



**Keynote Address by the Deputy Basic Education Minister,
Dr Reginah Mhaule, MP, at the High-Level Engagement
between RSA and Finnish Education Ministry, held at the
University of Pretoria**

12 October 2022

Programme Director

Her Excellency Anne Lammila, Ambassador to South Africa

Finnish Education Minister Ms L. Andersson

Ms Jaana Palojärvi, Director for International Relations, Ministry of
Education, Helsinki

Mr Henri Purje; Political Advisor

Ms Johanna Koponen, Advisor

Ms Iina Soiri, Counsellor Education and Science, Embassy of Finland,
Pretoria.

Senior officials from Basic Education in South Africa

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to speak at this high-level engagement between ourselves and the Finnish Government representatives, including Finland's ambassador to South Africa and the Finnish Education Minister.

Finland is a long-time friend of South Africa.

Finland has had a diplomatic relationship with South Africa since 1949. The relations have followed the prevailing political conditions.

Finland participated actively in the fall of apartheid and participated in the commercial blockade in 1987-1991.

South Africa and Finland upgraded the relationship to an ambassadorial level in March 1991 following the release from the prison of Nelson Mandela and the easing off of sanctions.

In post-apartheid South Africa, Finland and South Africa continued to enjoy warm relations.

A Declaration of Intent was signed in June 2000 to facilitate bilateral consultations between South Africa and Finland.

On behalf of the people of South Africa, we thank the Finnish people for their part in ending apartheid in our homeland.

Programme director; according to the 2022 September tourism performance figures, the Europe Union (EU), of which Finland is a member, is a crucial source for SA Tourism.

The numbers show that collectively Europe had the biggest percentage increase in arrivals of 573.7%.

The total number of arrivals from Europe from January to July 2022 was 422 674.

Overall forward bookings to South Africa for Jan – July 2022 were up by 281,3% compared to the same period of last year.

The top forward bookings were from Europe and the Americas.

On the trade front, South Africa's imports from Finland were US\$ 348.4 Million during 2020, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade.

South African exports to Finland include food products (fresh and dried fruits), wine, pulp, paper, iron, steel and coal.

But in reality, the Finnish people enjoy our world-class wines more than any other product.

As a country, we sold an equivalent of 319.2-million litres of wine to the EU and USA in 2020 alone.

European Union imports from South Africa were US\$24.54 Billion in 2021, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, making the EU our largest trading partner.

Today, we meet to explore further cooperation between Finland and South Africa in basic education, especially in early learning foundations and teacher development.

As Basic Education, we are new to the function of early learning foundations.

We assumed the function of early childhood development in April this year from Social Development.

The function shift allows us to reimagine the sector and put it on a growth path.

The function shift of early childhood education from Social Development to Basic Education makes the sector a key government priority.

As we know, there is no better way to start building the future we imagine for our country than to focus on all children having access to quality early childhood development.

We know that participation in quality and impactful ECD programmes is linked to improved attention and learning outcomes, higher completion rates and school attainment levels.

International research has further shown that high-quality early childhood development leads to higher years of education, improved adult employment and improved adult labour incomes.

These are all societal issues that we, South Africans, strive to achieve a Better Life for All children through quality early childhood development.

South Africa has made great strides in increasing access to early childhood education for the age group 4 – 6-year-olds since 2002.

However, there is still a long way to go towards realising this right for all children.

Beyond the challenges of providing access to ECD programmes to young children lies the matter of quality.

The recent Thrive by Five Index showed that only 43% of 4-year-olds in ECD programmes in South Africa are developmentally on track.

We, therefore, realise that there is a long road ahead of us in improving the early development opportunities for children.

Quality early learning opportunities are critical to ensuring that children from poor households start formal schooling on an equal footing to their wealthier peers.

This is key to attaching the high levels of inequality and poverty.

In fact, Sustainable Development Goals tag ECDs as the key to dealing head-on with inequality.

SDG, Goal 10 says to reduce inequality in and among countries – early childhood stimulation and food supplementation will enable children living in extreme poverty to attain outcomes closer to more affluent peers.

As a department, we must get the early learning foundations right in seven years if we meet the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECD sector.

SDG goal 17 calls for strengthening the means of implementing early childhood development interventions to ensure that all children thrive by five.

We are called upon to strengthen coordination across sectors to achieve common health, social, and economic goals and bring civil society and governmental partners together, all by paying attention to pre-schoolers.

Upon taking over the function in April, we have already embarked on many projects to ensure better and more effective resourcing of early childhood education.

