



From Dakar to Democracy

A history of Idasa

By Moira Levy

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A history of Idasa

This publication commemorates 20 years of Idasa

1987–2007
20 Years of Building Democracy
idasa

The author thanks Joanne Bloch for her assistance in researching and writing this publication.

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From Dakar to Democracy

A history of Idasa

By Moira Levy

INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRATIC ALTER FOR S.A.



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It has been said that an understanding of the past is the only reliable guide for the future. South Africans would do well to be reminded of that. As a nation South Africans are expert at complaining mightily about the present and compulsively predicting the future, but it seems share a collective amnesia when it comes to the past. Smoothing over the sharp edges of history is one thing; ignoring memory is short-sighted. Anniversaries are times for celebrating, they are also opportunities to look back and take stock. As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Idasa, we celebrate too 20 years of democracy-building in South Africa. As we consider how we have changed as an organisation, we are reminded of how far South Africa has come as a nation.

The 1980s – and South Africa was in turmoil. The apartheid security forces were engaged in a determined campaign to suppress almost daily guerrilla attacks on strategic installations and to curb the upsurge of popular resistance that had grown since the 1983 launch of the United Democratic Front. The government's arsenal of detentions, shootings, bannings and repeated states of emergency was met with the mass movement's "Make South Africa Ungovernable" campaign.

Against this backdrop of mounting violence and repression, Dr Alex Boraine and Dr Frederik van Zyl Slabbert made their decision in 1986 to resign as members of parliament. This was their protest against the bankruptcy of whites-only government and the politics of exclusion and repression. It expressed a widely felt frustration with piecemeal National Party-dominated reform efforts which were being seen as the last desperate attempts of the apartheid government to

maintain white domination in the face of international and local resistance.

Travelling throughout the country and abroad to consult a wide cross-section of political leaders, including O. R. Tambo, president of the then-banned ANC, they solicited support for the conclusion they were coming to – that they could play a more effective role in the struggle to end apartheid from outside parliament, by bringing together South Africans from across the racial, political and economic divides to explore the idea of a democratic alternative.

The result was the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa or Idasa, which opened its first office in Port Elizabeth on 1 November 1986 and held its official launch at a conference in Port Elizabeth on 8-9 May 1987. Its aim – to find an alternative way to address the polarisation between black and white South Africans. Its mission – to assist a peaceful transition to democracy in the country and foster and strengthen a culture of democracy.

It seemed unthinkable at the time, and indeed immediately drew harsh criticism from many quarters – from the state, vitriolic anger; from the mass democratic movement and many of its allies, scorn and cynicism about Idasa's faith in negotiations in the face of the state's onslaught.

"In 1987, the politics of coercion and co-option held full sway. Negotiation politics was not an option. The ANC and others were banned, and exiled organisations were demonised and marginalised," wrote Boraine, Idasa's first Executive Director.

Yet what was unthinkable at the time became the inevitable; within a few years the politics of negotiation had started taking shape. Twenty years on, and

Idasa's democracy-building project mirrors South Africa's recent past.

Idasa's strength has always been its ability to change and adapt to different circumstances. Its history and development have been closely tied to the evolution of democracy in South Africa – it has worked under the apartheid regime, states of emergency, a transitional government and democratically elected parliaments. But while it has changed focus and reshaped its strategy many times over the years, it has always seen itself as a critical ally of democracy. In this role over the years Idasa has engaged in projects and activities covering the widest spectrum of democratic transition and consolidation, not only within the borders of South Africa but also in a growing number of other African nations.

Bridge-Building and Dialogue 1987-1990

Idasa's task, as the organisation saw it at the end of the 1980s, was to encourage South Africans of all races to find a common space where they could meet and together explore a non-racial and democratic alternative. The strategy adopted then was to hold forums, workshops, seminars, and national and international conferences. These were all seen as opportunities to bring South Africans together to explore democratic solutions to the country's problems and seek alternatives to the prevailing racial divisions and repression.

One of the first, and certainly the most dramatic, was the conference in Dakar, Senegal, in July 1987, which Idasa organised to bring together white South Africans, mostly Afrikaners, and their counterparts in exile. This was the first open

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ert had warned a
oner to be careful
the group did not

consist only of liberals
but also of "radicals and
conservatives".

Reacting to a question,
Dr Boraine said there
was no doubt that a
number of the ANC
delegates present were
South African commu-
nist party members.

"This is a harsh reality
which we debated and
which must be faced. The
only way to cope with it is
to offer something better,
and the onus is on us to
do so."

Remarks

Dr Boraine said he was
personally strongly
opposed to the commu-

nist party and they never
disclosed precisely who
they were.

He also explained Dr
van Zyl Slabbert's
remarks regarding the
ANC as not being
"merely terrorists" by
saying that to describe
the ANC as such was to
fly in the face of reality.

Dr Slabbert had p
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the ANC as being
a terrorist organis-

He and Dr van
Slabbert, direct-
Idasa (Institute
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discuss the option
reduce conflict.

He said: "I cert-
will be taking a
threats with a great
of seriousness."

Dealing with
Dakar tour he



MR EUGENE TerreBlanche, leader of the AWB (centre) and two of his lieutenants surrounded by members of the media at Jan Smuts Airport yesterday. Mr TerreBlanche was protesting against the Dakar talks.

and public meeting between members of the banned ANC and members of South Africa's white political establishment. It enraged the apartheid authorities, who threatened dire consequences for those who had "betrayed the volk" and warned that such trips would be outlawed in future and the passports of anyone attempting them would be revoked. On their return, the delegates were greeted with threats and fury, beginning with the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging's demonstration at the Johannesburg airport and followed by angry public statements, an orchestrated abusive telephone call campaign and the ostracism of some of the participants' families. Nevertheless, the visit sparked immense interest among ordinary South Africans – reportbacks drew large crowds and those who travelled to Dakar came back permanently changed by the experience. For them it cracked open a façade of ignorance and fear that had always characterised the white Afrikaner laager.

