



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs
Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Charlotte Maxeke Memorial
Lecture held at the Glen High School, Pretoria East**

18 October 2021

Programme Director

Ministers and Fellow Deputy Ministers present

Senior Government Officials and Stakeholders

Development Agencies and International Organisations

Delegates and Guests

Ladies, Gentlemen, Friends

Good morning

It is a great honour for me to address to be called upon to reflect on the life and times of Struggle stalwart and our giant in a war against colonialism and apartheid, uMama Charlotte Maxeke.

The mere mention of her name fills me with joy and gratitude.

Programme Director, I am deeply humbled by the honour to present this Memorial Lecture, and I wish to heartily thank the organisers and all of you for being present today.

I present today's lecture in the context of UN inspired International Day of the Girl Child commemorated last week.

I will detail the Government through us (Department of Basic Education) various initiatives and policy positions that seek to liberate the child, honour women and smash the system of patriarchy, the rule by the Father as it were.

Programme Director, I dare say the best way to honour Mama Maxeke is to free the potential of each girl child, each woman and liberate men from their unearned vantage point of male privilege.

If we did not aim to smash the engrained system of patriarchy, male chauvinism and win the war against gender-based violence and femicide, Mama Charlotte Maxeke's fervent contribution to the national cause of national liberation would have been in vain.

Programme Director, let me briefly educate our young girls about Mama Charlotte Maxeke.

As we know, the year 2021 has been declared by our Government: The year of Charlotte Maxeke.

We commemorate this important year under the theme: ‘the year of Charlotte Maxeke: in celebration of the 150th birthday anniversary of Mme Charlotte Mannya Maxeke.

Mama Maxeke was a gender/political activist par-excellence and a lifelong student.

She was also the first African woman B.Sc. graduate in South Africa and one of the first Black South Africans to fight for freedom from exploitative and social conditions for African women.

Mama Maxeke was a revolutionary, a pioneer, a trade unionist, a gender activist, and a deeply spiritual person who dedicated her entire life to the struggle for the liberation of her people, especially women.

Mama Maxeke’s humility, compassion and humanity earned her the love and respect of the people of South Africa, Africa and beyond.

Her abiding vision was for a society where no woman was exploited and/or oppressed.

Without any fear of contradictions, we can genuinely say that Mama Maxeke was a midwife of a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous South Africa that we enjoy today.

Sadly Mama Maxeke died in Johannesburg in 1939.

However, her spirit of resistance and fighting for the total emancipation of women lives on among us.

As a tribute to her extraordinary contribution in service to humanity Mama Maxeke is often honoured as “Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa’.

During the dark years of the apartheid regime, the ANC nursery school was named after her in Tanzania.

In the new democratic dispensation, we honoured this Struggle stalwart by naming one of our largest hospitals (formerly Johannesburg General Hospital) in her honour.

Today it is known as The Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital.

Mama Maxeke, together with other stalwarts of women struggles, including the leaders of the 1956 Women’s March, we owe them a debt of gratitude.

They represented through deeds and words what it means to be the true daughters of the soil and freedom fighters to the end.

We say to all the departed we will not fail your people.

Today, I call upon men and women to never cease to fight for what is right, a non-sexist society with a deep respect for its women and girl children.

If we fail, the struggle for women’s total emancipation will regress to the detriment of the national cause to free the potential of each one of us.

Thus in invoking the memory of this giant, Mama Maxeke, we do so as an act of restoration.

Because to honour, Mama Maxeke is to honour the best in ourselves.

To keep her memory alive and continue the fight for the liberation of the girl child, I have the pleasure to share with you some of the work we are doing to liberate the girl child.

We have registered some notable successes and made many strategic partnerships, yet the work isn't complete.

I still call upon more collaboration and scaling of some of our excellent policy-driven initiatives.

We will not tire until our mission of gender empowerment for the girl child is achieved.

Programme Director; our operational framework on **Care and Support for Teaching and Learning** places the child at the centre, with a deliberate bias towards vulnerable girl children.

Since 2000, we have been implementing life skills themed programmes to assist learners in acquiring knowledge, developing skills, and establish positive values to make informed choices and live healthy lifestyles.

We have done this through the **HIV and AIDS Life Skills** programme.

The programmes focus on, among others, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure, non-discrimination, alcohol and drug use (associated with the spread of new HIV infection).

The interventions also focus on addressing risk behaviours such as multiple concurrent sexual partners, transactional sex, inter-generational sex and early sexual debut.

At the core of the objectives of these interventions is a strong message on abstinence from sex, delay of sexual debut and, where required, safer sex.

Due to the high rates of HIV incidences among girls, in 2012, we started implementing programmes with a specific focus on the girl child through support from the Global Fund and USAID.

Another excellent programme is the **Adolescent Girls and Young Women** (AGYW), which focuses on providing Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), linkages to health and social services, homework assistance, and career guidance.

These programmes are implemented in fourteen (14) districts with high HIV prevalence in the country.

Over 500 000 learners have received Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

We have placed over 4000 **Learner Support Agents** (LSAs) in schools to scale up sexuality education and act as partners to link learners to services.

The Adolescent Girls and Young Women coverage will extend to 60% of education districts by 2022.

Programme Director, in 2019, we developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the **Provision of Sexual Reproductive Health Services** (SRHS) in Secondary Schools.

The SOPs are aligned to the **Integrated School Health Policy** (ISHP), which provides guidance on on-site services at schools.

