

**The South African Education and Environment Project  
And The  
Safety Unity Creche Forum**

*A 5 year critical assessment*



**Final Report**

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## **I. Introduction and Background Information**

The South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP) is an educational non-profit organisation based in Cape Town, South Africa. SAEP is committed to improving the lives of children and young adults in South Africa's impoverished township communities. SAEP provides the tools necessary to develop academic and life skills, raise environmental awareness, obtain productive employment, and make influential contributions to the socio-economic development of their communities and their country.

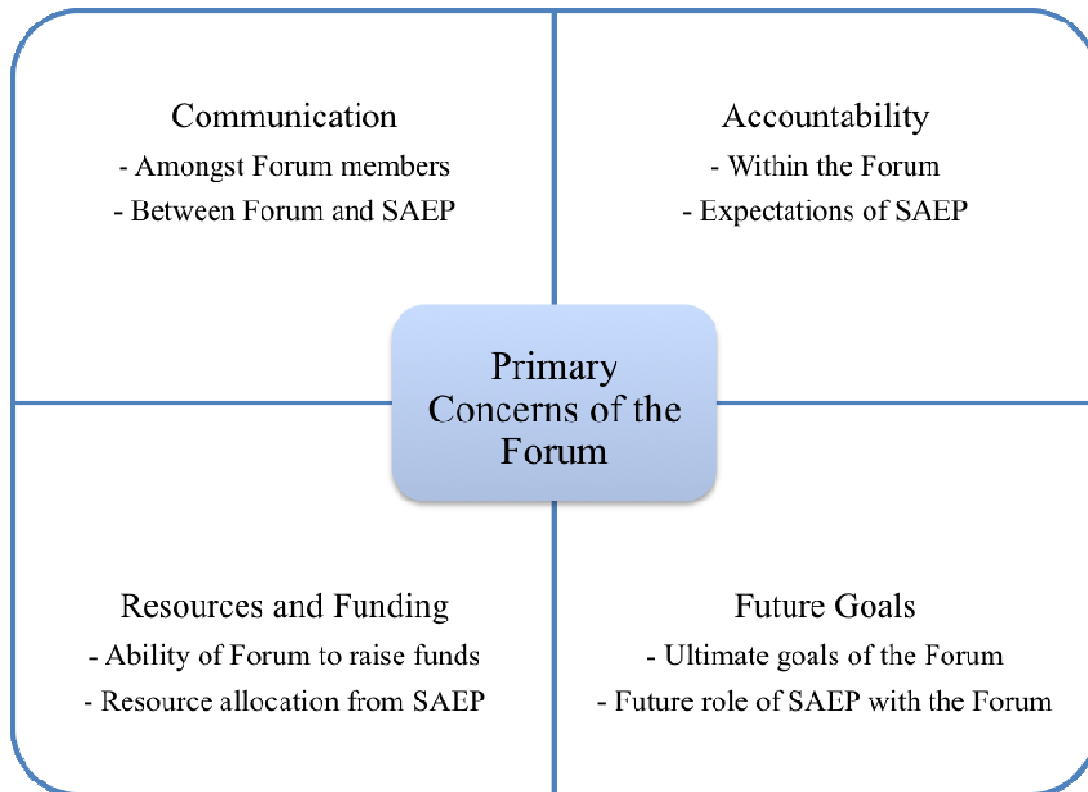
SAEP operates four programmes: Early Childhood Development, Hope Scholars, Bridging Year, and the Tertiary Support Programme. These projects were developed in specific response to the needs expressed by the youth and community leaders in the Cape Town community. These programs involve support for and improvement of education at the pre-school, high school, and tertiary levels and are supported by SAEP staff members as well as local and international volunteers.

SAEP began the Early Childhood Development program in 2003 providing a wide range of services to crèches in the Philippi community. Initially only supporting 9 crèches, SAEP has grown to include 7 additional crèches over the past 6 months. SAEP assists with financial management, provides fundraising assistance, facilitates the donation of resources, and offers effective training workshops for crèche principals and staff members. To share challenges and resources, these 16 centres have organised themselves as the Safety Unity Crèche Forum.

