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Education News

Mathebula faces uphill battle to rescue crisis-hit NSFAS

SIMON NARE

The administrator of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), Professor Hlengani Mathebula, faces the unenviable task of repairing an institution widely viewed as dysfunctional, plagued by governance failures and allegations of mismanagement that have cost taxpayers billions of rand.

Mathebula assumed responsibility for the day-to-day operations of NSFAS on May 4, taking charge of governance, management and administration.

His mandate is to restore institutional credibility, stabilise student funding operations and clear long-standing backlogs.

A key part of his brief is addressing systemic governance failures and audit shortcomings, strengthening internal controls, tackling maladministration, implementing consequence management and resolving outstanding audit findings.

This marks the third time in five

years that NSFAS has been placed under administration.

The recurring crises have prompted calls for a complete overhaul of the funding model, with Higher Education and Training Deputy Minister Dr Mimmy Gondwe suggesting that the National Treasury should assume responsibility for paying student allowances directly.

Gondwe stressed that her proposal was not intended to undermine Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela but was a response to his call for solutions. She argued that the current system has repeatedly failed, resulting in repeated interventions.

Manamela placed NSFAS under administration following the resignation of two board members, including acting chairperson Mugwena Maluleke.

The agency has been grappling with governance instability, audit failures and disruptions to funding processes that have affected thousands of students.

NSFAS has also operated without a permanent chief executive officer for



Professor Hlengani Mathebula, the newly appointed NSFAS administrator, has been tasked with restoring stability at the embattled institution. Photo: Tshwane University of Technology

more than 30 months, a vacuum widely cited as a major source of tension between the board and the minister over the appointment of a permanent CEO.

Announcing Mathebula's appointment, Manamela said the intervention was aimed at restoring stability at the embattled institution.

“This decision was not taken lightly. — Minister Buti Manamela

He cited a disclaimer audit outcome for the 2024/25 financial year, material irregularities identified by the Auditor-General and persistent weaknesses in internal controls among the factors that necessitated the move.

“This decision was not taken lightly. It follows a long process of engagement, legal assessment, governance intervention and consideration of alternatives.

“We took this step because government cannot ignore potential legal irregularities in the constitution of a statutory body entrusted with billions of rand in public funds and the futures of millions of students,” Manamela said.

A ministerial directive issued in March highlighted serious data integrity concerns, unresolved student appeals caused by system deficiencies, delays in ICT modernisation and accommodation failures that were affecting student dignity and safety.

The scale of the challenge facing Mathebula is considerable. Manamela said the department was confident

that he possessed the experience, independence, leadership capacity and institutional expertise required to stabilise the organisation.

NSFAS spokesperson Ishmael Mnisi, said Mathebula is not yet ready to reveal his turnaround strategy.

Mnisi told Inside Education that the administrator was still consulting stakeholders to gain a full understanding of the challenges facing the organisation.

“He cannot simply arrive and immediately announce how he is going to fix everything. He still needs to engage stakeholders, understand the issues and determine their root causes before deciding on solutions.

“The administrator has only recently assumed his responsibilities. Expecting him to have all the answers within a few months is unreasonable. Once he has completed consultations and identified the underlying problems, we will engage the media,” Mnisi said.

He declined to provide a timeline for the completion of the consultation process. Mathebula currently serves as director of the Business School at the Tshwane University of Technology and has held senior positions at both the South African Reserve Bank and the South African Revenue Service.

Under the terms of his appointment, he is expected to accelerate ICT and systems integration projects aimed at preventing payment delays and data errors.

He must also finalise funding guidelines, resolve outstanding appeals, improve oversight of student accommodation, oversee forensic investigations and lead the recruitment process for a permanent executive team and board to return NSFAS to stable governance. Mathebula reports directly to the minister.

Following a series of board resignations and the appointment of the administrator, Parliament's Portfolio

Committee on Higher Education strongly condemned the state of affairs at NSFAS and expressed frustration over the institution's persistent instability.

During a committee meeting, chairperson Tebogo Letsie highlighted several management failures and warned that having three administrators in five years suggested that students were being served by a “rudderless entity with no sense of direction”.

“Our interest is a stable NSFAS that works to benefit poor South African students who, without NSFAS support, would not come close to accessing post-school education opportunities. NSFAS must work for South Africans, and this committee will ensure that commitment becomes a reality,” Letsie said.

Defending his intervention before the committee, Manamela said: “This was not a political brawl; it was a legal, governance and student-protection response.”

Auditor-General Tsakani Maluleke's findings, presented to the committee by the department, painted an equally troubling picture.

The reports revealed payments made to 822 deceased students, funding allocated to students whose household incomes exceeded qualifying thresholds, unresolved appeals and a series of board resignations, including those of the chairperson and deputy chairperson.

According to the department, NSFAS recorded nine material irregularities, including four newly identified cases, and carried a closing balance of R85.356 billion in irregular and fruitless expenditure.

The presentation further revealed that Auditor-General data analytics identified 14,169 students whose incomes exceeded funding thresholds, 35,192 students who received funding despite failing eligibility rules, and 7,805 unresolved appeals.

Education News

Manamela's toughest year in charge

THEBE MABANGA

Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela finds himself in the unenviable position of constantly putting out fires. In the year since taking office, few ministers have had to place as many entities under administration as he has.

His first major intervention was to place three Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) under administration: the Services SETA (SSETA), Construction SETA (CETA) and Local Government SETA (LGSETA). Soon afterwards, he placed the College of Cape Town under administration and appointed Dr Robert Nkuna as administrator.

The latest institution to be placed under administration is the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), a move that has sparked a bitter dispute with the former board, barely a year after the funding body emerged from a previous administration process in March 2025.

The immediate trigger was a series of resignations, including that of the board chairperson, which left the board struggling to maintain a quorum. Remaining members subsequently challenged the appointment of Professor Hlengani Mathebula, a former executive at the South African Reserve Bank and the South African Revenue Service, as administrator.

“NSFAS is one of the most important public institutions in our democratic project,” Manamela said when announcing the intervention.

“For many families, NSFAS is not an abstract institution — it is the difference between exclusion and opportunity, between hope and despair.”

He argued that the government could not ignore potential legal irregularities in the governance of a statutory body responsible for billions of rand in public funds and the futures of millions of students.

According to Manamela, efforts to stabilise the board through interim appointments were insufficient. Concerns included a disclaimer audit opinion and material findings by the Auditor-General for 2024/25, weak consequence management, poor data integrity, unresolved appeals, stalled ICT reforms, student accommodation failures and broader governance concerns.

One questionable aspect of the process has been the extent to which Mathebula has been drawn into par-



More fires to put out: Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

liamentary accountability matters. The administrator has effectively been expected to account for the actions of a former board and has faced criticism for delays in responding to parliamentary summonses.

The result has been strained relations between the department and Parliament.

During Manamela's budget vote, opposition parties launched fierce attacks against him. More significantly, support from the Government of National Unity (GNU) partner, the Inkatha Freedom Party, appeared qualified rather than enthusiastic.

When he delayed an appearance to explain the NSFAS administration, he also appeared to lose the confidence of Portfolio Committee chairperson Tebogo Letsie. The situation bears similarities to the difficulties faced by former minister Nobuhle Nkabane before her departure amid controversy surrounding SETA chairperson appointments.

Manamela's recently tabled R149 billion budget highlighted the scale of the challenges confronting the post-school education sector. Approximately R100 billion, or 82% of the budget, is allocated to universities, while Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges receive R14.7 billion.

