**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER YUSUF CASSIM MP**

**CATHSSETA Accounting Authority Stakeholder Engagement Session**

**Date:** 22 October 2026
**Venue:** Protea Hotel Breakwater Lodge, Cape Town
**Theme:** Looking Ahead: Building a High-Impact, Skilled Workforce, Future-Fit

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Programme Director,
Acting Board Chairperson of CATHSSETA,
Chief Executive Officer, Mr Marks Thibela,
Members of the CATHSSETA Accounting Authority,
Representatives of the Department of Higher Education and Training,
Representatives of employers, organised labour, training providers and industry,
Colleagues and guests,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage with CATHSSETA and its stakeholders at a time when the relevance, quality and impact of skills development are central to South Africa's economic future.

Let me begin by commending CATHSSETA for this programme and the approach it represents. Engagements of this nature create an important opportunity for reflection, constructive dialogue and collaboration. They allow us to assess the progress we are making, identify the challenges that remain and consider how we can improve the impact of our work.

As SETAs, we must be intentional about our priorities, our partnerships and the outcomes we seek to achieve. Our work must be aligned with the skills our economy needs, the realities of our industries and the opportunities our people need to participate meaningfully in economic life.

We must also remain conscious of the responsibility that comes with the resources entrusted to us. Government does not exist independently of the taxpayers who fund it. Similarly, SETAs do not exist independently of the employers who contribute through the skills development levy.

These contributions come with an obligation to demonstrate value. We must ensure that the resources entrusted to us translate into relevant skills, stronger industries, meaningful employment opportunities and tangible benefits for South Africans.

CATHSSETA is one of six SETAs whose oversight responsibilities have been delegated to me by the Minister of Higher Education and Training. I take this responsibility seriously. My approach is to engage constructively, understand the work being undertaken, recognise progress and identify where we need to improve.

Ultimately, our shared responsibility is to ensure that skills development responds to the needs of our economy while opening pathways for more South Africans to participate in it.

Today's engagement gives us an opportunity to consider how effectively our skills development system responds to industry needs and whether it creates meaningful opportunities for our citizens.

CATHSSETA has an important role in this work. Through sector skills planning, funding and partnerships with employers and training providers, it can help ensure that the skills people acquire are relevant to the sectors in which they seek to work and contribute.

Imagine young South Africans who enrol in training programmes with a clear ambition: to find work, earn an income and build independent lives.

They attend classes, acquire new skills and complete their training. They receive certificates recognising their effort and achievement, hoping these qualifications will bring them closer to their aspirations.

But then comes the question that matters most.

**What happens next?**

Do their qualifications open doors? Do employers recognise the value of their training? Are there workplaces ready and able to offer them their first opportunities?

For these young people, the difference between completing a programme and securing meaningful work is not an abstract policy debate. It shapes their ability to earn an income, contribute to their communities and participate in our economy.

This is the standard we must apply to skills development. We must look beyond the number of people trained and ask whether we are connecting what people learn with what our economy needs.

## 1. FROM TRAINING PEOPLE TO PREPARING THEM FOR OPPORTUNITY

South Africa cannot afford to treat skills development as a peripheral issue. Our unemployment crisis makes it central to our economic future.

Statistics South Africa's second-quarter 2026 figures put the official unemployment rate at 33.6%, while unemployment among young people aged 15 to 34 stood at 47.4%. In practical terms, this means that nearly half of young people in this age group who are participating in the labour market are unemployed. The official rate also excludes those who have stopped looking for work.

Behind these figures are people whose talents and ambitions are not yet translating into economic participation. There are also businesses that need capable employees and sectors where skills shortages constrain growth.

Skills development cannot solve unemployment on its own. However, when training is disconnected from economic demand, we risk wasting both public resources, including those generated through the skills development levy, and human potential.

CATHSSETA's mandate spans hospitality, tourism, conservation, gaming and lotteries, and arts, culture and heritage. These sectors contribute significantly to South Africa's economic and social life, but each has distinct workforce requirements.

CATHSSETA's Sector Skills Plan identifies difficulties in filling vacancies, including a lack of work experience and a shortage of suitably qualified candidates. It also identifies gaps in leadership, people management, conflict management and customer service.