## II. Research Aims

The aim of this research is to address the primary concerns of the Safety Unity Crèche Forum. A four-hour informal workshop held with 12 out of the 16 Forum principals to better understand the issues within the Forum. These main concerns exist on two levels- within the Forum and regarding the role that SAEP plays with the Forum. Four primary concerns served as the focal point for which we structured our interview questions.

1. Communication → Discussion between principals at Forum meetings; relaying of information to absent members; effectively expressing opinions and problems; and the Forum's ability to communicate their views to SAEP
2. Accountability → Attendance at Forum meetings; the principal's responsibilities to the Forum; and deliverables from SAEP to the Forum
3. Resources and Funding → Ability of the Forum to acquire resources and raise funds independent of SAEP; and SAEP's allocation of donations and volunteers
4. Future Goals → Tangible and intrapersonal goals for the Forum; and SAEP's future involvement with the Forum



### **III. Methodology**

The data collection consisted of gathering information about the Forum from individual principal interviews, individual SAEP staff interviews, attendance at Forum meetings, and review of the minutes from past Forum meetings. Our aim in the individual interviews with the principals was to allow for a candid discussion concerning the goals of the Forum, its strengths and weaknesses, and how each principal views their role in the Forum. One of our main obstacles during the interviews was the issue of language- the native language of the interviewers being English and the native language of the principals being Xhosa. Out of the 14 total interviews we had the assistance of a translator for 11 interviews. Even though the translators who accompanied us were SAEP staff members we made it clear multiple times throughout the interview that we were unaffiliated with SAEP, hoping to encourage a more open space for discussion especially around the questions involving the Forum's relationship with SAEP.

The SAEP staff members we interviewed were Jane Keen, Zandile Mahlasela, and Isabel Babenschneider. These interviews were conducted in English and we asked SAEP the same questions as we did the principals with the exception of two questions that were not applicable (*Do you feel included in the decision making process of SAEP* and *What are your expectations towards SAEP in regards the forum*).

We attended three Forum meetings in total in addition to hosting the preliminary workshop with the principals. Our goal here was to observe the relationships between the Forum members as well as analyze the presence of SAEP at Forum meetings. Parts of the Forum meeting were not conducted in English therefore we were not able to understand what was being discussed at all times but we were still able to observe interaction and the group dynamic.

#### **IV. Ethics Statement**

All research was conducted with full confidentiality of the participants. Participants were informed before beginning the interview that their responses would be anonymous and used solely for the purpose of strengthening and enhancing the Forum. Participants were also informed of their right to stop participation at any point or refrain from taking part in any element should they see fit. When using an SAEP staff translator for certain interviews we made it known to all parties involved that the interview would be anonymous and confidential.

#### **V. Analysis of Data**

The interviews were conducted in a relaxed nature with the intent to create an open space for discussion where each principal felt comfortable expressing the issues and problems of the Forum. The uniquely qualitative responses we received from the principals as well as SAEP staff were difficult to quantify using a preexisting statistical analysis method. Therefore we analyzed our data by taking an indepth look at each of the principals responses to each question. To keep the responses anonymous we then extracted the main view points of the prinipals and presented their ideas in bullet formation in regards to each question (see Appendix 1). At the end of each of the four sections of the interview we summarized the principals ideas as well as the responses we received from SAEP staff. We then based our overall recommendations for the Forum and for SAEP from our analysis of the communication, accountability, resources and funding, and future goals summaries.

## **VI. Findings**

### **A. Communication**

After meeting with SAEP staff and attending Forum meetings, it seemed apparent that a large obstacle permitting effective action in the Forum was a lack of communication. In the workshop held in mid-August, Forum principals expressed that the original goals of the Forum were to provide guidance, support and share ideas. However, in recent months the lines of communication had been hampered such that this was an impossibility. This was illustrated by certain principals failing to offer input or share their thoughts throughout the workshop. Based on the interviews with the principals and SAEP staff, we discovered the following issues regarding communication.

