



## **SECRETARIAL REPORT 2019-2021**

### **TO THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2021**

#### **1. Introduction**

As we all know, we are living through unprecedented times. This Council has had to carry out its elected duties during this period and has managed to do so admirably. While more could have been achieved, especially in terms of the envisaged plans proposed and developed by members, concrete steps were taken to keep SASA alive and working during the pandemic. This is in large part thanks to the able leadership provided by the President and Deputy President and the commitment of the Council members in taking SASA forward. This report covers the main issues that the Executive Committee (Exco) and the Council dealt with during its extended term in office.

#### **2. SASA office bearers**

The Executive Committee members that served in 2019-2021 are:

President: Trevor Ngwane (UJ)  
Deputy President: Chinwe Obuaku-Igwe (UWC)  
Secretary: Aisha Lorgat (CHI/UCT)  
Treasurer: Letitia Smuts (UJ)  
Jean-Paul Solomon (NWU)

The Council members are:

Bianca Tame (UCT)  
Tatenda Mukwedeya (Wits)  
Percyval Bayane (UNISA)  
Tawanda Nyawasha (UL)  
Pedro Mzileni (NMMU)  
Anne Wiltshire (SU)  
Tsholohelo Kgosieng (UKZN) [relieved of duty due to non-attendance]

#### **3. Meetings**

The Exco and Council met regularly in constructive and productive meetings. Initially the meetings used the established teleconference platform but we have since adopted the now ubiquitous online platform, mainly Microsoft Teams, following the implementation of lockdown protocols. Standard meetings were generally held on a monthly basis for Exco, followed by a meeting of the Council, however, again, during the hard lockdown and following deliberations around the implications of that for SASA's work, meetings were held every two months until 2021, when the monthly meetings were again reinstated. Minutes of all the meetings are available from the secretariat on request. Additional meetings were held by various subcommittees to deal with, variously, webinars, SARS, Working Groups, etc. Despite all the challenges faced, Council members have, for the most part, remained committed to keeping SASA going during the pandemic and have been unfailingly stepped up when called upon to do so. This is exemplified by the extraordinary attendance record at

meetings which never failed to quorate, and the fact that despite the extended term only one elected member had to be relieved of their position due to failure to attend multiple meetings in succession without providing an apology or explanation (a policy that was agreed upon at the last AGM). Council discussed replacing this member but ultimately decided to leave the position vacant as the period before the AGM was short.

#### **4. Key issues**

I would like to highlight the following issues that occupied the attention of the Council; some are for noting and some may require discussion and decision by the AGM:

##### *a. COVID-19*

In March 2020 a hard lockdown was implemented in South Africa as a result of rising infection rates and fears that the health system would be overwhelmed without the imposition of extreme measures to reduce the spread of the virus. Like every other organization, SASA was forced to adjust in response, and as a result the decision was taken to postpone the 2020 Congress. This also meant that the AGM was postponed and so the term of office of the Council was extended until elections could be held once circumstances allowed the conference and AGM to proceed. Communications were sent out to the membership and, in due course, the decision was taken, in consultation with the LOC, to hold the current Congress and AGM virtually. In the meantime, the Council continued to meet and discussed ways to keep SASA active and alive for members, and the outcomes of these discussions will be discussed later. Despite the challenges, there were some positives. The lockdown necessitated moving meetings to a virtual rather than telephonic platform which may have encouraged attendance and this mode of ‘gathering’ meant that it was easier to organize a webinar, although the fact that the academy has become saturated as a result of the ease of organization and minimal logistical challenges has meant that the appetite for these may be waning.

##### *b. South African Review of Sociology journal (SARS)*

Following the dissolution of the previous editorial collective a new editorial collective was endorsed at the 2019 AGM with Zanetta Jansen retained for the sake of continuity. She was joined by Darlene Miller, and Zethu Matebeni. Darlene and Zethu subsequently resigned as a result of work conflicts, and this speaks to sometimes unavoidable conflict between the voluntary nature of the work of SASA and the Journal and the formal employment of those members who serve in their various capacities. Regardless, as a result of the re-emerging backlog in publication, Council decided to approach David Cooper and Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama to serve as interim members of the Editorial Collective, and requested that Zanetta aid them in the transition, while expressing its appreciation for her work on the Journal.