These findings highlight a challenge that goes beyond access to training. We must ensure that programmes equip learners with the capabilities employers require, while preparing them to adapt and progress throughout their careers.

A credible qualification should provide a foundation for further learning, workplace participation and economic contribution.

That requires closer collaboration between those who deliver training and those who understand the realities of the workplace.

## 2. THE WORKPLACE MUST BE PART OF THE LEARNING JOURNEY

Consider a learner preparing for a career in hospitality.

Technical knowledge matters. But so does the ability to work under pressure, communicate with customers, solve problems and perform consistently in a real service environment.

These capabilities require practice, feedback, assessment and exposure to the demands of the industry.

CATHSSETA's Annual Performance Plan records findings from its evaluation of the Chef Artisan Programme. More than 70% of surveyed participants reported improved employment readiness, while 97% reported applying their skills in real-world settings.

The evaluation also identified areas requiring attention, including trade-test alignment, programme duration, consistency among providers, mentorship, employer participation and support after training.

This is a valuable lesson: positive results should be recognised, but they must also provide a basis for continuous improvement.

Employers cannot carry the entire burden of training. However, they must be active partners in preparing people for work. Training providers, employers and public institutions each have a role in ensuring that what is taught and learned reflects workplace expectations.

Work-integrated learning, internships, apprenticeships and structured workplace exposure must be meaningful components of the learning journey, not simply administrative requirements to be completed.

CATHSSETA should strengthen its partnerships with industry to expand quality workplace placements and create more opportunities for learners to gain practical experience. This must include finding workable ways for small businesses to participate.

Small businesses can play an important role in opening doors for young people. Unnecessary administrative barriers should not prevent them from offering learners their first workplace experience. Appropriate support and safeguards should make participation practical for employers of different sizes.

The objective is straightforward: workplace learning must help learners develop practical capabilities and improve their prospects of entering and progressing in employment.

## 3. MEASURE WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE CERTIFICATE

To understand whether training is making a difference, we must follow the learner's journey beyond programme completion.

CATHSSETA's track-and-trace study, covering 319 learners and 30 employers, provides useful evidence. It records that 58.5% of surveyed respondents had secured full-time employment, while others reported fixed-term or casual work.

These findings must be understood in the context of the study's sample and methodology. They should not be interpreted as a national employment rate or assumed to represent every CATHSSETA programme.

Nevertheless, they demonstrate the value of tracking outcomes and listening to employers.

Do we know whether learners have found work, continued studying, started businesses or struggled to enter the labour market? Are we using that information to improve programme design and funding decisions?

**We must measure outcomes, not simply count outputs.**

For CATHSSETA, this means looking beyond enrolments and certificates to assess whether learners complete their programmes, gain meaningful workplace experience, secure employment, establish businesses or progress into further learning.

I would like to see CATHSSETA strengthen its reporting on these outcomes and provide a clear annual account of what happens to the learners it supports. This should help us understand where programmes are succeeding, where barriers remain and where improvements are needed.

Public funding must produce measurable results. Consistent data, effective follow-up and a willingness to act on the evidence are essential to achieving this.

Our responsibility is not to guarantee outcomes that depend on many factors beyond one institution's control. It is to understand those outcomes more clearly and use what we learn to improve the system continually.

## 4. BRINGING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES

The opportunities created by skills development must also be accessible to South Africans who face geographical, financial and other barriers to participation.

During our recent engagement with CATHSSETA, we discussed expanding skills development through Community Education and Training colleges and Community Learning Centres. I would like to see these discussions translated into practical opportunities that reach communities too often excluded from economic participation.

Community-based learning can connect people with training closer to where they live and respond to local economic activity, including tourism, hospitality, cultural enterprises and small businesses.

This is particularly important in rural communities and areas where formal employment opportunities are limited. Learners do not all have the same access to transport, technology, infrastructure or proximity to employers. Our programmes must take these realities into account.

Working with Community Education and Training colleges and Community Learning Centres could help extend the reach of skills development. CATHSSETA should explore practical models for collaboration that respond to local needs and connect learners to credible pathways into further learning and work.

We must also consider the barriers that prevent people from participating in economic activity and building businesses. Geography, infrastructure and unnecessary bureaucracy should not become insurmountable obstacles to accessing training or pursuing economic opportunities.

