



**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION DR BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITY (PSETA) – MICROSOFT - AFRIKA TIKKUN GLOBAL SKILLS INITIATIVE SOUTH AFRICA LAUNCH**

28 April 2021

Chairperson of the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) Accounting Authority, Mr Thulani Tshefuta;  
Chief Executive Officer of PSETA, Ms Bontle Lerumo;  
Chief Executive Officer of Afrika Tikkun, Ms Onyi Nwaneri;  
Managing Director, Microsoft SA, Ms Lilian Barnard;  
My Advisors;  
Officials from my Departments;  
Invited Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen; and  
Members of the Media.

**Good Afternoon**

It is my greatest honour to be with you virtually today in this important occasion of the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority

(PSETA) – Microsoft - Afrika Tikkun Global Skills Initiative South Africa Launch.

We are meeting in this launch, at the time the entire world is grappling with the COVID-19 global health pandemic. Our own capacity in South Africa to withstand the shocks caused by COVID-19 global health pandemic has been largely influenced by our social-economic circumstances. This has brought to the fore the deep inequalities which persist in our country until today.

However I must indicate that as a government and a people, we have learned a lot about the pandemic and made strong inroads into turning the tide against the virus.

Through instilling behaviour change by profiling everyday preventative measures and adopting a scientific approach to fight the virus, we helped stem the spread of this virus. Today we know much more about the pandemic and this has allowed us to respond more effectively to it.

As a PSET sector we continue to train thousands of peer educators and student volunteers, with support from our student leadership and our staff, to render knowledge, education and information to support South Africa massive countrywide vaccination drive.

It is our belief that it is impossible for **40 million people** to be vaccinated by the Department of Health, alone and as a result we have made available our universities and colleges to be possible vaccination sites.

In response to the coronavirus socio-economic impact, our has developed and consolidating our twin strategies on innovation and skills development. This is in support of our country's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), as announced by our President, Cyril Ramaphosa, in October last year. Provision of education to our youth and adults is an important dimension in any economic strategy.

It is also an undisputed fact that COVID 19 has acted as an accelerant on the back of previously existing levels of social inequality In our country. Education is therefore a very important weapon with which to fight poverty and inequality in society, and to roll back the negative impact of COVID-19.

Our goal as a higher education, science and innovation sector is to reposition our country not just to be a consumer of knowledge but also to be a producer of knowledge and new innovation.

I am delighted to point out that that in our own strategies, particularly in our skills plans, we do place emphasis on interventions to allow a large number of young people to access opportunities in the immediate-term to ensure that they are able to be absorbed into high-potential growth sectors of our economy in order to boost job creation.

Similarly, we are called-upon to develop interventions to support the re-skilling of workers so as to prevent further job losses in support of an inclusive economic growth.

In the first quarter of 2020 we had 16.4 million workforce, with the outbreak of this global health pandemic, the workforce decreased to 14.1

million. Put indications now are that our economy is recovering. As in the fourth quarter of 2020, we now have about 15 million workforce, through we have not yet recovered to levels we had in the first quarter of 2020.

I believe that this intervention which targets about 20 000 unemployed youth will go a long way. I welcome this initiative as it will continuously improve the prospects of our youth to meaningfully participate in our economy and support a number of initiatives we are undertaking.

COVID-19 provides us, both as government and the private sector a life time opportunity to inject new perspectives into how we can turn our socio-economic fabric around.

I am happy with this initiative and partnership involving the PSETA, Microsoft South Africa and Afrika Tikkun Services on the Global Skills Initiative South Africa (GSISA) especially that you are seeking to reach huge numbers of unemployed youth in all provinces in digital skills.

This Global Skills Initiative South Africa fits well with our drive to massify digital skills provision in our country, taking into account our transformational and developmental imperatives such race, class, gender, geography, age and disability.

The focus on skills is wide-ranging and entails optimising the regulatory environment, structural reforms to boost education and skills development and a concerted effort to build the skills base required by our changing economy ahead of global technology advances, to ease and cost of doing business and to create greater levels of inclusion for young people, women and persons with disability.

In our own skills strategy, the very first intervention is “**access to targeted skills programmes**”, with part of actions in this intervention focussing on digital economy and digital skills.

We have identified digital economy in our ERRP and skills strategy because digital skills cut across all of our economic activities.

Skills that we are strongly upon through our skills strategy, include: Big Data, Analytics, Software Development, Social Media, Internet of Things (IoT), Block Chain, Automation, Robotics, Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality and Cyber-Security, Data Analysis and Science, Cloud Computing and Machine Learning.

I therefore welcome this public private partnership. I want to see more of our collaboration, with the involvement of the entire higher education, science and innovation landscape, especially with our Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) Colleges, Science Councils and our Technology Innovation Agency (TIA).

We also are seeking your support for the implementation of the District Development Model (DDM) in which our PSET and our Science and Innovation sectors has a crucial developmental role to play.

The District Development Model (DDM) is a new integrated planning model that government is using to institutionalise an integrated, district-based, development approach aimed at fast-tracking service delivery and

ensuring that municipalities work together, with provincial and national government to realise local economic development.

It is through this model that we envisage establishment of our specialised colleges and universities in specific metropolitan municipalities.

Another important area in which we are seeking private sector involvement in on student funding.

All South Africans seek a better future for themselves and their children. I therefore call on everyone currently forming part of this partnership to make it work for all, especially our young people.

I would have not done my job if I do not reiterate government call for all of us to ensure that we fight the scourge of Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). It is our collective responsibility as both men and women to ensure that we double our understanding of our actions and inactions that perpetuate gender-based violence and femicide.

Lastly, COVID-19 is much still with us. Let us not drop our guard but keep up to all the safety protocols. Our government is rolling-out the vaccines in three phases and we are now entering the second phase of our vaccination programme. It take this opportunity to call upon all of you, to wait our turn for vaccination.

We must also fight against COVID-19 anti-vaccination misinformation which seeks to cast doubt on the safety and efficacy of the vaccines.

**I thank you**

**Word Count 1284**