basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, during the Education World Forum (EWF) Meeting held in London

8 May 2023

Programme Director,
Fellow Ministers,
Esteemed Dignitaries,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen

As South Africa's Basic Education Minister, I am immensely pleased to participate in this esteemed gathering at the Education World Forum.

I am excited to share our experiences and learn from other nations about innovative and effective ways to improve education outcomes for all children.

Let us unite to build a brighter future for the next generation and create a world where education is accessible, inclusive, and equitable for all.

We aim to engage in meaningful discussions to identify and implement necessary changes that will result in more robust, bolder, and better education and learning opportunities.

It is clear that collaboration among stakeholders is crucial in achieving these goals, and we must prioritise working together to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education that prepares them for a bright and prosperous future.

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa has made significant progress in transforming our basic education sector along six widely acknowledged dimensions: access, redress, equity, quality, efficiency, and inclusivity.

We have achieved near-universal access to schooling, with attendance rates above 98% for children aged 7 to 15.

Access to early learning opportunities has also increased significantly, with almost 90% of 5-year-olds attending educational institutions, compared to only 40% two decades ago.

Despite these advancements, we still face serious challenges that are not unique to us, especially unacceptably low and unequal early learning outcomes.

While there has been improvement in our performance in studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), our outcomes continue to be unsatisfactorily low and unequal.

Regrettably, the progress towards our education goals was temporarily halted by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, which caused significant disruptions to our education system and posed unprecedented challenges to our teachers, learners, and education infrastructure.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are emerging from one of the most significant global educational disruptions in the last 80 years.

However, we are encouraged by the remarkable resilience demonstrated by our basic education system during the pandemic.

Rather than observing an increase in the number of children dropping out of school, we have seen more learners than ever staying in the system and successfully completing their secondary school-leaving examination, the National Senior Certificate.

This is an encouraging sign of the resilience and dedication of our students, teachers, and educational institutions during a challenging time.

Despite our achievements, the pandemic has harmed learning outcomes, primarily due to disruptions to teaching time, particularly in the early grades and Early Childhood Development (ECD).

In response to these negative impacts, we streamlined our annual teaching plans during 2020 and 2021, leading to an ongoing process of strengthening the curriculum and building back better than before the pandemic.

Programme director, our teachers are at the heart of our education system and play a vital role in shaping our children's future.

To support and empower our teachers, we have developed several support plans, including additional training, professional development opportunities, and improving school infrastructure.

In today's rapidly evolving world, leveraging new technologies and giving children access to twenty-first-century skills is crucial.

However, it is equally important not to neglect the basics of literacy and numeracy.

These foundational skills are the building blocks for future learning and success and remain essential to a well-rounded education system.

To strike the right balance, we are committed to investing in both technology integration and strengthening literacy and numeracy programs.

By embracing innovation while staying true to the fundamentals, we can provide our learners with a comprehensive and future-proof education that prepares them for the challenges and opportunities of the ever-changing modern world.

To this end, we have developed a coding and robotics curriculum that we will roll out nationwide in the next few years.

Furthermore, we need to balance the provision of the basics of reasonable access to books and adequate teacher support with an effort to embrace new technologies.

We are committed to harnessing the power of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to create inclusive, accessible, equitable, and transformative educational experiences for all learners.

Our strategic goals encompass aligning ICT strategies, enhancing the use of technology for curriculum delivery, adapting education in response to global changes, and cultivating partnerships to promote sustainable development.

While the pace of ICT implementation in South African schools has been slow and uneven across provinces, we have made significant strides in leveraging ICTs to strengthen teaching, learning, and administration.

These advancements have resulted from a collaboration between the government, private sector, social partners, and NGOs that provide schools with ICT resources and teacher training.

We have achieved significant milestones through these partnerships.

We remain dedicated to further harnessing technology in education to better prepare our learners for the 21st century.

Collaborations have the potential to deliver added value, particularly when service delivery faces challenges that require the involvement of other partners or agencies.

