



**higher education
& training**

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Higher
Education and Training**

Prof Hlengiwe Mkhize, MP

At the

SADC Meeting of Ministers of Higher Education

Venue: Southern Sun OR Tambo Airport

Date: 05 June 2012

Programme Director

SADC Chairperson and Angolan Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Dr Maria Candida Pereira Teixeira

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Directors-General and Permanent Secretaries

CEO of SARUA, Ms Piyushi Kotecha

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to take this opportunity to welcome you all, and thank you sincerely for attending this important meeting for Ministers responsible for Higher Education and Training in the SADC region. As South Africa, we are very pleased to host you, and it is indeed an honour and a privilege to have you here.

The reason why we requested this special meeting was to create a platform for all of us as Ministers responsible of Higher Education and Training in the region, to reflect and share experiences on how we could speed up the revitalisation of higher education in the region. You will recall that Minister Nzimande proposed this meeting at the ordinary meeting of SADC Ministers of Education that was hosted by Namibia in 2011 and that meeting accepted the proposal. We are, therefore, delighted to welcome you all here today.

We are fully aware that, as a region we have platforms and structures in place that are tasked specifically to deal with these issues, and indeed, we all remain committed to the implementation of resolutions adopted in these structures.

However, after engaging with several studies on the status of higher education in the region, particularly a series of studies produced by SARUA, we felt the need to suggest this special meeting. The purpose is to examine some of the **themes emerging from these studies**, with the view to develop concrete strategies for the reinvigoration of higher education in the region.

One of the key themes from these studies relates to **access and the participation rate** in higher education, particularly with reference to young people. Young people, as you are aware constitute more than a half of the region's population. Thus, it becomes imperative that our policies and our strategies are responsive to the issues and challenges they face. After all, that is our main target audience.

Programme Director, the level of higher education provision and enrolment rates in the SADC region rank amongst the lowest in the world. Studies show that tertiary enrolments in the region were on par with enrolment rates in other parts of the world in the 1970s. By 2010, enrolments in those regions had risen by more than 20 percent compared to a mere 6,3 percent in the SADC countries.

It is apparent that our higher education system in **the region is not growing sufficiently in either size or capacity**, in order to meet the demand of a growing population of youth and to meet their needs.

Firstly, we do not have enough institutions of higher learning despite the new public and private institutions which have been built in various countries in the region over the last two decades

Secondly, we do not have enough academic personnel. Besides not having enough academics, the majority of those in our systems do not possess enough training either in teaching or in research or both. In South Africa, **only 33% of our academics have PhD qualifications**. Therefore, we depend only on 33% of academics to produce research outputs and to supervise Masters and Doctoral students. One result of this discrepancy is that **we are struggling to produce a new generation of academics**.

Thirdly, our indigenous languages are gradually dying. **We are not developing our indigenous languages** in order to make them languages of scholarship and research. Our youth are struggling to grasp learning content because they are taught in second or third language. The un-intended consequence to that is that, now parents start their children with English, French or Portuguese from an early age.

Fourthly, we seem to be unable to maintain and improve the facilities we currently have, to the extent that is necessary.

All these problems have a negative effect on access to higher education and must be tackled successfully if we are to ensure **quality institutions and quality graduates** with high level of skills needed by our respective countries and the region.

This gathering should confront some critical questions:

- What should we do to grow our higher education system in the region, so that we increase access to it?
- What should we do differently?
- How can we operate efficiently and in unison as a region in order to build synergies in our higher education systems?
- What timelines should we set for ourselves in order to realise tangible progress?
- What implementation mechanism should we put in place? and
- Which monitoring mechanisms are we going to employ?

In order to address the challenges facing us we need to have **funding** and that is also another theme of our discussions in this meeting. Simply put, where should we find money in order to meet these challenges?

In discussing funding, we should not be blind to the fact that we do not stretch the current pool of resources far enough in order to do more. Such a consideration should apply both to our individual countries and, most importantly in this meeting, to our region as a unit.

The SADC region is reported to be investing more per student than other countries with similar levels of educational achievement and income. These numbers refer to education as a whole and not only tertiary education. Nonetheless, our returns on investment in higher education, seemingly, do not compare favourably with those of other regions.

South Africa's investment on foreign students in 2010 amounted to R1 041 168 000 on students from the SADC region; for non- SADC students it amounted R735 761 000 and for all foreign students to R1. 78 bn.

It is a fact that previously our spending on education tended to concentrate more on primary education than in higher education. As you all know, this was due to pressures and prescripts of the World Bank, through its Structural Adjustment Programmes which discouraged investments in higher education in favour of the lower levels of education. The idea was that for the developing countries, primary education presents higher returns on investment than university education, which, by and large, was considered a luxury for these nations.