"There were some very nervous Afrikaners sitting in the Air Afrique aircraft as it turned low over the lights of Dakar and approached the runway," according to one member of the 61-person delegation from South Africa, Max du Preez. "Only a handful of them had had any contact with the ANC before and they were struggling to contain their subconscious prejudice before the first contact."

Thabo Mbeki, a member of the exiles' delegation and Director of Information for the ANC at the time, cut right through those fears when he introduced himself – "My name is Thabo Mbeki. I am an Afrikaner". Three days of intense consultation led to changed attitudes on both sides. Said Barbara Masekela, ANC Secretary for Arts and Culture at the time: "I discarded preconceptions about the

Afrikaner people. I was able to see people of great courage.” And Andre du Pisanie, a member of the delegation from within South Africa, commented: “the Afrikaners that went to Dakar can never be restored to the bosom of the National Party.”

The party itself made sure of that. One delegate, Trudie de Ridder, lost her government post on her return and Dutch Reformed Church dominee, Theuns Eloff, received a frosty reception from his church, forcing his eventual resignation a few years later. Said another delegate, Pierre Cronje, speaking some years after the event, “Dakar was the meeting that broke the monotonous circle of repression and revolt, in a sense it was the start of the negotiation process...”

In fact the outcome of the trip was immeasurable: “The unthinkable has become the norm. When Idasa initiated the second Great Trek of Afrikaners into the political unknown at Dakar in 1987, it was seen by most white South Africans as representing a lunatic fringe. However that trek started a process of self-analysis and introspection which contributed to creating an irreversible momentum...The new climate of open discussion and self-criticism, which for the first time in four decades makes a negotiated settlement a reality, is a vindication of the bold steps taken by Idasa to get South Africans across the political divide to re-evaluate their positions.” Idasa’s Annual Report, 1989

This was a time of intense repression. Many South Africans, including a number of Idasa staff members, were regularly harassed and threatened by the security forces and many more were living under stringent conditions – detentions, banings, police surveillance. The ANC was constantly bedevilled by the state; for white



“These ANC women are so...” The progressive young woman from Cape Town paused, looking somewhat embarrassed.

But she continued bravely: “So human!” To some of the 55 South African women who travelled to Harare for an historic meeting with Zimbabwean women and ANC women living in exile, this simple discovery was an affirmation of their political beliefs. To others it produced a dilemma. How could these “nice”, well educated women – warm and dignified granny figures like ANC executive committee members Gertrude Shope and Ruth Mompoti and South African Communist Party veteran Ray Simons – be associated with an armed struggle? 🐣

Democracy in Action, Monthly Newsletter of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, April 1989

South Africans to be meeting its members was unheard of. South Africans, mainly whites, who until then had lived in a cocoon of falsehoods and denials, were learning at last that their fellow South Africans were just that – citizens like themselves who wanted the best for their country and their future, but who had fallen onto the wrong side of the apartheid laws in their efforts to achieve that.

Most significantly, Idasa introduced the concept and practise of negotiation politics; this was the forerunner of a style of politics which was vilified and shunned at that time by those very parties who were later to come together around the negotiating table to draw up a joint solution to South Africa’s future.

It was not only the highly publicised meetings of South African leaders that engaged Idasa. It also brought to

gether ordinary South Africans who had never met or talked before. “At every level we have discovered walls of division,” wrote Boraime, in Idasa’s 1989 Annual Report. “We have sought to break down these walls by encouraging contact and communication to build a climate of trust where people can talk openly and honestly to one another.”

The target was mainly white South Africans whose ignorance and fear threatened to obstruct any political settlement. Idasa brought together from across racial divisions school pupils, members of the security forces, lawyers, women, teachers – dozens of ordinary South Africans who for the first time were able to entertain the possibility of a shared and collective future.

During these years Idasa organised a number of national conferences

Deputy Foreign Minister Leon Wessels looked like an unlikely star in the line-up of prominent speakers at the “South Africa in Transition” conference. But in many ways he was: admitting to government policies having “hurt” people in the past, calling on whites to identify themselves emotionally with Africa and become truly involved with its successes and failures, and showing concern and understanding for those who distrust his government...

It was the first time that a member of the government had appeared on a public platform with a member of the ANC (recently released Robben Islander Jeffrey Radebe) and also the first time the cabinet had accepted an invitation to participate in an Idasa conference. ʹ

Democracy in Action, Monthly Newsletter of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, June/July 1990

“ A school exchange programme facilitated by Idasa in East London between white pupils from Selborne College and their black counterparts from Ebenezer Majombozi High School in Duncan Village has laid the groundwork for continuing contact between the boys involved... “This programme opened my eyes more than I thought it ever would. I overcame many things, like not being scared of those who are not my colour and actually becoming friends with them.”
(Selborne pupil)

“The discussions we had in the hall introduced many new ways to look at different subjects. I will never, never forget these important three days of my life.”
(Selborne pupil)

“I never thought in my life I would sit down with whites and enjoy everything during the day. I was even afraid when they got to our school on the Wednesday, but I was surprised to see them happy. During these days we were brothers and sisters.”
(Ebenezer pupil) ”

Democracy in Action, Monthly Newsletter of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, June/July 1990

LDAS

WORKING FOR DEM



– strategic policy interventions which gathered major role-players to debate the crucial issues of the time; policing policy, the need for peace and security, the implications of covert operations, the meaning of democracy. In August 1988, Idasa held a conference on the ANC’s Freedom Charter. This initiated a clause by clause debate, probably the first airing of the historic document since it had been driven virtually underground after the banning of the ANC, and arguably the most thorough debate on the Charter since it was adopted at the Congress of the People more than 30 years before.

Idasa’s “Options for the Future” debate series on constitutional proposals was taken to every corner of the country. It culminated in Idasa’s conference on the ANC’s Constitutional Guidelines; because the ANC was banned at the time, Idasa decided it would take the ANC’s newly released constitutional policy document to the public for debate. These national conferences made headlines and had a countrywide impact – Nelson Mandela addressed one such conference, on “Democracy: A Vision for the Future”, soon after his release from prison.

