

CEP
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MEMO

TO: EDWARD SHALALA/PERMENTHRI PILLAY
FROM: FRAN BIGGS/DERRICK FINE
DATE: 28 February 1995
RE: NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING: NGO/NATIONAL PARALEGAL COMMITTEE
23-24 FEBRUARY 1995

This report will be divided into several parts. The first will deal with logistical and organisational issues, the second with comments and suggestions, the third with problems specifically around the lack of administrative assistance, and the fourth will deal with substantive issues.

This meeting was attended by 15 organisations and the National Paralegal Committee, a total of delegates.

Logistics and Organisation

1 The transport arrangements were co-ordinated by the Operations team. This assistance was requested through the Project Manager: Operations, and I was assured that there was no difficulty in performing this task. I was aware of other demands on the Operations team and so asked specifically if there was sufficient capacity. I was assured that there was no problem.

In fact, the transport arrangements were problematic. There were a number of reasons for this:

- 1.1 The names of participants were not known finally until 3 days before the meeting. Even then, changes were made up to the last minute. Communication with the paralegal sector is always difficult, due to lack of infrastructure, and these difficulties have to be accommodated.
- 1.2 There was difficulty of communication between Operations, the travel agent, and myself. I did not receive any information regarding travel or accommodation of delegates until the day before the meeting. This left me in a very difficult position as delegates constantly telephoned me to find out where they were staying, what time their flights were etc. Furthermore, I was not able to check whether all delegates did in fact have bookings. This meant that there were some last-minute alterations to the arrangements.
- 1.3 The travel agent, Connex, did not deliver the kind of service required for such a meeting. There was insufficient information coming from

them - on at least one occasion because there was no typist. When time is crucial, it is impossible to function without accurate and immediate information.

- 1.4 Connex proved to be very difficult to contact. The telephone lines were constantly engaged, and the cellular phone number on an answering machine. There was no response to the messages I left, and it was only because I tried repeatedly to contact Connex that I was able eventually to speak to them. This was only possible because on Friday I had a cellular phone. Furthermore, Connex's offices close at 4.30pm. This is an extraordinary situation - a travel agent which closes before 5pm!
 - 1.5 When delegates did arrive, Connex missed two arrivals, and failed to deliver one delegate in time for his return flight.
 - 1.6 My difficulties were compounded by the fact that communication was difficult. This situation eased somewhat on Friday, with the arrival of a cellular phone - used frequently on that day to communicate with the travel agent, the CA office and to return calls. It is difficult being out of the office for two days.
- 2 During the two day meeting, I was often in the position of having to arrange transport, combis, accommodation problems, travel claims and various other administrative tasks. This was at the same time that I was supposed to be running a national consultative meeting. This situation was clearly untenable, with the result that at various crucial times I was unable to be present at the meeting. This meeting was an important one, to discuss the CEP with NGOs and the National Paralegal Committee. The only way community workshops can be held in rural areas is by persuading these structures to incorporate CA material in their own programmes. It was embarrassing and very unstrategic for me to be called out of this meeting to deal with logistical matters. During small group discussion, Derrick was also inconvenienced due to my absence, as he had to monitor both groups, while himself trying to facilitate one of the groups. In addition, in my absence Derrick had to be absent from facilitating his group to deal with problems regarding the locking of the SACS offices as they close at 4.15pm, a fact we were not aware of.
- 3 There were several difficulties with the venue. We were not introduced to the regional director of SACS. At one point I introduced myself because we needed to keep the office open. There was insufficient introduction of us, and lack of official recognition of the CEP, with the result that staff at SACS did not know who we were or why we were in their offices. The SACS offices close at 4.15pm, but we were not informed of this until late in the afternoon. There was no-one from Operations to assist with the closing of the office. We were greatly assisted by Celine who stayed long after her normal departure time, and delayed a meeting, so that we could continue

with necessary discussions.