The minister has repeatedly expressed a desire to reposition TVET colleges at the centre of South Africa's Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system. Given the country's acute unemployment crisis and growing demand for vocational skills, achieving that ambition will require a significant shift in funding priorities.

Such a transformation would likely take longer than a single Medium-Term Expenditure Framework cycle. Whether Manamela will have the political time and stability required to see it through remains uncertain.

“The decisions we take today will shape the future of skills development ... for years to come” — Minister Buti Manamela

Another key area that Manamela is driving is technology and digitisation. He would like to use digitisation to improve access to higher education by supporting institutions to use digital platforms to recruit and teach more students, including those in far-flung locations, through online learning.

He would also like to integrate digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI) into South Africa's post-school education and training sector. This includes a curriculum overhaul that will equip graduates with skills such as AI, software development, cybersecurity and data analytics.

One reform he has managed to introduce with relatively little controversy is the phased transition away from pre-2009 qualifications under the new qualifications framework. Drawing inspiration from the 50th anniversary of the 16 June uprisings,

lowed to complete their studies and retain the value of their qualifications.

These are challenging but potentially transformative times for learners, filled with both uncertainty and opportunity. To formalise this process, Manamela gazetted the transitional arrangements in mid-June.

South Africa should resist the temptation to dismantle institutions simply because they experience governance failures. Calls to scrap entities such as NSFAS and the SETAs have gained traction among some political leaders and business interests, including Build One South Africa leader Mmusi Maimane and others.

The argument is straightforward: if an institution appears dysfunctional, abolish it and hand its resources directly to beneficiaries. But the logic is flawed because it ignores the reasons these institutions were established in the first place.

In the case of NSFAS, devolving student funding directly to institutions could deepen inequalities. Historically advantaged universities in urban centres would likely attract a larger share of resources, while historically disadvantaged and rural institutions could fall further behind. The current targeted funding model helps ensure that institutions such as the University of Limpopo receive infrastructure investment and that universities such as Zululand can expand student accommodation.

A similar argument applies to the SETAs. Dr Fellen Yende, Chief Executive of the Fibre Processing and Manufacturing SETA and chairperson of the SETA CEOs Forum, makes a compelling case for retaining SETAs, pointing to their access to research that helps guide the country's skills development needs.

Yende notes that approximately 80% of levy income collected by SETAs is returned to employers through mandatory and discretionary grants, with 10% going to administration. Between 2019 and 2024, SETAs invested R5 billion in TVET colleges for curriculum modernisation, lecturer development and related programmes.

During the same period, they invested R6 billion in universities, including support for the “missing middle” — students whose household incomes exceed the NSFAS threshold but who still cannot afford higher education.

SETAs also spent R300 million on Community Education and Training Colleges, benefiting approximately 1.2 million learners. If SETAs are to be abolished, policymakers must first explain what institutional mechanism will replace their functions.

For Manamela, that reality underlines the challenge ahead. There are no quick fixes. Only more fires to put out.

CREDITS

Publisher:

• Matuma Letsoalo

Acting Editor-in-Chief:

• Charles Molele

Contributing Editor:

• Thebe Mabanga

News Editor:

• Desiree Erasmus

Marketing Manager:

• Dineo Bendile

Special Projects Manager:

• Faith Murumbi

Sales Executives:

• Mfiseni Khumalo

• Linda Mahlophe

• Minenhle Masondiya

• Thembisile Mlangeni

• Faith Sono

• Kyleen Ostrich

• Belle Petersen

Acting Sales Manager and Supplements Head:

• Lance Petersen

Contributors:

• Johnathan Paoli

• Simon Nare

• Thapelo Molefe

• Xolisa Phillip

Photographer:

• Eddie Mtsweni

Subeditor:

• Richard Gibbs

Layout:

• Mziwamangwani Ndebana

@Inside_Edu

+27 (011) 312 2206

Inside Education

info@insideeducation.co.za

Education News



Clarity: Hubert Mathanzima Mweli, Director-General of the Department of Basic Education, writes that the DBE's position on its Learning and Teaching Support Material catalogue has always been about ensuring the best quality at the best price, regardless of the publisher. Photo: Vecteezy.com

Understanding the DBE catalogue

Why SA's textbook reform reflects quality assurance

MATHANZIMA MWELI

South Africa's education system cannot afford distraction when it comes to one of its most urgent priorities: improving reading outcomes in the Foundation Phase.

The recent release of the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) catalogue is a critical intervention aimed at addressing precisely this challenge.

Yet, instead of constructive engagement, the release of the catalogue may be derailed by allegations of corruption and impropriety. These misguided claims, amplified by sections of the media, risk distorting public understanding of what is, in fact, a structured and quality-driven reform process.

At the centre of the controversy is a fundamental and consequential error: a misunderstanding of how

and why the catalogue is created. Over a two-year period, following an open call for submissions in 2024, the department oversaw the development and screening of learning materials aligned to evolving evidence on how children learn to read, particularly in African languages, where historically there has been a shortage of high-quality, culturally relevant resources.

Let's turn to the procurement part driving the media discussion. The allegations of a "corrupt tender" rest on a false premise. The government's procurement of goods or services does not only follow a traditional tender process. Depending on the model and need, different processes are used, and this is one of those occasions.

The catalogue serves as a procurement process managed through creating a vetted pool of approved materials from which provinces and schools may later select and procure textbooks and readers according to their needs and budgets.

The work done so far means that the DBE has identified approved LTSMs for purchase based on the quality of the books and textbooks, but no specific contract with an amount has been signed or paid. It is important that this point be cleared.

Every reader of this article would agree that LTSM books guiding learners and teachers are a core ed-

ucational deliverable. We can also agree that we all want the best quality materials in the hands of children. The integrity of the selection process, therefore, becomes critical, and our design is deliberate and robust in addressing this.

The Terms of Reference governing submissions are publicly available and aligned to National Treasury principles, including value for money, fairness, transparency, accountability, and open competition.

The Department issues an invitation for publishers or aspiring publishers, small and big, to indicate their intention to submit materials as per the guidelines. All publishers or aspirant publishers were then given about four months, equally, to develop the materials that they indicated in their "intention to submit".

More importantly, all materials undergo blind screening: manuscripts are anonymised, stripped of logos, branding, and any identifiers that could introduce bias. This ensures that evaluation is based strictly on content quality and curriculum alignment, not on publisher reputation or market dominance.

The evaluation itself is conducted by curriculum and pedagogy experts, primarily provincial subject advisors, whose role is to determine whether materials meet the

required educational standards.

Only once this quality threshold is met does pricing enter into consideration in line with the principle of value for money. All this helps as preparatory information for provinces that will later undertake purchasing.

This sequencing reinforces the central point: quality first, procurement later. In my experience, this cataloguing process has led to savings of up to 50%, allowing us to buy more books for more learners.

Let's turn to the publishers we choose. The publishing industry is dominated by a handful of publishers, but textbooks make up 60% of books published and would therefore correctly draw the attention of major and minor players in the field.

While a select few large publishing companies with a national and/or international publishing footprint have dominated the textbook space for more than 15 years since we started developing national catalogues, we have encouraged all kinds of book developers to participate — large and small publishers, independent publishers, NGOs, individuals, academics, and universities. The DBE's position has always been about ensuring the best quality, at the best price, regardless of the publisher.