In addition to the routine health screening services, the **Integrated School Health Programme** provides other services like Deworming and Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination to prevent cervical cancer among girls.

The preliminary data of the 2021/22 HPV first round has reported a reach of just over 450 000 girls from over 16 500 schools.

The Department has further developed the **Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools**.

This Policy has been developed to support the rights of learners to education in case they fall pregnant.

Research has shown that only a third (1/3) of learners return to school after giving birth.

In this regard, the poverty cycle is perpetuated.

This progressive Policy guides schools on supporting and managing pregnancy cases to eliminate discrimination and exclusion of pregnant learners from their studies.

I am happy to report that cabinet has adopted the revised Basic Education Policy on the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools as a pushback against men in fancy suits who impregnate young girls as young as 10 years.

This revised policy seeks to ensure the accessible provision of information on pregnancy prevention, care for the pregnant, counselling and choice of termination of pregnancy, amongst others.

Furthermore, it provides for the upscaling of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a crucial part of school curricula to safeguard learners' sexual and reproductive health rights.

We must be ashamed that we are even developing strategies to respond to rape culture on steroids.

Yet, as a country, we have a moral and constitutional obligation to protect young girls from male predators, drug lords and men with money bags often of the stolen loot.

Programme Director, we also partner with the **Girls and Boys Education Movement** to create a safe school environment.

The movement provides our girl children with capacity building such as life skills that shape one's character.

These include measures to build self-esteem, self-respect and other girl child-related topics.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit our shores, we have had webinars to help the girl child navigate the new terrain of online communication.

We have covered different topics such as digital and media literacy, becoming a good communicator, and goal setting, amongst others.

We have learners today who are members of the **Girls and Boys Education Movement** and can attest to the positive impact they receive through the movement.

In 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa launched the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-based Violence and Femicide*.

But as the Department of Basic Education, we already had in place various policies to address the safety of our girl learners.

These policies include the *Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools*, the *National School Safety Framework*, and the *Protocol to Deal with Incidences of Corporal Punishment in Schools*.

The strategic plan on gender-based violence came when the country experienced a sudden spike in gender-based violence cases in the earlier parts of the hard Covid-19 lockdown.

We bemoaned the rise in gender-based violence cases, and our girl children were caught in the quagmire; it reinforced our contention that girls are safer in schools than at home.

Currently, we are finalising the Guidelines for the social inclusion of the LGBTQ+ schooling community.

This initiative is a collective effort with civil society organisations so that all children, irrespective of gender identity and sexual orientation, can realise their constitutional right to education.

Our partners in the space of girl education, health, and well-being have contributed immensely to our girls' programming.

For instance, The **Techno-Girl programme**, implemented with the TechnoGirl Trust, serves as a structural intervention to increase young girls' uptake of Science, Technology, and Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

This economic empowerment programme seeks to support girls in making informed choices about their future, including careers and life choices, to prevent HIV, AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

More importantly, they are encouraged to articulate their personal career goals for their development as early as Grade 11.

This turns them into ambitious young girls who are deterred from early unintended pregnancy.

The programme also provides girls with Life skills training.

They are sensitised to gender-based violence and equipped with the necessary tools and support to courageously speak up and seek help when they find themselves in a situation.

In 2018, I shared my vision to hold open community dialogues between school girl children and women of influence to discover ways to address the child's complex challenges.

Luckily, Unilever came forward to support this vision through one of its brands, Dove, to implement the **Dove Self Esteem Programme**.

The essence of the *Dove Self Esteem Project* affirms young girl children as beautiful, worthy and equal citizens in their own right.

This kind of intervention is critical to achieving complete liberation at the girl child's personal level.

Unilever has agreed to extend this intervention to boys because they too have their own psychosocial obstacles that could be addressed in this way.

I am delighted to announce that we will be holding intergenerational gender empowerment dialogues between women and girls in various

South African communities, encouraging girls to use their unique voices for positive change.

We will be connecting them with opportunities and intervention programmes led by women and some remarkable men who fully understand and appreciate the agenda of supporting the girl child.

Our social partner, AGAPE Youth Movement, will be facilitating these sessions.

Today, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Women of Influence have agreed to participate as resource persons in these sessions.

This is encouraging because it shows that many South Africans are bothered by the scourge of teenage pregnancy in our country and are willing to exert themselves in finding solutions.

We want to tap into these powerful women's personal and professional agencies to advance the population development agenda of the girl child.

Programme Director, all our programmes and intervention will be meaningless if our girls become pregnant too early.

Thus, UNESCO East and Southern Africa Region launched the **Let's Talk Early Unintended Pregnancies Campaign** to create safe spaces for open dialogue in communities regarding teenage pregnancy.

We recently launched the SA version of this campaign in 2019 to reach every girl child in the school environment.

It is yet another affirmation of our collective desire as a nation to protect the most vulnerable amongst us, our girl children.

The issue of Early and Unintended pregnancies amongst school going girl children must be understood as a societal problem.

The schools where sometimes these phenomena manifest is just a microcosm of society.

As a society, we must admit that we are fighting a losing battle.

In a roundabout way, I am saying, our schools are not the breeding ground of sexual misconduct and unprotected sex, yet we have turned our schools to be centres of health and welfare to address all social ills that manifest.

In conclusion, Ladies and gentlemen, my parting shot today is an inspirational quote from Mama Maxeke herself – I am convinced that it is relevant today, especially in the context of the “new dawn” she once said:

“This work (we do) is not for yourselves - kill that spirit of self, and do not live above your people but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you”.

I thank you.