#### **Summary of Principal Interviews:**

Despite a small number of dissenting opinions, it was generally agreed that poor communication is one of the primary impediments to growth and productivity within the Forum. It is apparent that newer Forum members feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions in Forum meetings, and at times feel unwelcome. Older members seemed to feel that SAEP did not take their thoughts into consideration in specific circumstances in the past year, and feel that the inclusion of the new members was forced (see Appendix 1). Everyone agreed that when working as a united entity, the Forum has tremendous power to achieve results. All interviewed members expressed a strong desire to rectify this situation so as to return to the original purpose of the Forum, which was to share and support one another in hopes of enhancing the quality of care for the children of Philippi.

#### **Summary of SAEP Staff Interviews:**

Interviews with SAEP staff reinforced the sentiment that poor communication was hindering the work of the Forum and liaisons between SAEP and the Forum. SAEP reiterated the frustration felt in trying to inform absent members of what transpired during missed meetings. SAEP staff also felt that the Forum has forgotten its own strength and value, and is currently lacking motivation. Staff felt that the Forum's expectations of SAEP to give direction and guidance are too high, hampering the Forum's ability to think and act independently. It was also felt that although certain individual principals are effective communicators, staff does not feel that the Forum communicates as a unit. It was similarly expressed that on an individual level the principals are eager and motivated but lose this momentum and spirit when they meet together.

## **B. Accountability**

It was evident that accountability, both within the Forum and between the Forum and SAEP was a critical issue. We chose to gauge issues of accountability within the Forum by looking at participation at Forum meetings and the principals feelings of responsibility towards each other and the Forum. We measured the accountability between SAEP and the Forum by ascertaining the principals expectations of SAEP. It was important to uncover where perceptions of responsibility fell.

### **Summary of Principal Interviews:**

All but one principal regarded attendance at Forum meetings as a vital and critical issue. Many principals feel that others take this issue lightly as is evident by small numbers at meetings and lack of apologies for their absence. There must be better clarification of what the constitution states regarding attendance, and what the proper operating procedure is regarding enforcement of consequences. Principals who are aware of the rules believe them to be reasonable however many are unaware of these regulations and need to all be in agreement concerning the protocol for attendance.

The principals see the Forum as a networking device in which they can benefit from shared past experiences, obtain resources and opportunities, and help each other grow personally and professionally. However, most have doubts about the effectiveness of the current state of the Forum. All seem passionate and have expressed a desire for the Forum to strengthen and progress. The majority of principals look to SAEP for guidance and capacity building on an individual level as well as for the Forum. They expect SAEP to provide administrative help on issues such as funding, government benefits, and subsidies. SAEP is viewed as an organization that will provide long term assistance for the development of the crèches.

### **Summary of SAEP staff interview:**

SAEP staff feel that attendance is not at the level it should be, however they understand that circumstances in the principals lives can take priority over attending Forum meetings. At the same time the principals must find a balance which allows them to dedicate the time needed to build a productive and effective Forum. To ensure this, reasonable consequences must be understood and enforced for lack of commitment to the Forum. There is consensus among SAEP staff interviewed that the current state of the Forum lacks leadership and motivation to the degree that if it were not for SAEP involvement, Forum

productivity would come to a stand still. The staff, however, does see the potential for the Forum to come together as a cohesive unit that can help each other, the children they work with, and the community.

### **C. Resources and Funding**

From the workshop discussion it was demonstrated that the Forum members view SAEP as a main provider of resources and funds. For many principals a point of contention lay within SAEP's distribution of resources to the creches. By highlighting the issue of fundraising we aimed to gauge the principals' commitment to increase the Forum's self-reliance.

#### **Summary of Principal interviews:**

The majority of principals feel that SAEP allocates resources fairly. The main issue revolving around resource distribution is when SAEP brings donations to Forum meetings and the principals are then in charge of deciding which crèche should receive the donation. Some principals put the needs of their crèche first even if, from an outside perspective, another crèche is in more dire need of that donation. At the same time, Forum members also feel excluded when SAEP decides to allocate resources to crèches without discussing the matter with the Forum. Some principals acknowledge that SAEP donates resources to the neediest crèches, however at the same time the more developed crèches still have uncompleted projects and some principals feel like the majority of SAEP's attention is spent on the newer, needier crèches. In regards to fundraising, all principals feel like it is something the Forum can achieve as long as it becomes united and can work together, whilst receiving guidance from SAEP.