Some wild exaggerations claim there are 1,700+ titles in the cata-

logue. This claim is misleading because it is based on counting individual components such as readers, posters, and teacher guides rather than complete subject packages. In reality, each submission represents a structured set of materials aligned to specific grades, languages, and pedagogical requirements.

Presenting these components as separate "titles" artificially inflates the scale and distorts the public understanding of the catalogue, as purchasing would be by package. Further, the amount a company will get will be based on school/district/province decisions after bargaining on prices and delivery plan feasibility.

Once the selection is finalised, the delivery plan with milestones and delivery notes is agreed on and implemented between the province and publishers with DBE oversight. As seen in the last 14 years, delivery has been above 90%. It is a well-oiled process, and I expect nothing less in this round.

I welcome the opportunity to share details on how the LTSM catalogue happens, and as the DG, I welcome all efforts to enhance transparency and scrutinise the process.

Hubert Mathanzima Mweli is the Director-General of the Department of Basic Education.

AIM OF THE THREE STREAMS MODEL

- The Three Stream Model (TSM) is a concept developed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE);
- It refers to **multiple learning pathways** for schooling within the **academic, vocational, and occupational** streams for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in the South African schooling sub-system;
- It was devised to mitigate the limitations of the prevailing **schooling curriculum that is predominantly focused on academic/theoretical learning**;
- Schooling needs to **respond to the unemployment crisis** that the country is facing, especially **among the youth**;
- A **Concept Paper on the TSM** was developed in 2018 and finalised in November 2020;
- An **Implementation Master Plan** of the TSM was developed to set out a process over a **three-year horizon** to implement the TSM in the schooling sub-system through a consultative process;
- This was to be followed by a **Business Plan**, which was subsequently submitted to the National Treasury (NT) to apply for funding to **conduct further pilot studies on the TSM**.

WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF THREE STREAMS MODEL

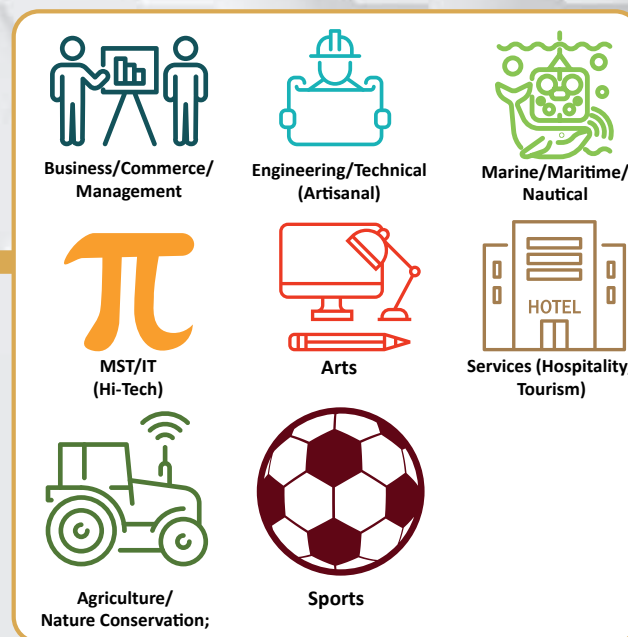
- To **make the schooling curriculum responsive** to the social, economic, and **labour market needs** of the country;
- To **improve schooling outcomes** by ensuring that the curriculum responds to the **interests, aptitudes, and abilities of learners**;
- To **create articulation** within basic education, and with the PSET sector for learners exiting the schooling sub-system;
- To **provide teacher development and support** to the existing cohort of teachers to offer subjects in the TSM;
- To **introduce Vocational subjects at Grades 8 and 9** in the General Education and Training (GET) Phase and **Occupational subjects at Grades 10, 11 and 12** in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase;
- To ensure that the **DBE and Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) are resourced** to implement the TSM;
- To **establish an assessment framework** for the GET Phase of schooling (leading to the introducing of the **General Education Certificate (GEC)**).

WHAT IS THE THREE STREAMS MODEL

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WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES IN EACH STREAM? ACADEMIC STREAM

It is common knowledge that the South African schooling curriculum is predominantly focused on academic staff based mainly on theory. This schooling curriculum does not cater adequately for vocational and occupational learning. As a result of this pedagogical-landscape, learners are faced with limited learning choices which ultimately impact on their career choices. The curriculum has previously not cater sufficiently for the technological advancements, emerging industries and new occupations fueled by the Fourth Industrial Turnaround.



CURRENT DBE PROGRESS

Occupational Stream Pilot

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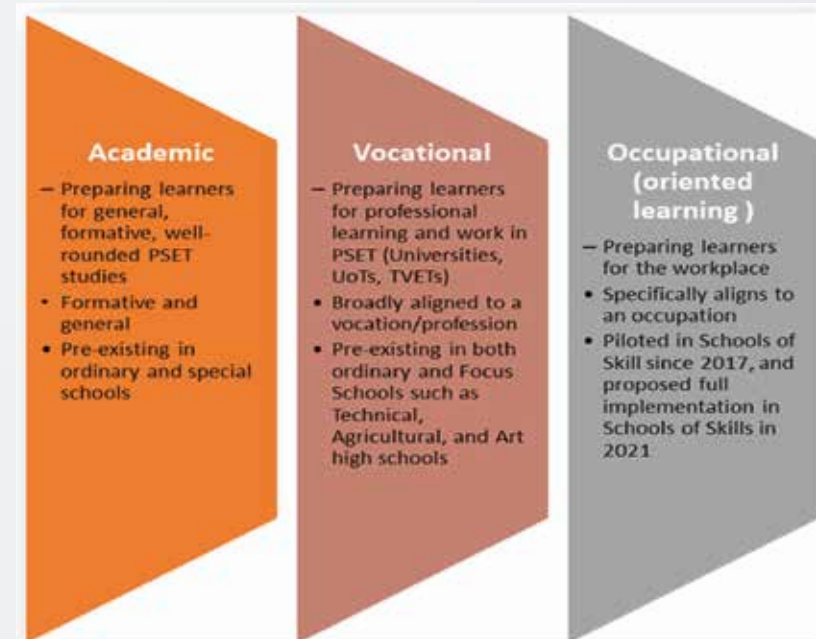
Focus on What You Do Best

- The Occupational pathway, meanwhile, was introduced together with the Vocational pathway as **part of the strengthening of the curriculum** in the basic education sector;
- 26 Occupational** Stream subjects were piloted in the **Schools of Skill at Years 1 to 4** (the equivalent of Grades 8 to 9 in public ordinary schools) back in 2017;
- The **four (4)-year curriculum stretch** was applied to adequately provide for the **special education needs of learners** at the Schools of Skill within the GET phase;
- The **pilot was completed in 2020**, immediately followed by **scaling in 2021**;
- Before approval was granted, schools participating in the piloting of Occupational – or Vocational – subjects were **initially audited to determine whether they met the required standards of resources, infrastructure and equipment** to allow for the pilot to be sustained;
- Piloting on the Occupational Stream in the FET Phase** at Grades 10, 11 & 12 is planned to **commence in 2025**;
- The conceptualisation exercise has produced a **Planning Framework with Action Points**;
- The Action Points led to the establishment of a team of experts/**Think Tank**, tasked with the development of an **overarching curriculum framework encompassing all three (3) TSM streams**, while defining their subject combinations and content as well as articulation options for learners. Six (6) workstreams resulted;
- Particular attention, however, is focused on the introduction of Occupational subjects at Grades 10, 11 and 12 in the FET phase of schooling.

