



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister for Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, during the Release of Thrive by Five Index held at the Sandton International Convention Centre

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Programme Director

Consul General of the US Embassy, Vincent Spera

Jacques Celliers, CEO of FNB

Sipho Silinda - CEO of FNB Public Sector Banking

Andrew Karas, USAID Southern Africa Mission Director

Nicole Biondi, Head of Communication and Marketing: Innovation
Edge

Sonja Giese, Project Lead: Thrive by Five Index

Senior Officials from Government

Members of the ECD Sector

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I rise to give credit where credit is due.

We are gathered here because of the visionary leadership of FNB CEO Jacques Celliers and the brains trust of people at Innovation Edge, for they steered the research ship to produce the first-of-its-kind Thrive by Five Index 2021.

We humbly acknowledge the generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and ECD Measure.

We do not take support from the private sector, international friends, and our social partners for granted.

Your contribution goes a long way in cementing the foundations for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, united and prosperous society based on justice, equality and fundamental human rights.

We have to continuously endeavour to build an equal society, right the wrongs of yesteryear, and heal the wounds of the past as instructed by our Constitution.

However, the future of our homeland is looking brighter after years of policy inertia, state capture and weakened public institutions.

This week, news broke that Moody's credit ratings agency isn't so moody after all.

This week, they upgraded SA's outlook from negative to stable because "South African fiscal position has markedly recovered".

Furthermore, Moody's praised South Africa for its ability to keep under control the growth of its public sector wage bill.

Similarly, SARS is now firing from all cylinders after they overshoot their revenue collection for the 2021/22 target of R1.21 trillion to a staggering R1.56 trillion.

We applaud the President, His Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa, for yet another successful fourth South Africa Investment Conference that raised R332 billion in one sitting, bringing the total value of commitments to date to R1.14 trillion in four years.

Our country is once more open for business.

Policy uncertainty and political risk are decreasing.

Despite energy challenges and other matters, Team SA is back on track.

We have a fine legal fundi in the brand new Chief Justice Judge Raymond Zondo to help us reimpose the courts' authority and sustain our lifeline, i.e. the rule of law.

We welcome the President's decisive judgement to appoint a new police commissioner, a career cop, General Fannie Masemola, whose immediate task is to help us reimpose the State's authority after the sad scenes of the July unrest.

Programme director, it warms my heart to address this Thrive by Five Index 2021 launch that seeks to paint a picture of the critical developmental milestone of our children by the time they turn five.

The Thrive by Five Index constitutes the first (baseline) in a series of nationally and provincially representative surveys that will monitor trends over time in the proportions of children aged 4-5 years who are 'on track' for their age's key areas of development.

Furthermore, the Index provides us with a starting point measure against which to monitor the progress in improving the quality of early learning services for children over time and allowing us to intervene timeously to get children back on track.

This is a historic occasion in that, until now, we did not have national data to track these critical developmental indicators of our children before Grade R.

The Thrive by Five Index provides us with a measure of service quality and child outcomes when this function shift occurs.

Consequently, the Index will support South Africa to change children's trajectories by presenting timely and reliable data in easy-to-understand and action ways.

This will help with monitoring and reporting trends over time to ensure greater accountability; and

Furthermore, it will analyse trends to help those with the will to create change within the public and private sectors.

We have resolved to rejig the ECD sector because not only is it an essential building block for a quality primary and secondary education system but critical for achieving equality of opportunity.

In other words, it is also a foundation of an inclusive economy and just society we seek to build.

The timing couldn't be more perfect, as it comes seven days after we assumed the complete coordination of the early childhood development function.

As I explained at the function shift launch event seven days ago, early childhood development needs and services are interdependent.

Thus, we have adopted a whole government approach to the delivery of a bouquet of services to meet the needs of our children.

We are mindful of ensuring all children in South Africa are developmentally on track before starting school.

This will require collaboration between multiple government departments and social partners.

In the main, these include Basic Education, Health, Social Development, Treasury, and Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation).

