



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY
AMBASSADOR THEMBISILE MAJOLA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF ENERGY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2018 LEARNERS FOCUS WEEK AWARDS
DINNER, HELD AT THE ETHEKWINI CITY HALL, DURBAN ON THE
13TH OF JULY, 2018.

Programme Director Mr. Jacob Mbele, Deputy Director General of Energy

Hon Mthandeni Dlungwane, MEC for Basic Education, KwaZulu-Natal
Province

Counsellor Ntandoyenkosi Khuzwayo, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality

Professor Thabo Msibi, Dean of Education, University of KZN

Partners from SOEs and Private Companies,

Senior Government Officials,

Valued Educators,

Learners, our special guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening.

I am pleased to be with you again during this Learners Focus Week awards dinner held today in the year which marks 100 years since the birth of two of our struggle icons and heroes of our revolution who dedicated their lives in the struggle for freedom and contributed immensely to the birth of a new South Africa we all enjoy today as a rainbow nation.

This month we all celebrate the birth of the founding father of our democracy Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela under the theme: “Be the legacy”, as well as Mama Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu one of the shining examples of our struggle who dedicated her life to the service of her people under the theme: “A Woman of fortitude.”

The Centenary encourages all South Africans to recommit themselves to Mandela and Ma Sisulu values and principles. South Africans must work together to remove all obstacles which still divide our society and strive to build on the many ties that bind us together. Tata Mandela, cherished education and believed that education was critical to our success as individuals, families and a nation.

Indeed, education is central to development and to the improvement of the lives of young people globally, and as such has been identified as a priority area in internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the World Programme of Action for Youth. Education is important in eradicating poverty and hunger and in promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. Increased efforts towards education accessibility, quality and affordability are central to global development efforts. Despite significant improvements in increasing primary school enrolment in some regions, Development Goal of achieving universal primary level education is unlikely to be met. It is also important that universal access to primary education be followed by an

equivalent transition to secondary education, vocational training, non-formal education or entry into the labour market, especially for girls and young women. Worldwide approximately 10.6% of young people are non-literate, lacking basic numerical and reading skills, and as such lack the means to be able to sustain a living through full and decent employment.

With youth unemployment and underemployment at persistently high levels worldwide, and with many young working poor lacking even primary-level education, such youth unemployment and underemployment rates act to jeopardize social inclusion, cohesion and stability.

South Africa is not immune to this challenge facing our young people globally. As a big part of the population, you, young people are at the heart of the future of South Africa. Like most of the global young people, South African youth is confronted with high level of unemployment. 42% of people aged 15-34 years old are not in employment, education or training – that's over 8.2 million people. South Africa is in danger of missing out on the full potential of its young people. Many graduates who have completed university and college studies are also unemployed. This is in most cases due to the fact that most graduates are skilled in areas where demand in the labour markets for such acquired skills is low. However, the demand for learners who have studied STEM subjects is still considerable high.

According to the U. S. Department of Commerce, STEM occupations are growing at 17%, while other occupations are growing at 9.8%. STEM degree holders earn a higher income even in non-STEM careers. Science, technology, engineering and mathematics workers play a key role in the sustained growth and stability of the global economy. STEM education creates critical thinkers, increases science literacy, and enables the next generation of innovators. Innovation leads to new products and processes that sustain our economy. This innovation and science literacy depends on a solid knowledge base in the

STEM areas. It is clear that most jobs of the future will require a basic understanding of math and science.

Science is everywhere in the world around us. Technology is continuously expanding into every aspect of our lives. In the 21st century, scientific and technological innovations have become increasingly important as we face the benefits and challenges of both globalization and a knowledge-based economy. To succeed in this new information-based and highly technological society, students need to develop their capabilities in STEM to levels much beyond what was considered acceptable in the past.

I am pleased to note that your science competition has shown that you have applied your acquired knowledge to develop projects that have a potential to save energy, save water and improve diversify of our energy mix in South Africa as well as contributing to transport efficiency. This is commendable. I hope that the project competition is something that we pursue to commercial scale. I commit to discuss the outcome and showcase your projects to the Ministers of Basic Education, Higher Education and Training and the Minister of Science and technology. I will also request my officials to explore other opportunities to showcase the projects with the intent to explore possibilities of improving the project and subject them to further competitions.

I was informed sadly that few girls participated in the project competition. The persistent gender gap in education hinders youth development. Gender inequity in education is characterized by, among other things, lack of access to and availability of gender sensitive educational infrastructure, materials and training programmes, as well as a high dropout rate amongst secondary school aged girls. I am however, pleased that we have a gender balance here. I am also told that the awarding of bursaries has taken into consideration the gender balance.

Knowledge and education are key factors to the full and effective participation of youth in the processes of social, economic and political development. Increased attention to improving participation rates of young people, particularly marginalized youth, is needed to ensure that they acquire the knowledge, capacities, skills and ethical values needed to fulfil their role as agents of development, good governance, social inclusion, tolerance and peace.

I would like to recognise the energy stakeholders who have assisted us to contribute to and have greater focus on access to quality education and learning, as well as increased access to vocational, formal education for young people. This private public partnership is key for young people to be able to address their aspirations and challenges, fulfil their potential, and influence current and future social and economic conditions and opportunities.

I am pleased that as an energy sector together with our partners, we have initiatives such as the Learners Focus Week which allows us to make a small but significant contribution to capacitating our youth to become effective global citizens who through their skills will be able to make a difference to our future.

I have been informed that you all the learners have been active in your participation during the week and that the test was successfully conducted. It is now the time for the Department of Energy and all its stakeholders to recognise your hard and smart work during the week. You have all gained knowledge which you would otherwise not have acquired. This is a big achievement. For the best achievers, I congratulate you for your success. This is a beginning of your long academic career. As energy sector partners, we wish you all a successful career.

To all our partners, your contribution to this programme is appreciated. You are making a difference not only to the individual students but their families, communities and the country at large. We have some of our best and fine minds

of this country here tonight. Ensuring and investing in their education is empowering South Africa incorporated. I, on behalf of the Department of Energy and South African Government thank you all partners for investing in the future of this country. The bursaries will equip them with the relevant skills needed to find a job, set up a business or engage in other productive work, thereby contributing to the South African economy.

Sustainable and shared economic development increasingly depends on the capacity of both governments and private sector to implement targeted policies to reach marginalized groups and remove barriers to ongoing learning and entry into the labour market. Through this programme we have as a collective, assisted in a small way to change lives and the story of this country.

I want to thank all the learners for your commitment and hard-work. You have gained knowledge and no one can take that from you. Those who have been able to secure bursaries, this has been an added benefit to you. Appreciate it and make sure that you become shining stars for your school, province and the all the young people who have gone through the Learners Focus Week programme. Your success will determine how we as a Department and our partners continue to support the programme and ensure its sustainability.

All the teachers and Education Coordinators who have made it possible for the learners to participate in this programme your efforts are noted and appreciated by all stakeholders. Without your dedication, we would not be able to have the quality of learners we have today. All the adjudicators, presenters on the programme and exhibitors, we appreciate your contribution.

The sponsors and partners without your contribution and participation, we would not have been able to host the event and provide the awards dinner and the prizes we have today. I appreciate your dedication and support.

I thank you.