FIELD NOTES

TAKING THE MEASURE OF SCOUTING IN GAMBIA

The Africa regional office of the World Scout Bureau, based in Nairobi, Kenya, has designed a leadership training project that it plans to implement in Burundi, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mauritius, Niger and South Africa. The aim is to build the capacity of the national Scout organisations so they benefit their local communities. YAW AMOATENG describes his first trip to Gambia in August 2005 as part of an independent evaluation of the Scout leadership training project.

My visit to Gambia, to kick-start the data collection phase of the Scout evaluation study, made all the difference in terms of boosting morale at all levels of the organisation and demonstrating the efficiency of the first phase of data collection for the project.

Almost all of the project volunteers were teachers, who became translators on the spot for some of the kids who were struggling with English. When one Scout indicated that he could only read Arabic, the teachers fetched a colleague who could translate for him. When the pencils for the survey arrived unsharpened on the first day, every volunteer took a blade and helped sharpen the pencils in a few minutes.

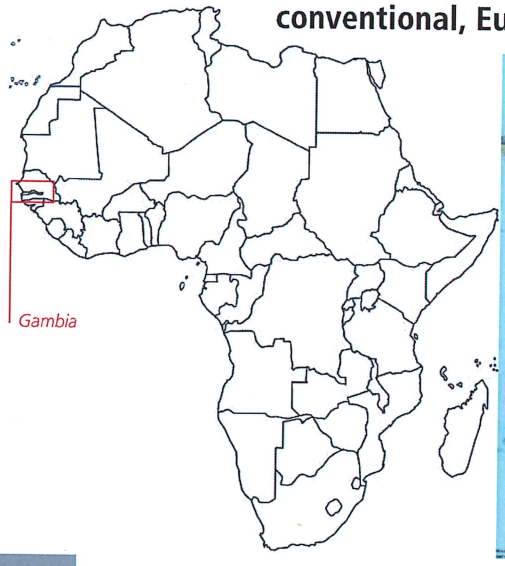
On my first day in the country I was taken to see one of Gambia Scouting's important community projects: road safety. Gambia, the smallest country in Africa, has only one traffic light, which makes road safety a community concern. The youth – boys and girls – were helping police direct traffic at this major intersection. Because of their participation in community safety and the general perception that Scouting inculcates positive values, there is a very good relationship between scouts and the police, as well as with the political and business elite.

The next morning, rain was pouring in the district we had selected to begin the survey. I didn't think anybody would turn up – but when I arrived at the venue, it was packed with leaders and their Scouts, and the scout vehicle was still transporting Scouts from other placess. Some Scouts and leaders walked from nearby areas to take part in the survey.

After everybody started working on their questionnaires, the communications officer for the Gambia National Scout Association told me the local radio station wanted to interview me on its afternoon call-in show. This was an opportunity to promote the Scouts' work, the Jacobs Foundation funded evaluation study, as well as the HSRC. So we raced off under umbrellas to the radio station, where for a good hour and a half we were bombarded with questions about Scouting in general and the evaluation study in particular.

After two days of fieldwork we had 60 questionnaires from leaders and 175 from Scouts. The most important benefit of the trip has been in the experiences that have challenged many of the conventional, Eurocentric research methods that we tend to apply blindly in all contexts. •

"The trip has challenged many conventional, Eurocentric research methods"



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HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS
3511

... continued from page 15

sense of urgency in meeting such challenges.

- In the dominant curricular approach, diversity is seen as a matter of relations between different racially defined cultures viewed as static.
- Teaching practice does not prepare aspirant teachers to teach in formerly white, Indian or coloured schools.

At the Afrikaans-speaking campus, there were expressions of goodwill in dealing with the history of isolation from other groups, and a broadly inclusive approach. There is consciousness of the need to deal with racial, religious and sexual diversity.

But these efforts remain largely peripheral to the overall curricular process. There is an awareness of the ways in which social divisions affect schools, but these understandings are not brought to bear on the curriculum. There is a sense of isolation from the national debates on these issues.

Staff at the urban 'liberal' university engaged systematically with the issue of diversity, and this informs students' experience across the curriculum. The dominant curricular approach falls within a critical multicultural or anti-racist frame.

But in terms of teaching practice – as in the Afrikaans-speaking campus – the focus is on nearby well-resourced suburban schools rather than townships schools. Nonetheless, there is considerable coherence and common understandings of the purpose and processes of the qualification among staff and students. This differs markedly from the other two institutions.

Teacher education institutions need to become more conscious of the challenges of preparing teachers for diverse schools. They also need to recognise the extent of the task, to work within an all-inclusive framework, and ensure that courses give specific attention to issues of diversity.

These diversity matters should be connected with institutional vision and mission statements, address limitations in teaching practice and resources, enable communication amongst universities, and develop support materials for the task. •

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For copies of the reports, e-mail media@hsrc.ac.za.

Mike de Klerk is more than usually preoccupied. He has just been appointed Chief Operating Officer of the HSRC. For him this is a huge career shift, from a lifetime of research and dedication to rural economic development to taking charge of operational functions at the HSRC.

What is foremost on his mind is the responsibility of leadership and the challenges of management style. In an interview in Mike de Klerk's office in Pretoria, from where he has established and managed the Integrated Rural and Regional Development (IRRD) Research Programme over the last four years, he ruminates on inclusivity and equality. A soft-spoken, humble man, his convictions stem from a deep Christian belief that God's grace covers all of humanity.

'If God in his wisdom sees fit to treat us all equally, and love us all equally, and we have the temerity to say, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done', that is what you've got to do! That is why I found apartheid difficult to live under. How could you possibly justify inequality if you believe in this God?'

