

# **The Khanya College Resource Centre – education and information for liberation and social change**

Andi Kaiser

Andreas Kaiser works as librarian/resource centre manager at the Johannesburg-based NGO Khanya College. Khanya College is part of the coordination of the South African participation at the WSF within the social movements.

Khanya College is a South African non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Johannesburg. Khanya's roots are to be found in the struggle days of the 1980s when its aim was to provide education to the oppressed and disadvantaged people of South Africa. Even though the political and institutional circumstances have changed, Khanya's mission remains a similar one until today: the education and liberation of disadvantaged communities by strengthening organisations and groups from those communities as well as trade unions, student and youth organisations, emerging new social movements and other non-governmental organisations. In July 2007 Khanya College will celebrate two decades of work for the empowerment and the liberation of the poor and oppressed people of South Africa by hosting a week-long 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference under the motto "Education for Liberation".

The increasing political, social and economic integration in the Southern African region in the last decade lead to a broadening of Khanya's work to include facilitating links and solidarity among the new social movements and mass organisations in the region. Khanya's dedication to contribute to social change and development made it an active participant in the World Social Forum (WSF) movement since its emergence. Khanya College is one of the organisers of the participation of the South African social movements at the WSF in Nairobi in 2007, arranging the logistical preparations, establishing the contacts to the Kenyan organisers and the East African counterparts in the social movements and NGOs as well as coordinating the South African contributions.

Part of Khanya's educational work is the provision of information and knowledge through the Khanya College Resource Centre. The centre was formed a few years back through a strategic partnership with the Workers' Library and Museum (WLM). The WLM was founded in Johannesburg in the 1980s, the library section of it providing literature and information to workers

and other disadvantaged people in the then apartheid South Africa. Since the early 1990s the WLM was based at a workers' compound, an all-male workers' hostel, in Newtown, central Johannesburg. The compound, being an important site for the South African working class and a historical monument of the apartheid migrant labour system, couldn't have been a better place for the workers' museum and the library. During the 1990s, museum and resource centre were part of the lively Newtown cultural precinct, the library therefore not only being a place for reading and studying, but also a venue for book launches, political discussions and other events, highly popular with a large number of people who otherwise wouldn't have had access to books, information and space for cultural activities.

Due to financial and structural problems in the non-profit sector in the late 1990s the Workers' Library and Museum and Khanya College formed a partnership. The resource centre survived some turbulent years, but wasn't functioning in the same way as before any more. Khanya College's decision, after years of fighting and under threat of getting evicted by the Johannesburg Development Agency, to move from the historic workers' compound to a newer, larger building in the nearby Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD), offered the opportunity to overhaul and reopen the resource centre with renewed enthusiasm. Due to lack of funding the resource centre had been run for a number of years by casual staff, new acquisitions of books and journals were rare, the once-existing library card catalogue and the classification of the books were abandoned. In that situation Khanya College decided to employ, with the assistance of one of its main foreign donors, the German Church Development Service (EED), a librarian or information specialist for a certain amount of time to get the library back on track.

My engagement as the Khanya College Resource Centre Manager started in January 2006. The main tasks for the next two years were defined as follows: the selection of a new library software, the set-up of an electronic online-public-access-catalogue, the classification and indexing of the documents, the provision of the whole collection in a user-friendly environment, the development of an out-reach programme, e.g through book boxes or a book bus, the conception of educational and readers' programmes and workshops.

In short: the mission is to revive the spirit of the old workers' library, to create a resource centre that will function as a readers' library for the large number of communities and people who are still disadvantaged in the new South Africa and who need every possible access point to information and knowledge, but also to serve as an NGO library for Khanya College and a number of other social movements, non-governmental and mass organisations that are expected to move into our new "house of movements". And finally, to form part of a wider network of resource centres through resource sharing with an online union catalogue and virtual collections in South Africa and beyond.

The first year of my work at the Khanya Resource Centre was dominated by the move of the whole college to its new premises. That gave us the opportunity to reorganise the books and journals collections and to prepare them for the later cataloguing and processing. We had to move the books and other materials earlier than expected, because of a two-month-long security guard strike, which led to a number of break-ins and made us fear not so much the loss, but the damaging of books. As a result the new library floor wasn't ready yet and we had to put up our old book shelves for the meantime on another floor. In the last few months I had the exciting task and rare opportunity to plan and design our new library from scratch together with our architect Nicholas Whitcutt. The new resource centre will have space for our more than 6000 books, 2500-strong articles-and-pamphlets-collection, hundreds of journals and newsletters, audiovisual material and poster collection, covering a wide range of subjects from the political and social history of the old South Africa and the anti-apartheid struggle to the politics and economics of present day South and Southern Africa, to labour and trade union issues, land, water and housing rights, social movements, etc. We also still hold a large fiction section from the reading library's days. There is enough space for growth and to accommodate other institutions' collections who are going to move into the building and hopefully will be sharing their resources and the centre with Khanya.

Besides the move and the planning of the new library our key projects in 2006 have been the research and selection of a suitable library software, an appropriate classification and indexing system. Essential for that research were a number of visits and contacts to resource centres and libraries of social movements, non-governmental organisations and other institutions. I learned a great deal about library software, cataloguing standards, classification and indexing systems in South Africa, especially within the alternative library and information sector. The Khanya College Resource Centre will follow the widely used bibliographic standards (i.e. Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Dewey Decimal Classification, Library of Congress Subject Headings) to make our data easily accessible and exchangeable on the national and international level.

But the visits and contacts also served the purpose to (re-)establish the cooperation and coordination within the South African social movement and alternative NGO sector. The solidarity was certainly stronger during the last years of the anti-apartheid-struggle and the first years of the transition period. The early 1990s saw a number of meetings and forums of the South African resource centre scene, a directory of resource centres listing more than 100 institutions was published in 1992. Maybe the crisis of the social movements in the late 1990s is mirrored in the decline of resource centres' activities and their networks, too. The second and so far last edition of the directory of South African resource centres was published in 1999, the once very active Library and Information Workers' Organisation also ceased to

exist. It would be interesting to investigate similar developments in other countries and regions.

I only learned about the library-related activities and workshops at the WSF since working for Khanya College and being involved in the preparations. Part of Khanya's activities preceding the WSF this year has been its annual winter school in July, which functioned as a preparatory workshop ("Building solidarity across borders"). I have tried to inform as many of my South African library activist colleagues as possible on the planned activities. Only very few knew about the workshops in the library and information sector, even though many of them work for organisations that have been participating in the WSF in the past. The same must be said concerning the knowledge of the PALIAct (Progressive African Librarian and Information Activists' Group) project. But maybe the South and Southern African resource centre scene will be encouraged by projects in other African regions and by the worldwide support and solidarity within the library and information community, and the WSF will be the starting point for a revitalisation and a stronger cooperation of the alternative South African library and resource centre scene.

Andreas Kaiser, Khanya College

contact:  
andi.kaiser@khanyacollege.org.za  
Khanya College  
123 Pritchard St.  
Johannesburg 2001  
South Africa