



ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF THE VIRTUAL FOURTH ANNUAL NATIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEKGOTLA 2020

15 September 2020

Prof Ahmed Bawa, CEO of Universities South Africa (USAf);
Prof Henk de Jager, Chair of the USAf World of Work Strategy Group and Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Technology;
Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans;
Esteemed international guests and speakers;
CEOs and officials from private companies represented here today;
Officials from the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and other Government Departments present today;
Academics, support professionals and students;
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure for me to open the fourth annual national Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Lekgotla, held under the theme ***“Afrotech, African Entrepreneurship through Technology”***

We are also hosting this lekgotla as we celebrate the annual heritage month. During this month, as government we call on all South Africans to foster greater social cohesion, nation building and a shared national identity. It is during this month that a conducive environment is created for all people to embrace and celebrate what was inherited or bequeathed to us by our forebears.

Our annual national Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Lekgotla was unofficially established towards the end of 2016 and since mid-2018 the programme has been implemented as part of the University Capacity Development Programme, with Universities South Africa (USAf) acting as the Department of Higher Education and Training's implementation partner.

This programme is our well-considered integrated platform to develop the entrepreneurship capacity of our universities, students, academics and leaders in society.

For the first time this lekgotla is taking place as a virtual event, which brings about mixed feelings.

While we are disappointed about not being able to meet and enjoy each other's company as a result of Covid -19 pandemic, we equally celebrate the fact that we can, for the first time, open our virtual doors to colleagues and champions for entrepreneurship, innovation and technology from across the African continent.

We are no longer bound by the restrictions of budget and logistics. We can now include all stakeholders in the events that we will undertake. In

that sense, the EDHE Lekgotla 2020 can be celebrated as a truly inclusive continental event, that can be attended by participants from anywhere in the globe.

Again our capacity as a country to withstand the shocks caused by COVID-19 has been largely determined by our social circumstances and it has brought to the fore the deep inequalities that persist in our country until today.

We have learnt, for example, that perpetuating a situation where young people in rural areas do not have access to technology to enable them to work and to study is untenable.

This pandemic provides us with an opportunity to inject new perspectives into how we can turn our economy around, but also how we can really imagine our very society.

Young people must rise to the challenge of leading our recovery after the Coronavirus. Europeans are saying about their economy, we too should work towards our economy bouncing forward in the recovery phase, and not bouncing backwards. We have young entrepreneurs and business owners who through their innovative ideas have been able to change their communities for the better and create new employment opportunities, and they should also contribute to this objective.

The remarkable potential in our young people across all sectors and spaces is undeniable and young people from time immemorial have always been driven by changing the world, by changing the way things

are done, by changing the way we live, by changing unjust systems, by bringing about justice and bringing about a new world.

The moment that we now confront post COVID-19 calls young people across the length and breadth of our country to be part of that change and to be change agents.

It also calls on young people to rebuild our economy and make a difference in the lives of our communities.

It also calls on young people to be the young people who are going to underpin everything they do with the best of values, who are going to be rooted in principle in creating a South Africa that we can all be proud of.

I must declare upfront that as a government our commitment is irrevocable. We will continue to support our young people from cradle right through to young adulthood. We will continue to provide the education and training opportunities that provide our youth with the skills that are needed by our economy.

Our Lekgotla today takes place in the context of our innovation-led economic growth and development strategy, which requires us to address what is sometimes referred to as the “Innovation Chasm”.

In simple terms, this means addressing and removing the barriers that slow down and, in some cases, prevent the movement of ideas and inventions from the laboratory into products that play a crucial role in the productive economy, including in the commercial section of our economy.

This is a challenge that South Africa has long identified and our President, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa wants to address by focusing our government to be even more on innovation by bringing together the Department of Higher Education and Training and the Department of Science and Innovation under one Ministry.

This is aimed at closely aligning our skills development and innovation strategies much closer together in order to facilitate an innovation-led economic growth and development strategy.

We must make full use of this space to take further and strengthen entrepreneurial initiatives by ensuring that we integrate theory and practice. Effectively this means that we need to integrate our universities, TVET colleges, SETAs and our National System of Innovation (NSI).

Having said that, I must acknowledge that through the EDHE programme, on a smaller scale, we have made great strides in supporting the development of entrepreneurship and we continue to grow in output and impact annually.

The achievements of the EDHE programme are rooted in the exponential growth and acceptance of the programme and its objectives at universities nationally. Entrepreneurship in its different forms is now strategically recognised as a priority area within Universities, with University leadership increasingly supporting the development of entrepreneurship in their institutions.

Going forward it will be critical that the entire sector (universities, TVET Colleges, SETAs and the NSI) have integrated annual training workshops

for academics and support professionals, as well as the executive leadership workshops for Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans and TVET College Principals. This will go a long way to ensure that our sector's response in entrepreneurial development and economic development is recognised.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our dedicated drive to grow student entrepreneurship has been propelled by a number of focused projects, one of which was yesterday's third annual Studentpreneurs Indaba for all students who do business while studying.

Another example is the important work done by Universities in organising annual Student Entrepreneurship Week (SEW) programmes to raise awareness of entrepreneurship as an avenue for participation in the economy.

We are therefore looking forward to the first collaborative one-week virtual Student Entrepreneurship Week event, to be held in October which will be accessible to all students across the country. Ideally, going forward this event must integrate our university and TVET College students, so that it identifies the top student entrepreneurs from all the public universities and our TVET Colleges, supported by the NSI and the SETAs.

This year, with the current regional rounds having been completed and excellent student businesses discovered, we wait in anticipation for the national final round of the competition in November.

We must continue to provide the necessary support as government working together with the private sector.