We are happy that even the World Bank has since turned away from this orthodoxy, and that there now appears to be a consensus, both internationally and on the continent, around the value of higher education and its contribution to socio-economic and technological development. In South Africa, our education pipeline talks to continuing vocational-FET-High Tech-Knowledge.

Another critical question that we have to consider in our deliberations moving forward is the question of **RELEVANCE** of programmes offered in our higher

education institutions for the developmental needs of our region. In considering this question we have to problematise the notion that all regions have to follow the same development path, especially to copy developed countries as if our development priorities are same. For instance we are a region rich in mineral resources, and we therefore we need to build regional capacity for beneficiation, invest in basic infrastructure and build our manufacturing capacity. Our education systems in the region must effectively respond to these priorities.

Colleagues, as much as it is a fact that we have over decades suffered colonialism, conflicts , apartheid and many other social ills we cannot continue to moan and lament. We should use our intellectual capabilities in order to fast-track change and development. This gathering today and tomorrow provides us with the opportunity to begin to increase the pace of change in higher education in our region. Where do we want to be in the next twenty or thirty years and how will we get there?

Colleagues, the view of the South African government is that education is a public good, and should remain as such. I believe that every effort must be made to increase public funding of higher education. However, government funding on its own may not always be sufficient for such a rapidly developing sector. Other sources of funding, including from public development finance institutions, private funding and donor funding, may be useful depending on the circumstances of a particular country. Furthermore, new ways of funding education should also be explored - such as graduate work schemes which allow for students to repay the costs of their studies through work after completion of their studies.

But despite all this, I believe that it is most beneficial to rely primarily on public funding as this will give our governments stronger possibilities to shape our education systems and maintain our sovereignty over them. Other sources of funding can be useful, but if we allow them to dominate our budgets they will soon dominate our policies as they have done to our detriment in the past.

Where we must rely on private or foreign resources, I believe our aim should always be to move to a situation where such funding does not dominate. In any case, this is an issue that we need to consider in our discussions.

The recent SARUA leadership dialogue held in October 2011 on ***Building a higher education scenario 2025 for developing a strategic agenda for development in SADC***, has made it clear that if the current level of investment in higher education is continued, the region will not be able to achieve its target of 30% tertiary enrolment by 2050 due to inadequate funding. In fact, if the current pattern continues, experts tell us that by 2050, SADC countries will fall even further behind other regions of Africa and the world at large with respect to tertiary enrolments.

Colleagues, we all know that our region, and the continent at large, face challenges of underdevelopment, including poverty, unemployment and gross inequalities, and so we certainly should not allow that these evils should be perpetuated. We need to increase our investment into higher education and devise strategies and mechanisms to ensure that education, and higher education in particular, becomes accessible to all our people especially the poor.

We need to explore all the available options in this regard, and **Open and Distance Learning** presents one such option. Open and Distance Learning education offers us an opportunity to expand access and reach to people who otherwise are not reachable through face-to-face education. We must build on our current initiatives and expand them and we need to develop our use of new technologies to ensure high quality distance education.

Open and Distance Learning is used internationally as a more affordable form of education, allowing more people to access education. However, we should be driven by developmental considerations and ensure that we respond to specific needs of our students. This must include ensuring that they have adequate

support as distance education can be a gruelling and lonely process, especially for those who have weak educational foundations and feel isolated with nowhere to turn for assistance.

Another key challenge is to improve the **quality of higher education**. Quality relates to teaching, and research. We need to make sure that our institutions have or develop the teaching and research capacity of their staff to ensure better learning experiences for students and enhanced research performance by the institutions. Teaching needs to be creative and reflective, developing a student as a whole and not just focus on memorising and rote learning. It is through quality teaching that enrolments will be accompanied by expected student success. We also need to strengthen our quality assurance systems to make sure that the programmes that our universities offer, both through contact and distance learning, are of high quality, and meet international standards.

Programme Director, in brief, this meeting will engage, amongst other things, the findings of the SARUA study ***“The Future of Higher Education in SADC: SARUA Recommendations to Higher Education Ministers”*** with particular reference to the issues I have highlighted.

Positive developments include the expansion of the higher education sector in terms of increasing enrolments and provisioning. In this regard, we have also witnessed the growth of private providers. With the increasing demand for higher education, we need to consider **private higher education** and the potential role it could play in expanding access to higher education in the region. This calls for more dedicated studies into this sector to know more about its size and shape, and the policy environment that regulates it in different countries in the region. I am pleased that SARUA has already embarked on this process, and we look forward to their findings.

Some of the challenges highlighted in the studies include issues such as persistent low research outputs, shortage of staffing especially properly qualified teachers and lectures, inadequate quality assurance mechanisms, lack of sufficient data on private higher education and its impact, inadequate infrastructure, as well as the overall lack of accurate and comparable data on higher education in the region for systems planning.

