

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING, MR BUTI MANAMELA, AT THE 3SIXTY VAAL HIGH IMPACT LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2018

KOINONIA BIBLE CHURCH, SEBOKENG, GAUTENG

8 SEPTEMBER 2018

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It gives me great pleasure to address you at this 3sixty Vaal High Impact Leadership Summit 2018.

I am glad that this important event takes place here in Sebokeng in the Vaal.

The usual practice is to confine these events to Johannesburg or Cape Town or Durban.

We gather at a time when there are two commissions of enquiry underway in South Africa.

One into state capture and the other into tax administration.

We gather at the time of an increase in value added tax (VAT) which leads to a knock-on rise in the prices of food, transport, services and other things that we need on a daily basis.

We gather at a time of technical recession wherein our country has recorded negative GDP growth in two consecutive quarters.

We gather at a time where 3.3 million of our young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

Dark clouds seem to be circling this young democracy, threatening to engulf it.

Indeed times are tough.

And in these tough times, we must remind ourselves that this is no ordinary nation.

This nation has seen tougher times.

This is the nation that negotiated itself out of incessant conflict that was leading to civil war.

This is the nation that enshrined positive rights in our constitution making it one of the most admired constitutions in the world.

This is the nation that has arrested the spread of HIV and is now implementing the world's largest anti-retroviral therapy programme.

Let us not forget that this is the nation of Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu.

This is the nation of Ahmed Kathrada and Nkosi Johnson. This is the nation of Helen Joseph.

We are a nation of great leaders. While some of our great leaders may have passed on, there are many that are still around, seated right here in this auditorium.

However, there is much progress to note in spite of the difficult period that our country faces.

Formal households and dwellings have increased by 131% from 1996 to 2016. More people are living in formal houses today than ever before. Access to piped water have increased by 110% over the same period.

Life expectancy has increased by 16,6 % over the 2002-2017 period. All South Africans are now living longer.

While it may not feel like it, the murder rate has dropped by 49,3% since 1994.

Black employees in executive or top management has increased by 363% over the 1996-2016 period.

We must recognise this progress because the evidence that is in front of us is clear and compelling.

However, for each of these indicators mentioned, more can and must be done.

While we note the progress, it must spur us on to close the gaps and create a more equal and just society.

There has been much progress that has been made in the higher education and training sector too.

We have seen a 290% increase in university headcount enrolment since 1995 to 2015.

The number of black South Africans holding degrees have more than doubled since 2002.

You will recall government's decision to phase in "fully subsidised free higher education and training for poor and working class South Africans" over a five year period.

In many respects the announcement of this policy decision will change the higher education and training landscape forever.

The provision of fully subsidised free higher education and training is now extended to the children of the bottom 90% of South African households.

Government plans to have 400 000 poor and working class undergraduate students at public universities within 5 years compared to the 205 000 university students in 2017.

Government plans to have 600 000 poor and working class students at public TVET colleges within 5 years compared to 200 000 TVET college students in 2017.

The total number of students supported by NSFAS at full cost of study at public TVET colleges and universities will increase from a targeted 405 000 students in 2017 to 1 million students by 2022.

The vicious cycle of race, gender and class based inequality in educational access and attainment will be seriously disrupted by the implementation of fee free higher education and training for the poor and working class.

So as you can see, government is and will be making significant investments in higher education and training.

But the challenges we face within higher education and training cannot be solved by money alone.

The high dropout rate especially for first year students is worrisome.

The Department of Higher Education released a report in 2015 highlighting that 47.9% of university students did not complete their degrees.

Black students had the highest drop-out rate, with 32.1% leaving in their first year.

Drop-outs jeopardise our throughput and graduation rates and compromise the valued investments being made in higher education and training.

Ultimately they represent lost opportunities in a country that cannot afford them.

I appeal to you today, as private sector leaders, as community leaders, as religious leaders, as civil society leaders – help us to get young people to graduate in the stipulated time.

For every young person who graduates from a university or TVET college on time, they create a space for a new entrant into the system.

The higher education and training sector, like other sectors, has faced its fair share of leadership challenges.

The student movement has rightly highlighted the plight of fees and other impediments to higher education.

However the methods used to do this are concerning.

Intimidation, bullying and curtailing the freedom of thought and speech have proliferated during student protests.

The estimation of damage to property of universities amounts to over R786 million.

This figure will rise if you take TVET colleges into account.

At the same time we see an intransigent leadership by some Vice-Chancellors and TVET college leadership.

Stubborn, inflexible and uncompromising attitudes have fuelled the conflict.

This results in reduced or no dialogue at all.

Our higher education agenda is not served well by this kind of leadership.

We need a better, more principled leadership.

We need leadership that is flexible and more embracing.

A leadership that always embraces dialogue and is solution oriented.

Leaders, both student and institution leaders, must serve the greater good of higher education rather than narrow self-interests.

This brings me to my concluding point about leadership in society.

My call to you today is to Lead where you are.

It is for you to recognize the impact you can make irrespective of how less you regard your position, your role or the size of your office.

As Ghandi always emphasized, 'be the change you want to see'.

We cannot see change if we expect it only from others, but we have to also pull our weight towards effecting that change.

Sometimes, we are the best critics of the actions of others, and often times forget that we are polluting the prospect of societal change more by not realizing that it is more our action, than that of others.

Secondly, we need community leaders to rise up and multiply microzones of change leadership.

It is not enough to look for a messia from up there, when we in the process undermine the potential of local leadership.

Change comes from the school principal, counselor, teacher, nurse, artist and all those local heroes that we often times u deeming their impact.

Let's elevate those, and we will see them changing the microzones that they operate in and therefore become heroes of their local spaces.

In this way, we will also be recognizing leadership in others.

Any leader, whose track record is blemished with carcasses of killed leadership prospects, do not deserve being called leaders.

Leaders should elevate those whose they recognize in their space, and ensure that they succeed, otherwise they will leave office with a bitter taste.

We are all leaders in our own spaces, big and small, and therefore should rise to the occasion if we are to also hold others responsible.

Recently we have seen a rise in active citizenry in our country.

Many, many ordinary citizens have rightly called out the behaviour of public representatives on issues of corruption and poor judgement amongst others.

This is a positive and necessary action to build our young democracy.

And we must continue to hold public representatives accountable.

As we do this, we must ensure that we also live up to the accountability framework that is used for public representatives.

We cannot rail against corruption while we pay the cold drink money to a traffic cop to escape a traffic fine.

Or bribe government officials to get important tender information.

This is hypocrisy.

As leaders, we must not succumb to narrow self-interests and hypocritical behaviour.

This must be defeated at all costs.

The times are tough.

And it is especially during these times that we need leaders who will provide bold and principled leadership across all spheres of our society.

This leadership will move us into better times ahead.

Our country needs you.

I trust that you will rise to the occasion.

I thank you.