



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Keynote Address Delivered by the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, MP, at the SAPA National Conference held at Mittah Seperepere Convention Centre, Kimberley**

**08th September 2022**

Programme Director,

President, SAPA National,

President, SAPA Northern Cape,

SAPA Leadership at all levels,

All speakers,

Officials from both the National and Provincial Departments

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I greet you all.

It is indeed a pleasure to address the 2022 South African Principals Association (SAPA) National Conference.

This year's conference theme is "Crafting the Unpolished Diamonds."

The theme is fascinating as it avers that our learners are in a diamond factory to be polished and made functional.

According to Law Insider, an unpolished diamond means a diamond in its natural state or a synthetic diamond that has not been altered in any manner after its production.

I like the metaphor of our learners being unpolished diamonds, rare and unaltered in any way.

Our collective responsibility as a sector is to polish these rare gems and set them off to the marketplace, the world of work, adventure, progress, and wonder.

Programme director, I am happy we didn't liken our learners to rough diamonds, which means an individual of intrinsic merit but uncultivated manners.

Of course, the metaphor isn't lost on me as we converge here in Kimberley city, the diamond-mining centre and the capital of Northern Cape Province.

In this province, one can admire the 616, the world's most enormous diamond crystal.

But as any pedestrian diamond dealer would tell you, a diamond would be dull and not shine without the polishing phase.

As we know, without schooling and our dedicated teachers, John and Nthabiseng will remain dull and never shine in the world.

I keep harping on about the importance of basic education as a significant contributor to stable societies, faster economic growth and better health outcomes because it is true.

Hence, our schools are the giant diamond polishing centre with the sole purpose of making our most significant assets, our learners, shine and not remain dull and intellectually unattractive.

Our intrinsic value as teachers is to make learners (citizens) shine and inhibit their natural flaws.

As teachers, educationists and principals, we know that only the discipline of education that tinkers with the neat proverbial narrative that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

In our sector, even play for kids and learners is a vital part of education.

When we ask our learners and parents to read for pleasure, we ask them to use their “free time” to learn about the beautiful world of books and to immerse themselves in the migrating words, in other words, education.

Thus, in our sector, all reading is playtime, and it doesn't make John and Nthabiseng dull kids but makes them shine in a world full of intellectually dull people who don't appreciate the world of words.

Just like diamonds, education is forever.

Once you know how to read, write and count, that becomes a lifelong skill.

If you are certificated and possess an avalanche of varsity qualifications, they are yours forever; you can't even bequeath them to loved ones.

The phrase diamonds are forever is actually a coinage of an advertising agency hired by De Beers Company to help increase its sale of diamonds in the late nineteen forties.

The agency N.W. Ayer developed an extremely successful campaign linking diamonds and romantic love.

The campaign invented the slogan "A Diamond is Forever," meaning a diamond is a never-ending sign of love.

It also meant that a diamond would always keep its value, just like education.

It is a beautiful coincidence that Che Guevara, the Cuban revolutionary, urged his comrades many years ago to acquire an education before guns.

He said: "The first duty of a revolutionary is to be educated."

Thus, the next logical question is what tools do we need to craft the unpolished diamond of our homeland, to make them shine and remove the intellectual dullness?

Let's get the basics right first. Batho Pele, Putting People First.

September is Integrated Public Service Month, celebrated under the theme “Batho Pele Revitalization – Walk the talk.”

If we are to craft and polish unpolished diamonds, then we must be of service to our schooling communities.

The Integrated Public Service Month programme is a service delivery improvement programme and an integral part of the Batho Pele Revitalisation strategy.

This year, it is happening from 29th August to 02nd October across the country.

It seeks to instil good ethics and professionalism in public servants’ work.

To recognise and celebrate the hard work and commitment of public servants throughout the country.

To recommit and rededicate the public servants to the principles of Batho Pele and the Service Charter.