The goal is to ensure that where someone lives does not unnecessarily limit their ability to develop skills, participate in the economy and contribute to their community.

## 5. PREPARE FOR THE ECONOMY THAT IS EMERGING, NOT ONLY THE ONE WE KNOW

We must also prepare learners for an economy whose skills requirements are changing.

Digitalisation, artificial intelligence, changing consumer expectations and the transition towards more sustainable economic practices are reshaping the capabilities businesses need to compete, both locally and internationally.

In tourism and hospitality, digital marketing, online booking platforms, data analytics and evolving visitor expectations are changing how businesses operate. Conservation and the cultural and heritage sectors must respond to emerging occupations and sustainability priorities. The gaming and lotteries environment is also changing, increasing the importance of capabilities such as data analytics, cybersecurity and digital platform compliance.

This is why sector skills planning must be an ongoing exercise, informed by evidence and regular engagement with industry.

Being future-fit does not mean abandoning foundational capabilities. Communication, critical thinking, leadership, problem-solving and customer service will remain essential. It means combining these foundations with the technical and digital skills that emerging working environments demand.

It also means recognising that learners will follow different pathways. Some will enter employment through learnerships or internships. Others will need technical qualifications, further study or support to establish businesses.

A future-fit skills system must accommodate these different routes while maintaining credible standards and responding to the needs of employers and communities.

We cannot predict every change the future will bring. But we can strengthen our ability to identify emerging needs, adapt our programmes and build partnerships that help people remain productive as the economy and competitive environment evolve.

## 6. ACCOUNTABILITY MUST LEAD TO ACTION

These ambitions place a clear responsibility on CATHSSETA’s Accounting Authority and management.

They must ensure that strategy translates into effective delivery, that resources are used responsibly and that the organisation can demonstrate the value of its work.

CATHSSETA’s 2026/27 Annual Performance Plan sets out targets for learner enrolments and workplace learning opportunities, including learnerships, skills programmes, internships and work-integrated learning placements.

These targets provide an important framework for planning and accountability. Their value, however, depends on the quality of implementation and the outcomes they help achieve.

A placement target should prompt us to examine the quality of the workplace experience. Completion figures should help us understand whether learners have acquired the intended skills and capabilities. Employment outcomes should help us identify what supports successful transitions and where additional intervention may be needed.

Accountability should do more than establish whether targets have been met. It should help identify what works, where delivery falls short and what needs to change.

It also means recognising that no single institution can deliver a high-impact skills system in isolation.

Government, SETAs, employers, organised labour, training providers and communities each have a contribution to make within the broader skills development ecosystem. Our responsibility is to ensure that these contributions reinforce one another and produce practical results.

As a newly appointed Deputy Minister, I see engagements such as this as an opportunity to strengthen that shared responsibility, identify improvements and ensure that evidence from implementation informs the decisions we make.

## 7. THE MEASURE OF OUR AMBITION

Let us return to the young South Africans with whom we began.

They have invested time and effort in learning. They have completed their training and are ready for the next step.

They should be able to expect a credible qualification that empowers them, relevant skills and a learning journey that has prepared them as well as possible for the opportunities ahead. They should also be able to expect institutions that listen, learn and improve when the system falls short.

We cannot promise every graduate a job, nor can skills development alone resolve the structural challenges facing our economy.

But we can make training more responsive to economic demand. We can expand meaningful workplace placements, track outcomes more consistently, improve access in underserved communities and prepare people for emerging skills requirements.

Above all, we can hold ourselves accountable for the difference our work makes.

**Our success will not be measured by how much money we spend or how many certificates we issue, but by how many lives we change, how many**

**opportunities we unlock and how many young South Africans we help move towards economic participation.**

We must also remember that the skills development levy represents an investment in our country's people and productive capacity. Levy payers must be able to see the value of that investment, just as taxpayers must be able to see the value of the public resources entrusted to government.

**Every rand must be accounted for, every programme must have a clear purpose, and our performance must be judged by the outcomes we achieve.** This is how we strengthen confidence in our institutions and demonstrate that skills development is contributing meaningfully to South Africa’s economic future.

That is what building a high-impact, future-fit workforce must mean: a skills system that helps people find their place in a fast-changing economy, while enabling our sectors and businesses to realise their potential.

This is the standard we should set for ourselves, and the work we must continue together.

I thank you.