



STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 - 2024

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Foreword

SAASSAP President – Dr Sibusiso Chalufu

The 29th of November 2019 marked a critical milestone for the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals as it ushered the genesis of the repositioning and renewal project (#SAASSAP Repositioning and Renewal Project - #SRRP).

Prior to the SAASSAP Annual General Meeting (AGM) which was held in Cape Town on 29 November 2019, there had been a number of behind-the-scenes activities by various individuals – including the work by the then President (Dr Moonira Khan), Secretary General (Dr Pakiso Tondi) and Deputy President (Dr Sibusiso Chalufu), to try and sort out the financial and administrative affairs of the organization; the report commissioned by the SAASSAP meeting of 4–5 July 2019 whose Task Team was led by Mr Pura Mgolombane and produced a seminal report that served at the AGM of the 29th – to name but a few.

These and other various efforts by committed Student Affairs and Services (SAS) professionals have culminated into the current trajectory aimed at reimagining, reinventing and revitalizing not just SAASSAP as an organization, but SAS in general.

Following the election of the SAASSAP national executive committee (NEC) on 29 November 2019, this dedicated group of leaders committed themselves to the crafting of the organization's strategic plan and met on the weekend of 10–12 January 2020. The intensive three-day strategic brainstorming session – what our nimble facilitator, Dr Shamin Bodhanya, referred to as “strategic improvisation” – culminated into the current strategy for our organization.

We hereby unveil the five-year strategy of SAASSAP: Strategic Plan 2020 – 2024 (SP 2024). The SP 2024 represents our collective aspirations and the future we want. The strategy is ambitious. Our determination to succeed is emblazoned by the necessity to reposition the association as a critical instrument and voice in favour of a more transformative higher education sector. The SP 2024 will serve as a roadmap in our efforts not only to revitalize the organization, but also in terms of repositioning the sub-sector and ensuring that we as student affairs and services professionals, take our rightful place in terms of reshaping the sub-sector and the higher education sector in general. Through this strategy, we seek to champion and catalyse change – based on evidence – both at institutional and national levels.

The SP 2024 is buttressed on nine interconnected and fortifying strategic thrusts in support of our statement of purpose. Through vigorous implementation of the nine focus areas, we hope to make substantial contributions to the development of the sub-sector – particularly SAS professionals – and in the growth and development of our students.

The successful implementation of all the projects and programmes that are planned for the next 2 to 4 years will depend on the collective efforts of all the SAASSAP members and the critical partners and stakeholders that we work with.

We look forward to the critical engagements and work which will allow us to achieve our purpose of articulating, directing and actualizing holistic student growth, development and success within the broader South African Higher Education sector.

We call for all hands on deck!

Inspiration

SAASSAP Deputy President – Mr Luthando Jack

SAASSAP is embarking on a new journey of renewal. This renewal process is aimed at catapulting the association into a new trajectory of reconstruction, growth, transformation, innovation and thus positioning itself as the epicentre for holistic student development and championing of enduring quality learning experiences for students in universities in South Africa.

We collectively commit ourselves to the realisation of this ideal. There are instructive lessons we have learnt because of weak organisations. We have learnt that the world we live in is ever-changing, dynamic, uncertain and is fast paced – and all these developments do not wait for actors or those affected to organise themselves. The pace of change favours the organised, knowledgeable, foresighted, agile learners and future facing leaders who are open-minded and rooted in praxis.

We are thus inspired by the possibilities presented by the new journey of our association, SAASSAP. We are further inspired by a compelling responsibility to sculpt a new kind of graduate that can adapt and re-invent in the rugged world characterised by rapid technological changes, socio-economic contradictions and increased social distance between those in leadership and the populace.

We commit to remake the association and continually renew the capabilities of the student affairs and services professionals to be adaptive, creative, excellent, inspiring and transformative leaders. The possibilities on the horizon enthuse us to embody the features of servant leadership and to be collectively determined to traverse and accelerate our path to renewal.

We will flourish!

Operational Statement

SAASSAP Secretary General – Mr Pura Mgolombane

SAASSAP will strive to create a transformative culture, work ethic and behavioural practices that will ensure humanising lived experiences for Student Affairs practitioners, student wellbeing and student success. SAASSAP's goal is the professionalisation of the Student Affairs profession and practices so as to provide growth opportunities for the membership and to achieve unique competitive advantages for students we serve and the sector we embody.

Having concluded the strategy development process, the next critical step is the coordination of its execution.

