

## **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2019: Module 1 Experience**

I have always wondered how likely it is for one's life to rapidly change within a short space of time (a maximum of seven days). My wondering got answered when I arrived at Arminel Hotel in Hogsback on Thursday, 18 April 2019, for the first module on Social Democracy and Political Economy of the Fort Hare Autumn School (FHAS).

I was introduced to an organisation that is guided by the three basic values of democracy (Freedom, Justice and Solidarity). People always say the world revolves around politics and I always strove to evade stuffing my brain with such. I had a reason; ignorance. In social detachment, I sat there in the conference room listening to my fellow leaders (who were strangers then) speaking boldly and confidently, yet indistinctly. All the terms, historical occurrences and ideologies were new to me and I told myself I was never going to learn anything.

Little did I know that there was a reason why students of various disciplines (and levels) were selected. A variety of students ranging from Science to Politics, Economics to Accounting, Law to Education, Business Studies to Psychology, etcetera. Day 1 of the first module made me realise how important it is to not go around trying to find solutions to an issue I do not even understand. It was a matter of tackling socio-economic issues using the skills and knowledge I have learnt in my field of study and not closing the door to the space of learning more than the society deems sufficient. I went to bed wondering if I was ever going to be able to tolerate lack of relatability for the duration of the module. I could not relate to the content.

Big breakfast in a very awkward table before taking a 15-minute drive to Hunterstoun Centre for Ms Sonja Kathrina Eichwede to drive an eye-opening session called 'Social Democracy: History and Values'. She helped us understand what Social Democracy is by relating it to everyday challenges we face in our society. Ms Sonja gave examples that illustrated how social democracy impacted us each and every day, she talked about positive and negative rights, education and justice systems. This is where I started uttering words out of my mouth in contribution to an issue at hand. The room became lively with a debate on what each of us understood about social democracy and how it contributes to the socioeconomic status of our communities.

It was day 2 of Module 1. Ms Tessa Dooms facilitated the session in such a way that connected all fields of study in the room and found a central point where they could

meet to bring about social democracy in the world (starting in the Republic of South Africa).

It was on the ride back to the hotel when we found a way of breaking the ice in each other's midst. Music. 'Amagqwijo' are traditional African songs varying from liberation songs to love songs. They calmed me down. We sang and clapped in the bus as we drove up and down the steep streets of Hogsback.

Ms Dikeledi Mokoena came to fertilise our minds for the seeds of wisdom to be planted later by Mr Khwezi Mabasa. Her presentation was on the introduction to the different strands of African political thought. She gave us a brief introduction on pan African thought leadership. Pan-Africanism can be defined as efforts to promote the political, socio-economic, and cultural unity and self-reliance of Africa and its Diaspora. Mr Khwezi Mabasa's presentation on social democracy in an African context: Development and transforming the economy followed.

The two sessions were followed by a 30-minute tour around the parameters of Hunterston Centre guided by Mrs Elizabeth Thomas. It was an exhilarating moment for us all. We were all eager to learn and participate more when we came back. My ignorance was getting damaged; perspectives were improving.

Reading and writing are said to be very good ways of seriously damaging one's ignorance. We had Professor Ndangwa Noyoo's 'Public Policy-making in the Mbeki Era', Social Democracy Readers and Guy Martin's 'African Political Thought' at our disposal. Both our brains and stomachs were taken good care of.

Not only is she good in facilitating, but in chairing a session too. Ms Tessa Dooms drove a session called 'Finding a blueprint for South Africa: The National Development Plan in perspective'. I must say every single student was eager and willing to engage in this session. It was very informative and relatable. Ms Tasneem Essop delivered a presentation around 'Political realignment in post-apartheid South Africa: Possibilities for social democracy?'. What a better way to finish the Module. Dr David Masondo and Professor Ndangwa Noyoo gave insightful, informative and thought-provoking presentations that got most, if not all, students on the edge of their seats. It was as though we had just begun. Dr Masondo spoke about liberalism and Conservatism: History, values and developmental theories. One of the Students Ms Gcotyelwa Jimlongo, challenged him to include how feminism impact decisions of liberalism and

conservatism in his discussion. Professor Noyoo's presentation talked about social democracy and the welfare state. Social democracy has been said to be a political system which seeks to achieve social justice and equality within the framework of a market economy.

Before we knew it, it was on Tuesday, 23 April 2019. That meant one thing; we had to depart from one another. We had to drive opposite directions. We had an emotionally driven bonding moment. Every single student came out of the shell to share a bit of their personal life. We loved each other, as we still do. Here I am today, looking forward to meeting my mates again in Chintsa.