Report of the African Student Leaders Network (ASLN) Meeting (University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa 13 November 2004)

By *Mlungisi Gabriel Cele, University of Western Cape (UWC), South Africa*

List of Participants

1. Nico Cloete   -Director, CHET& ASLN
2. Edwina Goliath   -Director, UCT Student Development Services
3. Mlungisi Gabriel Cele   -Researcher, UWC

Introduction

The first Western Cape African Student Leaders Network regional meeting occurred at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa on the 13th November 2004. Fifteen students from five Western Cape higher education institutions (UCT, UWC, Stellenbosch, Cape Tech and Pentech) attended meeting. The majority of students (about nine) were women. Students also came from diverse racial and leadership backgrounds-management forum, arts, religious and political. So evident was the absence of dominant student political organizations and Student Representative Councils (SRCs)-in the future a decision will need to be made about inclusion or exclusion of these organisations. Also present in the meeting were Nico Cloete (Director of CHET & ASLN), Mlungisi Gabriel Cele (UWC researcher and consultant) and Edwina Goliath (Director UCT Student Development Services-also the coordinator and chair of the meeting).

This short report is divided into three sections. First section focuses on background of the project and various responses of students. Second section consists of the reports of the two commissions or breakaway groups and subsequent deliberations. Third section provides recommendations and issues to be considered in the future.

Background of the ASLN

The meeting was officially opened just after 10h00 a.m. Edwina welcomed everybody and requested people to introduce themselves and tell from which institutions or organisations they were coming. She then outlined the programme and asked Nico to provide the background to the establishment of ASLN. A group of students from different institutions initiated and conceptualised ASLN as encompassing all forms and levels of student leadership rather than purely focusing on SRCs. ASLN consists of two regional groups, that is, East Africa group and South Africa Western Cape. Students initially identified governance as the main problem both at the institutional and state level and as a result certain individuals were asked to write short think pieces on the topic to stimulate discussions. Ford Foundation is the main sponsor of ASLN.

The meeting of the East Africa regional group occurred in Nairobi and was attended by students from different institutions. One of the key challenges is to keep and sustain the momentum of the students for consistency and continuity purposes. The Nairobi meeting resolved that the fight against fees would be the major focus of the group in 2005. This is in part in part because higher education system there is extremely elitist and entails dual streams. That is, some students are top class attend in the morning and do not pay fees (receive government subsidy), and the rest attends in the afternoon and expected to pay fees. However it is ironic that students are doing well are those paying fees.

According to Nico there were three discernible and interesting things about the Nairobi meeting. Only one woman from Medical Private Institution attended the meeting. The SRC operated like a Cabinet with Prime Minister and Ministers. There were academic guilds that

shared strong relations with the Cabinet. It was explained that one reason for women not interested to participate in Kenya was because national politics got into institutions with national political parties supporting certain candidates contesting for student governments.

The purpose of the UCT meeting was characterised as manifold. That is:
- To see if students are interested to join and form part of the network.
- To identify issues and concerns of students
- Planning to hold workshop in 2005 March coinciding with autonomy conference

Students were then given opportunity to engage the presentation in general and the purpose of the meeting in particular. Students raised questions around the establishment of ASLN (when, who, funding sources), the sustainability, links with other youth forums, communication (between Western Cape and East Africa regional groups), benefits and incentives of involvement (including possibility of certification), whether students would be allowed to make suggestions on what should be done, discussed, electronic network (whether students would access internet free and where will it be based) etc.

Students were told that unless Ford Foundation extends its funding, the future of ASLN remains in limbo. In this regard efforts would be made to convince the Ford to extend its funding. Students were informed that they were not going to gain any material benefits. Except that ASLN was going to provide them with wide range of opportunities to meet and discuss and establish contacts with each other in the Western Cape and East Africa. In other words the network students would be able engage, share and contribute to the enhancement and development of youth in general and student leadership in particular. The idea of electronic networking is based on the assumption that most students have access to computers facilities such as email and internet and would use such to interact. In instances where students would have used their own money, say in the internet café ASLN would try and reimburse the students as long as there are clear justifications.

As part of an attempt to reach some common understanding and consensus students proposed that they split into two commissions or groups in order to determine the following:
- The need and interest for ASLN and subsequent participation of students
- How ASLN should be conducted? What would be needed to have effective ASLN?
- Various topics to b explored by Western Cape group.

Therefore each group was given twenty minutes to engage on the above three sets of issues and expected to appoint a scribe to report to the plenary.