- 4 No menu was received by the CEP. At lunch on Thursday wine was served; apparently this was on the menu sent to the CA - presumably to Operations?
- 5 Problems also arose with regard to accommodation. The accommodation list arrived on Wednesday, the day before the meeting. This meant that there was insufficient time to check details, inform delegates where they were staying etc.
 - 5.1 I had been told that all delegates were staying at the New Regency Hotel. Two early arrivals were booked into this hotel, on the understanding that the other delegates would join them. They were very displeased when it transpired that no delegates were staying in this hotel, which was situated in Sea Point. I was at no stage informed that there had been a change to the accommodation plans. They had to be moved so that the National Paralegal Committee could meet before the meeting started.
 - 5.2 I was assured by Connex, at 2.30 on Wednesday afternoon, that accommodation for all delegates was confirmed. At 10pm I was trying to persuade the Cape Town Inn to take delegates who they said had not been booked in. At 11pm delegates continued to try to find accommodation for themselves (a late arrival who arrived to find no accommodation for him).
- 6 We received administrative assistance 2 days before the meeting. Clearly many of the problems encountered would have been reduced had we had a full-time administrator. It is not sufficient to have temporary staff - a temp can make photocopies, but what is needed is someone who knows the CA structure and procedures, who can take over the administrative tasks of travel claims, assisting delegates, liaising with the travel agent etc.

Comments and Suggestions:

- 1 It is not practicable to have the Operations team assist the CEP. Their focus is on the CPMs, and it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to assist the CEP. This was clearly evidenced in the lack of communication between the Operations team and myself. I felt that I was not getting the information I required, which meant that I could not inform delegates, or fax them regarding their flight details.
- 2 At no time was there a meeting between the Project Manager: Operations, the Operations team members working on the CEP and myself. This would have made it clear that it was unrealistic to expect the Operations team to provide the backup and support I needed. I do not know what would have happened in that case - where the necessary support would have come

from. We still do not have an administrative assistant.

- 3 Connex failed to deliver in a number of ways. Two arrivals and one departure were missed. The accommodation was badly managed, with delegates arriving without a place to stay.

Problems which arose because there was no administrative assistant:

- 1 Delegates were not contacted prior to the meeting with travel details. This resulted in several delegates not attending the meeting eg the Centre for Human Rights Studies from Bloemfontein, the Northern Cape paralegal representatives.
- 2 Details of programme and documentation regarding the purpose of the meeting were not sent to delegates before the meeting. This meant that delegates arrived without a clear understanding of what the meeting was about, with the result that time had to be spent on explanations.
- 3 Travel arrangements were made between three parties: Connex, Operations and the CEP. Operations did not have a clear understanding of the process or the constraints inherent in the sector. A full-time administrator with knowledge of the sector would have alleviated this situation.
- 4 The CEP managers had to deal with logistical matters, to the detriment of the meeting.
- 5 On the day and night before the meeting, the CEP managers, with some assistance from the temp, spent a great deal of time ordering and preparing folders and documentation for the participants. This time could have been much better spent preparing the content of the inputs and interacting with participants who had arrived in Cape Town.

Substantive report

- 1 The National Paralegal Committee agreed, in principle, to join the CEP. There were several questions raised about the involvement of SACS, due to past experience in many of the provinces.
- 2 The NGOs present at the meeting also agreed to work with the CA in attempting to deliver the CEP. Questions raised included the legitimacy of the process (are submissions really going to be taken into account?) and how this could affect their own credibility in the communities they work with.
- 3 Some resources were collected, valuable comments were received on the proposed workshop kit and Derrick will continue to liaise directly with NGOs in developing the resources.

- 4 Various options emerged for NGO/paralegal - CA co-operation in running community workshops, including CA slots in NGO workshops, until such time as we have the capacity to offer full CA-run workshops.

Final Comment:

Both Derrick and I are fully committed to working on the CEP. However, we feel very strongly that it is not possible to deliver the programme without the full support of the CA Administration. This support includes knowledge and understanding of the CEP, the limitations imposed on us by lack of infrastructure and resources and an undertaking to assist us by providing us with necessary resources. We both come from a particular work ethic, where we are willing and able to perform well in adverse circumstances, but the situation we find ourselves in at the CA is, even for us, completely impossible.

In short, there seems to be no acknowledgement of the problems caused by the lack of forward planning with the result that we are expected to implement the CEP at the same time as developing resources and employing staff.

This week we are again expected to spend time that should be spent on implementing our programme on processing applications for the 19 positions advertised. The failure to sufficiently manage and resource our programme does not augur well for the implementation of the CEP at either provincial or national levels.

Finally, both CEP managers have worked long and hard over many years to build up reputations and careers. These reputations are at risk due to the inability of the CA Administration to support the CEP through assistance and resources.