

ACTSA Youth and Student delegation to southern Africa 2009

Report



AIM:

The aim of the programme was to ensure engagement with a range of key young influencers from different backgrounds across the United Kingdom, providing them with the opportunity to learn about the challenges facing their counterparts in southern Africa, build sustainable links and provide them with the resources to build upon and share their experiences with a wide audience of young people in the UK.

CONTEXT:

Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) has received support from Coca-Cola since 2006 to take a group of 10 youth and student leaders to southern Africa. The 2009 delegation was the fourth consecutive trip and proved to be the most successful to date. The organisations represented in 2009 were very broad, including the National Union of Students, the Young Fabians Society, Young Labour, Trades Union Congress Youth, Princes Trust and young parliamentary staff. The delegation took place from 7th - 20th June, falling over Youth Day celebrations in South Africa marking the Soweto uprisings of 16th June. The delegation also visited Swaziland and hosted a visitor from Zimbabwe.

JOHANNESBURG (Days 1):

The group arrived to a chilly Johannesburg and headed straight to the iconic Constitution Hill where many leading anti-apartheid activists were imprisoned. The tour was an excellent introduction for the group to both the history of the country's tumultuous recent past and the progress that has been made over the last two decades as the delegates witnessed South Africa's new Constitutional Court and Gender Equality Commission. The group were then met by a group of young South African's who participated in the 'Democracy Begins in Conversation' programme and an engaging workshop ensued.



Delegates visiting the iconic Constitution Hill in Jo'burg

SWAZILAND (Days 2-4):

This year's delegation went to Swaziland at the beginning of the tour so as to generate discussion around the political, social and economic challenges facing the country. The group spent 3 vastly productive days in Swaziland and were given a greater exposure to rural Africa as they had the chance to see this largely agricultural country. After having driven from Johannesburg the group had a chance to meet with peers from Swaziland youth and student groups and exchanged opinions and experiences facing youth and students in both southern Africa and the UK.

The group was hosted by the HIV/AIDS organisation, Swaziland Positive Living, and on the second day there the delegation shown all the relevant aspects of tackling the AIDS pandemic in the country with the highest infection rate in the world. Meetings included a person with HIV, field staff who administer and care for AIDS affected communities and a workshop looking at different gender roles in terms of HIV/AIDS. The group also had the chance to visit an orphanage which was both uplifting and very challenging for the individual delegates.



Two delegates meeting the leader of Swaziland United Front

The final full day in Swaziland was spent getting to grips with the political situation in the country. Firstly the group met with two international institutions working in the country: the European Commission Delegation in Swaziland and the United Nations Development Programme. This gave the delegates a chance to discuss with staff working on development in Swaziland the challenges and opportunities which exist in the country. The day finished with a meeting between the delegates and the Swaziland United Democratic Front who represent civil society organisations across the country.

JOHANNESBURG (Days 5-7):

Having departed Swaziland, the group moved back to South Africa's main city for the weekend where they were joined by student leaders from Zimbabwe and Swaziland. The group had a chance to discuss current political developments in Zimbabwe with the visitor and representatives from the Zimbabwean Diaspora living in South Africa. The same day, the whole group met with an education group called the Global

Campaign for Education who are campaigning for free access to education for all. The meeting was a very successful exchange and the group had a chance to preview some of the education work that will be taking place in 2010 when South Africa hosts the Football World Cup.

The following day, the group developed their understanding and knowledge of South Africa during the apartheid years with visits to the Apartheid Museum and the Hector Pietersen Memorial. This was a fitting time to visit these sites just in Soweto just two days before the Youth Day celebrations in South Africa marking the anniversary of the Soweto uprisings.

Coca-Cola engagement day

The day spent with representatives from Coca-Cola SA and GB was hugely successful this year with the delegates very pleased to be able to meet and engage with local employees and staff from headquarters. It provided them with the opportunity to ask questions which they had regarding Coke's operations in the country as well as regarding their social and environmental responsibilities.

The day began with a briefing from Coke SA staff at the bottling plant where the group witnessed presentations on the ABI HIV/AIDS Workplace Programme, CCSA Corporate Social Investment Programme and finally on Employee Programmes by HR representatives from ABI. Then the delegates were given a guided tour around the factory to see the operations of bottling.



In the afternoon, the group were exposed to some of the social responsibility work of Coca Cola SA and specifically their collaboration with the Olive Leaf Foundation. After a brief presentation by the Foundation staff, the group visited a community outreach workshop where young people living in the township were challenged to discuss gender roles in terms of sexual violence and HIV/AIDS transmission. The two groups of youth from SA and UK then had a chance to chat informally amongst each other to continue the discussion. Finally, the group went out into Soweto to see the street



intervention work of the Olive Leaf Foundation through its Men as Partners Programme; designed to shock and impact, the group witnessed the excellent work done in the township and learned a great deal about tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic first hand and the invaluable contribution that Coca-Cola is making through its support of organisations such as the Olive Leaf Foundation among many others.