Partnerships not only promote value for money but also enable the efficient use of resources to achieve delivery outputs effectively.

Transparency, consistency, and effective management of programmes are vital elements of good governance that partnerships can reinforce.

Furthermore, these collaborations reinforce our objective of making education a societal matter by actively involving communities, businesses, organised labour, and non-governmental organisations.

As we strive to improve education for poor and vulnerable children, we must recognise that support programs must extend beyond the classroom.

In South Africa, we acknowledge the importance of a holistic approach.

To provide our learners with comprehensive support, we collaborate with Provincial Education Departments and other National Departments to integrate services on health, school nutrition, learner transport, early childhood education, and learning and teaching support materials (LTSM).

One positive example is the Integrated School Health Programme, jointly rolled out by the Departments of Basic Education and the Department of Health since 2012.

This comprehensive initiative provides primary and secondary school learners with health education, screenings for vision, hearing, oral health, tuberculosis, and deworming and immunisation services.

The health education component addresses age-appropriate topics such as sexual and reproductive health, personal hygiene, safety, and drug and substance abuse.

The National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is another successful initiative, providing about 80% of South African children with a nutritious meal every school day.

Evaluations of this programme indicate positive effects on punctuality, regular school attendance, concentration levels, performance, and overall well-being among participating learners.

Similarly, the Scholar Transport Programme, a collaboration between the Basic Education Department and the Department of Transport, offers safe transport solutions for learners who live far from their schools.

This programme ensures that all learners can access education, regardless of location.

The Scholar Transport Programme meets the needs of learners by providing dedicated transport services, ensuring they have a safe and reliable means of transportation to and from school.

Through these comprehensive and collaborative initiatives, we aim to improve education outcomes for poor and vulnerable children by addressing the underlying factors that have the potential to adversely affect their ability to learn and thrive.

Our future goals for South African education include eradicating unsafe and inappropriate school infrastructure and ensuring all children can read with comprehension by age ten.

Additionally, we aim to improve access to quality Early Childhood Development (ECD), especially now that the responsibility for ECD has shifted from the Department of Social Development to Basic Education.

South Africa is expanding access to technical, vocational, and occupational education by increasing participation in technical subjects during the Further Education and Training Phase (Grades 10-12) in both schools and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

As I said earlier, collaboration is critical to achieving these goals.

An example of a successful initiative is the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) programme, launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2018.

With the support of private sector partners, this initiative has successfully addressed the sanitation infrastructure backlog in many schools.

During the 2023 Basic Education Lekgotla held in January 2023, President Ramaphosa announced the progress of the SAFE initiative, stating that “we have constructed 50,000 sanitation facilities at 2,388 schools so far.”

He revealed that a further 15,000 appropriate toilets were constructed at 1,047 schools as part of the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative - ASIDI.

I can confirm that all remaining SAFE sanitation projects at approximately 1,000 schools are scheduled for completion in the next financial year.

Our partners in the private sector and the local and international donor community have provided substantial financial resources for the SAFE project, technical assistance and strategic support.

Another collaboration project worth mentioning is the National Education Collaboration Trust, which since 2013 has mobilised financial and other resources from big business, government and civil society.

Working together through this collaboration vehicle, we have been able to implement urgent interventions and convene multiple stakeholder seminars aimed at concerted action.

Today, we seek international collaboration to further support our basic education system, focusing on school infrastructure, early learning improvement, and scaling up evidence-based reading support programmes across priority primary schools.

Together, we have the power to transform the lives of millions of children, giving them the tools they need to succeed and positively impact the world.

As we work together to improve education, we can unlock the full potential of our teachers and learners and build a brighter, more promising future for all.

I am confident that through our shared efforts, we can make a real difference in basic education and ensure every child can thrive.

On behalf of all Ministers present here today, I thank you for your attention, and I look forward to engaging in fruitful discussions with all of you during this critical gathering.