**Summary of SAEP staff interviews:** SAEP struggles with the allocation of resources because no matter what decision they make someone is going to feel like they were not treated fairly. Bringing donations to Forum meetings allows the principals to decide amongst themselves who gets the donation but this also results in some principals taking resources yet not using them. Therefore SAEP feels that it is most fair to allocate resources by deciding amongst themselves what crèche is in most need of the resource. This may create tension amongst some principals but SAEP feels this is the best way to ensure that donations are used most effectively. SAEP thinks the Forum has the ability and knowledge to fundraise but lacks the cohesion and motivation to do so at this point in time.

#### **D. Future Goals**

After a five year working relationship between SAEP and the Forum we thought it necessary to assess the principals' future objectives for the Forum as well as the Forum's ongoing collaboration with SAEP. Due to SAEP's wish for differentiation between themselves and the Forum it was crucial to discover the principals' thoughts regarding the future role of SAEP within the Forum.

#### **Summary of principal's responses:**

All of the principals feel the main future goal of the Forum is to become united, improve communication, and continue sharing information, knowledge and resources. A few listed tangible goals such as NPO registration but the main thoughts revolved around resolving issues within the Forum and between Forum members. The principals also all feel that SAEP will always play some sort of role with the Forum. The future role of SAEP varied from continuing to provide resources and materials to just being available for questions and administrative assistance.

#### **Summary of SAEP staff responses:**

SAEP believe the principals need to assess whether or not they still want to exist as the Safety Unity Crèche Forum. Their future goals all rest on whether or not they can become stronger leaders, take initiative, and focus their attention on developing the Forum and not just developing their individual crèches. SAEP would like the Forum to become less dependent on them in the future. They see crèches becoming developed to a point of independence yet acknowledge that there is resistance to this idea from the principals.

## VII. Recommendations

- The addition of seven new crèches within the past year has strained SAEP staff and resources which has not gone unnoticed by the original crèches. The recent restructuring of SAEP staff in which each crèche reports specifically to one staff member has the potential to reduce these feelings of neglect. Although there may be legitimate reasons why the development of projects at crèches stall, lines of communication need to be kept open with the principals. **More attention needs to be focused on completing existing or ongoing projects at the original crèches. The needs of the newer crèches may seem more immediate but cannot take precedent over completion of preexisting projects.**
- While it is imperative that SAEP and the Forum remain consistently aware of the other's input and thoughts, the Forum must have the opportunity to converse individually so they can speak with 'one voice' in communication with SAEP. **We recommend that SAEP attend Forum meetings only once per month and the Forum should be responsible for setting its own agenda at those meetings.** This decrease in Forum contact will necessitate more dialogue with individual principals which may also simplify the laborious decision making processes at Forum meetings.
- **Although SAEP staff has indicated their desire for developed crèches to become completely independent of SAEP we do not believe this to be in the best interest of the crèches. A more effective relationship would be one of interdependence, in which SAEP continues to provide support or assistance as the crèches continue to develop.** SAEP is an important resource for information and knowledge and is a pillar of moral support. Criteria for levels of association with SAEP should be established and thoroughly explained to the crèches so they are aware and comfortable with the evolving relationship.
- From past experiences with the individual crèches, it has been noticed that the involvement of an SAEP volunteer greatly improves the development of the crèche, as well as the communication between the crèches and SAEP. However, it is apparent that this process is hindered by the short term nature of the volunteer program. **In light of this, brokering stronger relationships with local schools and Universities**

**has the potential to attract a greater number of long term volunteers. Suggested targets for volunteer pools can include the Education Faculty of UCT, UWC, Stellenbosch, as well as the CIEE semester abroad program which has an established commitment to volunteerism in local townships.**

