



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Keynote Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs  
Angie Motshekga, MP, at the Commemoration of  
International Day of the Girl Child (IDG), held in Lephalale,  
Limpopo**

**28 October 2022**

Programme Director

Deputy Minister, Dr Mhaule

MEC: Ms Lerule-Ramakhanya

District Mayor, Cllr Mataboge

Kgosi ya Baphuting ba Ga-Seleka

Our traditional leaders

Senior representatives from Unilever, and its brand, Dove

Officials from our social partners,

Senior Officials of the DBE and Provincial Education Department

SGB members, parents and caregivers

Educators and Learners

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dumelang! Lotshani! Sanibonani! Good Morning!

It is a distinct honour and privilege to address you this morning to discuss the girl child.

Since December 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared the 11<sup>th</sup> of October as the International Day of the Girl Child, a day to honour girls.

So this year, we commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Day of the Girl (IDG).

In these last 10 years, there has been increased attention on issues that matter to girls amongst governments, policymakers, corporate companies and the general public.

More opportunities for girls to hear their voices globally have opened up in the last decade.

Yet, young Girls around the world continue to face unprecedented challenges to their education and their physical and mental wellness, not to mention structural violence

Honouring girls acknowledges their importance, power, and potential and fulfilling their inalienable human rights.

This is particularly relevant for our villages in South Africa because we come from a history that never recognised the importance of investing in the life of a girl child.

Calling out for the rights of girls silently oppressed worldwide is a commendable phenomenon in communities, not an act of folly.

On such days, we get to appreciate girls and remind ourselves that the struggle against patriarchy is not yet over.

We have an aspiration of producing empowered girls who grow up into educated and skilled women.

It is a well-documented fact that an educated woman is far more effective in preventing child mortality, reducing the burden of HIV, and contributing to household finances and society in general.

In addition, International Day of the Girl Child works to *eliminate deep-rooted gender-based issues*.

Deeply entrenched issues and problematic mindsets passed on to us for generations have threateningly made gender-based discrimination and oppression common in many households.

International Day of the Girl Child, therefore, seeks to eliminate the tragic predicaments of girls worldwide.

Programme director, adolescence is a critical stage of development in every person's life.

It determines the trajectory of children's lives, which is why caring for girls in their youth benefits all.

If girls are empowered at a formative age, they can mature into liberated, wise women of the future.

In this way, as a society, we all win.

Through the Dove Self-esteem Project, we have decided to celebrate this day in a village as a community engagement occasion.

We do so because we realise that self-esteem and all related phenomena are not entirely school problems but community problems.

Celebrating this day in this way, therefore, gives a platform to underprivileged girls to raise their voices and demand equality of rights, education and health, no matter where they live.

It gives them a forum to discuss the structural violence they are subjected to and voice their pleas to end this cruelty.

Our efforts in allowing them a safe space to raise their voices will go a long way to free them from the clutches of patriarchy.

We have an outstanding partnership with Unilever through its various brands.

About two weeks ago, we were in another village in KwaZulu-Natal with another brand of Unilever to commemorate Global Handwashing Day.

Today, with Dove, we are in the village of Ga-Seleka in Lephalale to commemorate yet another International Day.

I must commend Unilever and its brands for their openness towards going with us to places no one is willing to go on a learner well-being mission.

Today we are using this observation event to showcase initiatives geared towards supporting the girl child, such as the Global Fund Adolescents and Youth Programme.

We also spotlight the United Nations Education Plus Initiative – highlighting the benefit for the girl child and what it means for the boy child who should not be left behind.

We also emphasise the importance of placing Girls' Education at the centre of the Maths, Science and Technology efforts.

The partnership with Unilever is geared to speak to Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which focuses on improving the quality of education.

We are behind all programmes that expose learners to various developmental tools and resources.

The partnership between Dove and us will equip learners emotionally, helping them to stay in school, build resilience to life's adversities and aspire to be more despite these challenges.

These proactive measures will address sexuality, alcohol and violence issues, education and mentorship, sexual and reproductive health and career guidance.

As the Deputy Minister indicated, we are commemorating this event under the theme *"Digital Generation. Our Generation"* under the hashtag *#BrighterFutureForGirls*.

We know that today's generation lives in a digitally advanced environment.

Our job as Government is to narrow the digital divide between children from urban and rural areas.

However, children need to be protected against the dangers of online activity, especially young girls, with their increased vulnerability to sexual violation.

Programme director, young girls, are at higher risk if exposed online without consent.

