

Public-private partnerships essential to solve education crisis

By [Sizwe Nxasana](#)

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South Africa has done well in improving access to education - today almost all children of school-going age have access, which wasn't the case in 1994. However, the quality of that education leaves much to be desired - about 35% of the school districts are simply dysfunctional; another third just average.

Just over three million kids, out of 12 million, are getting an acceptable education, which is why it's an apex priority in the National Development Plan (NDP).

Active citizenship required to implement the NDP

The NDP talks about active citizenship; government requires partnerships with people who want to get involved in improving the quality of education. First Rand contributes to one such partnership via sponsorship of the Thuthuka Bursary Fund (TBF), an initiative by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA), in collaboration with government and private sector donors, which identifies talented African and Coloured learners with an aptitude for maths, then funds and mentors them through university and on to qualification as chartered accountants. It has already provided 95 qualified graduates, with 1200 more in the academic pipeline.

The Department of Higher Education and Training matches TBF donors rand-for-rand, and since the launch of the NDP, we have embarked on a joint project to ensure that every Further Education and Training college has a properly qualified CFO. The KZN treasury has also recently partnered with the TBF to put 100 students from every municipality in the province through the programme, to ensure qualified financial professionals are in place in every local authority within ten years.

On 16 July 2013, President Zuma launched a new public-private partnership to create a National Education Trust, which brings together all the stakeholders needed to improve the quality of education. It is going to identify districts and schools that require interventions to fix what doesn't work today - and will also pilot new ideas of learning and teaching; improving the materials we use, including technology.

The idea is to introduce systemic change, as opposed to adopting individual schools. The aim is to improve education from Grade R to Grade 12, over the next ten years, so that in ten years' time at least 90% of our schools are performing. We want to have 450,000 matrics passing mathematics and science with the grades to get into university every year, instead of the 120 000 we have at the moment. Prior to the NDP, SAICA had already set up programmes to encourage learners to choose core mathematics as a subject, rather than mathematics

literacy; these programmes will remain important to the National Education Trust.

Involvement as important as funding

It's an ambitious project, and it calls for the private sector, private donors, the unions and civil society to support these initiatives - not just in money, but in kind. We want parents to get involved - to hold schools accountable. We need teachers who show up to teach. We want the youth to be involved; to take responsibility for their own lives, but also ensure accountability from their schools. We need the unions that can still look after the interests of their members, while playing a constructive role.

If we don't fix education, we're in big trouble. But I think we're seeing the emergence of a partnership that is the first of its kind in this country, where civil society, unions, companies and private donors are working with government to change the system. There are going to be a lot more projects, but this is the first that supports the NDP in such an active way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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