

Speech by Minister of Basic Education, Ms. Siviwe Gwarube at the Basic Education Lekgotla | 27 February 2025

His Excellency, President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa,
Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Professor Blade Nzimande
Deputy Ministers,
MECs for Education,
Members of the Diplomatic Core and Representatives from Multilateral Agencies,
Leaders of Teacher Unions, SGB Unions
Leaders of our education sector,
Representatives from institutions of higher learning,
Distinguished guests, partners, and colleagues,
Good Morning.

This 10th Basic Education Lekgotla is an essential platform for collective reflection, engagement, and planning for the future of our education system.

This Lekgotla has played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of Basic Education in South Africa, and I am honoured to address the 10th edition today as we continue our mission of improving educational outcomes for all children in our country.

Strengthening the Foundation: The Five Priorities of Government

Over the past several months, we have been engaged in an intense and deliberate process of defining the five key priorities of this Department.

We took these 5 priorities to a strategy session at Diep in Die Burg in September of 2024, where we laid the foundation for a new strategic reorientation of the basic education system to strengthen foundational learning. We then went through numerous iterations in our management meetings, engaging in extensive discussions to refine our strategy and this Department's annual performance plan.

While those were internal processes, this Lekgotla represents an opportunity to extend the conversation to our partners—to bring you along on this planning journey, so that you can enrich the process with your insights, expertise, and resources.

As government, we cannot do this alone. The task before us, to improve the quality of Education in South Africa, is a national imperative that requires collective action from all stakeholders.

Navigating Budget Constraints in Education

Colleagues,

We must acknowledge the pressing reality that we are operating in a fiscally constrained environment. The current economic climate is forcing difficult trade-offs across all sectors, and Education is no exception.

Budgetary constraints are a growing challenge, impacting our ability to expand infrastructure, recruit and train teachers, and improve learning resources. Provinces have retained the same basket of posts for the past 5 – 10 years while the number of learners enrolled in schools has been increasing; this has led to the average teacher-to-learner ratios trending upwards in the wrong direction, threatening learning outcomes.

Despite these constraints, our commitment remains steadfast: to ensure that every child in South Africa has access to quality education. To achieve this, we must rethink how we mobilize resources.

The private sector has an essential role to play in alleviating the financial pressures we face. We must build strategic partnerships that leverage private-sector innovation, investment, and expertise to supplement our efforts. This is not about outsourcing education—it is about enhancing our capacity to deliver quality learning experiences to millions of children.

The recently launched World Bank Country Update recommends that we review our school funding models and this is work that will be assigned to the soon to be constituted National Education and Training Council.

We also want impact investment initiatives, that can inject much-needed capital into the sector while ensuring sustainability and accountability. The reality is that the future of Education cannot rely on the state alone; our purse is overstretched, and we need partnerships for Education. We need to be bold and creative in how we unlock additional resources to drive positive transformation in our schools.

The Complexity of the Government of National Unity (GNU)

Mr President,

We are navigating financial challenges and operating within the complexities of a Government of National Unity (GNU). Bringing together ten different political parties, each with its own value system, priorities, and interests, has required unprecedented political maturity, resilience, and adaptability.

Governing under such conditions is no small task. It demands a new kind of leadership—one that is anti-fragile, capable of withstanding and even benefiting from shocks and pressures. It requires us to move beyond traditional political divisions and instead work towards a coherent, unified approach to governance.

For Education, our policy direction must remain clear and unwavering, even as the political environment shifts. The imperative to improve literacy and numeracy, strengthen early childhood development, and ensure that no child is left behind must transcend party politics. It must be a national priority that binds us all together.

In this GNU, we must find common ground and build a governance model that prioritizes the best interests of our children. This requires ongoing dialogue, negotiation, and, most importantly, a shared commitment to the long-term future of our country.

Celebrating a Decade of the Basic Education Lekgotla

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Basic Education Lekgotla—an occasion that calls for celebration and reflection.

Through the Lekgotla, The education sector has been able to engage with leading experts, researchers, and practitioners to ensure that our policies are informed by

evidence and innovation. We have strengthened collaborations between government, civil society, and the private sector to drive meaningful change in Education. And most importantly, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to placing learners at the center of everything we do.

Looking ahead, we must build on this foundation. The lessons we have learned over the past decade must guide us as we navigate the next phase of educational transformation. We must continue to challenge ourselves to do better, to think differently, and to push the boundaries of what is possible in basic Education.

The Need for Thinking Partners in Education

As we move forward, I want to extend my deepest appreciation to all the organizations that have generously given their time, expertise, and intellectual property to the Lekgotla. The education sector does not only need financial partners, it also needs thinking partners.

We need collaborators who will help us analyze trends, interpret data, and make sense of a rapidly changing world. We need institutions, researchers, and policymakers who can bring fresh ideas and bold solutions. We need partners who share our vision of a thriving education system and who are willing to invest their knowledge and creativity in making that vision a reality.

To those who have walked this journey with us, and to those who are joining us for the first time, I value your contributions and look forward to working together to build an education system that truly empowers every child in South Africa.

Conclusion

Colleagues, partners, and friends, Education is the foundation of our nation's future. The work we do here today and in the months and years ahead will determine the trajectory of millions of young lives. The challenges we face are significant, but so too are the opportunities before us.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of this Lekgotla, let us recommit ourselves to the goal of quality education for all. Let us be bold in our ambitions, collaborative in our approach, and unwavering in our commitment to our learners.

Thank you. Let us get to work!