CAPETOWN (Days 8-10):

The delegates had a very productive few days in Cape Town. The first day proved very useful as the delegation first visited University of Cape Town to meet with their Student Representative Council where they were given a tour around the university campus and had a chance to discuss student politics. After leaving UCT, the group went on to a Youth Day commemoration event in Langa township where the delegates witnessed grassroots literacy work and had a chance to talk with local community members about the importance of solidarity and campaigning. The next visit in Gugulethu township was to a school choir which will be featuring in a UK film called Fezeka in 2010. The delegates enjoyed the opportunity to participate in a rehearsal and visit a very under-privileged group of students using music to inspire them. The day was finished off with a visit to the stunning table mountain.

The following day was spent visiting places of political and historic interest. The day started with a visit to the legislative centre of South Africa at the Houses of Parliament where the group were given a guided tour and also the opportunity to question the guide on the South African political system. The group then went on to District Six Museum which gave the delegates an excellent exposure to a part of the city where the injustice of apartheid was most acutely felt. The group were then given the opportunity to see what was left of District Six itself as part of the Journey of Remembrance tour which guided the group through the parts of Cape Town where some of the racist atrocities were carried out, especially to the youth who were opposed to the apartheid regime.



The delegates outside South Africa's parliament



Nelson Mandela's cell, part of the tour of Robben Island

The highlight of the third day in Cape Town was a visit to Robben Island, the place when Mandela was incarcerated for so many years. The group benefited greatly from meeting a former inmate who guided them round the prison blocks and then took them around the rest of the island. It was a timely reminder of the scars still affecting modern day South Africa and the delegates found it to be a poignant reminder to the newly democratic South Africa of the price paid for freedom.

PRETORIA (Day 11):

The delegation's last day was spent in South Africa's capital city where they had the chance to meet with representatives from the British High Commission and the Department for International Development. The delegates asked challenging questions of the government representatives and developed the links which would benefit both the delegates, ACTSA and the High Commission. Finally the group had a chance to meet the Chair of the South African Human Rights Commission who urged the group to stay active in southern African affairs after they return home from the trip. This brought the end to an excellent twelve days for all involved.

DELEGATE FEEDBACK:

I believe that the trip was highly useful in increasing my understanding of the challenges facing Southern Africa. As somebody who had little previous experience of southern Africa, the political make up and contextual social history it was fascinating to see how poverty, societal change and external influences have affected the region.

(Ben Whittaker, NUS)

It is an amazing opportunity to learn firsthand. It is well organised with good leaders who are well educated in their field. It allows partnerships to be formed between organisations in Southern Africa and the UK to assist the growth of both. All in all, it is a very worthwhile delegation.

(Zara Asante, Prince's Trust)

I had pre-conceived ideas of what to expect, mainly gained through what I had read and heard in the media, being able to see the reality of the situation really challenged my views. The delegation was fast paced and full but I enjoyed our meetings and found them to be very insightful.

(Naush Khan, Young parliamentary worker)

POST DELEGATION ACTIVITY:

ACTSA convened a meeting for all the delegates in London 4 weeks after having returned from southern Africa to reflect upon the experiences they had gained and discuss the initiatives and relationships they wished to take forward.

The National Union of Students with the Trades Union Congress youth section plan to host a delegate from the Swaziland National Union of Students in March 2010, organising a series of events and meetings in London. The President of SOAS students union has already begun organising some musical events to attract a wide audience to sample southern African cultures while also having the chance to discuss many of the issues arising from the two week visit.

The Young Fabians have written a number of online publications and are in the process of organising a series of public meetings in the Houses of Parliament discussing the issues relating to HIV/AIDS in southern Africa.

The young parliamentary staff have been rallying support for the delivery of football shirts and balls to go to Swaziland over the World Cup in 2010. Meanwhile, the Prince's Trust representative has been fundraising for ACTSA and looking into ways of supporting ACTSA's work with women in Zimbabwe. Compass Youth and the British Youth Council have met independently and continue to raise the profile of ACTSA's work through online publications.

The delegates all have individual plans for the rest of 2009 and forward into 2010 and are all now committed to working hard towards a positive future for the region and the different people they had the chance to meet.



An exchange visit of student leaders from Swaziland is planned for early 2010, akin to last year's Zimbabwe visit