Just as significant were all the smaller meetings, workshops, forums – a ground-breaking gathering in Harare, Zimbabwe, early in 1989 of about 30 white South African lawyers, mostly Afrikaans-speaking, with some of the top legal minds in the exiled ANC; another meeting in West Germany in October 1989 of a handful of white South Africans, a group of exiled members of the banned ANC and a delegation of high-powered African experts from the Soviet Union; a large gathering in Paris, France in November 1989, which was characterised by blunt clashes over alternative forms of economic and political governance.

In May 1990, Idasa pioneered contact between the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, and a motley delegation from "home", including Citizen Force officers, "homeland" colonels, military strategists and academics, retired senior South African Defence Force (SADF) officers, conscripts, End Conscription Campaign (ECC) activists and church leaders. The meeting, in Lusaka, Zambia, was one of the first initiatives to address the question of MK/SADF relations. Its aim was to explore a future mutual cessation of hostilities and de-escalation of the armed conflict; more than that it was an exploration of the common humanity of all participants as a first step towards real peace.

Idasa's bridge-building initiatives took it well beyond South Africa's borders. In its Africa Programme, Idasa organised trips for South Africans, from different political persuasions, to Eritrea, Ethiopia, other parts of West Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Trips to the Soviet Union and Europe were also arranged. The participants were mainly emerging South African leaders and the aim was to expose them to new ideas and build networks and alliances.

A Time of Hope and Despair: 1990-1994

On 2 February 1990, State President F. W. de Klerk unbanned the liberation movements allowing them to operate openly and their leaders to return from exile. This historic development had a profound effect on the work of Idasa and presented the organisation with a significant challenge. Alex Boraine proposed at the time that Idasa continue in its role as a facilitator under the new





"HATE TO BREAK UP THE GAME BOYS, BUT IT'S NEARLY OPENING TIME."

political dispensation, but that, with the inclusion of the ANC into the political process, Idasa concentrate on the new outsiders – conservative white South Africans – to encourage them to take part in political developments.

Said Boraine: “...facilitating contact between whites and the ANC was just one aspect. There are different kinds of facilitation roles...There is confusion, misunderstanding and fear among many whites which makes them wide open to the propaganda of the right wing. This must be countered. Idasa, through its regular contacts, can play an interpretive role, and educational role and a facilitating role against the background of these contending aspirations and fears.”

At the same time it was agreed within Idasa that while the organisation’s main focus in the past had been on white South Africans, it was now time to include more black South Africans in the organisation’s programmes.

Idasa staff and supporters met and discussed the organisation’s role in the dramatically changed circumstances. Boraine confirmed at the time, “we have always sought to consult widely and are continuing to do so, so that we can receive feedback, criticism, suggestions, ideas and guidance from a wide spectrum of South African thought and opinion.”

The result was a newly defined five-fold role for Idasa post-1990: Firstly, in a time of competing loyalties and alliance-building, it was extremely important that Idasa maintain its independence. This did not mean that Idasa would remain neutral, or that it would sit on the sidelines and criticise, but rather it would seek to be a critical ally of the transition to democracy by working with any and every party, by any constructive means possible, to achieve this goal.

6 The Soweto civic leader, Dr Ntatho Motlana, was elected chairperson of Idasa's board of trustees at a meeting of the board. Outgoing chairperson was Dr Beyers Naude, who has served in the position since 1986.

In his address to Idasa staff, Dr Naude said the challenge for the Institute was how to bring a fearful white community to a new understanding and to work with those on the left who, while not opposed to negotiations, were deeply suspicious of the National Party.

...Dr Motlana said [while] he deeply admired the work of Idasa, it needed to broaden its work to allay black fears and promote democratic ideals in the black community.

"People are not born democrats. I think they are born damn selfish! We need to learn that it is better to share and work together." 9

Democracy in Action, Monthly Newsletter of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, June/July 1990

Secondly, against a background of widespread confusion about the political situation, which often led to uncertainty, fear and even opposition arising out of ignorance, Idasa would take on the role of interpreter. This would mean helping people to understand political events and placing them in historical perspective, indicating the costs involved in significant change and the constraints facing such change.

Thirdly, Idasa committed itself to continue in its role of innovator, initiating high-risk projects which others would not undertake – or could not even conceive of.

Fourthly, Idasa would continue in its role of facilitator or mediator. This was a task undertaken at the organisation's inception and it would continue to be essential, even though the parties it mediated between had changed.

Fifthly, Idasa remained committed

to continuing work in the field of education, both formal and informal. In particular, Idasa saw itself as having a responsibility – and an opportunity – to develop a greater understanding of what democracy meant, at every level, not only in constitutional terms, but especially in terms of how it affected people’s daily lives. This was the task of building a culture of democracy, as Idasa saw it then.

By this time, Idasa had grown into a fair-sized organisation employing about 50 staff nationally. Six regional offices operated in Pretoria, Durban, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth, East London and Cape Town with the Training Centre for Democracy in Johannesburg and the national office located in Cape Town.

As South Africa embarked on the lengthy negotiation process that would define the shape of the future constitution, it became apparent to Idasa that if South Africa was to have a democratic future, it would not be enough to hold high-level talks. While multi-party negotiations took place between national leaders and behind closed doors, Idasa realised that ordinary South Africans needed to be brought into the process, at a local level, to take part in, support and understand the process.

This was partly the thinking behind the launch of Idasa’s Training Centre for Democracy in Johannesburg in 1992. The Training Centre enabled Idasa to take its workshops, seminars and conferences a step further and offer in-depth training on the philosophy of democracy, its history and the skills necessary to develop a democratic society.

As the national negotiation process unfolded, with its one-step-forwards, two-steps-backwards uncertainty, Idasa’s response was to facilitate a large number

“The Training Centre for Democracy launched its first programme with a countrywide workshop series. The aim was to translate the concept of democracy into something that can be practised -- in the home, the workplace and broader society...

Idasa Programme Director, Paul Graham, said: “we explain to people that democracy is not one thing. It is a complicated process. People have to define democracy for themselves.”

Participants have an opportunity to discuss their fears and concerns for the future, and raise their questions about the current constitutional changes. For [one participant] the highpoint was the realisation that all South Africans, black and white, share the same fears and hopes. “It cleared up my misconceptions”, she said. “We are not stupid or uneducated people, but we are naïve....Fear is the biggest obstacle in the way of all South Africans coming together.”

