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## **Progress Report On the State of the Association – July 2020**

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This report is an overview of the state of the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP) since the virtual general meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2020.

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### **THE GENERAL MEETING 8 MAY 2020**

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The SAASSAP membership general meeting was the first official National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting with general membership since the NEC was elected in November 2019. As a vote of confidence to the newly appointed NEC, sixteen (16) institutions attended the meeting in the midst of the novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) hailstorm.

The meeting was duly opened by the SAASSAP President, Dr. Sibusiso Chalufu. The President welcomed all members present at the meeting and thanked everyone for taking the time off their busy schedules to join the meeting. As per the meeting proceedings, the President recognised the Secretary-General (SG), Mr. Pura Mgolombane to take platform. The SG also took an opportunity to welcome all members present at the meeting. The SG further affirmed that going forward, only fully affiliated members of SAASSAP will be allowed to attend SAASSAP meetings. To this effect, this first meeting is an attempt to take all higher education institutions into confidence about the renewal programme of the association by the newly elected NEC, and therefore, invites all the institutions to collaborate with the NEC in reshaping the sub-sector for the future.

The SG was followed by the SAASSAP Deputy President (DP), Mr. Luthando Jack. The DP observed all protocol and continued to flag the SRC elections as an issue of utmost significance for the sub-sector. He further urged the institutions to be open with communicating any required support from SAASSAP through the SG's Office in dealing with the intrinsic complexities that have been created as a result of the COVID-19 tsunami.

The NEC tabled SAASSAP's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 (SP2024) which was overwhelmingly supported and endorsed by the members present. The Strategic Plan 2024, now awaits its final and legitimate adoption at the duly constituted Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The SG presented his report on the state of the organisation. Upon reflecting on the report, members advised the NEC to seek legal advice on the possibility of the association registering as a non-profit organisation (NPO). To this submission, the NEC through the office the Treasurer-General (TG) is currently acting on the advice.



The TG, Dr Kweyama, presented the financial report of the Association. She affirmed that all documentation needed for membership affiliation payment will be sent to institutions following the general meeting.

The DP proceeded with proposed amendments to the SAASSAP Constitution; the meeting agreed that written submissions on proposed changes should be made through the Office of the SG.

The Research and Development Officer (RDO), Dr Matete Madiba, presented the Research Plan of SAASSAP. The Research Plan was well received, with some members volunteering for its various research streams.

The meeting concluded with a presentation from the Presidency on a concept paper to Re-Think/Re-Imagine Student Affairs and Services in the COVID-19 (during and post) era. The idea behind the concept paper was received with excitement and supported by membership – and the Presidency was highly appreciative.

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## MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATION

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The SAASSAP membership affiliation initial deadline was 31 May 2020. However, due to the unique complexities being confronted by the sector with members operating from home and the Finance departments being unable to process payment as efficiently as they would be expected to under normal circumstance, the NEC resolved to extend the final deadline to 24 July 2020.

*Given the fact that some institutions paid directly to the association's account without informing the TG, there may be more institutions that have paid their membership at the time of writing this progress report. In this regard, the TG is currently busy with an audit to ensure the true reflection of membership. Over and above the audit by the TG, the TG is actively encouraging members with outstanding payments and/or documents to finalise their membership affiliation processes by no later than the 24 July 2020.*

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## THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2024

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As cited in the inaugural association's report, the strategic plan consists of nine focus areas. These focus areas include to: *Provide Strategic Leadership and Facilitation, Develop and Sustain Organisational Capability, Mobilise and Leverage Resources, Enhance Student Governance, Facilitate Holistic Student Success, Develop and Disseminate New Knowledge, Influence Policy Development and Practice, Advocate and Lobby Effectively, and Engage and Mobilise Stakeholders.* The SG's Office can confirm with both excitement and a great deal of optimism that there is good progress across all the nine focus areas of the strategic plan 2024.

Pertaining to the focus area which seeks to *Provide Strategic Leadership and Facilitation*, SAASSAP is still at the infancy of its developmental stage of establishing a think-tank. The strategic think tank will be established with a view to assisting SAASSAP towards not only its revitalisation, but also in terms of repositioning the sub-sector. This revitalisation and repositioning of the sub-sector is to ensure that Student Affairs and Services (SAS) professionals take their strategic position in terms of reshaping SAS and the higher education sector in general. The composition of the think tank has been consolidated and is in process of establishment.

On *Developing and Sustaining Organisational Capability* of SAASSAP, the work has begun. To this effect, the process of developing technologies, developing specialised skills and knowledge, communication and interactive abilities of the organisation, is underway. The association currently has a reliable organisational storage, and members of the NEC have successfully migrated to online functions, thus making SAASSAP 4IR compatible.

In the process of *Mobilisation and Leveraging of Resources* for SAASSAP, the NEC elected to take a creative approach to mobilising and leveraging resources; this the NEC intends to do by drawing on overlapping constellations of stakeholders with common goals and interests. A case in point would be to strategically collaborate and partner with the existing academic conferences. In addition, work with the organisers to build in slots, commissions, and panel presentations of Student Affairs work. Resources will not always be in monetary form, but we shall draw extensively on in-kind resources including shared infrastructure, assets, knowledge, events, activities, flights, accommodation, venues with others, grants, subsidies, etc. Due to the complexities presented by COVID-19, this focus area is in motion at a rather slower pace than projected, but the trajectory also seems to be gradually going north propelled by recent events.

