens in Australia ...is that the Australian National University holds much of the expertise. Within that, they have a Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies and a National Centre for Development Studies. AusAID works pretty productively with that...There is quite an effective national network which operates as a conduit.

We do not have that for African studies. I have attended many of the African studies conferences here over the last 20 years and one of the troubles in an outfit like that is that you have a thousand different disciplines, a massive continent and different languages.¹⁴

The Indian Ocean Centre

11 Hetherington, Submission, p. S1013.

12 Hetherington, Submission, p. S1014.

13 Gertzel, Transcript, 4 October 1995, p. 298.

14 Lea, Transcript, 6 September 1995, p. 87.

10.23 The Western Australian and Commonwealth governments are together supporting the establishment of an Indian Ocean Centre (IOC) in Perth, to create a centre of excellence in research and teaching on Indian Ocean Issues. The Centre, established at Curtin University has as part of its function to act as an interim coordinator for the Indian Ocean Research Network established at Perth. The Centre will:

assist the academic community to advance a 'second track' alternative to official exchanges, produce high quality work in specialised area studies, including by collaboration with other scholars in the region. The research program defines objectives and strategies for integrating a network of academic research and targets areas of significant benefit to Australia's economic, social, and security interest in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁵

10.24 The Indian Ocean Centre for Peace Studies, established late in 1990 as a joint research centre of the University of Western Australia and Curtin University has been active in researching the area of regional security issues across the Indian Ocean. As funding ceased for the IOCPS at the end of 1995, it is hoped that the new IOC will continue work in the area of regional security as well as economic and political issues.

10.25 Funding for the IOC has been provided for an initial three year period. The setting up of the Centre has been welcomed by many academics involved in the study of Africa as it is seen as providing a basis on which to construct a centre that would provide not only undergraduate but also post-graduate courses on African studies. The Committee agrees that such a centre would most logically be based in Perth, given its strong interest in the Indian Ocean region and its significant attempts to build trading and other links with Southern Africa.

10.26 The Committee recommends that:

- 41. the Commonwealth Government be prepared to consider any feasibility study submitted by the Western Australian Government and the University of Western Australia and Curtin University on establishing a Centre for African Studies in Western Australia.**

Sporting and cultural contacts

10.27 The Committee took little direct evidence on the role that sport and cultural exchanges might take in building the relationship between Australia and Southern Africa. However, the need for increased contact in these areas was noted in a number of submissions, for example World Vision noted it 'would welcome government encouragement of greater cultural links with Africa - for example, in scholarships, sport, music, handcrafts...'¹⁶

10.28 Australia and Southern Africa, and in particular South Africa, have a long history of involvement in sporting competitions. Although disrupted for a period due to the sporting sanctions imposed on apartheid South Africa, the revitalisation of those links since the end of apartheid has been very encouraging. DFAT commented:

15 DFAT, Submission, p. S918.

16 World Vision Australia, Submission, p. S648.

Our sporting teams are great ambassadors for the country and do a lot to help break down those old stereotypes.¹⁷

10.29 The Committee believes that cultural exchanges are best undertaken on a commercial basis by the private sector, but that the government might provide some assistance in facilitating such visits. The role that government might play was illustrated by Mr McColl of the WA Chapter of the ASABC:

We recently had a request to help finance the tour of the Drakensburg boys choir. One of the vineyards wanted to bring them across to perform. We contacted our Sydney office as well and thought maybe we could get some finance through them. Because of the time constraints we were not able to put the package together. This is where I see the government could assist, not only could they perform in Western Australia on a commercial partly subsidised basis here but they could go to the different states as well. They could also have national television coverage because they are internationally acclaimed. Vice versa, if we took over cultural things to South Africa, they would become a lot more aware of us.¹⁸

10.30 The Committee believes that there should be some flexibility in dealing with such requests, and that government assistance of some kind should be possible to be provided for significant events of this type.

10.31 The Committee recommends that:

- 42. Australia support cultural exchanges with Southern Africa and set up a liaison with the Australian Southern Africa Business Council (Inc) through which requests for assistance can be channelled.**

Ian Sinclair, MP
Chairman

17 DFAT, Transcript, 25 August 1995, p. 11.

18 McColl, Transcript, 4 October 1995, p. 320.