We must also continue with the important work of advancing the entrepreneurship development agenda through our four Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) Communities, comprising of academics, support professionals, students and university leaders in doing the groundwork to pave the way for the economic participation of all our students.

I therefore call on all our institutions to recognise and support these individuals and their important contributions, in the hope that others will follow suit.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank dynamic leaders from our universities who ensure that projects such as the University Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Baseline Report which was launched earlier this year are realised.

This baseline study is instrumental in the research work which precedes the establishment of a university entrepreneurship policy. That said earlier, we need to work towards a consolidated national policy for entrepreneurship across our sector. Such a policy will therefore be our sector's contribution to economic development of our country.

Ladies and gentlemen

The other points that should come out of today's session are the relevance of our sector to resolving our socio-economic challenges and the need for

entrepreneurial orientation in our society so that we stimulate the economy.

Our country is battling one of the economic challenges of our time, with our economy shrank by only 16.4% from the first quarter and compared to the second quarter in 2019, the economy was 17.1% smaller.

We therefore must ensure that we continue to develop our societal skills through the National Research Foundation, the National Skills Fund, SETAs and Technology Innovation Agency, amongst others. Through these, as a sector we can continue to develop the skilled/knowledge workers that can generate new ideas and knowledge.

The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARCHI) and the Centres of Excellence initiative are establishing a number of instruments to deal with the development of new knowledge and requisite skills. It should be noted that this is a fraction of investments made by the Department of Higher Education and Training in skills development, and therefore in making use of the new HESI landscape a lot more can be done!

Again, this lekgotla should be regarded as cause for celebration – a celebration of the resilient and innovative spirit which resides in our students and graduates. It is in this spirit that they leverage the investment in their academic development to pave a way for themselves to participate in the economy.

We acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices of students who informally learn the ropes in business while they study. Working while studying is a daunting task at the best of times. We are aware that many students are

active in the large informal economy of our country and as universities, we should increasingly support the training and development of the informal sector through our community engagement.

Ladies and gentlemen

Our effort for entrepreneurial training can only serve to strengthen our commitment to an economy and development driven by the twin imperatives of skills development and innovation. But this also gives impetus to increasing efforts to empower our youth as well as stressing the benefits of integrating of entrepreneurship into the curricula of engineering and science faculties, including at TVET colleges.

The second point is on strengthening public private partnerships in all our academic programme offerings, including the creation of new industries and companies.

It is evident that the policy framework that government has provided facilitates the NSI to innovate – the Integrated Resource Plan and White Paper on Science, Innovation and Technology are to ensure inclusive development and growth.

While we celebrate the gender representation among students in our universities, with approximately 62% of graduates being women, I am concerned about the low representation of student women in entrepreneurship.

Against the backdrop of the scourge in gender-based violence, the economic empowerment of young women is critical.

I therefore would like to encourage our universities to identify the barriers to the participation of student women in entrepreneurship and to work with EDHE to address such barriers in future activities.

Having said that I would like to encourage our Student entrepreneurs across our continent to utilise every opportunity that your university and TVET education brings, consciously taking charge of equipping themselves with a variety of skills that might support their future participation in the economy, be it through employment or entrepreneurship in the broadest sense.

I also take this opportunity to commend our academics for having stepped up to the challenges and changes in the teaching and learning landscape, brought about by the covid pandemic.

I know that many of you have gone the extra mile to ensure that the outcomes of our academic programme are achieved and that students are supported.

We encourage you to persevere and to innovate as you keep the big picture in mind, namely equipping every student to participate in the world of work actively and meaningfully upon graduation.

Regardless of academic discipline, academics can be instrumental in creating an entrepreneurial mindset within all students, even if only through their comments, conversations and the teaching content they select.

I therefore call upon our academics and researchers at all African universities and Colleges to deliberately innovate with a focus on research that might result in commercialisable inventions, products, services and start-ups.

We have the capacity and expertise amongst ourselves to solve the problems of our continent.

Our sector is even under more financial pressure than before, given the unanticipated costs of measures to ensure the safety of all and institutions' adaptation to online teaching and learning – all against the backdrop of a marked decrease in income.

In this context, we urge all our institutional leadership, both universities and TVET Colleges, to continue to explore and expand entrepreneurial training.

We therefore need to find ways to redirect existing resources and infrastructure towards developing and supporting entrepreneurship. This will ensure that we entrench an entrepreneurial culture in our institutions, where invention and innovation give rise to entrepreneurial ventures.

As we gather here in cyberspace to explore the latest developments in entrepreneurship in our post school education and training sector, it is with an acute awareness of the plight of our people, more importantly the plight of our youth.

I am looking forward to the four days of information and experience sharing about the technological entrepreneurship success stories from our continent.

When we consider the investment – financial and otherwise – made in and by students in all our institutions, we must bear in mind that this is a necessary investment for our future generations.

I call on all stakeholders to support these torchbearers of the future and the businesses they have already started and those in planning.

We also must ensure that we work closely with the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, the National Youth Service and the National Youth Development Agency.

Thank you for attending the EDHE Lekgotla 2020. Thank you to our esteemed speakers who will be sharing their well acquired national and international expertise and development.

We encourage you to embrace this opportunity, not only as a learning and sharing opportunity, but as an opportunity to build bridges through continued engagement across the boundaries of faculties, institutions and countries.

Keep encouraging and inspiring each other and your students in these difficult times. Remind yourselves that you are the leaders our world needs right now, as you, once again, rise to the occasion.

We cannot become complacent. Never has our country needed our fervent and focused action to foster entrepreneurship as much as it needs it now. With these thoughts, I wish you fruitful and engaging deliberations in the sessions that you participate in.

I thank you

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