On the focus area *Develop and Disseminate New Knowledge*, SAASSAP has already developed a research strategy. SAASSAP aims to maximise opportunities for scholarship, creation and dissemination of knowledge within the SAASSAP community. The idea is for members to work towards a minimum of one publishable unit per member per year. The publishable unit could take a form of a journal article or a book chapter. Following the publication, the members could use available platforms (including the proposed SAASSAP e-newsletter) to share their knowledge and expertise with relevant audiences. This matter is currently in motion, as task team members have been consolidated, and progress reports will be shared in due course.

In relation to *Influencing Policy Development and Practice*, SAASSAP has since established a policy desk, with a team of dedicated members led by the SG. The policy desk will allow membership in good standing to form part of the policy desk. The policy desk is currently working on several policies which will follow a widely consultative process including the NEC, membership and selected professionals in the sector who will have an opportunity to make valuable inputs.

On the focus area of *Advocating and Lobbying Effectively*, the NEC is in the process of rolling out a website that will ensure that the association is properly profiled, including fore-fronting the strategic plan. This project will assist with improving access to SAASSAP online materials with navigational ease. This will also allow for online feedback and will create advertising and revenue generation opportunities. In addition, SAASSAP is set to develop a quarterly e-newsletter for circulation both through the website and social

media. This will include the launch of the new constitution and strategic plan once adopted in the AGM, amongst others, to realise the aspirations of this focus area.

In *Engaging and Mobilising Stakeholders*, the NEC aims to engage and mobilise stakeholders in a way that will build generative relationships, work collaboratively, contribute equitably to the success of stakeholders in a way that will compound the impact on the student success and well-being. In achieving this, SAASSAP will position itself as a nexus to be able to facilitate engagements across a wide diversity of stakeholders, yet with strategic focus and commitment on realising the SP2024. In implementing this focus area, the Deputy President has since sourced to solidify partnerships with various identified relevant stakeholders.

To this effect, SAASSAP is awaiting the finalisation of the membership affiliation process so as to be able to invite members in good standing to form part of task teams of the Association's themes. However, members are encouraged to start identifying themes which they can volunteer to join according to their areas of expertise and interests; once they have made their choice(s), they should inform the Office of the SG.

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## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

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As part of the Association's vision to be a nexus that can facilitate engagements across a wide diversity of stakeholders with strategic focus and commitment, SAASSAP has engaged various sectoral partners. These potential partners that have been engaged include:

- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET),
- Council on Higher Education (CHE),
- National Association of Student Development Practitioners (NASDEV),
- South African Union of Students (SAUS),
- Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA),
- The Association of College and University Housing Officers-International South African Chapter (ACUHO-I SAC),
- Universities South Africa (USAf),
- International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS),
- Higher Education Leadership Management (HELM),
- Campus Protection Society of Southern Africa (CAMPROSA),
- Financial Aid Practitioners of South Africa (FAPSA), and
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA).

The invitation to solidify the partnerships between SAASSAP and the organisations mentioned above was warmly received through the responses of the organisations concerned. Collaborative programmes for

particular organisations are already in the development phases, and SAASSAP looks forward to working with all organisations in close collaboration and partnership going into the future.

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## COVID-19 MATTERS

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The effects of the novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) on Higher Education Institutions have been observed by SAASSAP. The NEC has deployed members of SAASSAP to several task teams to keep track of developments and possible interventions within the sector.

Concerning student accommodation, members delegated to the Universities South Africa (USAf)– Private Student Housing Association (PSHA) Task Team (Dr Maditsane Nkonoane, Ms Zoleka Dotwana and Dr Pakiso Tondi) have reported that landlords have committed to being part of the solution and not the problem. However, concerns have been raised about health issues in the residences and how such will be managed when students return to campuses. The Higher Health Guidelines were shared with PSHA and they raised several concerns. The report to this effect is hereby shared in the Annexure. The delegated team affirmed that there will not be a one size fits all scenario for institutions. However, the engagements are still ongoing.

On the rest of the academic calendar, SAASSAP has engaged with relevant stakeholders from an expressed commitment and position by the Higher Education sector on the principle of *'no student left behind.'* The NEC met with USAf to discuss the readiness of the reintegration process of students. USAf mentioned that the demand for the refund or discount of tuition and accommodation fees, is getting louder. USAf affirmed that the reintegration of students was guided by institutional contexts, and that institutions should respond to the Higher Health according to their contexts.

USAf stressed the importance of learning to live with the virus whilst containing the risk of high infections on campuses given that it is becoming clearer that the virus will be with us for a longest time. USAf affirmed that institutions need to develop programmes that will co-exist with the virus as the world is not near to finding a vaccine. In response to this, SAASSAP is developing a generic Social Compact which will seek to facilitate social solidarity within and between institutions. The Social Compact will attempt to facilitate collaboration between students and staff in dealing with COVID-19 and in appreciating the importance of taking necessary precautions in institutions. Once this Social Compact has been completed, it will be shared with the membership in due course for further consultation.

With regards to the SRC elections, the NEC has opted for a process of sharing institutional choices pertaining the SRC elections in relation to the extended 2020 academic year. This process is underway and the information will be shared with all members in due course, for ease of reference.

**END.**