The successful implementation of the strategy will be a collective endeavour. The NEC will champion the implementation. The work of the leadership will require support and active participation of members and partners. Joined up action will define our pace to success. As we galvanise collective action for implementation through mobilising and leveraging resources, forming partnerships, establishing project teams and champions, we invite members to join us in this endeavour to execute the strategy.

The building of our capabilities is a key success factor and this is our top priority, because without the requisite infrastructure and resources, we cannot and will not succeed.

It is our collective journey!

Statement of Purpose

To articulate, direct and actualise holistic student growth, development and success in the South African Higher Education context by influencing policy and mobilising and leveraging stakeholders, resources, knowledge and innovation.

Focus Areas

1. Provide Strategic Leadership and Facilitation

SAASSAP conceives of itself as the primary national entity that engages in constant monitoring and environmental landscape globally and nationally, especially in terms of the higher education terrain that impacts student life, wellbeing and success. This acute understanding of the environment coupled with drawing on and actively contributing to the scholarship of Student Affairs and Professionalism of the field, will enable us to provide strategic leadership on all matters concerning Student Affairs. This means that our focus here is on influencing policy, bridging the policy-practice divide while simultaneously drawing on the lived practice of our members to ensure that we remain rooted in the practical realities and messiness of Student Affairs and Student Life.

Actions

- Establish a strategic think-tank led by an NEC member
- Study generational trends for 10 -15 years
- Scenario planning for Student Affairs of the future 10 -15 years from now
- Provide ethical leadership.

2. Develop and Sustain Organisational Capability

SAASSAP is charting a new course in its strategic trajectory. Consequently, it requires concomitant effort in developing and sustaining its organisational capability. Each of the focus areas in and of themselves require significant skills and competencies covering a number of domains in an interdisciplinary way. They also require pragmatic, practical skills seamlessly combined with leadership and behavioural competencies.

This focus area will include developing our capacities at individual, group, member, NEC, and at a holistic organisational level. In order to do this, we require an appropriate organisational architecture that is responsive to a dynamic, changing context. The development and deployment of the organisational architecture will be supported by periodic organisational development interventions.

Actions

- Conceptualise, fashion and implement a dynamic organisational architecture including physical and financial components
- Develop technologies, organisational culture and reputation that enhances the credibility of the organisation
- Develop specialised skills and knowledge, communication and interactive abilities of the organisation.

3. Mobilise and Leverage Resources

SAASSAP is a membership-based body, acting on behalf of its members and the field of Student Affairs at a national level. Although SAASSAP does have the ability to raise funds through subscriptions and the like, this quantum of funding is minuscule compared to the resource requirements to fulfil its purpose, chart out the focus areas, and carry out all of its strategic and operational actions effectively. SAASSAP, thus, has to mobilise and leverage funding and resources from a wide variety of sources.

SAASSAP will take a creative approach to mobilising and leveraging resources, by drawing on overlapping constellations of stakeholders with common goals and interests. A case in point would be to “piggy-back” on existing academic conferences, and work with the organisers to build in slots, commissions, and panel presentations of student affairs work.

Resources will not always be money, but we shall draw extensively on in-kind resources including shared infrastructure, assets, knowledge, events, activities, flights, accommodation, venues with others, grants, subsidies, etc.

Actions

- Use the new strategy as a strong case for acquiring subscriptions from all universities
- Develop a database of resource providers
- Develop compelling, value added and bankable projects and initiatives for consideration by profiled resource providers
- Implement projects through partnerships with mandated/resource endowed structures, e.g., student governance protocol through the Department of Higher Education and Training Grant (DHETG) that has been identified.

4. Enhance Student Governance

A significant and important role of Student Affairs professionals is to ensure that the institutional context and governance sphere supports our students to be their fullest selves, in practising democracy at grass roots level; that we reap the benefits of a democratic national milieu in a healthy way such that democratic engagement builds on the creative capacities of our students in constructive ways. In the last decade, Student Governance has become a hotly contested terrain, and has become a proxy for posturing between national, provincial and local political parties, amongst other interest groups. We have short-changed our students. They grow up in what is a fundamentally undemocratic milieu dressed up as revolutionary and progressive.

Our institutions of higher education have become combat grounds paramilitary style, where we bring in police and private security against our students; our students destroy and harm life and property with disdain. This is a huge wastage of national resources, and is nothing less than a race to the bottom.