- At the AGM a number of recommendations were suggested for the Forum to consider implementing including sharing the Constitution with all members; making changes and adaptations to decide what the new Constitution should be; discussing the importance of strong leadership in the Forum Committee; increasing Forum dues in order to increase funds and resources; and suggesting the attendance of SAEP at Forum meetings be limited to once a month. The underlying goal of these recommendations was to motivate and unite the principals thus allowing them to work together as a functioning Forum. **Scheduling a workshop for the principals to reflect on the Constitution is pivotal to facilitate a change in attitude. Although this action needs to be taken by the Forum, SAEP's involvement, encouragement, and assistance is critical.**
- The opportunity to engage in networking activities can provide support, motivation, and access to knowledge that is crucial for the strengthening and survival of the Forum. **SAEP is encouraged to assist the Committee in making contacts with other entities that have been effective in their own communities.** For example, the Khayelitsha ECD Forum has been a positive force in their community and therefore can serve as a model by which the Safety Unity Crèche Forum can be inspired.

### **VIII. Concluding Thoughts**

With the recent addition of members the Forum has nearly doubled in size, and is currently undergoing growing pains. While the original ten members were principals who knew each other and subsequently began the Forum for the purpose of helping one another, the recent additions have added a new dynamic to the group and it is clearly taking some time for this new relationship to iron out. Considering the growth of the Forum, it is imperative that they have strong leadership. Already it appears that this situation may be on its way to improving. The 15 October Annual General Meeting of the Forum resulted in discussions regarding the need for greater vocalization of thoughts and open discussions within the Forum. To this end the Forum elected a new representative body that will bear these issues in mind as they plan for the upcoming year. The individual interviews with the crèche principals revealed a dynamic and enthusiastic group of women who are eager to grow, develop and “brighten.” They have a wealth of ideas and objectives and need to collectively harness this energy and remember that they are all working towards the same overarching goal.

## Appendix 1

### **Summary of main points from principal interviews**

#### **A. Communication**

##### **1. Do you feel all forum members communicate effectively?**

- Five crèche principals said that there was no problem with the communication.
- The rest believed that communication was certainly something that had to be improved upon, with some suggesting that in the past communication had been better but had deteriorated over the last year.
- A number of new members mentioned that they felt uncomfortable speaking at meetings because the older members did not make them feel welcome, with a few stating that they were “scared” to speak at meetings. It was generally agreed that there seemed to be ‘cliques’ within the Forum which were preventing effective communication from occurring.
- The lack of communication is debilitating not only at meetings because it is difficult to make decisions, but also in terms of communicating to members who may have been unable to attend meetings as members are unwilling to relay information to the absent constituents.

##### **2. What steps can be taken to create a more open space for communication?**

- Five out of fourteen principals reiterated that there was not a communication problem; two principals reported that if they do not speak at Forum meetings it is because they do not have anything to contribute.
- Recommendations presented by Forum members were to have a workshop on creating bonds with one another, or simply fraternizing outside of the meetings to learn more about each other.
- A number of principals suggested that they plan a meeting to sit together and discuss the issues that the Forum is currently facing
- It was similarly strongly advocated that the Constitution be disseminated and discussed; that the Forum meet separately from SAEP; and that Forum members each be prepared to provide input at the start of each meeting so that everyone becomes accustomed to contributing (contributions could be a question, concern or update on what their crèche has been doing).

### **3. Do you feel the forum effectively communicates their issues with SAEP?**

- The majority of principals feel that there is a good process of communication with SAEP, and report that SAEP listens to their collective needs and issues, and helps the Forum to achieve its goals.
- A small number of principals felt that SAEP does not fully acknowledge the problems of the Forum, and sometimes fails to listen to the Forum's input or keep them properly informed regarding certain situations.
- One principal stated that the Forum needs to be more vocal and take more responsibility in communicating their thoughts to SAEP. She also suggested that the Forum create its own agenda for Forum meetings and follow through on the plans it sets for itself.
- Everyone noted the importance of maintaining open and effective lines of communication with SAEP, and a few stressed how imperative it was for the Forum to speak with one united and strong voice when interacting with SAEP.