Democracy in Action, Journal of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, 30 April 1992

of regional and local forums on a range of issues – peace and security; economic justice; education; diversity; human rights, the media. Idasa also saw as its mission at the time encouraging the development of a just economic system and helping the education transformation process, particularly at secondary school level. The organisation worked to achieve these goals through public education and media, and training people for democratic practice in South Africa. The work generally involved identifying stakeholders in a particular debate, political negotiations with recalcitrant parties, preparatory work with non-statutory groups that had previously been excluded from the political arena, the facilitation of meetings and the provision of a secretariat to many forums.

Idasa also recognised that peace and stability were critical to the success of the democracy-building project and concluded that the security forces would need to be restructured. The first step in this long-term programme was to undertake research on police policy. The research results were published and officially launched at the conference, “Policing in South Africa in the 1990s”, in October 1992. This was the culmination of nearly two years of planning and negotiating, and it brought together representatives of the South African Police Force (SAPF) and the various homeland police forces with political and non-governmental organisations, international policing specialists and private citizens to examine policing in the context of the transition. Idasa recognised that while the SAPF had been an essential instrument for maintaining white domination, it was the only police force in South Africa, and to refuse to engage with it would be to invite anarchy.

Idasa was instrumental in bringing the rightwing into the negotiation process

under the auspices of its Conservative Dialogue project, launched in 1992 in the Pretoria office. Under the leadership of Braam Viljoen, the project organised an initial meeting between Viljoen's twin brother, Afrikaner leader General Constand Viljoen, and Nelson Mandela. The latter mandated Thabo Mbeki to lead a high-powered ANC delegation in a series of secret meetings with rightwing Afrikaner leaders. In time the ruling National Party came to join these meetings as well. At the end of 1993, Idasa took a small group of rightwing and ANC leaders on a joint tour of Belgium and Switzerland to explore constitutional methods of accommodating minority groups; the result of this process was the addition of the 34th constitutional principle which recognised the right to cultural self-determination, removing one of the last stumbling blocks in the process of writing the constitution.

The years between 1990 and 1994 were painful and confusing ones in South Africa. The decade had started positively, with the National Party government signing the National Peace Accord with the liberation movements and political parties, including the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), in September 1991, and the start of multilateral negotiations at the end of that year. Despite the boycott of the talks by the Conservative Party, the Pan Africanist Congress and the Azanian People's Organisation, there were strong hopes for a negotiated settlement. The 1992 whites-only referendum, which the apartheid government initiated at a time when its position was particularly precarious and its support from the rightwing within and outside the party at an all time low, nevertheless returned a convincing vote of confidence in the National government's proposed

constitutional reforms. But when the talks collapsed in May 1992, and stumbled through 1993, with the IFP refusing to take part and deadlocks over the form the interim government should take, the national mood of optimism started waning.

Above all, the escalating violence within the country threatened to completely derail any negotiated settlement. Clashes between Inkatha and ANC supporters left thousands dead, mainly in KwaZulu-Natal, but also in other parts of the country as the violence spread to the migrant workers' hostels and townships of the Witwatersrand. Idasa worked on a number of peace efforts bringing together other local NGOs and stakeholders.

‘ Violence and killings have been continuing unabated in the East Rand, particularly Thokoza and Kathlehong...In the light of this threat, the Wits-Vaal Peace Secretariat approached Idasa in February to organise a police-community relations workshop.

The commitment of the residents of the Kathorus areas to achieving peace and stability was evident in the overwhelming and speedy response to the workshop, which was organised in a matter of weeks. Approximately 160 people attended, with virtually all the major interest groups in the three areas well represented – including the SA Police. Political organisations ranged from the Azanian People's Organisation and the PAC to the Inkatha Freedom Party, the ANC alliance and Intando Ye Sizwe. Also present were civic structures, most noticeably the Hostel Residents' Association, and the local peace structures. ’

Democracy on Action, Journal of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, 28 February 1994

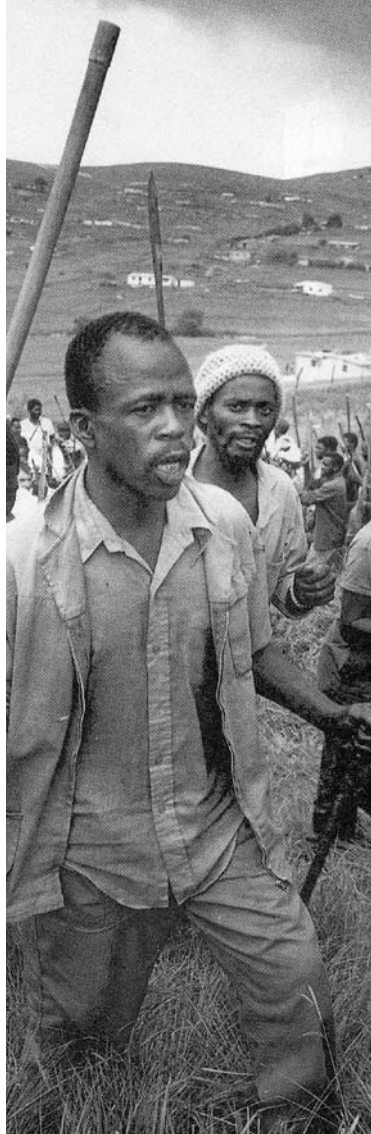
The massacre at Boipatong in June 1992, when Zulu-speaking hostel dwellers from the KwaMadala Hostel went on the rampage through the ANC-supporting township, left 46 people dead and shook the nation and the world. It led to the ANC walking out of the World Trade Centre negotiations, accusing the National Party of complicity in the attacks. A few months later, in September, 28 ANC supporters were shot dead in Bisho, in the nominally independent homeland of the Ciskei, when they held a protest to demand the Ciskei's reincorporation into South Africa.

The Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, under the chairmanship of Justice Richard Goldstone, was set up in October 1991. In its first year the Commission's principal investigation team consisted solely of members of the South African police and it struggled to pierce the veil of secrecy around the security forces, relying solely on third party information. After the Boipatong and Bisho massacres, Goldstone requested president De Klerk's permission to set up independent investigation teams, comprising not only members of the police force, but also attorneys and foreign police officers. Allegations started coming in of government and security force complicity in the violence and about the existence of a state-sponsored "third force".

Idasa was instrumental in bringing "Q", a security force member stationed at the notorious Vlakplaas, to the Goldstone Commission. After Idasa arranged for witness protection under the Goldstone Inquiry for "Q" he, later joined by two of his colleagues, released information on the role of senior police generals in what they described as an orchestrated effort to sow violence and mayhem

in the country to derail the negotiation process, particularly on the East Rand and in KwaZulu-Natal, including manufacturing and purchasing arms, delivering weapons to Inkatha, orchestrating terror attacks and engaging in other “third force” operations.

A month before the election, on 28 March 1994, 38 people were killed and 250 injured when the IFP held a march of thousands of its supporters through the Johannesburg city centre. The area around the central library and outside the ANC’s national and regional offices was turned into a battle zone. In response to the re-imposition of a state of emergency in KwaZulu-Natal, Inkatha leader Mangosutho Buthelezi threatened “a final struggle to the finish between the ANC and the Zulu nation” if the election was not postponed. Right up until Inkatha’s sudden and unexpected decision to participate in the poll, and the miracle of election day, the violence threatened a very different outcome. To the bitter end, the outcome of the four years of gruelling negotiations seemed uncertain.





From Building Bridges to Building Active Citizens: Post-1994

The announcement of a date for the first free and democratic election in South Africa galvanised Idasa – and South Africans across the board – into action. Idasa conducted extensive, country-wide voter education in all sorts of organisations and settings, including churches, businesses, army bases, factories, rural areas, townships, single-sex hostels and informal settlements. Idasa also trained observers and party election agents and produced a poster package, “You Can Vote”. On election day, Idasa deployed 54 observer teams in more than 60 districts, visiting more than 750 voting stations.

In KwaZulu-Natal, where extreme violence marked the pre-election period, voter educators had to deal with particularly difficult and often dangerous circumstances. Nevertheless, successful voter education was conducted across the province. In the Eastern Cape it was estimated that the Idasa voter education campaign reached 180 000 people and in the Free State and Northern Cape, Idasa’s voter education campaign was considered a great success, with far fewer ballots being spoiled than had been expected given the high illiteracy levels in the area. It was a time of intense mobilisation and action, and the organisation’s roots in local level training and education provided a solid base for the focus on voter education.

It was after the election, however, when the dust had settled on the new democracy, when the democratically elected ANC government was firmly in place and the citizens of South Africa had clearly demonstrated that they were capable of, and committed to, a peaceful, negotiated settlement, that Idasa faced the

“The secrecy of the vote is one of the subjects raised often in voter education workshops run by Idasa’s Western Cape office – sometimes in unexpected forms. “Will the tokoloshe know who you are voting for?” was one of the questions asked recently.

Intimidation, often in subtle forms, is another recurring theme. Residents of Crossroads and Nyanga East, for instance, have complained that a local sangoma told them who to vote for, and are convinced that it is impossible for their votes to remain secret from a person with magical powers.

One of the ways the issue of secrecy is addressed, for example, is to take workshop participants through a process of simulated voting, where all mark ballot papers and place them in a ballot box. At the end of the session, one of the ballot papers is removed, and participants are asked to guess who placed it there. In this way, people experience concretely that votes can be secret.”

Democracy in Action, Journal of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, February 1994



question: if the country had a democratic government in place, what then was the point of an institute committed to forging a democratic alternative? What had been “alternative” up to that point had become mainstream.

Boraine’s response at the time was far-sighted, reaching beyond the period of post-election euphoria: “Long after the first free and fair election in South Africa has been held, there will be a need for an organisation like Idasa to continue to focus on democratic values and thus to challenge any possible abuse of power from whatever source.”

Renaming itself the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, while retaining the well-known acronym, the organisation at the time focused on the process of democracy-building; its energies post-1994 were devoted to establishing and developing democratic institutions to help strengthen the newly elected government. This entailed a significant shift in perspective from one inimical to the government to one committed to working with the government, doing whatever it could to strengthen it and ensure the success of democracy in South Africa.

Working behind the scenes during the constitution-writing process, Idasa took some of the experts and politicians engaged in drawing up South Africa’s final constitution to India, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, Portugal, Australia – countries with constitutional arrangements they could learn from in shaping South Africa’s own. The National Party Government’s Minister of Constitutional Development at the time, Roelf Meyer; the right-wing Freedom Front’s Constand Viljoen; Deputy President of the Constitutional Assembly Leon Wessels; the Inkatha Freedom Party’s Peter Smith; ANC MP at the time, Pravin Gordhan were among

those taken by Idasa to meet constitutional experts abroad to debate federalism vs regionalism; cantons as opposed to provinces; proportional representation and pluralism.

With its aim of assisting in the reconstruction of the state, Idasa engaged in projects on reform within the new government. The department of correctional services, then still sharply militarised, came to Idasa's attention. Working with the government minister, the parliamentary portfolio committee, police trade unions as well other NGOs, the organisation took its programme to all the provinces and participants were invited to tour Denmark, Britain and Holland to learn more about prison reform.

During this period, Idasa focused on developing civic values, encouraging democratic practices and procedures, and consolidating the new constitution. Idasa soon came to realise that as a critical ally of democracy it would sometimes be necessary to criticise the fledgling ANC government, even while at the same time working closely with it. It found itself negotiating a fine line between government critic and friend.

As the new parliament took shape and settled down to its mammoth task of legislating out of the statute books the panoply of laws that constituted apartheid and setting in its place legislation that matched the principles of the constitution, Idasa played both a consultative role and a critical one at the same time.

One of its key areas of interest was the need for a code of conduct to guide the ethics and behaviour of the new generation of post-apartheid MPs, most of whom were new to parliamentary politics and who had to learn to rapidly shed

their style of populist opposition and resistance politics.