Fundamentally, unless this situation changes, we are unwittingly at war with our students, and the assertion of power is what drives outcomes not logic, design, common sense, empathy and care.

The writing is on the wall, if we do not address this problem it will fester and make our universities totally ungovernable in the longer term, and will undermine any professionalisation efforts of Student Affairs.

In order to turn this situation around it requires, boldness, determination, diplomacy, and strategic wisdom. As SAASSAP we are prepared to take up these cudgels to gently nudge the context by setting Frameworks, Strategic Dialogues, Constructive Engagements, Teach-ins, Educational Conferences, and Generative Relationships to deal with this problem of national proportions. We do understand that this could be politically sensitive, but we are clear that our principles are those of the national democratic revolution

that brought democracy to South Africa in 1994. Anything that undermines those principles, irrespective of the guise in which they come, will be up for critical interrogation, debate and discussion without fear or favour. We owe this to our students, and we owe this to our country.

Actions

- Develop a National Sectoral Student Governance Framework and Protocol in collaboration with DHET, SAUS and NASDEV
 - SAASSAP to develop Draft 0 of the framework
 - DHET, NASDEV and SAUS – Draft 1
- Design and organise a sector wide workshop – jointly with DHET in interrogating, finalising and promoting the Student Governance Framework
- Develop and implement a Student Governance Protocol based on the Framework.

5. Facilitate Holistic Student Success

Key milestones that serve as indicators of the success of the work of Student Affairs are those that relate to student access, student wellbeing and student success. SAASSAP will endeavour through its various activities, focus areas, and the experience of its members, to identify the critical components that will facilitate holistic student wellbeing and success. These components include hard and soft components such as resources, infrastructure, technology, processes and procedures, organisational culture, attributes of student-facing staff, vertical and horizontal communication channels, amongst many others. The practice of Student Affairs professionals is mediated by all of these components. Hence, student access, student wellbeing and success, and their dynamic relationship with the work of Student Affairs professionals at our campuses need to be understood and worked on systemically. We will draw on the experience of our membership, our research and our learning from stakeholder engagements to articulate, and where possible, codify the elements of holistic student wellbeing and success. We shall then design programmes and interventions that our members may deploy. Notwithstanding all of the above, context always matters, and such deployment of best practices do not suggest that it is a “one size fits all” but will be adapted for each local context and application at each of our member institutions.

Actions

- Cultivate a culture of integrative student wellbeing and success practices
- Create collaborative forums between SAASSAP, related Communities of Practice (COPs) and academic departments
- Design innovative student success programmes through exploration of global trends that are reflective, future facing and humanising.

6. Develop and Disseminate New Knowledge

In order for us to be able to affect the desired actions and outcomes, SAASSAP has to be seen as a credible player and leader in the field. This requires that we draw on the academic scholarship, but even more importantly, that we actively *contribute* to the scholarship of the field locally and internationally. Given the unique challenges in the South African Higher Education landscape and the dynamic terrain of Student Affairs, student politics and governance, the fallist movement, etc., we have much to draw on and to contribute to help others navigate the complexity of the terrain.

As a start, SAASSAP will chart out a conceptual framework that will provide the scoping and boundaries of the terrain academically. This will include the various categories of higher education institutions, e.g., research universities, comprehensive universities, universities of technology, etc. While there are strong commonalities of Student Life across these, there are many unique features too. We shall therefore develop a typology of the Student Affairs context, which will be partly aligned to the categories of universities.

Secondly, our conceptual framing will be unapologetically action research and practitioner focussed. Every member has their daily lived reality of being Student Affairs practitioners with its challenges and nuances.

Thirdly, our framing will fill in the gaps in the policy-practice divide – our knowledge work will therefore be about praxis. This is an area of dire need and therefore sets the stage for us to make significant contributions to the scholarship in a relatively short space of time.

One of the paradoxes we face as Student Affairs practitioners is that in the academy, in our respective institutions, we are often considered as “practitioners” and not scholars or academics, given that other portfolios in the university deal with academic issues and subjects. This puts us at a disadvantage in relation to drawing resources for research support, attending colloquia, hosting writing retreats, etc. SAASSAP endeavours to change this perspective, as we are unashamedly scholar-practitioners, professionals and

scholars in our own right. There is much to leverage from this approach, and we shall be open to working with colleagues as co-authors in the academy who may not be in Student Affairs, but nevertheless with whom we can engage with productively as academics.