### **4. Do you feel included in the decision making process of SAEP?**

- The majority of the principals felt that they were included in SAEP's decision-making process, and stated that they work "hand in hand." Most agreed that SAEP never imposes decisions on the crèches. Newer members felt they did not have enough experience with SAEP as of yet to comment on this question.
- One principal mentioned the decision to allow the new crèches into the Forum and stated that the older crèches did not want new members, and although SAEP technically asked them if it was acceptable, they do not feel that SAEP really took their opinion seriously. The Forum members do not really understand the point of SAEP working with crèches who are not Forum members because donations and resources are allocated in meetings. Another issue where some principals felt they had not been included was the decision to issue financial statements to SAEP.
- They explained that it has been useful having volunteers who can report issues and improve lines of communication between SAEP and the crèches.
- One principal reported that SAEP tries to be "democratic" and ask for input from the Forum but the Forum is not forthright enough in stating their opinion. She explained that nothing would ever be accomplished if SAEP waited for the Forum's thoughts.

## **B. Accountability**

### **1. Do you feel attendance is a critical issue among forum members?**

- The overwhelming majority of principals feel that attendance is a critical issue and that it has become a problem within the forum.
- Many principals feel that members are not showing up, and do not provide a valid excuse in compensation.
- All of the principals agree that attendance is vital to forum cohesiveness, though some share the feeling that time constraints and shortness of staff limits options, and serves as a valid excuse.

### **2. Do you feel there should be consequences for lack of attendance? If so, what?**

- All principals are in agreement that there should be consequences for lack of attendance.
- There is an attendance clause written in the constitution, however many of the principals seem to be unclear about exactly what those consequences are, and some don't even know that this clause exists.
- The majority of principals feel there is no enforcement of the existing consequences, and that is the fundamental aspect that needs improvement, as even if more consequences are established, they are of little use without enforcement.
- The principals seem to be content with the consequences as written in the constitution, though some provided alternative options, for example payment of a certain amount if a meeting is missed.
- Some feel that the old members don't want the new members to know what is going on, so they keep them in the dark by not showing them the constitution, therefore thwarting communication and cohesiveness.

### **3. What are your expectations towards SAEP in regards to the forum?**

- The principals in this instance generally see SAEP as an institution that provides them with assistance. They expect SAEP to help them meet their goals as an ECD, as they have in the past. And they expect SAEP to continue taking on new members to further improve the community.
- The dominant responses given were SAEP to help them with their problems, help them with fund raising, help to generate new ideas, help them with access to obtaining and assistance in filling out forms, general management information.
- Many of the principals expect SAEP to treat them respectfully and equally. They expect SAEP to respect the position of the elected committee, and not to undermine

their decisions or make decisions without first consulting them.

#### **4. What do you see as the forums function?**

- The vast majority of principals responded similarly, in that they see the forum as a space to help each other. The most dominant answer given was the sharing of knowledge from past experience, information on filling out forms, how they obtained the resources they have and allocating funds.
- Many feel that there is a sense of jealousy among forum members, and that this prohibits them from fully opening up and sharing their experiences with each other, as each is looking out for themselves and doesn't want to see the others succeed or surpass them.
- Many principals see the forum as an opportunity for networking, not only with professional help regarding the ECD, but personally as well. It is viewed as a space for helping each other act and live in a professional manner, how to budget personal finances, as well as general business and administration knowledge.

### **C. Resources and Funding**

#### **1. Do you feel SAEP allocates resources fairly among forum members?**

- The majority of principals agree that SAEP distributes resources fairly.
- A few principals feel that SAEP can allocate resources more equally; sometimes they will give resources to the least developed crèches despite the fact that some well developed crèche's still have uncompleted projects and are still in need of other resources
- Many principals think that a problem lies in SAEP bringing resources to the Forum meeting and allowing the principals to decide amongst themselves who gets the resources
- There are instances where the principals have decided that the neediest crèche should receive the donations but the overall tendency now is that each principal thinks of their own needs and wants before considering the needs of other members