They may become victims of trafficking, be forced into drugs, prostitution or worse sexual violence.

We know that the majority of perpetrators are men.

However, we applaud a growing number of men and boys who have used their agency to add their voices to the fight against the violation of women and girls.

Today, I call upon men and boys 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 of us.

The struggle for the emancipation of women and girls is a struggle with a long history in South Africa.

If our society was as intentional as it is supposed to be about its women and girls, we would not be raising these issues on days like this.

The International Day of the Girl Child would have been a celebration in the true sense of the word.

The ideal aspiration for women and girls has historically called for:

1. The right to vote.
2. Equal pay for equal work.
3. Equal rights to property, marriage, inheritance and the removal of all laws and customs deny women such equal rights.
4. For the development of every child through free compulsory education for all;
5. Right to an adequate standard of living, including access to modern amenities to free women of slavery conditions; and
6. Right to freedom of Movement and of freedom of association.

Since the 1994 Democratic Breakthrough, we have noted plenty of progressive legislations promulgated to free us women from the clutches of patriarchy.



As we know, much more needs to be done.

We have since used the power of basic education like we do to advance the aspirations of women and girls.

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 programmes to assist learners in acquiring knowledge, developing skills and establishing values to make informed choices about their bodies.

We do so through the **HIV and AIDS Life Skills** programme.

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

The interventions also address 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, the Department started implementing programmes with a specific focus on girls through support from the Global Fund and USAID.

The **Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW)** programme 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 CSE.

Over 4000 **Learner Support Agents (LSAs)** have been placed in schools by the Department and partners to link learners to services.

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

The Standard Operating Procedures, which are aligned with the Integrated School Health Policy (ISHP), provide guidance on on-site services at school.

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

We have further developed a 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 will guide schools in supporting and managing pregnancy cases to eliminate discrimination and exclusion of pregnant learners from their studies.

Since Cabinet approved the policy, we have been working with provinces on a vigorous policy dissemination exercise.

The idea is to strengthen the efficiencies of the education system in preventing learner pregnancy and ensure that schools do right by our learners should they fall pregnant.

The Department uses the **Girls and Boys Education Movement** to create a safe school environment where learners, through life skills, are capacitated in shaping their character, self-esteem, understanding of respect and similar areas.

As this year's International Day of the Girl Child is commemorated under the theme: "**Digital Generation. Our Generation**", different topics such as digital and media literacy are explored in depth.

We want our girl learners to know how to become good communicators, set realistic goals, and develop steps to achieve personal goals.

We do this work with the Girls and Boys Education Movement through various digital platforms.

We have learners today who are members and alumni of this Movement and can attest to the positive impact they receive through it.

Some alumni are now teachers in the basic education system, ploughing back the investment.

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

As Basic Education, we had already published 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 GBV came at a time when the country suffered spikes of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 Lockdown.

In 2018, I shared my vision to hold open community dialogues to discover possible ways of addressing the complex challenges faced by school girls in our country.

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

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

This kind of intervention is critical in the effort to achieve complete liberation at a personal, individual level of the girl child.

Unilever has agreed to extend this intervention to boys because boys have their own psychosocial and self-image obstacles that could be addressed in this way.

The International Day of the Girl Child is therefore used as a platform for us to showcase the work of the Dove Self-esteem Project and lobby community partnerships to help us reach learners in scale through this project.

Programme director, the UNESCO East and Southern Africa Region has launched the *Let's Talk Early Unintended Pregnancies Campaign* in our country, which aims to create safe spaces for open dialogue in communities regarding teenage pregnancy.

We have been holding intergenerational gender empowerment dialogues in various South African communities linked to disseminating the policy, encouraging girls to use their unique voices to end the scourge.

Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Women of Influence, have been using their agency and taking turns as resource persons to lead these dialogues.

This is encouraging because it shows that many South Africans are bothered by the state of teenage pregnancy in our country.

Thus, they are willing to overextend themselves, using their personal and professional agency, to advance the population development agenda of the girl child.

This is the one mission I would encourage this community to participate in to help us fight the scourge of teenage pregnancies in our schools.

We are battling to fight these social ills successfully, many of which are accelerated by self-esteem deficiencies.

For us, the Dove Self-esteem Project is not just a nice-to-have programme.

It helps us deliver on our mandate as basic education because it produces confident and assertive learners who can withstand peer pressure and make informed decisions.

We hope that Dove can mobilise additional resources to reach more children with this kind of timely intervention.

I thank you.