CURRENT DBE PROGRESS

Vocational Stream Pilot

- The purpose of introducing the Vocational Stream subjects at Grades 8 and 9 in ordinary high schools is to **allow learners the opportunity to have earlier access to a differentiated vocational pathway**, which would enhance their learning and ultimately improve performance in the technical and vocational curriculum offered in the FET phase at schools and at TVET colleges;
- 26 Occupational** subjects offered in the Schools of Skill (Schools catering for learners with special educational needs) were repackaged into **13 Vocational subjects grouped according to organising fields** with a view to strengthening articulation with FET phase vocational education;
- The focus is on **introducing learners to generic and basic vocational oriented learning** at Grades 8 and 9, which will be further developed in the FET phase;
- Learners follow the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)** as specified for Grades 8 and 9 in the Senior Phase for the following subjects: Home Language, First Additional Language, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Life Orientation and may replace one to three of the following subjects: Technology, Creative Arts and or Economics and Management Sciences with one but no more than three vocational subjects. (A guideline in this respect is to be found in DBE Circular S10 of 2020);
- Learners who meet the minimum promotion requirements may in future be awarded a General Education Certificate (GEC)**, a Grade 9 transitional "qualification" at NQF level 1, and may choose to enter a TVET college to further their studies in a preferred learning field or they may enter Grade 10 and select an area of specialisation as provided by a school.



WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH STREAM?



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My Favourite Teacher

Mhlauli credits education for her rise to the Union Buildings

SIMON NARE

For Deputy Minister in the Presidency Nonceba Mhlauli, education not only shaped her as a person but also helped her find purpose in life, ultimately leading her to a position in the highest office in the country.

Mhlauli, who grew up in the quiet Northern Cape town of Upington, describes herself as having been both a top achiever and a mischievous learner during her school years. She believes she would not be working from the Union Buildings today had it not been for her commitment to education.

“I was very naughty but also very smart. I used to frustrate teachers a lot. One of the things I still struggle with today is that I am a chatterbox. I talk a lot,” Mhlauli said.

“I was one of the students who had to sit in front because whenever I sat at the back, I talked too much. Even now, at ANC National Executive Committee meetings, I am one of the noisemakers. I am always told to sit in front because I make too much noise at the back,” she laughed.

Raised by her grandmother, who instilled in her the values of hard work and perseverance, Mhlauli was a consistent A student and remembers her high school years as some of the best of her life.

She was actively involved in extra-curricular activities, captained the debating society and served as one of the scriptwriters for the school's drama group, which still exists today.

“I think it was really the extracurricular activities I was involved in that shaped me as a person and influenced my growth, my schooling journey and eventually my career path,” she said.

Coming from a politically conscious family, it was perhaps inevitable that history would become her favourite subject. The subject also influenced many of the topics she debated during her school years.

Mhlauli said she was exposed to politics from a young age. Her grandfather was a member of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, while her grandmother was an active member of the ANC Women's League.

“I am not in politics by coincidence,” she said.

Mhlauli spoke fondly of her favourite teacher, Zolile Prusente, at Paballelo High School in Upington, whom she credits with deepening her love for history. Prusente's passion for the subject and dedication to his learners earned her admiration and respect.

Her educational journey was not without challenges. Coming from a poor background, she had to work harder than many of her peers. The



Top achiever: Deputy Minister in the Presidency Nonceba Mhlauli's pursuit of education has not ended. Having completed a master's degree while working full-time, she is now pursuing a PhD. Photo: Presidency/Facebook

transition to university proved particularly difficult and affected her academic performance during her first year.

Having never used a computer before arriving at university, she suddenly found herself having to type assignments and learn new skills. She also had to enrol for additional sub-

jects, including computer literacy.

“Even though I was very smart, I struggled academically in my first year because of the background I came from. You are at university with students who went to private schools, while you come from a township school.

“Although I passed throughout my

university career, my marks definitely dipped in my first year because of the culture shock and having to adjust to a completely new socioeconomic environment. This is the story of many working-class children,” she said.

Despite occupying a senior position in government, Mhlauli's pursuit of

education has not ended. Having completed a master's degree while working full-time, she is now pursuing a PhD.

Mhlauli believes education remains one of the most powerful tools for personal advancement and social mobility.

“I can't imagine achieving anything in my life if it weren't for education. It is one of the things I feel most strongly about. “Whenever I travel around the country and speak to young people, I tell them that regardless of their circumstances, one thing nobody can ever take away from them is their education.

“It becomes part of who you are. It stays with you and carries you through life. I don't think I would be anywhere close to where I am today if I had not prioritised education, especially coming from a community where not being educated is often seen as normal,” she said.

The deputy minister said it was worrying that dropping out of school remains acceptable in some township communities.

“When I go home and engage with young people, I tell them that the difference between many of them and me is that I stuck it out. I remained committed to my education,” she said.

Mhlauli also expressed concern about what she described as declining enthusiasm for education among many young people. She said some learners reach matric without any plans to further their studies or pursue additional training opportunities.

She also lamented the disappearance of some traditional school practices, such as singing the national anthem and reciting parts of the Constitution during assemblies, which she believes helped instil discipline, patriotism and a sense of civic responsibility.

In her work, she regularly visits schools across the country and engages with matric learners. She said she is often disheartened to find that many have not applied to universities or other post-school institutions.

Government, she argued, needs to do more to promote post-school education opportunities and demonstrate that success does not only come through universities but also through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

Mhlauli said the TVET sector continues to suffer from negative perceptions despite its critical role in developing the skills needed to grow the economy.

“Now we are producing unskilled labour in the sense that people may have the paper qualification, but they do not necessarily have the practical skills required to drive the industrial and developmental changes that the country needs,” she said.

School Infrastructure



Unfair: Pupils at a school kneel on the floor at their desks because there are not enough chairs for all. Photo: X

Equality expert warns that poor facilities undermine education quality

AKANI NKUNA

School infrastructure backlogs continue to undermine the quality of education for pupils in poorer communities countrywide, despite government reporting progress in replacing unsafe schools and providing basic services, a senior attorney at the Equal Education Law Centre has said.

“The reality is that when school infrastructure is bad, there are questions that come to the fore around whether learners will be able to get a good quality education,” Tarryn Cooper-Bell told Inside Education.

“[Those] learners in schools which have broken buildings and no electricity and a lack of access to computers and libraries are not developing at the same level as those [that have access to these things],” she said.

“Sometimes it ends up looking like education and safe schools are a privilege rather than a right. The ability of a teacher to deliver a curriculum that is required of them when they do not have the necessary resources [is difficult].”

Her comments come as official figures presented to Parliament show that major infrastructure back-

logs persist, even after more than a decade of targeted school-building programmes.

In March, the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education said it remained concerned about the gap between the department's official infrastructure reports and the conditions observed during oversight visits.

The committee said it had been told that only 32% of schools had laboratories, 57% had libraries, and 49% had computer centres, while 9,248 schools had no sports facilities. It was also told that 43,677 additional classrooms were needed to address overcrowding and that an estimated 3,523 schools still had inappropriate buildings.

The DBE has reported progress through the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI), which was launched in 2011 to replace schools built from inappropriate materials and to provide basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity.

According to the DBE's 2024/25 annual report, all 331 ASIDI schools made of unsuitable materials had been replaced, all 1,336 ASIDI water supply projects had been completed, all 373 electricity supply projects

had been finalised, and all 1,087 ASIDI sanitation projects had been completed.

