



The African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP)

AFSAAP President's Report 2008/9

David Lucas david.lucas@anu.edu.au

My apologies for my absence from the 2009 General Meeting but in common with several other members of the Executive I will be in Africa. I am sure we all appreciate the way that Peter Wakholi, Cynthia Ojiambo, Amadu Barrie and Liz Dimock filled the gaps when others were overseas.

The view expressed in my AFSAAP Renaissance paper (see <http://www.afsaap.org.au/Conferences/2008/Monash/Lucas.pdf>) was that AFSAAP needs to re-build, identify what needs to be done, and who will do it. In 2009 matters considered by the Executive in 2009 included:

- changes to the Constitution, especially to the clauses relating to composition of the Executive
- amending the rules relating to the Postgraduate Prize
- the preparation of a report by the Futures sub-committee to be presented at the 2009 General Meeting
- Revision of the Conference Kit (originally entitled the handing-over notes) by Liz Dimock and myself

Conferences

The November 2008 conference was organized by Monash University but several AFSAAP Executive members were involved in the planning process. We are particularly grateful to Catherine Bevan-Jones, Project Officer, Africa, at Monash, for her considerable efforts. Unfortunately she left Monash in early 2009 and was not replaced. Innovations for this conference included a Business Forum, the refereeing of papers, and feedback on the current and previous conferences. It seemed a long time since we had a guest speaker from Africa at the conference dinner and this and the opening session were enlivened by speeches by Mac Maharaj.

The Postgraduate Workshop preceded the main conference and we had the benefit of a report by organizer Sam Balaton-Chrimes. Building on the attendance list from the previous conference, thirty postgraduates attended, as well as seven professionals who constituted the panels of experts. Sam's conclusion was that the Workshop was 'a great success'

Communications

We have certainly gained in the field of communications. AFSAAP has been steadily developing its webpages. One example is the number of experts appearing on the clickable map of African countries <http://www.afsaap.org.au/Map/Map.html> which can

be used to find AFSAAP members with expertise of a particular African countries. AFSAAP members have been active on the radio, talking about a variety of countries, including Somalia, Guinea, and Zimbabwe. Our journal, *The Australasian Review of African Studies* (ARAS) is now online with a two-year window. However, even though googling for 'African Studies Association' will soon find you the AFSAAP homepage, many people interested in Africa are unaware that AFSAAP exists. Perhaps we need an entry in Wikipedia.

To bridge the gap between ARAS and the emails circulated to members by the Secretary, we now have a two-page newsletter, *Habari kwa Upfu* (News in Brief). Hyperlinks compensate for its brevity. Inter alia, the newsletter has reported on the increased interest in Africa by the Australian Government and on the African Australians Project of the Human Rights Project. Several members made submissions to this project either as individuals or as members of NGOs. I am happy to continue with writing the Newsletter even though I will not be on the Executive in 2009/2010.

Africa Day and an Africa Update

In February of this year I had a productive meeting with Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development, his adviser Sabina Curatolo, and Suzanne Dageven from AusAID's Africa section.

At the 2006 AFSAAP General Meeting I received support for the idea of an African Update, similar in format to the Indonesia Update and the Papua New Guinea Update regularly presented by The Australian National University in different cities. Bob McMullan was also encouraging and suggested testing the waters in 2009, but logistically this proved to be too hard. The lesson learned was that Africa Day itself was too full, so that plan is that an 'African Afternoon' will be held on the day before, that is on May 24th, 2010. A committee chaired by the Dean of African Heads of Mission, H.E. Mrs Marie-France, and including two AFSAAP members, Cynthia Ojiambo and myself, is planning this event.

Membership

Melbourne has the largest concentration of AFSAAP members, while some other cities are poorly represented. It is important that we build up links at the local level with organizations such as the Australia Africa Business Council and with Universities such as Newcastle which have a well-defined interest in Africa.

Nominations for the new Executive show a strong field with a good regional spread. I hope that each Executive Ordinary member will have well-defined responsibilities so that AFSAAP can continue move forward in many different directions in 2010.