Around this time Alex Boraine resigned from Idasa and handed over the leadership to a leading academic from the University of Cape Town, Wilmot James. One of James's first tasks was the establishment of Idasa's Public Information Centre (PIC), under the directorship of Mamphela Ramphele. James said at the time: "The PIC represents what is different about both South Africa and Idasa in the post-election phase of our history, where there is a recognition that, to meet the challenges of the present and the future, we constantly need good information about the real and difficult choices we have to make."

Speaking at the launch of the PIC, Ramphele said that critical to the emerging political system in South Africa was an empowered and knowledgeable citizenry. "Access to information is key to such a nurturing process. The voting public, elected as well as appointed public officials at all levels of government, and actors in the wider South African society will be better served by an open flow of reliable, in-depth information. The PIC is geared to bridge the information gap which exists in our society."

The PIC's mandate was to collect, collate, analyse and provide information on public policy with a view to enhancing government transparency, accountability and effectiveness. It aimed also to provide citizens with relevant information, believing that for citizens to be active participants in the governance process they need to be fully informed. "Transparency and public information are critical," James wrote at the time. "How can we expect citizens to live peacefully with trade-offs when they do not have the information that lies behind the choices."



“What is meant by a democratic culture is not always very clear. To my mind, it means an understanding of our formal rights, obligations and responsibilities as citizens, an understanding that can only be cultivated by public and school education. It also means an enthusiasm and willingness to make claims on such democratic rights, to call government and public policy to account when there is a temptation to sidestep such rights and an inability to deliver promised goods.

At the same time a democratic culture implies that individual citizens must take full responsibility for their actions and lives, that they must stop blaming others for failure and not always wait for government to take the initiative....

A democratic culture also means that all citizens must be treated with respect, dignity and in utmost recognition of their humanity, rights and obligations. This is true not only for the police service and military, often accused of lacking the most elementary understanding of democratic and human rights values, but for the rest of us as well. ”

Wilmot James, Executive Director, Idasa's 1994 Annual Report

The PIC recognised the need to break with the past oppositional approaches to public policy and work instead with government where necessary, within parliamentary politics, fostering a new civic ability to constructively influence government and participate in public policy debates.

This represented a shift in the organisation away from its work as facilitator and bridge-builder between South Africans, to working directly with citizens as active agents of change. It required the development of a culture of democracy among citizens and fostering of their active participation in a new form of politics. Idasa continued organising conferences, workshops and public debates, building on its work at local level, but this time with a crucial shift in focus to democracy-building by ordinary citizens.

At this time, the regional offices, whose programmes had begun to resemble each other and whose locations no longer reflected the new provincial divisions in South Africa, were closed and two amalgamated Democracy Centres were established, one in Cape Town and the other in Pretoria.

Convinced that government at local level was closest to the people and therefore most important in consolidating democracy, Idasa threw itself into voter education and training for the October 1995 local government elections. While concerns over the protracted process of drawing up the final South African constitution dominated national level politics, Idasa chose to focus at the level where ordinary South Africans were located – local level – where the need for individual and community capacity-building was to be found.

Realising, particularly from its work at local government level, that the

CHERISH THE IDEAL

KUTLWANONG DEMOCRACY CENTRE WAS DEDICATED ON 11, 1997 WITH GRATITUDE FOR THE VISION OF OUR FOUNDERS, THE GENEROSITY OF OUR DONORS, THE FRIENDSHIP OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS, AND THE COMMITMENT OF OUR PAST AND PRESENT STAFF.

THIS BUILDING WAS ACQUIRED ON THE BASIS OF A NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE NORWEGIAN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION NORAD AND WAS DEDICATED BY MR PER Ø BRIMSTAD NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR TO SOUTH AFRICA

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For the first time, South African MPs have to be open with their electorate. As of February 1997 a new Code of Conduct required all 400 members of the national assembly to disclose their outside financial interests in a Register of Members' Interests. The code and register are giant steps towards establishing government accountability. Now the public can see when an MP has a potential conflict of interest between public duty and private interest. The procedure that has been set in place means, however, that it will cost a member of the public R2000 to see the register as a whole. It has not been made available electronically and no mainstream newspaper has seen fit to publish it. In the public interest, therefore, Whip publishes the register in full as a special supplement. 9

*Parliamentary Whip, published by Idasa's
Parliamentary Information & Monitoring
Service (PIMS), 14 March 1997*

success or failure of democracy in South Africa would largely hinge on delivery by government to meet the long-held aspirations and hopes of the people, Idasa saw the need to take on the role of monitor of government policy and delivery. The Parliamentary Information & Monitoring Service (PIMS) was set up to focus on parliament, tracking legislation and monitoring MPs' performance, in line with similar practices in other democracies internationally. Its objectives were to increase parliamentary accountability, accessibility and transparency and also to track and monitor the implementation of post-apartheid policy.

Idasa recognised the need to measure the state of democracy in South Africa and the organisation set out to "audit" South Africa's progress in the critical areas of transparency and accountability of decision-makers;

participation by civil society; and social delivery to address the ongoing crisis of inequality.

Drawing on the organisation's experience and expertise, it developed a unique Democracy Index, a questionnaire designed to measure progress in South Africa's democracy-building project. Above all it set out to address the question: "To what extent does the political system in a particular country bring about popular self-government?"

The Democracy Index, first published in 1998 (two volumes followed in 2002 and 2005), was designed around two principles – the extent to which people can control those who make decisions about public affairs and the extent to which people are equal to each other in this process.

Idasa approached the 1999 election with a confidence and assurance that was reflected throughout the country. The first term of office of the democratic government was drawing to a close in an environment that was relatively prosperous, significantly more peaceful than it had been for decades and that could point to considerable legislative progress and political accomplishments.

Building on its experience in voter education and election monitoring, an experience that had been broadened over the years by staff members who had conducted voter education campaigns and monitored elections in other parts of Africa, Idasa swung into action; for the 1999 election, Idasa coordinated 165 workshops and trained close to 450 voter educators in seven different provinces. It produced a voter educator's package entitled, "your vote counts", distributing more than 4 500 copies across the country.

