



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, on the Occasion of the 2022 Global Handwashing Day held in KwaZulu-Natal**

14<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Programme Director

EThekweni Municipality Mayor, Cllr Mxolisi Kaunda

KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Education: Ms Mbalenhle Frazer

Unilever South Africa CEO: Mr Justin Apsey

District Director, Mr Shangase

The school principal, Mrs Khuzwayo

School Governing Body,

School Management Team and Teachers

Officials from the Department of Basic Education (National and Provincial)

Officials from the Department of Health (National and Provincial)

Parents

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

*Sanibonani,*

It is a great honour to address the 2022 Global Handwashing Day held here in the province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Programme director; Global Handwashing Day is an annual global advocacy day dedicated to advocating hand washing with soap as an easy, effective, and affordable way to prevent diseases and save lives.

Global Handwashing Day was founded by the Global Handwashing Partnership.

It is an opportunity to design, test, and replicate creative ways to encourage people to wash their hands with soap at critical times.

Global Handwashing Day is celebrated every year on 15 October, which is tomorrow, but as an education department, we decided to make an effort to hand washing on a school day.

The 2022 Global Handwashing Day theme is to unite for universal hand hygiene.

The theme calls upon all of us to do more to achieve hand hygiene which is crucial in disease prevention like Covid-19, diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections.

As Basic Education Department, we certainly believe that the health of our children is intrinsically linked to improved learner outcomes.

As we mark this international hand washing day, it is worth reminding South Africans that long-lasting behavioural change is only achieved through basic education.

Within this context, we have an overarching framework known as Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) to address barriers to teaching and learning.

The framework has two flagship programmes: the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP).

We have adopted a three-pronged approach (in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organisation (WHO)). These include:

- Health education integrated into the workbooks;
- Regular deworming of children in schools; and
- Provision of adequate sanitation, safe water and the maintenance thereof to be provided to schools.

Programme director; we are incredibly grateful to various private and international agencies who support us in providing decent and safe hand washing facilities in our schools.

To ensure the well-being of learners, we, together with Unilever, initiated the National Schools Hygiene Programme.

This programme adopts an early childhood development approach to instil behaviour change habits at a crucial stage of development amongst Grade 1 learners.

We have been implementing the National Schools Hygiene Programme since 2017.

We are proud to share that through the programme, we have provided hygiene and sanitation education, reaching five million Grade 1 learners in 15 000 primary schools per year.

Through the partnership with Unilever, particularly the Lifebuoy brand, over the years, Lifebuoy has graciously built and supplied permanent hand wash stations in many schools.

These hand washing facilities are similar to the one we are unveiling here at Empusheni Primary School.

It is designed to help make regular hand washing easier for learners and staff.

In addition, Lifebuoy is also providing soaps in the community surrounding this school.

They are currently making these deliveries to the members of the community.

We thank Unilever and Lifebuoy for providing products and books for our schools and soaps for the local communities.

It should be noted that the National Schools Hygiene Programme would not have been this successful without the support and guidance of all our partners involved, including the critical stakeholder, our sister Department, the Department of Health.

We are incredibly thankful to the school principals, teachers and parents who have been so committed to encouraging and teaching these hygiene habits to learners at school and home.

This year, activists for the hand washing campaign in South Africa have adopted the slogan “children - our hand washing advocates”.

In the past few weeks, Grade 1 learners have been appointed and trained as Chief Education Officers (CEOs) of hand washing in schools.

As such, schools are encouraged to identify learners who will be champions or Chief Education Officers of hand washing.

These learners will be tasked with teaching other learners about hand washing and lead activities on hand washing, supported by educators.

This is important, and as the world moves beyond state-led intervention to stop the spread of Covid-19 to living with the virus, we must unite for universal hand hygiene.

In 2020 as part of the measures to halt the spread of Covid-19, Unilever extended its support for our hygiene measures by providing soaps to all schools in the country.

We are talking here of two million (2 000 000) bars of soap and hand sanitisers to the value of forty million (R40 000 000) to assist in implementing these critical hand-washing lessons.

We must propagate the need for hand-washing with soap.

