



OPENING REMARKS BY THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT, MR DAVID MABUZA, AT THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

03 December 2020

Council Members

Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande,

HRDC Secretariat

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to this virtual first meeting of the Human Resource Development Council for the term 2019 to 2024. We meet at this tail of the year due to other unfolding developments that have us all engaged in various activities as we navigate the country out of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has had a negative and cumulative effect on the mandate of the Human Resource Development Council, which is to among others, monitor and report on the implementation Human Resource Development Strategy: Towards 2030.

We thus have a mammoth task, as the Council, to recalibrate and return to the achievement of the goals of the Human Resource Development Strategy which are:

- Strengthen basic education and foundation programmes in science, technology, engineering,
- Expand access to quality post-school education and training,
- Production of appropriately skilled people for the economy,
- Engender a developmental and capable state with effective and efficient planning and implementation capabilities, and
- Facilitate an improved research and technological innovation outcomes.

Today's meeting is critical to reflect on the implementation of the Human Resource Development Strategy, in light of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan announced by the President, to respond to the negative impact of Covid-19.

This will be highlighted in the presentations tabled today for discussion, namely, the report from Statistics South Africa providing an overview of the impact of Covid-19 on human development, and the report from the HRDC Secretariat which identifies areas of convergence between the HRD Strategy and the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

Needless to say, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is not being implemented in a vacuum. It builds on the government priorities and plans articulated in the National Development Plan.

For instance, there are direct linkages between the five 5 goals of the HRDC Strategy mentioned earlier, plus the Reconstruction Plan's 2 targets and enablers of skills development and building a capable state as the stipulated outcomes of the National Development Plan of engendering:

- Quality of education,
- A long and healthy life for all South Africans,
- Decent employment through inclusive growth,
- A skilled and capable workforce, and
- An efficient, effective and development-oriented public service.

We are confronted by objective conditions that make the work of the Human Resource Development Council important, inarguably, unlike at any other time in the democratic South Africa.

Firstly, Covid-19 has made more urgent the need to develop skills and training that is innovation-led, entrepreneurial-focused, and technologically advanced. We live in a dynamic, fluid and fast-changing context where life-long learning is a fact of life.

We are called upon to adequately respond to young people who are digital natives that are adept with Information and Communication Technologies, and who are demanding skills and expertise that will enable them to adapt adequately to changing workplace and technological demands.

We no longer exist in a time where a person can survive on knowing only one skill and occupy one career path. Instead, the 21st century requires persons who can transcend academic disciplines, transcend the artificial distinctions between the soft and hard sciences, bridge the divides between theory and knowledge, and match classroom learning with market demands.

The current state of persistent insecurity with regard to employment or income for today's labour force, calls on the Council to look in depth at the challenges identified by the HRD Strategy which still remain the following:

- Poverty and inequality,
- Quality of education,
- Absorptive capacity of the economy, and

- Social cohesion.

Secondly, the other objective condition which underlines the significance of today's meeting is the report released recently by the Department of Higher Education and Training. This report, stipulating the 2020 National List of Occupations in High Demand, comes in the background of the worrying figures on the national unemployment rates, more so, unemployment amongst young people and young women.

Addressing youth unemployment is in the best interest of our nation if we are to be globally competitive. Therefore the task and responsibility placed on the capable shoulders of the new HRD Council Members, is crucial.

They are called upon to assist government to popularise the occupations identified in the National List of Occupations in High Demand. These professions, which are critical to lowering joblessness and growing the economy, are mainly those of artisans including pressure welders, toolmakers, mechanics etc.

As evidence-based experience from countries like Germany and Singapore highlights, the Technical and Vocational Educational and Training sector, can be a significant difference-maker as we embark on the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan founded on some of the following priorities:

- Aggressive infrastructure investment,
- Strategic localisation and reindustrialisation,
- Economic inclusion of women and youth, and
- Mass public employment interventions.

It bears remembering that two of the enablers of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan are building a capable state and skills development.

Whilst identifying vocational training and TVET colleges as strategic interventions, we are equally aware of the structural challenges at these colleges including curriculum, lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure.

Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic represents a new knowledge economy that demands new capacities, so-called e-skills or e-readiness to adequately build a capable state, an inclusive economy, and fight poverty and inequality.

As HRD Council Members, our role extends beyond merely provision of oversight, coordination of programmes but also includes thought leadership.

Council Members, the onus falls on us to work together as social partners to mobilise efforts for the empowerment of the young people.

As the Presidential Employment Stimulus Package has demonstrated, there is appetite across South Africa to provide young people and young women with economic

opportunities. This Stimulus programme can grow if organised business, civil society and labour play an active role in efforts of rebuilding the economy.

The private sector is a key partner in making local investment, helping small business to grow and thrive, and assisting to close the skills mismatch that disadvantage the young people not in employment, education, or training.

In conclusion, as the National Youth Policy 2020-2030, reminds us, the millions of disempowered young people “are not just statistics, (therefore we are called upon to) start putting faces to all these numbers and then the problem will become real. These are people with hopes, dreams and capacities, who could be contributing to their communities and country”.

As government, we remain optimistic that the Human Resource Development Council and its new Council Members, are alive to these surmountable structural challenges that we are facing as a country.

I thank you.