Several initiatives have already been put in place to address some of these challenges, and we need to continue to work harder and to collaborate with one another to ensure that our higher education systems compares favourably with the best systems in the world.

We also need to examine differentiation of our higher education system in order to meet the different needs of our people. A **differentiated system** – ranging from research universities to universities of technology (polytechnics) and technical and vocational education and training colleges, with diversified programmes will go a long way in meeting the diverse educational aspirations of our communities. In South Africa we are now conceptualising all these various institutions as part of a single, coherent, differentiated and well-articulated post-school education and training system in which the different institutions work in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing fashion to the benefit of all our people, and particularly our youth. I invite you to read our Green Paper in which our vision is set out.

A critical matter affecting both individual countries and the region as a whole is that of **articulation**. To respond effectively and holistically to our challenge requires that our higher education system needs to have a well-designed and harmonious relationship with our schooling and vocational education and training systems. For example, there should be no dead-end qualifications in the vocational training system; all vocational qualifications should offer the possibility of moving on to higher vocational qualifications or to university degrees. This not

only opens up opportunities for capable individuals but also raises the general status of vocational qualifications.

Another important articulation issue is the articulation between educational institutions and places of employment so that students can find real workplaces to get experience during or immediately after the course of their studies. Such experience is essential to producing skilled artisans, technicians, professionals or administrators. In our country we have engaged private employers, state-owned enterprises and other government departments in order to develop relationships between them and our universities and colleges. Our ambition is to turn every workplace into a training space.

Articulation is also an important issue for the region as a whole. We must aim to achieve a situation in which a qualification achieved in any country in the region is recognised in all other countries and leads to opportunities for further study anywhere else in the SADC region. In this respect we need to make further progress towards a broad, common regional qualifications framework. This will require a lot of work and a lot of consultation in all of our countries and the sooner we get started the better.

As important as it is for our educational institutions to prepare our youth for employment, we must not lose sight of the fact that they must also produce responsible citizens and contribute to the way society thinks and functions. In order to build a relevant, socially responsive higher education system in the region, we need to create and strengthen linkages between higher education institutions and civil society formations in an exploration of the role of higher education as a space for public engagement, democratisation and citizen empowerment in Southern Africa. In this respect, we should not allow the humanities and social sciences as areas of study to be neglected in our enthusiasm to promote economic growth.

We must share experiences and **build stronger partnerships between our universities** in the region. We need to continue to promote student and staff mobility in the region. Our universities should embark on joint research programmes on areas affecting our people in the region such as HIV/AIDS, rural development and land reform, environmental studies, poverty eradication, socio-economic inequality, democratisation and conflict resolution. The SKA project to host some of the world's most sophisticated space research equipment is a good example of what could be achieved when we pull together as a region.

One phenomenon which ties South Africa to most other countries in the region is **cross-border higher education**. In 2010 there were 66 113 foreign students in South African universities of which 70% (46 200 students) were from SADC countries. In line with the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, students from SADC countries pay the same fees as South African students for tuition and accommodation. This means that they are being subsidised by the South African government.

I am not raising this in order to complain as all our countries are interdependent and the strengthening of Southern Africa economies must inevitably result in the strengthening of South Africa's own economy. We do not have data on South African students who study in other SADC countries and I must admit that we have not been encouraging them to do so. However, I think that as pressure increases for us to expand university access for South African students, we must look at expanding the opportunities for some of them to study in other SADC countries. Perhaps we could use this meeting to begin a dialogue on the possibilities in this regard. Apart from educational benefits to the students involved, such arrangements could also contribute in strengthen the ties between our countries.

We need to drive our system in the direction where our university systems are able to compete with their counterparts across the world. Certainly the

challenges are many, and we cannot resolve them at once. We need to make choices on possible starting points, and areas of strategic and immediate investments, without necessarily losing sight of our long-term goal, which is to ensure that the higher education sector in the region is fully developed to deal with the specific challenges facing **our** students, **our** countries and **our** region. We will only compete with others if we can tackle our own challenges as well as others do theirs. While continuing to learn from and collaborating with others, we must always ensure that we set our own intellectual and developmental agendas, confidently, unapologetically and proudly.

This gathering has also presented an opportunity to have the Technical Committee on Higher Education launched yesterday. The Technical Committee will serve as a resource structure for the region on matters relating to higher education, particularly the implementation of some of the provisions of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training. Our discussions and resolutions of this meeting should also be carried forward by the Technical Committee.

I hope that at the end of our deliberations, we will have started a process to develop a clear plan to develop a higher education strategic framework for the region.

I really look forward to our deliberations.

Thank You