WESSA’s Mike Denison and the Southern African Weltwaerts Network (SAwN) vice chair, Abel Amotokolo and coordinator, Dambisa Dube, undertook a learning and sharing road trip with a Weltwaerts focus through the Eastern and Western Cape to visit partner organisations over the last 2 weeks of May 2018.

The purpose of the road trip was to better appreciate the challenges, learn of the successes and identify areas for attention in both the work of SAwN and the African German Youth Initiative (AGYI) as it relates to the Weltwaerts program.

A workshop was held for 28 host organisations in the Cape Town area on the 30 May to bring our findings from the road trip to the table and establish ways to move forward in the interests of South African exchange actors operating in the framework of the Weltwaerts program.

A report on the road trip and the workshop are being compiled and will be available in the June issue of the News-bit.

Thank you to all those who made time to meet with us and to those who attended and contributed to a very meaningful workshop.

A similar trip to Gauteng is planned for July 2018.
Nolitha January is a young lady who finished her exchange year in Germany just eight months ago. She lived in the city of Bonn and rendered her services at Lebenshilfe Bonn, an NGO helping mentally disabled people. It came as shock to her when she left South Africa, because this meant that her life would change forever. She often emphasized her urge to grow and be better than the last year. Nolitha loves reading and says that it is one of the things that inspire her to make change. For when she reads, she’s able to speak from a place of knowledge, for when she speaks, she’s able to inspire.

Did the exchange lead to learning?
Nolitha says she’s learnt so much through her experience and alludes to how being alone in a foreign country helps one shape their perspective, changes their context and leaves a vacuum space for nothing but newness of mentality, life and the like. She learnt to be independent, she learnt that if you view the world as your oyster, then so it shall be. Being of service to needy people, taught her to be a selfless young leader and she continues her work in the community since she came back home.

Most powerful was her growth towards real independence. With being in a mental institution and working for it, she says that the residents were very independent people. No level of mental illness stood in their way of doing things for themselves. No level of physical disability stood before them and what they wanted. They made it work with what they could. This was a profound lesson! Independence, no excuses and the power of realizing that anything is possible when you want. She continues to speak highly of her experience and realizes that in life, there is no room for procrastination.

An Embassy Highlight
One of Nolitha’s best experiences in Germany was being invited to the South African Embassy in Berlin at just the right time as she was feeling slightly home sick, empty and yearning for home. From food, to the people she met at the Embassy, Nolitha speaks highly of that experience.

What can we do to strengthen the exchange experience?
Nolitha suggests integration methods are done earlier because language was a barrier for quite some time before she eased into speaking German. She also mentions that communication between the sending organization and where she was placed, wasn’t always timely.

Goal oriented - She says she is content with how everything unfolded and she feels she achieved one of her goals which was growth and influencing the change of the current African narrative abroad which she did through the school visits she was part of. Here she spoke of South Africa and diversity among other things. She is optimistic about the future and says she “can’t wait to unlock the next level in her life”.

Submit copy by 22nd month for inclusion
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Mike Denison reflects on the Road Trip

To participate on the AGYI SA Road Trip and visit host organisations was a very humbling and inspiring experience. While we all know of the magic being done by civil society organisations, powerful individuals, religious groups, volunteers and communities, it was a privilege to be immersed into this space on a learning and sharing journey through the Eastern and Western Cape.

We are a country with powerful living examples of Agenda 2063’s African Inspirations –
- A Prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
- An Africa whose development is people driven, relying on the potential offered by people, especially its women and youth and caring for children

Sadly, our news is typically dominated by a “NOT in my backyard” mentality and negative stories of our country! This trip emphasised an “ONLY in my backyard” genre of change, love and support.

The role of exchange and volunteering in this space should not be under-valued. Small NGOs and PBOs work to incredibly tight and constrained budgets and more often than not, are radically extended in terms of what they are delivering on these limited resources.

Where the exchange and volunteering are of suitable, to high quality, these organisations can bring dramatically enhanced value to the work they are doing through the contribution of a human resource that they would not ordinarily be able to afford or through access to a skill that may not be immediately available to the organisation.

Exchange and volunteering should never replace local employment opportunities and it can be a fine line and hotly debated topic in trying to really understand and appreciate the necessary balances for this conundrum. BUT, much of what we were exposed to was beyond the normal call of giving and it falls outside the scope of what one can easily define as a job. It is a deep sense of non-judgemental humanity, kindness and dedication that drives these projects. To try and put a clear “description” to the work would undermine the essence of what is happening across our country.

Having said this, we encountered numerous challenges and questions related to exchange and volunteering. Mis-matching is real and places a burden on hosts, poor preparation and false expectations by participants leads to un-workable scenarios and hosts did not always feel they had support to deal with this. Low awareness of the mechanisms and processes abroad, budgeting and not understanding the selection of participants suggests that many hosts are not engaging in an equal cooperation but are just recipients at a “take what you get” and make the most of it level.

Very few hosts were aware that outbound opportunities exist, nor were they aware of the size and scope of volunteering and exchange as a sector in South Africa. There is clearly the need for a strong Information, Advisory & Support Service going forward.
Initiated by the AGYI, the BMZ launched a new funding line embedded in the weltwaerts Begegnungen (wwB) or extracurricular exchange projects in the context of the Agenda 2030 between civil society partners from Germany and the Global South with the aim of increasing dialogue and face-to-face contact – especially with African countries.

The main goal of the program is the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Funding is possible for exchange projects (up to two years, including one outgoing and one return visit, groups of five to ten participants in each country, age range from 16 to 30 years) and supporting projects for project partners to enhance the quality of the exchange projects by strengthening structures and actors.

Innovative projects with particular relevance for international youth work with a development focus that can be transferred to other organisations and contexts, can also be promoted.

Over the course of the AGYI pilot phase, WESSA will be giving considerable attention to this format. It provides an excellent opportunity for growth of the sector as it relates to sport, arts and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the format encourages actors in the south and north to work very closely at every level of concept, design, development, submission and implementation. Through 2018 and 2019, WESSA will engage relevant stakeholders, both existing and new to exchange, to consider innovative and creative projects that talk to our South African needs as it relates to meaningful, relevant and enabling exchanges and which are suitable to the wwB format.

This is an exciting new space and we are looking forward to growing this with you.

**More information:**

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**Please Assist**

We are building exchange related databases and would like your support to reach organisations that we may not yet be engaging with.

Privacy legislation prevents us from being provided with direct contact to partner organisations, schools, clubs or other entities involved in German – Southern African exchange.

These organisations and entities **NEED TO CONTACT US** if they would like to harness the opportunities afforded by the AGYI.

Should you know of organisations involved with weltwaerts, ENSA, ASA, City to City Partnerships or any other German – Southern African exchange format, please ask them to contact

**youth@wessa.co.za**