

Manuel highlights shortcomings in education

Minister in the Presidency and chairperson of the National Planning Commission (NPC), Trevor Manuel was the keynote speaker at the 2012 Rachel's Angels Annual lecture at Groenberg Secondary School in Grabouw in the Western Cape, where he outlined the NPC's Vision 2030 - Improving the quality of education in South Africa.

Minister Manuel said the main focus of the Vision 2030 is to use the backdrop of the Constitution for South Africans to start living out its values. "The Constitution is an incredibly strong document that needs to be lived out and the starting point is to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality. These two aspects are not the same. No one should live in poverty. We use a poverty measure of R432 per person per month as an indicator and currently about 20 million or 40% of people in South Africa lives below the poverty line."

Not enough to pass matric

Inequality is a difficult issue, as more learners go on to higher education having come from communities where education is not attainable or a high priority. "We must be mindful of poverty issues as we look at the present anger among mine workers and truck drivers." He said there is no longer room for hollow promises and that there are two important issues to pay attention to regarding better education.

"One is to look at education in its entirety from foundation phase to high school and post school education that should include trade/artisanships, as well as post-university research and innovation. It is no longer enough to get through school or university. You only have to look at the United States to see that there are one and half million BA graduates that are unemployed because they have not been trained in skills that are needed."

Import qualified teachers

"The measure of the current problem for me is that we cannot wait until learners get to grade 12 to solve problems; we need to know how to fix the problems long before then." He said that many educators are not moving forward with the times. "We must understand the interest of the next generation and the global situation and model education accordingly. Improve Maths and Science levels even if we have to import educators to educate our teachers and to implement Information Technology in schools. We are falling behind other African countries including Zimbabwe, in this regard."

The role of teachers came under the spotlight with continued evaluation of competency. "We need to ensure that teachers feel accountable to principals. Principals need to be appointed on competency and skills - it is a job that requires a skills set to manage 1 200 learners," Manuel said.

Commenting on the Rachel's Angels Trust, he said there needs to be more 'angels' coming forward to implement

programmes to improve the quality of education and mentor learners, some of whom are the first generation to complete matric and go on to further education.

A difference going beyond academics

Rachel's Angels Trust which was founded in 2007 is a joint project between Media 24 and Stellenbosch University that aims to contribute towards the building of excellence in high school education in the Western Cape. It currently includes mentorship programmes between grade 11 learners from 20 disadvantaged schools and second and third year students from Stellenbosch University.

Co-founder and chairperson of the trust, Professor Rachel Jafta said the board of trustees' aim is to make a difference in education that goes beyond academics. "We take a holistic approach helping students from similar disadvantaged backgrounds who have problems adjusting to the alien environment of university. They have no role models and by the time they get used to university life - three months has already gone by, they are late for their first test series and start to lose confidence as they lag behind their peers."

Professor Jafta said that the mentoring process builds confidence and prepares students to life after school. "The Rachel's Angels Trust stands for academic excellence - we encourage participating schools to compete and do better every year. Last year the pass rate was very good as 95% of our 'angels' passed matric."

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