

THE RDP A CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

**A word of welcome by
WILLIE CONRADIE
President of SASA**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say a word of welcome on behalf of the executive committee of the SASA and the broader statistical community in our country. In the first place welcome and thank you to our distinguished guest speakers for their willingness to participate in today's seminar. We are looking forward to your expert views and we trust that it will be a fruitful exercise for all of us. In the second place to all of you who have an interest in the role we as statisticians and operations researchers can play in the RDP and have made the effort to attend this meeting today - thank you and welcome.

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to take the opportunity to give you some background on the events which lead to SASA's involvement in today's proceedings. After the government of national unity came into power and the RDP became a reality a number of prominent statisticians in South Africa came together in October 1994 just before our national conference to discuss the role the statistical community could and should play in the RDP.

At the annual conference of the SASA held in the National Kruger Park in November last year the former president of our association, Prof. C.F. Smit (one of the participants today) devoted his entire presidential address to the theme "**Statisticians and the RDP**". He urged members of our association, the

professional statisticians in our country, to get involved in the activities of the RDP. Prof. Smit emphasised the fact that Statistics is bound to play a prominent role in any analysis and monitoring of the progress of the RDP. In fact, the minister entrusted with the execution of the RDP, Minister Naidoo, had remarked that statistics will play a key role in the whole process.

Ladies and gentlemen I don't want to jump the gun regarding what is going to be said and discussed today - I just want to make a few brief well known remarks regarding Statistics and Statisticians to emphasise their importance.

1. **No planning** can be done without the relevant information:

- Most of the time, information is in the form of numbers and is also incomplete.
- Quite often this information is obtained by questionnaires to determine the feelings and needs of people.
- These numbers must be analysed and conclusions be drawn from them.
- Statisticians are the people who have the knowledge and tools to interpret these data to help the **Social Workers, Health Worker, the Educators, the Developers, the Politicians**, in short the leaders of all activities in our society - to determine the places and communities with the largest needs - to compare the needs of different environments and to determine priorities - to determine tendencies etc.
- **Important** - the Statisticians (so we believe) have the tools to communicate the rationale of the decisions (often unpopular) resulting from the planning, to the people in the form of graphical presentations etc. - to help the authorities to communicate their decisions in such way that ordinary people can understand them and have trust in them.

- Statisticians have the knowledge to manage the logistics of programs and to utilise limited resources optimally.

Ladies and gentlemen, I can also say a lot about the role that Statistics and Statisticians can play in:

2. The whole aspect of **quantifying and measuring**
3. **Executing of scientific surveys**
4. **Facilitating research in basic health care**
5. **Teaching of basic courses in statistics to - for example governmental officials etc.**

I anticipate that these issues and many others as well as those in the field of Operations Research will be addressed in the rest of the program and I am leaving these to our experts to put on the agenda and elaborate on. I trust that at the end of this seminar we will be reaching a point of presenting some modus operandi for future involvement. Ladies and gentlemen this modus operandi must be achieved today. It must be communicated to all the statisticians and operations researchers in the country. It must inspire them to take part in the RDP.

Ladies and gentlemen I would like to thank Professor Paul Fatti and all others, especially our friends of the **Operations Research Society**, who were involved in organising this seminar. I wish you all a very stimulating seminar with many fruitful discussions. It is important to realise that today is the beginning of a more formal involvement for us and not the end - the real work has still to do done - today is just talking. Let us all work together to make today a great success.