

Presentation at Ntataise ECD Conference on Monday 18th August 2014

The current status of the NDP

Commissioner Elias Masilela, Commissioner of the National Planning
Commission

Introduction

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the leadership of Ntataise and the organisers of this event, for inviting the Commission to come and share with you, as well as update you on progress. It is an opportunity to keep the Commission accountable.

I am honoured to have been given this opportunity to deliver one of the most meaningful speeches, in my short professional life. This is because I will be talking about people, in particular, those people who will determine the future of our country – the young.

I will not be bothering you with technical economic and market jargon. We are back to basic – ground zero.

You are the implementers of the NDP, we salute you and thank you. You are the game changers

The people gathered here – funders, social entrepreneurs, managers, practitioners, carers – are the true implementers of the NDP. Government through the NPC has mapped a course in which the provision of Early Childhood Development (ECD) is critical – for the rights of our children and for the progress of our country. This is one of the most crucial investments we can make as a nation.

But clearly Government cannot take on the full responsibility for implementing the plan. The challenges are too big and solutions too complex, for one economic player. As has been emphasised, from the early days of the national consultation, the implementation of the NDP is the business of every South African. As was said with the recent release of the Medium Term Strategic Framework for 2014-2019:

“... the NDP train left the station in 2012 and is now moving at a very high speed. Tribute must be paid to those who were first to board the train by taking the first steps to implement the NDP An invitation is extended to those who are still standing on the sidelines, to board this

train and join us on this wonderful journey to 2030. They are invited to contribute towards remaking their country into one that is many times better than the present."

The partnership between Government, NGOs and private providers has indeed brought us a long way in ECD. Grade R is now almost universal and aided by the subsidy for ECD services and substantial private funding.

We want at the outset to thank you and assure you of both the NPC's and government's support.

The private and voluntary sectors, will always be central in delivering ECD as well as the broader NDP dream.

The NDP is unambiguous about the importance of ECD services.

- The NDP clearly places ECD as one of the four pillars of our education system, which also includes basic education (schools), post school education as well as the research and innovation system. ECD services are fundamental.
- The NDP supports much of the thinking in the sector by stating that ECD cannot be narrowly defined. It must span the time from before birth until children start going to school – and for children with disabilities that may mean beyond the age of six. ECD also include a range of services – and not only centres where children are looked after during the day.
- The NDP clearly states that universal access to quality ECD is the target
- It also points out that while private and voluntary provision is strong in the sector, there is a need for government to strive to play an even stronger role.

It is therefore not about whether we should expand or improve, but about how and when.

But ECD services have not only been championed in the NDP. In a number of spheres things have moved forward.

Also beyond policy, we have also seen a significant expansion of ECD. In budgetary terms it was one of the fastest growing spending areas in government over the last 5 years. This includes the growing ECD subsidies from

the Department of Social Development, for services in the early years and the spending by education departments on grade R learners.

Challenges in the ECD sector still remain. But together, we have moved a long way forward.

Making policy, planning for a service and implementation can be greatly hampered if we do not understand a service well. If we are, for example, not sure of what should be provided, what are the most effective (and affordable) ways of providing it and what the resources are that we need.

In the new South Africa the challenge often is to do new things in different ways because the old ways were elitist, discriminatory, undemocratic and inefficient. Ironically, we need to do these things within tight constraints. While the NDP could point in important directions with regard to where ECD has to go, a lot of details still need to be worked out.

From this perspective it is very exciting to see how the voluntary sector in the field of early childhood development **is charting new ways, experimenting, learning and then feeding all this back into policy processes.**

One example is the **Essential Package of Services** now being considered. To remind ourselves, the recommended package includes:

- i. maternal and child health,
- ii. nutrition,
- iii. social services,
- iv. support for primary caregivers, and
- v. stimulation for early learning.

The notion of an essential package in ECD and setting it out clearly, is one of those simple innovations which people hardly notice when it is there. But it is critical in making all understand what needs to be done, who has to take responsibility and what resources we need. It can really invigorate.

Bringing this concept into ECD services looks like a very useful piece of social entrepreneurship and welfare innovation. All those experimenters and thinkers behind it, need to be commended.

In addition to the challenge of defining what is needed there is always the challenge of determining how service delivery will be governed or controlled. What mechanisms do we put in place so that targets are set, resources used efficiently in reaching those targets and that targets are reached. What do we put in place to make sure that over time we are still responding

appropriately and adequately to needs as well as making sure that we have the necessary human and other resources in place?

The ever-ringing demand for **accountability** shows how we have been struggling in government with this governance of services. It seems, it is in this area – models for governing, managing, monitoring and in short a model of accountability - where Ntataise is not only operating very effectively but also forging new ways and providing a model that is a gold standard for the country.

As your website says:

“Ntataise has established a network of early childhood development training organisations, spanning seven of South Africa’s nine provinces and reaching more than 1,000 pre-schools and 1,500 practitioners. Ntataise serves as the central training agency, offering its professional training programmes and courses, materials, assessments, and monitoring services.”