These include self-introspection, open and transparent response to critical issues like professionalism, ethical conduct, commitment and patriotism and corporate ethos,

The thrust of Batho Pele, as I have said, is Putting People First.

As we know, principals are the heart of any school, the sharp-end as it were.

Thus, they must walk the talk.

If a principal is in tune with the community he/she serves, the whole school will follow.

Programme director, as part of going back to the basics, for me, that means embracing skills for the changing world, such as Robotics and Coding.

As we ought to know, digital skills are now the new gold of basic education, alpha and omega, if you insist.

I am happy to report that the development of the Grades R–9 Coding and Robotics curriculum by a team of experts was concluded in January 2020.

The Coding and Robotics curriculum is intended to ensure that learners leave Grade nine having acquired the necessary digital skills for the changing world and to adequately face the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

We gazetted the draft CAPS for Coding and Robotics Grade R-9 for public comment on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

These have simultaneously been submitted to Umalusi the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training for quality assurance.

Project Management Teams have been established in each of the nine provinces to oversee the introduction of the new curriculum.

A National Training Team has been orientated on the Grade R-3 and Grade 7 Curriculum.

Facilitators' and participants' orientation manuals have been developed.

Learner and Teacher resources have been developed and uploaded on the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Moodle Platform.

Programme director, I am happy to announce that Sasol has partnered with us to pilot the Coding and Robotics curriculum in 110 project schools across nine provinces.

The pilot will benefit teachers from 1 200 schools and 60 000 Grade R-3 and Grade 7 learners.

The European Union (EU) funding has been made available for the pilot project.

Coding and Robotics lesson plans for Grades R-3 and Grade 7 have been provided to all the piloting schools.

A total of 728 teachers in Grades 4-6 and 8 were orientated on the Coding and Robotics curriculum.

A total of 896 Foundation Phase teachers are attending the Coding and Robotics content training conducted by the University of South Africa (UNISA).

We have visited 26 schools to monitor the Coding and Robotics pilot project implementation.

Lessons from the ground make it clear that we need to provide infrastructure and training faster to many more teachers in these early stages if we are to make a difference.

The Covid-19 hurricane taught me what should have been evident by now that Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) is a game changer.

Programme director, I will present a truncated progress report on the rollout of ICTs in the sector at this conference.

I urge principals, parents and stakeholders to pay attention to this programme as it can short circuit our many problems in the sector.

From the outset, we resolved that implementing ICT in the basic education sector required a collaborative effort between Government and the private sector.

To date, 214 special schools were provided with a school-based solution consisting of assistive devices, ICT equipment, and connectivity through the Universal Service Access Obligations initiative.

The number of schools ICT-connected schools since 2019 has increased significantly from 68,96% to 74.4% in 2021.

In recent years we have launched various initiatives in the ICT space for basic education.



In March this year, we launched with fanfare the Vodacom Virtual Classroom.

The Virtual Classroom will make a difference to teachers and learners in the selected schools by improving connectivity and making gadgets accessible, thus enhancing computing skills and appreciating the power of the ICTs.

Secondly, this solution in secondary schools will allow teachers to transform their pedagogical practices by providing them with improved educational content and more effective teaching and learning methods.

In October last year, we launched the MTN Online School.

The Online School solution was developed in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT).

This new innovation allows us to have all learning resources in one portal designed for learners and teachers with our Department and MTN Foundation experts.

The Vodacom Virtual Classroom and MTN Online School solution will improve the learning process by providing more interactive educational materials that increase learner motivation and facilitate the easy acquisition of basic skills in various subjects.

For these virtual platforms to make the desired impact, we must ramp up the ICT professional development for all teachers.

I urge teachers to know that they, too, like diamonds, are forever hence the need to never stop learning and studying.

Lifelong learners and readers are real gems in basic education.

I wish you well at your conference.

Let's get back to work and polish those diamonds, for our country needs them, shining and sparkling.