

## **SOMAFCO-X TRUST**

### **Building on a rich legacy of youth development**

THE SOMAFCO-X TRUST, launched on Friday 6 April, is the brainchild of former students of Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. The trust is "open to everyone who subscribes to its values and principles... chiefly promoting thought, leadership and youth development". It aims to facilitate integration and promote SOMAFCO's history.

The launch of the trust is indicative of the important role the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) played in the history of the ANC, and indeed of South Africa. Between 1977 and 1992 the ANC established two unique settlements near Morogoro in Tanzania. The Government of Tanzania provided the ANC with land at Mazimbu (1,000 hectares) and Dakawa (10,000 hectares). At Mazimbu, the ANC built SOMAFCO's secondary school, primary school, nursery school and the Adult Education Centre. At the Dakawa Development Centre, the Ruth First Education Orientation Centre, the Vocational Training Centre and the Dakawa Arts and Textile Centre were built.

These structures were complemented by boarding complexes, youth centres, a multi-purpose library, daycare units, sports facilities, a 16-bed hospital, two clinics, and many staff houses.

Two farms and several small industries for furniture, clothing and leather production provided for the needs of learners and the community at large. Both settlements were endowed with infrastructure for running water, electricity, sewage and a road network. All these facilities were the result of the ANC's planning and construction departments. Volunteer experts from many countries and local Tanzanian workers made substantial contributions.

Mazimbu and Dakawa developed as mini-municipalities which provided services, undertook maintenance work, supplied food and other needs and had a range of structures for administration, transport, housing, motor repairs and so on.

The impressive output of physical facilities, the production of food and clothing, and the provision of various services made the ANC significantly self reliant. Looking back, the ANC's achievements in 14 short years can be seen as a remarkable case study of service delivery. Dedication, discipline and volunteerism were important ingredients that contributed to this success story.

If the building of facilities was a daunting assignment, even greater was the challenge to formulate education policy, the curriculum and pedagogic methods and principles. This was at the heart of the SOMAFCO project. In the context of the people's education movement inside South Africa at the time, Jack Simons, a member of the ANC's National Education Council (NEDUC), wrote in 1985: "Developments at SOMAFCO have to an increasing extent been coincident with those in SA. It is in this way that SOMAFCO has not only become the site of an alternative educational establishment for exiled South Africans, playing a pivotal role in the overall strategy of the ANC for seizure of political power, but also an important

platform from which to develop, experiment with and adapt rudimentary forms of People's Power."

The ANC's education policy aimed to prepare cadres for the struggle and for a liberated South Africa. Six principles, the antithesis of the philosophy underlying Bantu Education, were adopted to guide the development of SOMAFCO. The education should:

- aim to produce a new type of South African dedicated to non-racism, non-sexism and social justice;
- be accessible to all irrespective of age, colour, creed, race or sex;
- be based on scientific and cultural values, drawing on advanced scientific knowledge and progressive cultural traditions of the people of South Africa;
- combat the division between mental and manual training and the artificial separation between the arts and the sciences;
- promote the full participation of learners, educators and the community;
- adapt to the demands of a changing world.

In many respects, SOMAFCO's secondary and primary schools had curricula that were outcomes based - learner-centred, based on collaborative learning and continuous assessment, and non-authoritarian teacher-learner relations. The secondary school offered 10 subjects. There was dual emphasis on the social sciences and the natural sciences and mathematics. The former were examined by the ANC's own examination board, while English and the sciences/maths were examined by the University of London Examination Board.

SOMAFCO graduates had the option of obtaining scholarships through the ANC's National Scholarship Committee to universities in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Western countries, or doing vocational training at the Dakawa Vocational Training Centre or elsewhere. In some respects, SOMAFCO was a microcosm of what pertains in South Africa at present. The teacher complement was uneven, with excellent teachers on the one hand and poorly qualified or unqualified teachers on the other. Teacher shortages and a high turnover were perennial problems. However, even with these constraints, results were reasonable and many students went on to tertiary and further education and vocational qualifications. SOMAFCO had a mix of students. There were those who had taken part in the Soweto

Uprising and other subsequent student resistance activities and were highly politicised. At the other extreme were those with no political background. Those with leadership potential were a great help to the administration of the school. There were those students who could not come to terms with the harsh realities of exile, some of whom were deeply affected by the torture and imprisonment they had experienced.

Today, 30 years after it began, SOMAFCO has an important legacy. This includes firm ties of friendship between Tanzania and South Africa. In July 1992, when the late ANC President Oliver Tambo handed over SOMAFCO to the then President of Tanzania, Hassen Ali Mwinyi, he expressed the hope that Mazimbu and Dakawa would remain as monuments of the friendship and solidarity between the peoples of Tanzania and South Africa.

The facilities of Mazimbu and Dakawa are now used by the Tanzanian ministries of Education and Labour. The Sokoine University of Agriculture based in Morogoro uses the extensive facilities at Mazimbu, which is now called the Solomon Mahlangu Campus of the university. At Dakawa, the Ruth First Orientation Centre is now a thriving secondary school while the Vocational Training Centre we left behind offers training in six trades to 150 trainees annually. The ANC-Holland Solidarity Hospital has become part of the Morogoro regional health service, while the farms and small industries are also functional.

SOMAFCO featured strongly in the ANC's international campaign against apartheid. It was instrumental in creating bonds of solidarity between ordinary citizens in many countries and the oppressed people of South Africa. As a result, since 1994, South Africa has been able to establish strong diplomatic ties worldwide.

The objective of preparing cadres for the liberation struggle and for a liberated South Africa was largely achieved. Many former SOMAFCO students are serving in important roles within and outside government today.

Documents and artefacts from Mazimbu and Dakawa are lodged as part of the ANC archives at the University of Fort Hare. They provide a rich source of information on SOMAFCO and the wider Mazimbu and Dakawa communities, giving insights into the many issues and complexities of a unique and proud exile experience.

It is against the background of this legacy that we launch the SOMAFCO Trust. It is a legacy of hard work, commitment and sacrifice, which should stand us in good stead to achieve the objectives of the trust: thought, initiative, leadership, and youth development.