“*We need to acknowledge that this should not be happening and should not be allowed to continue.* — Tarryn Cooper-Bell, attorney

“

The department's 2025/26 annual performance plan says ASIDI has completed its allocated scope for replacing schools built from inappropriate materials. It also says the School Infrastructure Backlogs Grant will be incorporated into the Education Infrastructure Grant in 2026/27, allowing provinces to address remaining backlogs while the national department focuses on planning, oversight and support.

Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube told Parliament in May

that 99.9% of pit toilets identified in the 2018 SAFE Initiative had been eradicated, with one remaining project under construction. She said, however, that some pit toilets may have been missed in the 2018 survey or emerged afterwards.

Cooper-Bell said the focus on curriculum reform and learner performance could not be separated from the physical conditions in which teaching and learning take place.

“Logically, one can assume that a child learning under a tree because the building is broken is not going to learn at the same pace and with the same ability as a child at a school where everything works.”

She said National Senior Certificate results showed that pupils in rural and township schools had ability and talent but that many were being held back by poor and declining infrastructure.

She attributed the slow pace of change partly to a lack of political will, saying changes in the language used in infrastructure policy documents suggested a shift in priorities.

“Right in the beginning of the Norms and Standards [for Educators] it used to say ‘eradication of infrastructure backlogs’, now it says

‘infrastructure backlogs must be addressed’. The words ‘eradication’ and ‘addressed’ mean different things, so to us it shows that political will and political priorities are potentially changing.”

She also questioned the DBE's data collection capacity, saying it was not properly equipped to collect infrastructure data at full scale, making it difficult to accurately measure the extent of poor facilities and their effect on pupils.

Cooper-Bell said the debate should not focus only on remedial measures for children forced to learn in unsafe or inadequate conditions but on holding government accountable for allowing the problem to persist more than 30 years into democracy.

“We need to acknowledge that this should not be happening and should not be allowed to continue. We cannot have another generation of pupils that are struggling with the same infrastructure problems that children who are in universities endured during their schooling years.”

The DBE had not responded to a request for comment by the time of publication.



Advertorial

What EWSETA can do for, and with,

The training authority is a critical player in creating opportunities for young people in the energy and water sectors

ROBYN VILAKAZI

As South Africa commemorates Youth Month, we must continue to honour the courage and determination of the young people of 1976, whose call for education, dignity and opportunity helped shape the South Africa we know today.

Fifty years later, their legacy challenges us to ask an important question: Are we creating enough opportunities for young people to participate meaningfully in our economy and society? What are we doing, and what can we do better, to create opportunities in a way that reduces youth unemployment, currently estimated to stand at 60% and arguably the greatest challenge we face as a country?

This question is particularly relevant to the energy and water sectors. These sectors are critical to South Africa's growth, infrastructure development, energy security and water resilience. They are also sectors that can create life-changing opportunities for young people through skills development, artisan training, workplace learning, entrepreneurship and employment.

EWSETA sees itself as a critical player in creating opportunities for young people through partnerships needed to ensure that young people are not only trained but are able to access real opportunities and sustainable livelihoods.

EWSETA believes in commitment and a shared responsibility for youth development. The future of our sectors and our country depends on the opportunities we create for young people today.

As a SETA, our responsibility is not simply to fund training programmes. Our responsibility is to anticipate future skills needs, understand changing sector demands and ensure that South Africans, particularly young people, are equipped to participate meaningfully in the economy. We do this through access to Labour Market Intelligence, the National Skills Plan and research from various institutions that focus on these two critical sectors, water and energy.

This is especially important at a time when both the energy and water sectors are undergoing significant transformation. South Africa's energy transition, infrastructure expansion, water security challenges, technological advancement and growing sustainability requirements are creating new opportunities and new skills demands. These developments require a workforce that is technically competent, adaptable and future-focused.

For EWSETA, youth development is not only a social imperative but also an economic imperative. The sustain-



Critical player: Acting CEO of EWSETA, Robyn Vilakazi, says the training authority has a vital role to play in creating life-changing opportunities for young people. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Powering up: In the critical areas of renewable energy and just energy transition programmes, EWSETA works with TVET colleges, international partners, and government bodies to fund training and business development for women and youth to enter the alternative energy sector. Photo: Vecteezy.com

ability and competitiveness of our sectors depend on our ability to develop the next generation of artisans, technicians, engineers, professionals, entrepreneurs and innovators.

This is why partnerships are so important. No single organisation can solve youth unemployment or skills shortages on its own. Success depends on collaboration between government, employers, education and training institutions, youth development agencies and young people themselves.

Through discretionary grants, the largest component of our work, we partner with employers to offer workplace-based training opportunities through training providers, who are critical to our training ecosystem. But these are by no means the only partnerships we have or run to benefit young people.

Through our Women in Energy & Nuclear programme, for example, EWSETA partnered with institutions like the Wits Business School to run leadership and executive development programs specifically tailored for women in the nuclear and energy sectors.

In the critical areas of renewable

energy and just energy transition programmes, we work with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, international partners, and government bodies to fund training and business development, specifically empowering women and youth to enter the alternative energy sector.

“Youth development is not only a social imperative but also an economic imperative. — Robyn Vilakazi”

We recognise that small businesses are the bedrock on which sectors can be built and employment created, and young people are perfectly suited to take on the risk and enterprise to start a small business. That is why EWSETA



Smart solutions: EWSETA beneficiary Mfanelo S'Phelele Calvin Ndlela, the Founder, CEO and Research and Development Director of Volutaire and Electri-Coal Technologies, participated in EWSETA's Renewable Energy and Water Skills Transfer Programme, which helped strengthen his technical expertise and leadership capabilities. Photo: Facebook



Water of life: This precious resource needs skilled workers of all types – from scientists to data technicians to plumbers – to ensure the systems that deliver water are functioning properly and are secure and resilient. Photo: Vecteezy.com

offers SMME and enterprise support. Through the Energy Infrastructure Skills Programme, we partner to equip and resource small, medium, and micro enterprises to participate effectively in the demanding energy sector.

This is why it is gratifying to see and share platforms with EWSETA beneficiaries such as Mfanelo S'Phelele Ndlela, or Calvin, as I remember him, the Founder, Chief Executive Officer and Research and Development Director of VOLUTAIRE*, a proudly South African, youth-owned technology enterprise operating in the fields of artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, smart utilities, renewable energy, water security and sustainable infrastructure solutions.

SETAs have also collectively directed about R6 billion to universities to assist in funding the “missing middle”, comprised of young people who would otherwise not access higher education. Over the same period, Community Colleges have been funded for about R300 million. Most of this funding benefits young people.

We worked with Ndlela during the 2019/20 financial year, where he participated in EWSETA's Renewable Energy and Water Skills Transfer Programme, which he says has helped strengthen his technical expertise and leadership capabilities. In July this year, he is preparing to launch an application that can be used to monitor water systems, including detecting

leaks, which we believe will positively impact the water sector

Dr Felleng Yende, the CEO of the Fibre, Processing and Manufacturing SETA and also chairperson of the SETA CEO Forum on which I sit frequently, shares how, between 2019 and 2024, SETAs invested R5 billion into TVET Colleges for lecture development and curriculum and infrastructure modernisation.

We believe that uplifting young people will have a transformative impact on South Africa's economic growth trajectory and all of society, which is why we are invested in their success.