#### **2. Do you think the forum has the ability to fund raise? If so, how?**

- The majority of principals want to fundraise and feel like the Forum has the ability to fundraise
- A few feel like they lack the knowledge or skills to fundraise but if they receive proper training then they will be able to raise funds

- The reason why the Forum is not currently raising funds is due to lack of unity and communication between Forum members
- Some ideas for fundraising include the selling of clothes donations, bake sales, concerts and performances involving the children

#### **D. Future Goals**

##### **1. What are the ultimate goals of the forum in the future?**

- All the principals feel that the Forum needs to become united in the future which involves an improvement in communication, sharing of information and knowledge, and working together like they have done in the past
- The principals feel that once they are united as a Forum they can work towards more tangible goals such as registering all crèches as NPOs or with social services, making sure everyone has the resources they need
- A few principals think that an improvement of attendance at Forum meetings are a future goal
- A point of contention in the Forum revolves around the original members and the new members; if they can work together in the future then the Forum will be able to work together to accomplish their goals

##### **2. What do you see as SAEP's future role with the forum, and do you see crèches' becoming independent of SAEP?**

- All principals agree that SAEP will always play a role in the Forum in one capacity or another
- Most of the responses were in regards to the individual crèches and SAEP; the majority of principals view SAEP's relationship with the Forum and with individual crèches as one in the same
- The principals see SAEP's future role with the Forum revolving around resource support as well as providing information about trainings, workshops, and assistance with application forms
- A few principals feel like if communication and unity can occur within the Forum again then they will depend less and less on SAEP; the more developed crèches are the more independent they will become

## Appendix 2

### **Summary of findings to be translated for Forum use**

- All the principals show dedication and enthusiasm about the Forum.
- Most Forum members agree that there are problems with communication within the Forum. Some Forum members don't feel comfortable speaking their mind at Forum meetings and hold back information that could be helpful to other principals.
- There is also a disconnect between what the Forum wants and what it communicates to SAEP. Therefore SAEP cannot help the Forum if they are unaware of the Forum's concerns and opinions. It is important that the Forum as well individual crèches communicates their problems with SAEP so they can help.
- Most Forum members agree that there is a lack of attendance at Forum meetings and that there should be reasonable consequences that are enforced.
- It is important for the Forum members to unite and work together so they are able to speak with one, strong voice when communicating with SAEP.
- All Forum members feel that they have the ability and desire to fundraise. Some examples given in the interviews included the selling of donations, food sales, and events involving the children.
- Some principals shared that there is a bit of tension between the original Forum members and the new members. The Forum will be able to accomplish more if all members are accepting of each other and are willing to all work together, no matter how developed each crèche is.
- The opportunity to engage in networking activities can provide support, motivation, and access to knowledge that is crucial for the strengthening and survival of the Forum. The Committee should make contacts with other entities that have been affective in their own communities. For example, the Khayelitsha ECD Forum has

been a positive force in their community and therefore can serve as model by which the Safety Unity Crèche Forum can be inspired.

- Most of the principals feel that SAEP allocates resources fairly. The main problem is when SAEP brings donations to Forum meetings and the principals are then in charge of deciding which crèche should receive the donation. Some principals put the needs of their crèche first even if another crèche is in more dire need of that donation. As a Forum it is important to share not only knowledge but also resources in order for the children to receive the best care possible.
- At the AGM we suggested a number of recommendations for the Forum to consider implementing including sharing the Constitution with all members; making changes and adaptations to decide what the new Constitution should be; discussing the importance of strong leadership in the Forum Committee; increasing Forum dues in order to increase funds and resources; and suggesting the attendance of SAEP at Forum meetings be limited to once a month.
- All of the interviews with the crèche principals revealed a dynamic and enthusiastic group of women who are eager to grow, develop and “brighten.” The Forum has a wealth of ideas and goals and need to use this energy and remember that they are all working towards the same overarching goal.
- Right now the Forum is in need of strong leadership. This leadership needs to not only come from the new Committee but from all the principals. Everyone is a strong leader in their home and community and by working together the Forum can become a strong, positive force for the children and all Philippi.