Yet, it is clear that we have to turn to our social partners, civil society and international friends if we are to make an impact on a scale required by the SDGs and our developmental blueprint, the National Development Plan (NDP).

We have conducted an ECD Census to understand the sector and have incorporated the data into the Education Management Information System.

A whopping 42 420 ECD centres were identified in the country!

Simultaneously, we conducted a baseline study dubbed the Thrive by Five Index in 2021 that provides us with relevant information to improve quality through practitioner development and appropriate resourcing.

The ‘Thrive by Five Index’ survey revealed that 65% of South African children, aged between four and five cannot meet the expected early learning and physical growth standards.

Despite being enrolled in Early Learning Programmes (ELPs), they will begin Grade R with a considerable disadvantage.

The Thrive by Five Index survey assessed over 5 000 children enrolled in various types of ELPs around South Africa.

They were assessed in three areas: early learning, physical growth and social-emotional functioning. These three areas give a good indication of a child’s performance at school.

The Thrive by Five Index will also enable us to report on the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Indicator 4.2.1: Proportion of

children under five years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being by sex.

Most importantly, we will collect data for the Thrive by Five Index every three years; therefore, the Index will enable us to track progress in increasing the proportion of children who are developmentally on track by the time they enter Grade R.

We are also driving the redrafting of the Children's Second Amendment Bill, and one of the objectives of the Bill will be to alleviate the bureaucratic burden of multiple registration processes.

The review of the regulatory framework is to make registration and access to funding more easily accessible to all ECD programmes.

In collaboration with the World Bank and National Treasury, we are also conducting a public expenditure and institutional review of the early childhood development sector.

For us, this is the first step to building a case for more public investment in early childhood development in our homeland.

A further project includes developing a Quality Assurance and Support System, where clear quality standards will be designed to ensure the quality provision of early learning programmes.

This system will also include a vital support element, in the form of coaching and mentoring, to support early learning programmes to reach the required quality standards.

Finally, we are also working closely with the Department of Cooperative Governance to find ways in which integrated service delivery can happen more effectively at a municipal level.

All these initiatives should create a more conducive and supportive environment for ECD programmes to flourish, thereby providing our youngest children with the best chances of succeeding later in life.

As you can see, Ambassador and Minister, there are plenty of areas of cooperation to get our early learning foundations on track.

Programme director, another area of possible cooperation, is teacher development.

One of the new sector priorities for the sixth administration is to ensure that teachers and learners are supported to acquire skills and competencies for a changing world.

The Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the urgency for the sector to migrate from manual and paper-based operations to the use of technology.

We are pleased with our strides in this regard, although a lot still needs to be done.

One of our key achievements in this regard has been the development of a Teacher Development Framework for Digital Learning.

The framework identifies a set of competencies teachers need to acquire to master the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the classroom.

We are working with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) to ensure that all training service providers offer teacher development programmes that are ICT related.

Through the partnership agreement between South Africa and the United Kingdom (UK), we have also achieved significant gains in improving the content knowledge and pedagogical skills of many of our teachers.

We offer English teachers an English Audio Programme (LEAP), which aims to improve the quality of teaching and learning in Multi-Grade schools.

English language teachers can also upgrade their qualifications and enrol for the Certificates in Primary/Secondary English Language Teaching (CiPELT).

Through the National Institute for Curriculum and Professional Development, we are also in the process of developing an online Teacher Development Platform.

We want to thank the partnership with the ETDP SETA, which is mandated to promote and facilitate the delivery of education, training and development.

Its mandate is to enhance the skills profile of the Education, Training and Development sector, which supports us in this latest innovation to enhance teacher development.

Through the online Teacher Development platform, we will finally be able to implement a system of teacher professional development that is coordinated and collaborative.

The platform will create opportunities for teachers to engage in ongoing professional development at their leisure and convenience.

The platform will have a portal for self-reflection and assessment and host a library of resources from the Department of Basic Education and its partners.

Furthermore, it will also create opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other by creating online Professional Learning Communities.

For this platform to be effective, there is a need to have a strong theory of change that can assist teachers in transitioning from the manual to the online platform.

We are working with the South African Council for Educators and other stakeholders to ensure that teachers are rewarded with participation points and to create incentives for teachers to achieve their point targets.

The use of our District Teacher Development Centres and Provincial Teacher Development Institutes will further strengthen the use of the online platform, thus creating additional opportunities for teachers.

We want to thank our partners, such as Vodacom, MTN and Unisa, for their continued support of our Teacher Centres through valuable ICT resources.

We encourage our teachers to take full advantage of the resources deployed in these Teacher Centres.

We appeal for academic, technical and financial cooperation to take teacher development to the next level.

I thank you.