In coordinating such a network there are important lessons to learn – not only for other providers but also for provincial social development departments and district offices that face essentially the same challenge. How do you support, motivate and monitor a large group of service providers effectively. Here Ntataise and approximately around 75 resource and training organisations (in Harrison 2012s description) show the way forward and we have to learn more intensively from their experience.

Closely related to this issue of support and accountability systems, is that of the **appropriate service delivery models** which span a lot of questions:

- i. public or private?
- ii. What role for state funding?
- iii. Size of establishments? Location?
- iv. How to manage and the list goes on.

There we also note the ongoing work and the collaborations around the country, namely, Ntataise in the Free State and Ilifa Labantwana in the North West and KwaZulu-Natal.

Here we note the increasing references to “social franchising” as an “entrepreneurial strategy”. As Carol-Ann Foulis referred in a recent article to “social franchising” as a “game-changing strategy for bringing essential services to poor people” by drawing “from systems, processes and approaches in commercial franchising to provide a consistent range of

services, by creating an organised network of providers". While there may, of course, be many different approaches it is these kinds of ideas that are being explored by our NGOs - which provide very promising models for the future.

Urgent progress needed but also a measured and phased response

Clearly there is a long way ahead in ECD provisioning: coverage is very uneven, especially at younger ages. Work for the 20-year review estimated that over a million 0-4 year olds are in an ECD facility or some form of out-of-home care and of these 467 000 received means-tested subsidies, in 18 826 registered centres.

But access declines steeply as households become poorer, for example in 2011, from 56% for children in households with monthly expenditure above R10 000 to 22% for those with expenditure below R200 per month.

Across the range of services there are serious quality issues. At the upper end of ECD, Grade R, a recent study for the DPME indicated that Gr R makes little difference where we need it to make a difference, namely among the poorest. And this is not a problem with Grade R and ECD as such but it relates to the provision of sub-standard services.

These challenges of improving quantity and quality become very challenging in a fiscally constrained environment where government must also balance fiscal stability and sustainability with expansion and improvement of services.

However, when we recall that a lot of building blocks must be put in place for us to be ready to actually deliver services we need to see how we use this relatively "slow" time in terms of the availability of additional funding to make sure we get all the different aspects in place, namely:

- i. accountability systems,
- ii. training systems,
- iii. material and facility design, and
- iv. planning.

In the past we have expanded services very rapidly but without the necessary attention to quality and control systems. It is a error we must not commit with ECD. It is too important.

The NDP underlines the need for a long-term vision and plan. It is important for the sector not to fall into the trap that everything can be done tomorrow. Among other things, ECD is very dependent on developments in our

universities and colleges which need to provide the requisite trainers and facilitators.

The NDP also underlines partnerships and experimenting for fresh approaches. From this perspective the ECD area provides a lot of opportunities and we are indeed blessed with a strong and dependable voluntary sector with which we can partner.

Central thrust of the NDP

The NDP was adopted by Cabinet in September 2012, so is now nearly 2 years old

To recap, the Plan, mapping a course for the period from 2012 to 2030, has six key pillars or objectives:

MOBILISATION – uniting South African of all races and classes around a common programme

ACTIVE CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT – encouraging citizens to be active in their own development, in strengthening democracy

EXPANDING THE ECONOMY AND MAKING GROWTH MORE INCLUSIVE – raising economic growth, promoting expertise and making the economy more labour absorbing

ENHANCING KEY CAPABILITIES – focusing on the human, physical and institutional capacity of both people and country

BUILDING A CAPABLE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

STRONG LEADERSHIP – in a society working together to solve our problems

Implementation of the NDP

Since 2013, Government has moved notably on the implementation of the plan. The private sector is yet to follow through on its commitment under the guiding principles of a social compact led implementation programme.

Implementation has three main thrusts

- i. Driving certain key, catalytic projects identified in the NDP – Examples are land reform in Mpumalanga, the National Education Collaboration

Trust and more recently, Operation Phakisa - a methodology to get “big fast results” in key sectors which is currently being applied to the “oceans economy” - with models for primary health care clinics – of key importance to ECD services, next on the agenda

- ii. “Rolling down or cascading” the plan into departmental, provincial and local government plans - here the Medium Terms Strategic Framework and government’s budget system, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (or MTEF)
- iii. Communicating the plan, supporting implementation and monitoring

In the past few weeks, two milestones were reached in the implementation of the NDP and the further management of implementation.

1. A new Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation was established which merges the NPC and the DPME – to ensure focused leadership and better integration of planning and monitoring
2. Publication of the MTSF which will guide government’s implementation over the next five years, and now will be carried into MTEF budgets as far as the fiscal constraints allow.

Conclusion

These two developments are indicative of the prioritisation given to the NDP in government. The Planning Commission hopes that this elevation will be mirrored across the private sector.

The work unfolding in the ECD environment is a deep encouragement in this regard. We commend you for all your sterling foundational work. It is pioneering.

We thank you.