The AGM must take a decision on the way forward with our journal and the composition of the editorial collective. Council recommends that the AGM endorses David Cooper and Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama, as well as Tawanda Nyawasha, a Council member who has agreed to serve on the Editorial Collective. Council further recommends that the AGM nominate an additional person, preferably a retired individual as suggested by David Cooper, who is able to dedicate time to the Journal.

### *c. Working Groups*

Working Groups remain an area of concern with some some lacking a convenor. The Deputy President Chinwe Obuaku has begun work on assessing the current state of the SASA Working Groups and has been developing a proposal to reinvigorate them and make them a more active part of SASA, with ongoing collaborations and activities beyond the Congresses. [Chinwe will speak more about this in the discussion item that follows.]

### *d. Keeping SASA alive*

During the lockdowns and the postponement of the 2020 Congress, the Council felt that it was important to keep SASA active and ensure that members could see that the Association was continuing to make a valuable contribution to the scholarly endeavour. As a result, three main initiatives were implemented:

- *Webinars*

One of the main initiatives to keep SASA alive during COVID restrictions was to begin hosting webinars with the stated aim of advancing the discipline, research, teaching, debate and the profession of sociology within the context of national, regional, and global cooperation. Pedro Mzileni was the primary Coordinator of this SASA National Webinar Programme on Sociology, Pandemics and Disasters.

As stated by Pedro, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided further complexities to our society and it has called upon the discipline of sociology itself to (1) sharpen its tools of critique and to boldly recognise patterns of power that ‘include’ and ‘exclude’, and (2) to interrogate the histories and political contexts of its existing methodologies, amongst other tasks.

The webinar took place on the Zoom platform, on Friday, 16 October 2020, under the theme of *Sociology, Pandemics and Disasters: Revisiting Theories, Contradictions and Prospects*, presented by Ashwin Desai and Nomalanga Mkhize as the discussant.

While Council and the webinar team had planned to host additional webinars prior to the Congress, the volume of webinars that were being organised by various institutions, often on similar themes to those we had proposed, worked against this. Upon reflection and discussion in Council, it was felt that focusing on the Congress would be more productive and add greater value to our work.

- *Special Issue*

Another initiative was to develop a Special Issue on the pandemic for SARS, edited by Letitia Smuts, Chinwe Obuaku and Tawanda Nyawasha.

From the call for papers, the issue sought to provide a platform for foundational theoretical and empirical reflections on a pandemic whose character or shape is yet to be fully understood, not only in South Africa - but across the world. It was hoped that such reflections would form the basis for future sociological discussions on COVID-19 in South Africa and beyond.

Papers that covered the following areas of interest were invited:

- (i) COVID-19 and State governmentality
- (ii) COVID-19 and the role of the Social Sciences
- (iii) COVID-19 and the Changing face of human work
- (iv) Methodology, Ethics and Fieldwork during and post-COVID- 19
- (v) Misinformation and the Political Economy of Health
- (vi) COVID-19 and inequalities in health and society
- (vii) Intergenerational solidarity, family networks and community cohesion in the time of the pandemic
- (viii) COVID-19, the Human Condition and Precarity in South Africa

While there was an unfortunate delay in getting articles out for review due to the challenges at SARS, the editors are working with the SARS editorial collective to get the issue out urgently.

- Forum

At the beginning of the lockdown and following the decision to postpone the 2020 Congress, Emeritus Professors Eddie Webster and David Cooper approached the Council with a proposal to collaborate on a sociological intervention into the Covid-19 crisis. Following deliberations, the decision was taken to move swiftly and set-up a discussion forum on the website, to “allow the sociological community to freely share ideas in order to highlight the social issues our society faces during this time, along with grappling with the way forward in informing social interventions and the long-term social implications”. The initial step was sharing a position paper and encouraging members to engage with it.

*e. Hosting of the next Congress*

Sol Plaatje and Stellenbosch have both indicated that they are willing to host the next two Congresses and the AGM must decide how to allocate.

*f. Website and Social Media*

Percyval Bayane has ably facilitated the website updates and Anne Wiltshire has set-up and managed SASA’s social media accounts including on Twitter and Youtube.

*g. Bid to host ISA 2024[now 2025] Forum*

UJ had proposed bidding to host the 2024 ISA Forum, and SASA was asked to endorse this bid and support it. Chinwe and Aisha were tasked with attending discussions around this and reporting back to Council. SASA supports the bid but is aware of discussions in ISA to amend the format of the 2025 Forum to a virtual platform. AGM to discuss.