De Klerk is the quintessential 'servant-leader', as described by Robert Greenleaf, who coined the phrase. De Klerk listens empathetically to his troops, carefully considers all views, and relies on his persuasive powers and the ability to conceptualise beyond daily realities to make decisions. Greenleaf calls this the 'ethical use of power and empowerment'. The servant-leader recognises both the top-down and bottom-up views of authority, and that leadership and following are interdependent.

In the words of Max Depree: 'The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant'.

Not that De Klerk would ever describe himself in such terms, and he has never read Greenleaf or Depree. He laughs and says, 'A great deal of management is about empowering colleagues to make up for one's own deficiencies'.

He grew up in Cape Town. His father came from upper-crust Afrikaner stock, and his Jewish mother – from the Sephardic, not the Ashkenazi branch, he points out – was a pianist.

De Klerk's philosophy on leadership and management style grew over a career of 37 years. As an economist, fresh from UCT, he met head-on with the realities of a harsh business world. After a spell at Rand Mines, followed by a few years as manager of five

HSRC review

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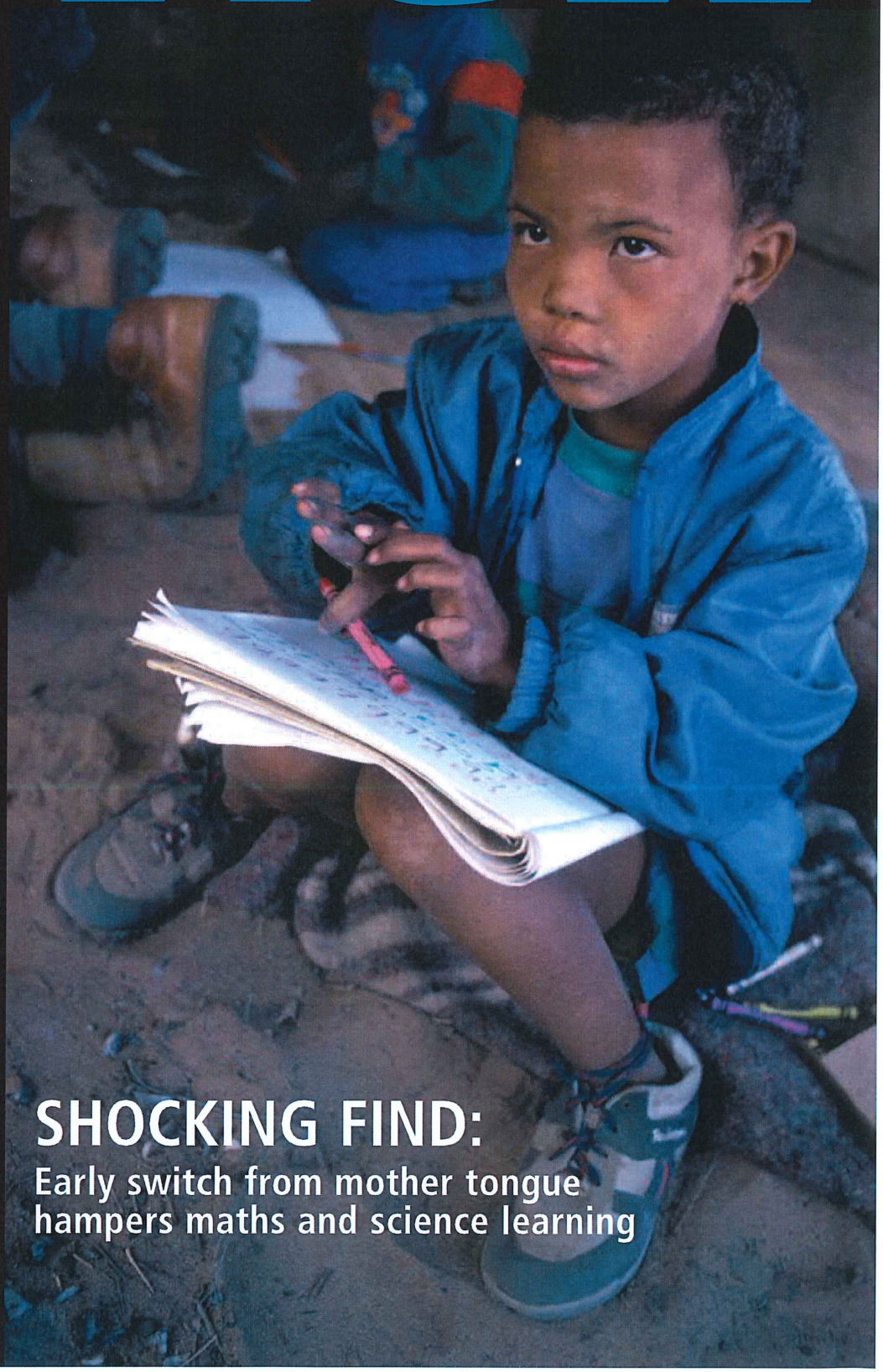
IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 1 – 2	NEWS ROUNDUP
PAGE 3	Q&As TO NEW CEO
PAGE 4 – 5	COUNTING OUR ORPHANS
PAGE 6 – 7	MOTHER-TONGUE EDUCATION IS BEST
PAGE 8 – 9	R&D SPEND OF SA FIRMS
PAGE 10 – 11	CHAMPION FAMILIES TO FIGHT AIDS
PAGE 12 – 13	TRADE WITH CHINA
PAGE 14	SCOUTING GAMBIA
PAGE 15 – 16	DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS
PAGE 16 – 17	PROFILE: MIKE DE KLERK



SHOCKING FIND:

Early switch from mother tongue hampers maths and science learning