Empowering Citizens to Face New Threats to Democracy: The Millennium

With the maturation of the political process and the entrenchment of parliamentary politics, South Africans slowly shifted their perspective; over time it became clear that the energy and activism of the mass democratic movement under apartheid was dissipating as the ANC government settled into its second term of office. The protests and mobilisation of the past began to give way to a national political apathy. The other side of the coin of relative political stability and certainty was citizen indifference and disinterest. Rising crime, unemployment and corruption contributed as well to a growing spirit of disillusionment among the populace. As the first decade of democracy drew to an end, Idasa noted the growing tendency to define democracy too narrowly, as the work of government, with citizens being increasingly relegated to the margins of decision-making.

Idasa's Public Opinion Service (POS), formed to survey the attitudes of citizens to a range of socio-political issues, confirmed this trend; citizen interest in and understanding of politics was low. Idasa therefore approached the millennium with a mandate to build citizen capacity for democracy, within communities as well as in government structures. The weakening of South Africa's once vibrant civil society galvanised Idasa into a number of further training initiatives.

The Citizen Leadership Project was modelled on the conviction that there is a need for strong citizens to interact with institutions of government at every level. It was felt within the organisation at the time that the lack of leadership and effective organising at community level was compromising the consolidation

of democracy and the promotion of good governance. Similarly, the Institutional Capacity Building Unit aimed to strengthen the capacity of non-governmental and community-based organisations to empower citizens to shape the course and conditions of their lives through effective engagement in social and political processes and structures.

The Local Government Centre was established to build capacity among councillors and municipal officials to empower municipalities and local communities to demand effective and accountable governance and service delivery.

The Budget Information Service (BIS) built capacity among civil society organisations to participate in budgetary debates and policy-making, emphasising above all public education; the programme

“In 2005, the Children’s Budget Unit, a unit within BIS, together with partners in South Africa and Brazil launched its Children Participating in Governance project, which trained children to monitor the degree to which government budgets realise their rights and needs. The idea is that participation by young people in decision-making ensures that government policy is responsive to children’s actual needs – not only their needs as perceived by adults – and helps children activate their citizenship and articulate their rights.

Said a participating youngster, “The one greatest thing I have inherited from this project is self respect...I believe if people can inherit that from me they will do whatever they set their minds to (do).”

Another said: “Now I know that as youth we can make a difference in this country.”

Idasa’s 2005 Annual Report



produced easily understandable budget information for grassroots organisations, researchers and NGOs. The Budget Training Squad, a project within BIS, took training in budget processes and understanding to NGOs and governments throughout South Africa, providing citizens and government officials with the analytic tools they needed to engage with the country's budget. The Africa Budget Project, also a project within BIS, later took this work to more than 300 organisations in dozens of countries in Africa.

Idasa's work at this time was about training and empowering citizens. But at the same time it also concerned itself with governance; the need for a more equal, just society with satisfactory delivery of services. Despite its model

“ Study circles are small, voluntary, informal education groups. Idasa's Citizen Leadership Unit adapted this method of learning, developed in Sweden, to train citizens to “talk, learn and act together” on issues that concern their communities.

Happy Xaba, a branch manager of the South African Association of Youth Clubs (SAAYC), became one of the first trainees in the Unit's study circle programme. She said of the study circle method: “People don't simply receive education, rather they must initiate and develop together. There is no teacher – everyone in the group is equal

“It does not matter if a member is highly educated or has little or no learning experience because he or she brings his or her own experiences of life and others in the group can learn from them. ”

Idasa's 2005 Annual Report

constitution and its sound constitutional framework, South Africa continued to be one of the most unequal countries in the world, and it was clear that continued socio-economic inequality was a threat to South Africa's democracy. Idasa understood that continued inequality and discrimination in the form of economic disequilibrium posed as much of a threat to South Africa's young democracy as diminished citizen participation.

"The governance challenge in South Africa remains three-pronged," wrote Judith February, PIMS Acting Programme Manager at the time. "First of all there is widespread, endemic poverty, underpinned by massive inequality. South Africa is now the world's third most unequal society. Secondly, it is difficult for the poor to access the new system of governance to have their voices heard...Thirdly there is a democratic deficit in the realm of oversight and accountability. This applies to both the institutions of democratic governance and to civil society. Parliament has been prolific in its production of new laws since 1994. It is often weak, however, in its ability to oversee the implementation of the new laws and to hold the executive to account for its policy implementation...This socio economic context... is the backdrop against which PIMS seeks to challenge inequality."

Research, analysis and monitoring of resource allocation and service delivery from a pro-poor perspective became logical extensions of Idasa's democracy-consolidation project. The focus within the organisation had turned to the threats facing South Africa's fledgling democracy. Crime, for example, came in for some attention in the Community Safety Programme. Xenophobia and the issues surrounding cross-border migration was another; Idasa is one of the founding partners of the

‘ Lessons from the Field: A Decade of Democracy was Idasa’s lead project commemorating South Africa’s first ten years of democracy. A series of seven roundtables took place from June to August 2004, focusing on key areas of South African life in which there had been a strong transformational agenda since 1994. Themes included citizen capacity, local government, Parliament, budget transparency, schools, higher education and land reform...The aim of the roundtables was to go beyond platitudes and oft-repeated observations to identify important lessons from our first decade of democracy, as well as major challenges for the next ten years.

Perhaps the strongest issue to emerge across all the discussions was the role of citizens in democracy...When democracy is conceived too narrowly, as simply the work of government, citizens become marginalised and democracy seems to revolve around politicians. When citizens are placed at the centre, everything looks different. Government is a critical instrument of the society...but the most fundamental question is the knowledge, confidence, power and skill of the citizenry as a whole. ’

Idasa’s 2004 Annual Report

“ At the end of 2004, ten graduates of Idasa’s Leadership Training Programme decided to mark ten years of democracy by walking the 1 952 km from Gauteng to Cape Town.

