



**basic education**

Department:  
Basic Education  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Address by the Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga,  
Delivered at the UNESCO International Literacy Day**

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Africa.

Chairperson, it is with humility that I address the 2021 UNESCO  
International Literacy Day.

The 2021 theme talks about the “Literacy for a human-centred  
recovery: Narrowing the digital divide.”

It is an important discussion in the context of the rampant Covid-19 pandemic that has forced many across the globe to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies to advance the right to literacy.

Literacy is a human right and the basis for lifelong learning.

It empowers individuals, families and communities and improves their quality of life.

Because of its “multiplier effect”, literacy helps eradicate poverty, reduce child mortality, and curb population growth.

It also contributes to achieving gender equality and ensure sustainable development, peace and democracy.

In today’s rapidly changing and knowledge-based societies, the acquisition of basic literacy skills and the advancement and application of such skills throughout life is critical.

We are acutely aware that our learners haven’t fared well despite notable improvements in the recent rounds of international testing systems as a country.

Be it the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) or The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Although not yet to celebrate, we have also noticed an upswing in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assessments.

We have committed ourselves to improve South Africa's average in SACMEQ results for Grade six Languages and Mathematics from 495 to 600 points by 2022.

We intend to improve the average Grade eight scores in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) from 264 to 420 points by 2023.

By 2030, we hope to reach the desirable 500 centre points in TIMSS for the Grade eight scores.

As a result, of these lofty goals, South Africa has added a new impetus to the literacy endeavours since the May 2019 general poll.

We remain convinced that literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy are the heartbeats of basic education.

His Excellency Mr President Cyril Ramaphosa has given us as the basic education sector a mandate to ensure that every learner can read with comprehension across all the subjects by their tenth birthday.

Thus, we have since coined eleven priorities to take the basic education sector to the next level.

Invariably, we decided that improving the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, especially ‘reading for meaning,’ is now our apex priority.

In 2019, we launched the National Reading Coalition (NRC) to support reading improvement across the country.

The NRC’s main tasks are establishing reading clubs, training teachers, and material development in Reading, Numeracy and Literacy.

They also have to mobilise resources and expertise to enhance quality teaching and learning in the reading, numeracy, and literacy space.

The NRC has developed and advocated a national plan that aligns and coordinates various initiatives that support existing initiatives, including the ‘Read to Lead’ campaign.

Subsequently, we have launched a comprehensive “cradle to grave,” Integrated National Reading Sector Plan.

The spanking new *Integrated National Reading Sector Plan* aligns with our policy lodestar, the *National Development Plan (NDP)* that seeks to achieve critical developmental milestones by 2030.

The *NDP* envisions that by 2030, schools will provide all learners with quality education, especially in Literacy, Mathematics and Science.

The National Reading Sector Plan is an overarching evidence-based strategy that will alter the country's entire reading and literacy landscape.

It complements rather than replace all existing literacy initiatives, including the *Read to Lead Campaign*.

The main thrust of our comprehensive National Reading Sector Plan is to ensure reading for meaning across the curriculum, in all grades, and in all schools throughout the country.

Our plan is to ensure that we teach all our learners to read well, to read for meaning.

By 2024, the plan would have been successfully implemented throughout the system, meaning: wall-to-wall coverage, circuit by circuit, district by district, and school by school.

This means all teachers would have been trained on the latest reading pedagogies.

This National Reading Sector Plan will be supported by teachers and subject advisors trained on reading methodologies.

All our learners would have been provided with a minimum reading pack for improving their literacy levels.

We would have mobilised civil society across the nook and cranny of our country to be part of this reading revolution.

All parents of school-going children will form the backbone of this National Reading Sector Plan

As Government, we have resolved that we need to socialise all our learners into becoming life-long readers.

We must support them in their reading for academic purposes, and for knowledge and for enjoyment.

We have emphasised in our public messaging that the importance of literacy is not a portion of education; it is education.

Since 2017, we have implemented the Primary School Reading Improvement Plan (PSRIP) in this regard.

The programme aims to improve literacy and reading outcomes in Grades 1-6, with a key focus on teacher development and support.

The PSRIP aims to strengthen the capacity of Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers to teach learners how to read more effectively.

It achieves this by improving the skills of Subject Advisors to provide adequate support to teachers and upskilling School Management Teams (SMTs).

We have launched the much-vaunted Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) to ensure evidence-based tracking of improvements.

The objective of EGRA is to track the reading proficiency levels of learners at regular intervals with a sample of learners in all the 11 official languages.

We focus on languages offered as the Languages of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) and English First Additional Language (EFAL) to inform interventions in the teaching and learning of reading.

We have also launched the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS).

The developmental objective of EGRS is to inform national scale-up of evidence-based programmes that positively impact reading and literacy outcomes in the early grades

The EGRS aims to build evidence about what works to improve the learning and teaching of early grade reading in South African schools.

It is a research project that has investigated the impact of alternative forms of support.

It focuses on the implementation of the Home Language Literacy and English First Additional Language curriculum.

Interventions have been undertaken in the North West province (2015-2017) and Mpumalanga Province in 2017-2019.

We have begun to provide teacher toolkits with the following: lesson plans, workbooks, Big Books, graded readers, most importantly, interactive digital content and trackers.

We are also providing teachers with tablets loaded with digital curriculum resources to aid in teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I am proud to announce that South Africa has designed its first-of-its-kind online programme dubbed *The Comprehension Across the Curriculum* that offers an opportunity for teachers to be upskilled in reading comprehension.

The programme will be launched later this month and will train teachers to teach reading comprehension skills across the curriculum.

In line with the UNESCO advice, South Africa intends to relaunch the much improved Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector under the basic education department in 2022.



The planned ECD function shift from Social Development Department provides us with an opportunity to implement early years literacy and numeracy programmes.

To this end, we have already conceptualised a Service Delivery Model for ECDs, which spells out our vision improvement.

In the meantime, we are working with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to promote play-based learning in ECDs and the Foundation phase.

To address disparities in basic education, we have the novel Rural Education Assistants' Programme (REAP).

The REAP programme uses Education Assistants in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases (Grades 1-4) to improve the quality of education, particularly literacy and reading skills, in rural schools.

The programme aims to improve learner performance in these schools and improve the livelihoods of unemployed youth by equipping them with skills that will increase their employability and chances to study further.

In conclusion, in response to the stubborn reading challenge, we have partnered with UNICEF to deliver on a European Union (EU) funded programme.

This programme is called Reading and Leadership Strengthening in South African Schools for Learning during Covid-19 and Beyond (REAL SA).

The programme is implemented in 650 schools across three provinces (Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal).

The REAL SA programme comprises five projects: Reading Recovery, Curriculum Trimming; Assessment; School Leadership and Management; and Monitoring and Evaluation.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to congratulate Ms Elinor Sisulu for winning the UNESCO King Sejong International Literacy Prize. I am glad that Ms Sisulu is joining the webinar to share with us all the work of her Foundation.

I thank you.