Obviously, one cannot contemplate talking about early childhood development without mentioning the generous support of Corporate SA, non-governmental players, community-based organisations, and researchers.

Thus, the inaugural Thrive by Five Index launch fortifies our belief in strong partnerships for growth in basic education, as referenced by the National Development Plan (NDP).

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.

Therefore, the Index is a critical building block in our quest to roll out a new reimagined early childhood development sector.

There is no better way to start building the future we imagined than to focus on the early learning foundations.

Early childhood education is the foundation for cognitive development by its very nature.

The success of the function shift will depend in part on understanding the need for improved universal access to ECDs and equitable access to quality ECD services.

Yesterday, I told a Basic Education District Conference in Durban that we must use the power of basic education to bridge the gap between urban and rural, information-rich and information poor, black and white, men and women, and finally between rich and poor.

The new dawn of the early childhood development sector gives us a second chance to deal head-on with the intergenerational poverty and rising inequality in our homeland rooted in vastly unequal opportunities for our youngest children.

We are already alive to the fact there are massive inequalities that persist in our homeland when it comes to the experiences that children have in the first five years of life.

We know that poor children are more likely to live in households with poor access to early health care and nutrition and limited resources for early learning.

They are also less likely to access early learning programmes.

It is high time to deal with the elephant in Zoom.

Finally, we focus on the heart of the problem in our quest to improve learning outcomes by concentrating on the crucial first five years of life.

The first five of life is when the human brain grows fastest and is most responsive to its environment, care, and learning opportunities.

During this period of development, not only does the brain learn best, but it sets up the foundation that will support lifelong learning.

Experiences during early childhood shape the architecture of the developing brain.

This is in line with the ancient wisdom of the Nguni people in our country, who insist that the tree is bent while still wet.

All of this depends on strong leadership, technical knowledge and expertise within the relevant departments and across all the spheres of government responsible for the delivery of a bouquet of ECD services.

Thus, today's Thrive by Five Index results release is a high watermark occasion.

At the outset, the Index gives us a bird's eye view of the prospects and complexities of the early learning landscape in SA.

Programme director, I am pleased to say the Index has practical utility for the early learning sector.

We will use the Thrive by Five Index data to improve the quality of ECD programmes in various ways:

These include ECD practitioner development: The data will help us prioritise practitioner development to address domain-specific concerns, such as numeracy.

On curriculum and materials: The data will inform enhancements to the 0-4 curriculum and the development and distribution of learning resources associated with improved outcomes for key domains.

Data will also offer insights into whether differentiated strategies might be needed to address developmental concerns for boys and girls.

Furthermore, on regulatory and compliance systems: ECD programme registration and monitoring policies and processes can be better aligned to the necessary conditions for improved child outcomes.

Consequently, the data will support the case for increased funding for early learning programmes, which currently receive 1-2% of the government's annual education budget, reaching just 13% of the 5 million poor children who need subsidised programmes.

Interestingly, the data may help identify strategic opportunities for public-private partnerships and ensure that Government and non-

government funders allocate resources to the types of interventions most likely to lead to improved child outcomes.

Obviously, it will improve accountability: The data will inform enhancements to routine monitoring systems to ensure that we are tracking indicators most relevant to quality programming.

Finally, the dataset offers insights into the bridging programmes necessary as children enter Grade R.

These may include social and emotional preparation and/or domain-specific interventions.

Programme director, our work is cut out to change the trajectories of poor SA children who fall behind in their educational milestones even before entering a classroom.

There is no conceivable way in which we can realise our development goals of eliminating income poverty and reducing inequality without addressing the significant challenges that our children face in their earliest years.

We have to tackle the injustice of unequal opportunities in early childhood space.

We must, with urgency, decrease the gap between young children in the richest and poorest households at the point of entry into school.

We must increase the percentage of young children in our country who thrive by five, setting more children up for success.

In conclusion, the Index gives us hope and a clear roadmap into the future.

Again, we extend our gratitude to our sponsors, partners, local and international partners and researchers for your service to the nation.

I thank you.