• Robyn Vilakazi is the Acting CEO of EWSETA



Advertorial

the talented youth of South Africa

Preparing youth for the jobs of the future

THAPELO MOLEFE

The Energy and Water Sector Education and Training Authority (EWSETA) says South Africa's next challenge is ensuring young people have the skills needed to participate meaningfully in an economy being reshaped by technology, climate change and the energy transition.

The message emerged during an EWSETA Youth Month webinar, hosted with *Inside Education*, where government, industry and youth development leaders reflected on the legacy of the 1976 Soweto Uprising while exploring how South Africa can better prepare today's generation for employment, entrepreneurship and economic participation.

Opening the discussion, EWSETA Board Chairperson Morwesi Ramonyai-Thonga said the webinar was an opportunity not only to commemorate the youth of 1976 but also to assess whether South Africa had created sufficient opportunities for young people over the past five decades.

“As we commemorate this Youth Month, we honour the courage and determination of the young people of 1976 whose call for education, dignity and opportunity helped shape the South Africa we know today,” she said.

Ramonyai-Thonga said their legacy should prompt South Africans to ask whether enough had been done to create meaningful opportunities for young people to participate fully in the economy.

She described the energy and water sectors as central to economic growth, infrastructure development, energy security and water resilience, while also offering significant opportunities through skills development, artisan training, workplace learning and entrepreneurship. EWSETA Acting Chief Executive Robyn Vilakazi said the organisation's role extends well beyond funding training programmes.

“We've got a far more important mandate, which really is about anticipating the skills that are going to be needed for the energy and water sector,” she said.

Vilakazi said the sectors are undergoing rapid transformation driven by the just energy transition, climate change, technological advances and growing infrastructure investment. As a result, South Africa must develop a workforce that is not only technically competent but also



High-level panel: Candice Moodley, moderator; Robyn Vilakazi, Acting CEO of EWSETA; Raymond Matlala, CEO of the South African BRICS Youth Association; and Sherrie Donaldson from the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator took part in the EWSETA Youth Month webinar, hosted by Inside Education. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Well connected: EWSETA Board Chairperson Morwesi Ramonyai-Thonga opened the EWSETA Youth Month webinar in which Maureen Miles, Senior Manager: Talent Management at Rand Water, and Mfanelo S'Phelele Calvin Ndlela, Founder of Electri-Coal Technologies, also took part together with dozens of others from across SA



adaptable and future-ready.

She stressed that youth skills development is both an economic necessity and a shared responsibility requiring stronger collaboration between government, business, educational institutions, communities and young people themselves.

The discussion also examined the widening gap between education and employment. Sherrie Donaldson, Lead for Emerging Opportunities and Opportunity Development and Incubation at the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, said that while access to education had improved significantly, access to employment remained a major obstacle.

“The challenge for young people now is as urgent, but it's not so much about education ... it's about access to jobs,” she said.

Donaldson argued that South Africa should move beyond isolated training initiatives towards complete employment pathways aligned with labour market demand.

“We should be building pathways, not programmes,” she said.

She added that skills development should respond directly to employer demand while addressing barriers

such as transport costs, limited workplace exposure, weak professional networks and poor access to information.

The webinar also highlighted the continuing importance of technical and vocational careers.

Rand Water Senior Manager for Talent Management Maureen Miles said artisans and process controllers remain indispensable to South Africa's infrastructure despite changing workplace expectations among younger generations.

Rand Water invests extensively in bursaries, internships, apprenticeships, learnerships and graduate programmes, with between 300 and 350 learners participating in its development initiatives at any given time.

Miles encouraged young people to consider careers through TVET colleges, noting that many artisans later continue their studies and become professionally registered specialists, demonstrating that vocational education provides a strong platform for long-term career development.

A key focus of the webinar was demonstrating how targeted skills development can translate into entrepreneurship and job creation.

Entrepreneur and Electri-coal Technologies founder Mfanelo Ndlela, an EWSETA beneficiary, explained how participation in one of EWSETA's renewable energy and water skills programmes helped launch his business.

The company was established to address two of Africa's most pressing challenges: reliable electricity and access to clean water.

Today, Electrical Technologies has developed patented and trademarked artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that monitor water quality, measure water flow, detect leaks in real time and improve water infrastructure management.

Ndlela said the company now employs 15 young people and continues to expand through partnerships with EWSETA, the Water Research Commission, Microsoft and Google South Africa.

He also revealed that he had been invited to Washington, DC, to participate in a programme exploring the use of AI to address water challenges after receiving international recognition for his work.

Ndlela credited EWSETA's support with transforming an innovative idea into a growing technology business.

“Had we not taken part in the skills development programme... supported by the Energy and Water SETA, we wouldn't be here today,” he said.

He added that the company plans to create further employment opportunities for young people through future projects. South African BRICS Youth Association Chief Executive Raymond Matlala encouraged young people to explore educational, entrepreneurial and trade opportunities available through the BRICS grouping.

He said BRICS initiatives include youth innovation summits, AI policy laboratories, entrepreneurship programmes, trade platforms and international internship exchanges that expose participants to emerging industries and global markets.

Matlala urged South African youth to take advantage of opportunities in renewable energy, manufacturing, agriculture, information technology and AI across BRICS member states, adding that greater awareness of these initiatives could help more young entrepreneurs access international markets.

As the discussion concluded, panellists agreed that preparing young people for the future would require stronger collaboration between government, employers, educational institutions and civil society.

Rather than focusing solely on the scale of youth unemployment, speakers called for practical solutions that create clearer pathways from education into employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

For EWSETA, the message was clear: while the youth of 1976 fought for the right to quality education, today's generation must be equipped with the skills, opportunities and support needed to transform that education into meaningful economic participation in South Africa's evolving energy and water sectors.

Technology



At risk: This young girl is not yet in school, but when she does start, should she be allowed to use AI chatbots? Photo: Vecteezy.com

AI chatbots weaken children’s critical thinking abilities

AKANI NKUNA

Tech expert Patric Trollope, Chief Technology Officer at d6, says children’s growing reliance on AI chatbots risks weakening their comprehension, critical thinking and healthy social development as more young users turn to the tools for answers and emotional support. Trollope told *Inside Education* that AI has made information easily accessible, but not necessarily understandable.

“I think that the bigger danger is not that the kids are using the tools; I think that is out of curiosity, and it’s a good exploration. The challenge is the lack of guardrails around these tools and what is being done with the information that the kids are sharing on these platforms,” he said.

Trollope said that confusing access with real learning could produce a generation able to deliver answers without grasping their meaning or questioning whether they asked the right thing.

“The access to information is wonderful, but access to information is not the same as education. Education is information that has been contextualised and is guided. A chatbot can give you an answer, but it cannot tell if you understood it or if you asked the right question for your situation,” said Trollope.

Research from Ofcom, the United Kingdom’s communications regulator, shows AI use is already widespread among children.

In its 2025 children’s media literacy report, Ofcom found that half of children aged eight to 17 had used AI tools for schoolwork and learning.

In the United States, Common Sense Media found in 2025 that 72% of teens had used AI companions and that 52% were regular users. It found that 33% of teens used AI companions for social interaction or relationships.

In the UK, Internet Matters found that 35% of children who had used AI chatbots said talking to one felt like “talking to a friend”, 23% had asked a chatbot for advice, and 12%

said they used one because they had no one else to speak with.

UNESCO has said that there is not yet conclusive evidence that generative AI tools such as ChatGPT improve learning outcomes. It has called for an age limit of 13 for the use of AI tools in classrooms.

