

After two extraordinary years – South Africa's 10th anniversary in 2004 and Make Poverty History/Year of Africa in 2005 – this has been more a year of continuous steady work than of spectacular highlights. There has been a great deal of this solid hard work done, however, much of it on long-term initiatives and producing some useful results.

Link with Eastern Cape: One long-term initiative that has come on strongly over the year has been the joint project on local economic development between Amathole District Municipality and Glasgow City Council, sponsored by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Two groups of ADM officials came to Scotland during the year for training and work-shadowing, and the project is considered to be very successful. There is a strong expectation that funding will be continued into a second phase beyond next March, and Mayor Somyo of ADM is keen for this to include a four-way link-up with other partners in England and Uganda. It is also hoped to widen the relationship beyond the specific area of local economic development.

We are not responsible for this project, but we are pleased to have been instrumental in bringing the partners together, and have been keeping in close touch with it. Our own existing link with Amathole has been strengthened as a result. The Municipality provided much practical assistance when our own delegation visited in October, and is keen for the next Wild Coast Walk in 2007 to be a joint project with the ADM Mayor's Challenge Hike.

Other strong elements of our link with Eastern Cape also developed over the year, particularly our contacts with Masimanyane Women's Support Centre (with visits in both directions and help with expanding the Centre's international connections in Scotland and beyond), Blythwood Institution, Vukani Old Age Service Centre and Lovedale College. New contacts were also made with the Kurt Warmberg Haven and the Heroes' Park project in East London. Brian Filling's connections in Further and Higher Education have continued to be put to good use through the British Council as well as directly, to encourage links between educational establishments in the U.K. and South Africa, including the Scotland/Eastern Cape special relationship. A dinner during President Mbeki's visit to London also made possible a number of conversations about developing links.

Mzi Mahola from Port Elizabeth has been in touch more than once to reiterate the inspirational impact of his visit to Scotland in 2004, not just on his poetry but on his efforts to spread a love of literature among young people through an impressive programme of school workshops. He would welcome help from Scotland with this.

The Book Appeal has continued to attract quantities of useful material, and the sorting and packing goes on at Hillhead Library. An unfortunate misunderstanding led to the loss of a quantity of books that were part of the consignment about to be dispatched in March which has meant a delay of about a year in completing the container-load. Amathole District Municipality has agreed to take delivery of that container as they did of the last one we sent. The Co-operative Group's help with taking in books at their stores was suspended early in the year for operational reasons, but we hope will be restored quite soon.

Funds raised by Scottish trade unions and the 2004 Walk for the Nomzamo Co-ops. at Fort Hare University were sent off this year, and used to branch out into the manufacture of chemicals for cleaning.

ACTSA Delegation: The delegation referred to above was part of the wider ACTSA UK visit to Southern Africa which we had proposed to the U.K. AGM in 2005. Although much of the organising work was done from the London office ACTSA Scotland played some part in the planning, including a visit to Denis Goldberg at his house in Cape Town. This visit and others in the first couple of days did bring home to many delegates visiting South Africa for the first time how deeply South Africa is inevitably affected by its history. The programme moved on to the building of dozens of practical connections between partner organisations in Britain and in South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho. The three delegates from Scotland shared the early part of the programme, but then went to Eastern Cape to work on our connections with that Province.

Events: Several events were organised during the year, most of them connected with anniversaries. Our annual social to mark the January anniversary of the founding of the ANC took place as usual in the STUC's premises, and on June 16th we held a reception at the same venue to mark the 30th anniversary of the start of the Soweto uprising and also of the formal constituting of the Anti-Apartheid Movement Scottish Committee which took place three days after the shootings. Kumi Naidoo, now Secretary General of CIVICUS and a long-standing activist in the South African liberation struggle, addressed the meeting.

Throughout the year discussions were held about the marking of the 25th anniversary of Glasgow's granting of the Freedom of the City to Nelson Mandela. The outcome was the establishment of an annual lecture on the theme of Freedom, jointly sponsored by Glasgow City Council, the city's universities and Glasgow Metropolitan College. The inaugural lecture on 26th October was given in the City Chambers by Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, and marked not only the Nelson Mandela anniversary but the beginning of the commemoration of the 90th year since O.R. Tambo's birth. As well as our involvement with the actual meeting, we were pleased to assist with background information for the writing of the lecture.

The Community HEART fundraising dinner in the same location the following evening was not an ACTSA event but we were quite deeply involved, not least through our shared Chair.

We were glad to be part of Clydebank Asbestos Group's international conference in February, which had a strong South African element with contributions from both Lindiwe Mabuza and Sophia Kisting. Contacts between Clydebank and Prieska have continued since the time of the Cape compensation campaign.

Southern Africa: With the limited resources available to us, both human and material, there is no possibility of giving equal attention to all 14 members of the Southern African Development Community, but we do our best to assist when the opportunity arises. The major ACTSA effort of the year relating to the Region but outwith South Africa has undoubtedly been the Dignity. Period! Campaign of solidarity with the women of Zimbabwe. With the help of AMICUS and NUS as well as the ACTSA office, Thabitha Khumalo of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions has spoken at meetings and through the media and made a huge impression on all her audiences. We have helped with the distribution of information and wristbands in Scotland, and there is no doubt that the campaign has reached new people and brought in new contacts with no previous connection with ACTSA. We have also maintained our links with the Scotland-Zimbabwe Group and were represented at the ACTSA/TUC conference on Zimbabwe in London in November.

The Scottish Executive's and Parliament's commitment to links with Malawi, not least through the priorities of the International Development Fund, have strongly encouraged the growth of active solidarity connections with that country. This is not an area of strength for us, but we have continued to be involved in the Cross-Party Group on Malawi to keep in touch with developments.

Although we missed the visit to Swaziland by the ACTSA delegation, we have been actively retailing the jams and pickles imported by the Balmore Trust from an inspiring community project in Manzini, and in promoting these to others with an interest in Swaziland. We were pleased to have a brief meeting with the Bishop of Swaziland, who is not only an important part of the pro-democracy struggle in the country but also grows some of the mangoes used in the jams and chutney.

Stalls: We ran 22 stalls in the course of the year, lasting from 2 hours to 3 days, which added up to a substantial commitment of time. On top of the primary function of these to spread information about ACTSA Scotland and build both old and new contacts, we have increasingly been using them also to sell craft goods from community projects in Southern Africa. These do attract attention to the stall, but we see them also as a useful economic contribution to the projects, on a very small scale. We organised our first direct, formal import this year, from Streetwires in Cape Town, and may do more of that.

Organisation: The Ayrshire Supporters Group has continued to meet, the Edinburgh group held its first public event with speakers from three SADC countries, and there is word of a prospective group in Dundee.

We have supplied volunteers for 4 Workers Beer Company events over the year, which has again brought in new people as well as helping with various aspects of ACTSA finances.

Other pieces of work that don't slot easily into categories have gone on throughout the year. We have given advice and information when requested. David Kenvyn has spoken at a couple of meetings for us. We continue to participate in the Trade Justice Movement coalition. Members have continued to visit South Africa for a variety of purposes, not least Iain Whyte's part in the Homeless World Cup. Irene Graham and David Fletcher continue to work actively through Local Authority ACTSA. One huge piece of work now completed (we hope) is the Peter Magubane exhibition, which should leave for Norway any day now.

Although for ACTSA 2006 has not had any events on the dramatic scale of "South Africa in the Gardens" in 2004 or the giant Make Poverty History rally in 2005, we have worked pretty hard, drawn in more people and made some solid progress. We expect next year to bring more of all these.

John C. Nelson