Commissions Reports

1st Commission Report

Need/Interest

- Too much literature on issues exists, yet need isn't there. This needs to come from students themselves. Need to gain idea (broader) of what other students need. The emphasis should be more on implementation.
- Need for capacitating students through sharing information
- Need to consolidate regional issues/positions through discussions
- Need to reaffirm the dignity of African Higher Education
- Need to sustain ideas=ensuring link to interest groups (such as Nepad) and evidence of use of output of project.

Topics
- Governance structures-uniformity throughout institutions
- Opportunities (leadership and learning), who has access to them
- African intellect: value and proper recognition
- Developing conflict resolution in Africa
- The integrity of governance structures in Africa

- Apathy-the mandate of this generation??? Caught between the past and future
- Youth Participation in viable economic activities
- To embark on economic transformation through education
- Image of the leadership

How

- Elected individuals and institution
- Meeting as leaders from different institutions
- Funds to secure projects
- Student charter
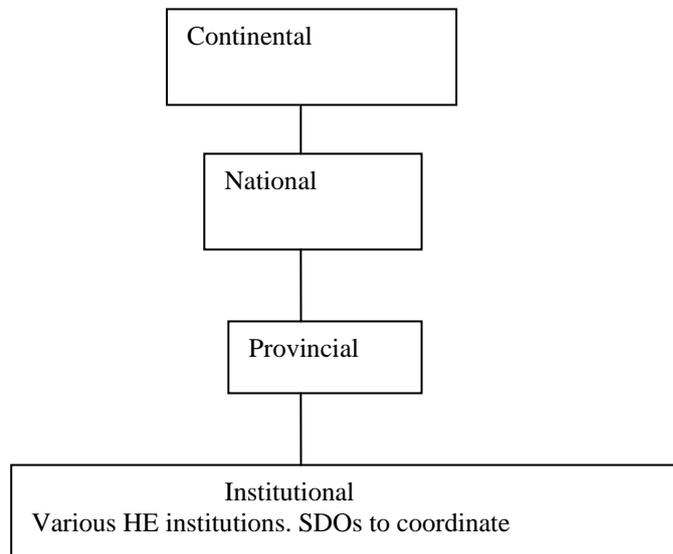- Shape objectives through proposal document

2nd Group

Objective-1st need-reason for need-leadership going from bad to worse
Strategy: to talk and communicate with others in trying to get solutions to issues at hand
Tool; to compliment things already being done at different campuses

Approach

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│           Institutional           │
│ Various HE institutions. SDOs to  │
│            coordinate             │
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Recommendations and Conclusion
- The next meeting will occur in March 2005 after all institutions have completed registration processes. A commissioned short paper on apathy will be presented in order to lead discussion.
- Should be follow ups and more gatherings of the group. Students could also try to secure additional financial support from institutions.
- An attempt should be made to ensure that all institutions and key actors were sufficiently represented
- Network provides space for African young leaders to interact and contribute towards broader development in Africa-NEPAD and AU. Therefore ASLN should engage NEPAD secretariat around the need to develop common and good governance guidelines for the rest of the continent. In fact nobody has said let us start continent wide student leadership.

- One of the key questions is whether students should be talking amongst each other in the Western Cape to discuss common issues or perhaps need to propose regular meetings in the Western Cape rather than relying on electronic media-no money to arrange it in other provinces.
- Need to use and exchange student newspaper articles across the continent-essential to this will be to prepare and disseminate these articles to the broader and wider audience. Radio media and national radio stations should be utilised.
- Since ASLN programme was not thoroughly researched- certain issues should probably be given to provinces to research and come up with reports and publish them widely
- Western Cape ASLN structure should not be linked to SRCs. Instead SDO's should be used to fund functioning and activities ASLN.
- Funding-CHET-needs to review and try and secure more funding, students should be encouraged to fundraise and get more sponsors.
- Institutions should award certificate as incentives in order to attract more students to attend ASLN activities

AFRICAN STUDENT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEETING

Saturday, 13 November 2004 from 10am 2pm on Level 6, SDSD Building, Upper Campus, UCT

Time	Activity	Facilitator/ Chair
10.00-10.15	Welcome Introductions	Ms Edwina Goliath (Director, Student Development Office, UCT)
10.15 – 11.30	Overview of Project ▪ Aims and Objectives ▪ Progress ▪ Discussion	Dr Nico Cloete (Director, Centre for Higher Education Transformation – CHET)
11.30 – 12.30	Student Democracy Project?	Mr Gabriel Cele (Researcher, Centre for the Study of Higher Education - CSHE, UWC)
12.30 – 13.00	Brainstorming Issues in Student Governance and Leadership	Ms Edwina Goliath (Director, Student Development Office, UCT)
13.00 – 13.15	Way Forward and Closing	Ms Edwina Goliath (Director, Student Development Office, UCT)
13.15-14.00	LUNCH	