UNICEF has said AI systems should support children’s independent cognitive and socio-emotional development, not weaken it through over-assistance or automation. It also said that little is yet known about the long-term effects of chatbot use on children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.

Said Trollope: “These tools were never designed for children. They do not adapt to the children’s developmental stage, they do not limit the topic scope that is available, and they do not let parents know when there is a conversation that is going somewhere concerning.”

Accessibility alone is not the problem, he told *Inside Education*. “I think the problem is the absence of age-appropriate design.”

The “judgment free” design of the tools exposed shortcomings in parental and adult guidance, he said. Trollope said parents and teachers need to create environments where children could raise concerns and explore their curiosity without fear of judgement.

He said adults needed to make time for children, despite busy schedules, because a lack of attention could push them to using chatbots.

“If a child is feeling safer talking to a chatbot than a parent or teacher, I think we need to ask ourselves why, and whether there is a stigma or judgment in the topics that they want to discuss, or whether they feel like they will be punished,” he said.

There was a growing tension between convenience and critical thinking, he said. While chatbot tools offer instant answers, they may also undermine the development of young minds.

“There is a convenience paradox; if a child can produce an essay in 30 seconds, then their incentive to develop critical thinking skills and writing skills collapses. So now, we

risk solving an output gap but creating a capability gap,” he said.

Trollope did say, however, that AI chatbots can be better utilised to assist teachers in identifying children who are not academically inclined, ensuring that the teacher develops teaching mechanisms better suited to their needs.

He warned that the lack of clear rules governing AI data processing posed a serious risk and called for age verification and parental consent where minors are involved.

Trollope said that when children’s data is processed, platforms should be required to limit the amount of information collected and explain their practices in clear, plain language so users can make informed decisions.

“[T]he private policy on these platforms is written for adults, and children cannot meaningfully consent under the Protection of Personal Information Act or any other privacy framework, so there is definitely a compliance gap here between the technology and the policy that is supposed to be protecting us.”

Early Childhood Development

ECD registrations more than double, but infrastructure hurdles keep centres from subsidies

CHARMAINE NDLELA

The number of registered Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes in South Africa has more than doubled over the past five years, but infrastructure problems, missing paperwork and delays in municipal inspections are still preventing many operators from reaching the compliance stage needed to access government subsidies.

According to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) 39,072 ECD programmes were registered in 2026, up from 16,968 identified during the 2021 ECD Census.

The increase comes as the government accelerates efforts to expand access to early learning, improve school readiness and tackle the country’s literacy crisis, with 81% of Grade 4 learners unable to read for meaning.

Using the 2021 ECD Census baseline, the DBE estimates that about 8% of ECD programmes remain outside the registration system. The department says its Bana Pele ECD mass registration drive is helping previously unregistered programmes enter the regulatory system while working towards health, safety and quality standards.

The programme is intended to help more ECD operators qualify for government subsidies, teaching materials and infrastructure support, but the DBE and sector organisations say many centres still struggle to meet full compliance requirements.

The Bana Pele campaign was launched to bring unregistered ECD programmes into the regulatory system while supporting operators to comply with minimum standards.

Registration is free and follows a phased process. Programmes first apply for bronze registration, which brings them into the system through a simplified process. They then progress to the silver/gold compliance stage, where they must meet more extensive norms and standards before qualifying programmes can access government subsidies.

The campaign has already recorded significant progress.

According to the DBE’s May 2026 Bana Pele newsletter, 27,521 bronze applications had been received, with 18,639 completed and 15,504 approved. A further 8,882 applications were still being finalised.

For the silver/gold phase, 5,694 applications had been submitted and 418 approved by May.



Head start: Research has consistently shown that children who miss out on quality early learning opportunities are more likely to struggle when they enter formal schooling. Photo: X

The department has set a target of approving 20,000 bronze registrations and 8,000 silver/gold registrations by December 2026.

DBE spokesperson Lukhanyo Vangqa said the registration drive had dramatically increased the number of recognised ECD programmes across the country.

“During the 2021 ECD Census, we identified 42,420 ECD programmes across the country, of which only 16,968 were registered. Today, that number has increased dramatically to 39,072 registered ECD programmes in 2026,” he said.

Vangqa said the bronze phase was deliberately designed to make registration easier and more accessible.

At this level, ECD operators register on the eCares digital platform, upload identification documents and National Child Protection Register forms, complete a health and safety declaration, and, if all requirements are met, receive bronze registration.

The next phase, known as silver/gold or the “Comply” stage, requires centres to meet more extensive norms and standards.

Programmes must submit supporting documentation, undergo inspections by environmental health practitioners and social workers, and demonstrate compliance with safety and quality requirements before becoming eligible for government subsidies.

Vangqa said many centres struggle at this stage because of missing

documentation, limited access to municipal inspections and the large number of site assessments required.

To address these challenges, the DBE has rolled out silver/gold registration clinics across provinces and strengthened collaboration between municipalities, social workers and environmental health practitioners.

More than 1,000 practitioners have already been supported through provincial registration clinics.

The department is also developing a WhatsApp support bot, expected to launch in July, and has established weekly monitoring meetings with provincial education departments to accelerate registrations.

The government’s long-term goal is not only to register centres but also to expand access to quality early learning opportunities, particularly in underserved communities.

The drive is closely linked to the proposed Children’s Act Amendment Bill, 2026, which the Cabinet has approved for submission to Parliament. The Bill seeks to simplify ECD registration, create a single registration process, recognise different ECD programme models and consolidate oversight under the Department of Basic Education.

It is also expected to address barriers that prevent many ECD programmes from accessing the R24 per child per day government subsidy.

Avo Vision, one of several organ-

isations supporting the registration drive, works with ECD centres to improve sustainability and compliance.

Speaking to *Inside Education*, Nthabiseng Mahlanga and Khwezi Cenenda said the organisation helps centres reduce operating costs through partnerships such as the Industrial Development Corporation’s Social Employment Fund (SEF) programme.

The SEF is part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus and supports work opportunities in community-based programmes.

Under the programme, Avo Vision places SEF-funded participants at ECD centres as support staff while providing mentorship and business development support to centre owners. The stipend is funded through the SEF, allowing ECD operators to redirect savings on wage costs towards improving their facilities and services.

“This support serves as working capital support alongside coaching to principals to redirect savings on wage costs towards improving their offering and driving financial sustainability,” they said.

According to Avo Vision, inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, sanitation challenges, funding shortages and irregular fee payments remain major obstacles to registration.

Mahlanga and Cenenda said many centres use the savings from the SEF partnership to improve infrastructure, obtain health certifications, comply with first-aid requirements, expand

classroom space and establish food gardens to support nutrition programmes.

“This support serves as working capital assistance and allows principals to reinvest resources into improving the quality of their offering and strengthening financial sustainability,” they said.

The organisation said these interventions had also improved centres’ chances of meeting DBE registration requirements, as compliance often depends on infrastructure improvements and health and safety upgrades.

As of April 2025, 25 centres supported by Avo Vision had successfully obtained registration. Some centres received direct assistance from Avo Vision’s local extension services and field coordinators during the application process, while others completed the applications independently after receiving guidance and support from the organisation.

Avo Vision is currently working with a cohort of 105 ECD centres, with 28 programmes still progressing through the registration process.

Mahlanga and Cenenda said registration remains one of the most important steps towards financial sustainability because it enables centres to access government subsidies and other sources of funding.

“Once registered, a centre qualifies for the government subsidy of R24 per child per day, which is often the difference between staying open and closing, particularly where parents cannot pay or pay late,” they said.