Actions

- Identify thematic lines of inquiry and develop a dynamic knowledge management agenda for SAASSAP
- Collaborate on research projects and organize research and writing retreats
- Identify technologies that support research projects
- Disseminate knowledge through targeted journals, book publishers, media and engage in public discourse.

7. Influence Policy Development and Practice

Student affairs itself is also comprised of multiple overlapping sets of perspectives, policies, practices, interest groups, actions and initiatives. When dealing with social complexity such as that characterised by Student Affairs, the policy milieu will likely be fragmented, confused, muddy, amorphous, with multiple fault-lines, areas of dissension and contention, with major policy-practice divides and gaps.

SAASSAP will take a key role in mapping out the policy context, undertaking analyses and diagnosis towards influencing policy development and practice. This will be supported by the other focus areas including Focus Area 6 (Develop and Disseminate New Knowledge), Focus Area 8 (Advocate and Lobby Effectively) and Focus Area 9 (Engage and Mobilise Stakeholders).

Actions

- Establish a Policy Desk (not more than 5 members) to be led by an NEC member
- Present strategy and engage in strategic conversations about SAASSAP positioning with DHET and other key stakeholders
- Engage relevant stakeholders to host a sectoral policy engagement workshop.

8. Advocate and Lobby Effectively

Given that we are a national body representing 26 universities, we have a critical role in furthering the objectives of our members in relation to Student Affairs, in ensuring that we have a voice at a national level across many fronts, especially government departments and agencies such as DHET, NRF, parliamentary portfolio committees, USAf, the media (especially television and talk show programmes), national student formations, etc. This means that we have to develop our skills and competencies, and effective programmes both in advocacy and in lobbying.

Actions

- Package programmes that require advocacy and stakeholder management
- Run advocacy campaigns in relation to identical programmes and emergent issues
- Periodically review the advocacy and stakeholder engagement plan
- Deploy members in various COPs within SAFSAS and beyond
- Serve in leadership positions in other bodies and stakeholder groups.

9. Engage and Mobilise Stakeholders

Given the complexity of the terrain there are many stakeholders with multiple, overlapping roles and mandates, with both complementary and competing goals, perspectives, behaviours, objectives and actions. This is the messiness of the real-world complexity and turbulence of an ever-changing, dynamic landscape. Given this complexity it is easy to misdiagnose problems, take actions that can be quite damaging and which may have unintended consequences. These ultimately add to the misunderstandings, misperceptions and counter-productive outcomes.

Given our new strategic orientation, SAASSAP is clear on our mandate, our directions and our strategic perspective. Hence, we are in a unique position to map out and bring strategic coherence to the multiple, overlapping stakeholder issues and engagements. In doing so, we shall be able to engage and mobilise stakeholders in a way that we build generative relationships, work collaboratively, contribute to each other's success without undermining each other, nor unwittingly getting ourselves in turf wars.

In achieving this we shall also become a nexus to be able to facilitate engagements across a wide diversity of stakeholders, yet with strategic focus and commitment.