It is the most cost-effective way of reducing diseases, thus promoting good hygiene and health.

Programme Director, the health, social and educational consequences of poor hygiene are well established.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), poor sanitation puts children at risk of childhood diseases and malnutrition that can impact their overall development, learning and, later in life, economic opportunities.

Lack of sanitation can be a barrier to individual prosperity and sustainable development.

It is also fatal to children; lack of sanitation kills young ones. It's true.

UNICEF concludes that diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections are associated with poor hygiene and contribute to child mortality.

Furthermore, poor hygiene threatens children's right to adequate, free, and compulsory basic education, a universal right in international conventions and law.

The report says the right to education is threatened when children, especially girls, cannot access private and decent sanitation facilities in their schools and learning environments.

UNICEF says while some parts of the world have improved access to sanitation, millions of children in poor and rural areas have been left behind.

I am pleased to announce that the project to eliminate pit latrines in our schools has gained momentum since the Covid-19 restrictions were eased.

It is crucial to close the chapter on pit latrines in our schools.

As we know, improved sanitation and hygiene in schools at a global level have been linked to improvements in children's educational performance, reduction in absenteeism, especially for girls, and improved retention rates among teachers (UNICEF, 2009).

The issue of proper hygiene isn't a local campaign but is referenced in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SDG 6.2 calls for governments to ensure that by 2030, we achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all.

As global governments and communities, we must end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.

Yet by 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported nearly 900 million children worldwide lacked a basic hygiene service at their school.

Yet, wellness, health and hygiene are positively linked to higher learning outcomes.

The World Development Report 2018 highlights a global learning crisis and notes that, while school enrolment has improved, including in our homeland, learning outcomes remain poor in many parts of the world.

Because of this crisis, 250 million primary school-age children (38%) are currently failing to learn basic numeracy and literacy.

Just one in 10 young people in low-income countries are on track to gain basic secondary skills by 2030.

The report calls for a renewed focus on learning and its determinants, improved evidence to make schools work for all learners, and better alignment of different actors to make the whole system work for learning.

Programme director, while UNICEF agrees that improving learning outcomes requires a context-specific mix of interventions, the report identifies a range of ‘highly effective practices in increasing access and learning outcomes,’ including providing ‘washrooms and water’ in schools.

Thus, as we mark Global Washing Day, we are not involved in a public relations gimmick or a tick box exercise.

Our endeavours with our partners remain to improve the overall standard of our basic education to make learning work for learners.

It is now well established that the best investment any nation can make for higher returns in a single generation is in education.

One seminal report from the Education Commission concluded that the potential returns on investment in education are most outstanding in low-income countries, where every dollar invested in an additional year of schooling generates \$10 in earnings and health benefits.



Programme director; as part of integrated health promotion, we have the universal National Schools Deworming Programme.

The programme covers all Grade R-7 learners in quintile 1-3 primary schools.

This holistic response appraises, protects, and improves learners' health, reducing absenteeism and increasing academic achievement and, ultimately, the quality of basic education.

We, therefore, call on all

- to promote national hand hygiene efforts, such as the development of a costed hand hygiene roadmap that considers a combination of policy, public financing, capacity building, and innovation to accelerate hand hygiene;
- to ensure sustained hand hygiene financing by investing in programs that are hygiene sensitive, promote behaviour change, and lead to hand hygiene habits;
- to support affordable, accessible, and desirable hand hygiene solutions to ensure supplies are available for everyone, including their own workforce;
- to prioritise hand hygiene infrastructure and policies within schools, healthcare facilities, workplaces, and other institutional settings;
- to conduct further research to fill in hand hygiene evidence gaps, with a focus on hand hygiene costs and return on

investment, as well as process evaluations for hand hygiene interventions; and

- continue to raise awareness on the importance of hand hygiene as an essential part of health and development to influence political and community buy-in.

To paraphrase our former statesman, Nelson Mandela, it is in our hands to make our world better for all, especially learners, the poor, the vulnerable & marginalised.

It begins with quality basic education that can only be achieved through partnership for the prosperity of our nation-state. Let's join hands for a better life for all.

Ngiyabonnga.