

Moving towards democracy



Jacob Zuma addressing a breakfast briefing while Senzele Mhlungu listens. In the background is Diakonia's "Heal, Reconcile and Build" banner.

The new South Africa

THE 17 years since April 1994 have seen Diakonia continuing to drive the involvement of Durban churches in the issues that affect those "at the bottom of the pile". In spite of the efforts and achievements of the first democratic government, the backlog of people living in poverty has remained huge. The growing wealth of the country is largely in the hands of a "rainbow" elite, while the "rainbow" middle-class struggles with debt and the expectation that it must join in the trend of "shop till you drop".

Diakonia's work has increasingly been focused on enabling church people to understand the global policies that are making it so difficult for the government to successfully help people get out of the poverty trap.

Self Help Groups

A practical way of empowering the poor to make a living for themselves has been the introduction of Self Help Groups (SHGs). These have become serious income-generating projects, impacting on over 5 000 people in poor rural communities.

Environment

At the same time, the environment has become a major concern. Diakonia enables churches to act to correct key environmental problems, while at the same time asking the question "Why" and discussing how to take action on the underlying causes.

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AS the '80s drew to a close, it became clear that the end of apartheid was inevitable. Diakonia started thinking more concretely about the shape of the future.

A key conference was held at Botha's Hill in 1989 that laid the foundation for the work on democracy that Diakonia has been doing ever since.

But as this happened, violence in KwaZulu-Natal was escalating. Internecine fighting, with the security forces involved, was taking a terrible

toll.

Over the years of what came to be known as the "Natal violence", thousands of people were killed and tens of thousands driven from their destroyed homes.

The churches, encouraged by Diakonia, became deeply involved in monitoring the rapidly changing situation as well as in endeavours to bring people together for efforts at reconciliation and peace-making.

By the time of the dawn of

democracy and the first free election in 1994, Diakonia, its member churches and its ecumenical allies had organised the training of thousands of people in voting procedures and basic understandings of democracy.

Diakonia had also successfully motivated for the signing of a Code of Conduct for the elections between all political parties, which has subsequently been organised at every election since then. Diakonia played a key role in the Durban metropolis.



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A TRANSFORMED WORLD IS POSSIBLE