Actions

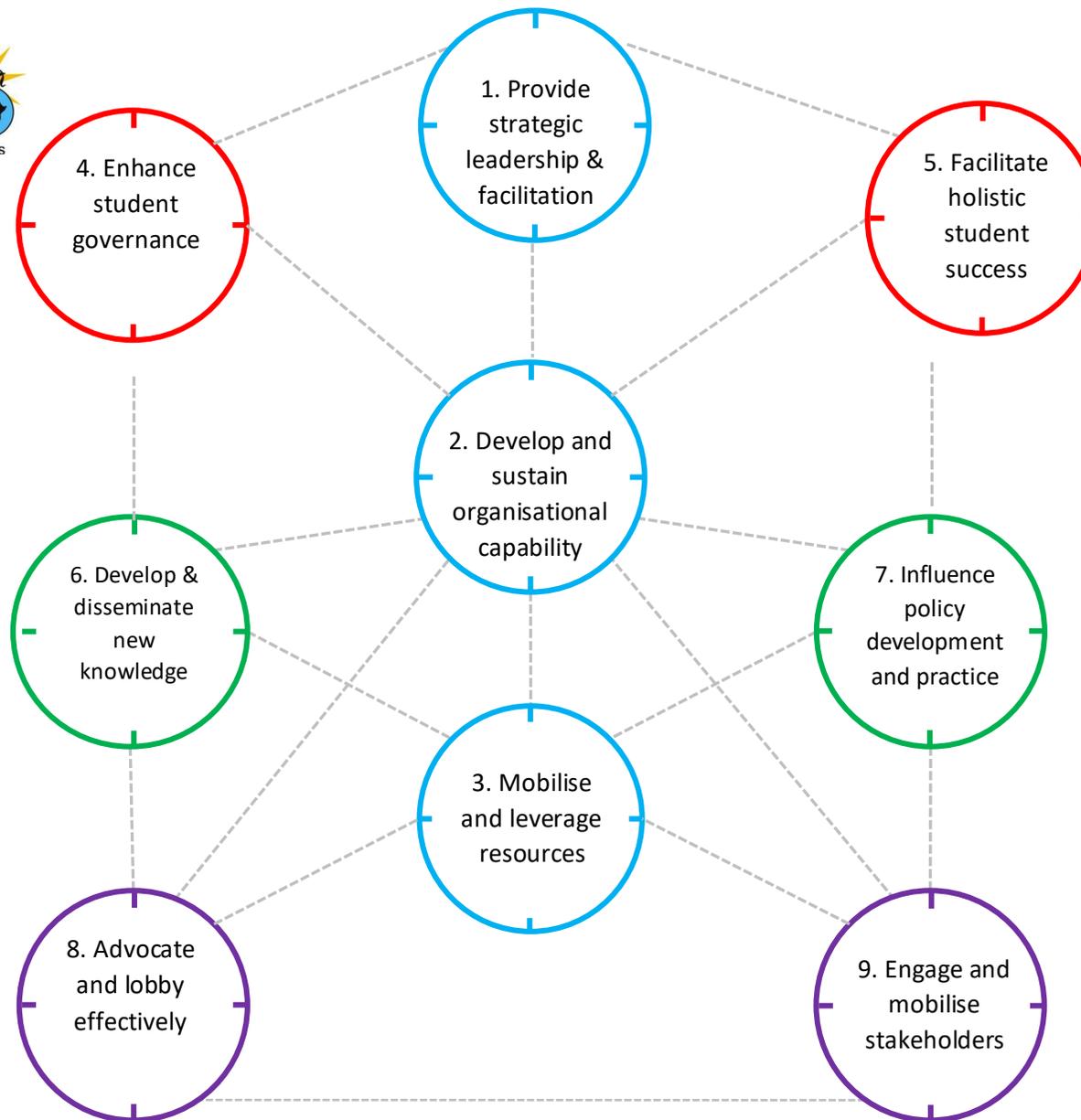
- Compile information brochure for relevant stakeholders
- Partner with strategic stakeholders and organisations on programmes
- Fashion and execute a programmatic stakeholder engagement matrix that is informed by the SAASSAP strategic focus
- Develop a dynamic profile of stakeholder relationships to be reviewed quarterly by the NEC in relation to programmes and projects.

Focus Area Champions.

	Focus Area	Champion
1	Provide Strategic Leadership and Facilitation	Sibusiso Chalufu
2	Develop and Sustain Organisational Capability	Pura Mgolombane
3	Mobilise and Leverage Resources	Luthando Jack
4	Enhance Student Governance	Pakiso Tondi
5	Facilitate Holistic Student Success	Thembi Kweyama
6	Develop and Disseminate New Knowledge	Matete Madiba
7	Influence Policy Development and Practice	Pura Mgolombane
8	Advocate and Lobby Effectively	Zoleka Dotwana
9	Engage and Mobilise Stakeholders	Luthando Jack

Operational Actions

	Actions	Project Leader	Target Completion
1	Develop national sectoral student governance framework in collaboration with DHET, SAUS and NASDEV	Pakiso Tondi	December 2020
2	Establish a policy desk to be led by an NEC member	Pura Mgolombane	April 2020
3	Identify thematic lines of inquiry and a dynamic knowledge management agenda for SAASSAP	Matete Madiba	April 2020
4	Package programmes that require advocacy and stakeholder management	Zoleka Dotwana	June 2020
5	Design innovative student success programmes through exploration of global trends that are reflective and future facing	Thembi Kweyama	July 2020
6	Develop technologies, organisational culture and reputation that enhance the credibility of SAASSAP	Pura Mgolombane	July 2021
7	Use the new strategy as a strong case for acquiring subscriptions from all universities	Luthando Jack	April 2020



Purpose: To articulate, direct and actualise holistic student growth, development and success in the South African Higher Education context by influencing policy and mobilising and leveraging stakeholders, resources, knowledge and innovation.