Leaders of the group, Sibeko and Tebogo, acknowledged that they didn’t plan the trip well enough. Without good walking shoes, they got blisters and pulled muscles, which often made walking difficult. They walked in heat of 30 degrees C and more, without enough to eat and drink. But they refused to give up – they were on a mission to promote democracy, and they kept on going.

“Wherever we went we tried to inform people about community development, local economic development, gender equality and the constitution. We talked to them about the need for accountability and transparency. We told them for a democracy to work, citizens need to take responsibility. And that only active, organised citizens can build a democracy”, said Tebogo.

The epic journey took 80 days to complete. The group finally visited Parliament where they were given a standing ovation and warmly welcomed by parliamentarians. ”

*Taking the Lead – Ordinary people, Extraordinary Stories,
published by Idasa, 2006*

Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), which conducts research on migration, trains officials in cross-border policy implementation and has helped organise international forums for migration officials from all Southern African countries.

More recently Idasa has recognised HIV/AIDS as one of the biggest threats to democracy. The organisation's response has been the Governance and AIDS Programme (GAP) to mobilise actors across the region to act collectively to combat this threat. GAP's research has shown that HIV/AIDS is not just a health issue; it has the potential to undermine the democratic project, in South Africa and across the continent, by destabilising electoral systems; reducing political party support bases and the ability to compete; decreasing participation in public policy processes by citizens infected and affected by the pandemic; and potentially undermining the capacity of electoral management bodies to conduct elections effectively.

Moreover, Idasa has increasingly realised that democracy in South Africa cannot be secure while neighbouring countries further north suffer from ongoing military or repressive government. This thinking has motivated Idasa to work more and more in other parts of Africa. Drawing on its long tradition of dialogue and of bringing role-players together, and acting on its role as critical ally of democracy, Idasa has taken its experience into countries elsewhere in Africa where violence and instability as well as lack of skill and capacity pose a threat to democracy.

Today much of Idasa's work takes place beyond South Africa's borders, working with NGO partners in capacity-building within a number of African parliaments, training MPs and facilitating the development of good governance practices within African states. In Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and

‘ The Afrobarometer project, launched first in Zambia in 1993 and in South Africa in 1995, aimed to systematically measure and assess citizen attitudes to democracy in different African countries, using a standardised and carefully refined survey tool. The work of four core partners – Idasa, the Centre for Democratic Development in Ghana, Wilsken Agencies in East Africa and Michigan State University in the US – the project has expanded steadily over the years to cover 18 African countries. Idasa is responsible for the surveys in southern Africa – South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The Afrobarometer enables Idasa to match what it believes to be important and relevant work in different countries to the perceptions of the citizens of those countries. ’

Idasa’s website, www.idasa.org

elsewhere Idasa seeks to engage civil society organisations in monitoring political violence and facilitating the resolution of conflict through multi-stakeholder processes. It has provided curriculum development and civic education resources in Ghana, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda; political institution support in Namibia and Swaziland; leadership skills training in Angola; and budget analysis and training in Zimbabwe, Chad and Ghana, to name but a few countries.

As Idasa has expanded its work into the rest of Africa, it has also taken on an increasingly self-conscious “African” identity and perspective on what democracy means. The aim above all is to understand and collaborate with intergovernmental institutions and regional bodies in those countries to promote

Idasa's Safety and Security Programme is engaged in a programme to examine police reform in 14 African countries. Most of the countries the programme surveyed shared a need for the demilitarisation of police style and culture, even where the police had been separate from the military. Symbolic changes to the names of ranks and to police symbols and uniforms are among steps taken to achieve this. One of the greatest challenges to police reform efforts is ongoing misconduct by police in countries where the previous police force was involved in abusive and corrupt practices, such as torture and bribery.

Democratic policing emphasises accountability to democratically elected structures such as parliaments or local governments. The study found that Nigeria offers an exceptional model of oversight of personnel management inside police organisations in the form of its Police Service Commission, which deals with matters such as promotions and discipline. In South Africa, the police labour unions play a role in monitoring personnel management policies and practices. ’

Idasa's 2005 Annual Report

democracy within country settings. But Idasa's primary focus is on building capacity for democracy country by country while understanding that each of these democracies will only be sustained if transnational challenges are faced squarely.

In line with these changes in the arena of its work, Idasa has over the years revised its mission statement to reflect the changes that the organisation has undergone; these modifications also reflect the changes South Africa has experienced in 20 years. The current mission statement declares: "Idasa is committed to promoting sustainable democracy based on active citizenship, democratic institutions and social justice." It is understood that achieving these goals in South Africa alone, even if it were possible, is not desirable. South Africa's democracy is dependent on that of its neighbouring states and countries throughout the continent of Africa, and their development and progress is of course dependent on that of South Africa.

Idasa's current Executive Director, Paul Graham, sums up the dilemma of our organisation and also the challenge of our times: "Sustainable democracies require active citizens, strong institutions and social justice. Idasa is committed to working for democracy in Africa in solidarity with ordinary people, the organisations they create, the institutions they establish and maintain, and the leaders they elect.

"But unless the democracies Africans create become sustainable so that lives can be peaceful, prosperous and increasingly predictable, all that work and its cost in human and financial terms is as nothing."

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

THE OFFICIAL NEWS BULLETIN OF THE INSTITUTE FOR A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE FOR SOUTH AFRICA
 AUGUST 1992
 THESE probably had not been as much fun and exchange of ideas as the Freedom Charter since the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955.

Historic IDASA Conference - Freedom Charter Emerges as Alive and Relevant as Ever

BY MARC GORDON

The annual IDASA national conference on the Freedom Charter that 400 delegates attended on Friday morning at the start of the 1992 conference will see 300 senior attorneys listening to Dr van der Merwe's closing remarks.

The overriding impression of that conference is one of the substance and spirit that permeated the proceedings, and the delegates re-committed what they stand for. But there were certain details which gave it a distinctive character, the Freedom being sung between Ben Swartz's speech. It highlighted the elderly women who had formed, and the delegates who had descended to listen from the audience.



RE • THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP



Spectrum

The democratic alternative

What is the alternative? The alternative is a South Africa that is a democracy, a South Africa that is a free society, a South Africa that is a society of the people.



'Laws more and more repressive'



idasa