Despite these challenges, the government remains confident it will meet its registration targets.

Vangqa said the department is on track to achieve 20,000 bronze registrations and 8,000 silver/gold registrations by the end of 2026, extending subsidy access to an additional 350,000 children.

“The registration process is not about being punitive; it’s about being supportive,” he said. “We want children accessing programmes. We simply want those programmes to deliver quality learning and care in safe environments.”

The next major milestone for the sector is expected to be the second Bana Pele ECD Roadmap Leadership Summit in October 2026, where government, business and civil society leaders are expected to meet to accelerate efforts towards universal access to quality early learning.

The summit is set to be officially opened by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Early Childhood Development



Makes sense: “Few investments offer greater returns than ensuring that every child has the opportunity to survive, develop, learn and thrive,” says Tshepo Mantjé of Real Reform for ECD. Photo: Vecteezy.com

R12.8bn ECD boost faces delivery test

CHARMAINE NDELELA

The additional R12.8 billion allocation to Early Childhood Development over the next three years is expected to reach 300,000 more children, but education stakeholders warn that infrastructure backlogs, registration hurdles and inadequate nutrition funding could blunt the impact of the investment.

Senior Right to ECD Coordinator at Real Reform for ECD, Tshepo Mantjé, told *Inside Education* that the additional funding was an important step in recognising the role of ECD in South Africa’s development.

“It signals growing recognition by government that early childhood development is not simply a welfare issue but a foundational investment in South Africa’s future,” he said.

But Mantjé cautioned that the true impact of the allocation would depend on whether the money reaches the children and centres that need it most.

“Funding is necessary, but it must be accompanied by regulatory reform, municipal support, simplified registration pathways, improved monitoring, and deliberate efforts to reach underserved communities,” he said.

Mantjé said ECD should be viewed as economic infrastructure rather than a social welfare intervention.

“Children who receive quality early learning and nutrition are more likely to succeed in school, participate in the labour market, earn higher incomes, and contribute productively to the economy,” he said.

The additional R12.8 billion allocation announced by Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana in February will

be channelled through the ECD conditional grant to provinces over the next three years.

Welcoming the additional R12.8 billion in her budget vote speech last month, Basic Education Minister Siviwe Gwarube said National Treasury had not allocated the full funding required to meet immediate Grade R implementation pressures.

“We have therefore redirected R800 million from the ECD grant to address immediate Grade R pressures. This is not ideal, but doing nothing would be worse,” she said.

Gwarube made it clear that national allocations are not keeping pace with the full cost of implementation in provinces. “The learner must not become the shock absorber for provincial cash-flow failures,” she said.

She also announced that an ECD nutrition pilot had entered implementation, with the contract advertised in March 2026 and centres in the Eastern Cape expected to be piloted soon.

She said the programme responded to Thrive by Five findings on stunting among young children, including four-year-olds in early learning settings.

The 2021 ECD Census recorded approximately 42,420 ECD programmes in South Africa, many of which continue to face challenges related to infrastructure, registration, funding and access to subsidies.

The Department of Basic Education’s 2026/27 allocation is R38.2 billion, including R32.7 billion for conditional grants. Those include almost R11 billion for school nutrition, R16 billion for school infrastructure, R4.6 billion for early childhood development, R477 million for mathematics,

science and technology, and R307 million for learners with disabilities.

According to a response provided to *Inside Education* by the National Treasury, the additional allocation was informed by the strong long-term returns associated with early childhood development, particularly in education, health and future employment outcomes.

Treasury said the increase also responds to mounting funding pressures in the sector, as the ECD subsidy had remained at R17 per child per day since 2019, limiting both access and the quality of services.

“The additional funding allows the subsidy to increase to R24 per child per day and supports broader access for children, especially in poorer households,” Treasury said.

Progress will be monitored through quarterly reporting by the Department of Basic Education on the number of children receiving ECD subsidies in each province.

“This should enable Treasury to monitor whether the projected 300,000 additional beneficiaries are being reached, assess provincial implementation, and identify where uptake may be slower than expected,” Treasury said.

Over the medium term, R33.9 billion has also been allocated to the National School Nutrition Programme, which continues to provide meals to more than 9.9 million learners in nearly 20,000 schools.

An additional R342 million has been set aside to progressively equalise Grade R teacher pay, while separate funding has been allocated to other education priorities, including the presidential employment initiative.

The school nutrition programme primarily targets learners attending public schools in Quintiles 1, 2 and 3, which represent the country’s poorest schools. Meals are also provided at qualifying special schools. Mantjé stressed that nutrition is fundamental to children’s educational success.

“A child who is hungry cannot learn effectively, concentrate, participate, or reach their developmental potential,” he said, adding that nutrition should be viewed as a prerequisite for education, particularly during the critical early years of brain development.

Despite the increase in subsidies, he said concerns remain about whether current funding levels are sufficient to provide adequate nutrition.

“The bottom line is that currently the subsidy is R24 per child per day, and of that R24, R9.80 is ring-fenced for nutrition. That is two meals and a snack per child at R9.80. That is grossly inadequate,” he said.

He warned that for many children living in poverty, meals provided through ECD programmes may be the most nutritious food they receive throughout the day.

“Reducing inattention, and identify where uptake may be slower than expected,” Treasury said. “Inequality requires intervention before inequality becomes entrenched. ECD is one of the most effective tools available to achieve this,” he said.

While the government continues efforts to register more ECD centres and improve access to subsidies, Breadline Africa, a non-profit organisation, believes infrastructure remains one of the sector’s most pressing challenges.

CEO Marion Wagner told *Inside Education* that many ECD centres operate from converted houses, informal structures, community halls and shared

facilities that are not designed for young children’s learning and development.

She said many centres lack adequate classroom space, sanitation facilities, fencing, ventilation and other basic infrastructure required for registration.

Wagner noted that centres often struggle to meet municipal compliance requirements needed to obtain health clearances and registration status, preventing them from accessing government subsidies.

She said overcrowded classrooms, unsafe cooking practices, poor sanitation and unstable facilities undermine children’s learning experiences during their most important developmental years.

Wagner pointed to findings from the Thrive by Five study, which showed that children who do not have access to quality ECD programmes often start school already behind their peers.

She warned that children who fall behind early frequently struggle to catch up, particularly in overcrowded and under-resourced schools.

Wagner said the biggest challenge is ensuring funding reaches centres serving the most vulnerable communities, “particularly in rural areas where children are often left behind”.

She suggested that the government should not only invest in building new facilities but also consider upgrading existing structures and converting underutilised public assets into safe ECD centres.

“Failing to invest in young children is ultimately far more expensive,” Mantjé said. “Few investments offer greater returns than ensuring that every child has the opportunity to survive, develop, learn and thrive.”

Travel

Cape Agulhas: Where two oceans meet and nature blooms at the southernmost tip of Africa

SIMON NARE

The rugged coastline of the Agulhas National Park in the Western Cape, about 190 kilometres southeast of Cape Town, draws visitors in with its quiet, elemental beauty.

As you enter the park – anchored around Cape Agulhas, the southernmost tip of Africa – the sound of crashing waves sets the tone, punctuated by the calls of Cape fur seals and seagulls and the occasional sighting of whales and bottlenose dolphins.

Cape Agulhas is the true geographical dividing line between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, where the warm Agulhas Current collides with the cold Benguela Current.

From the historic lighthouse, jagged rock formations and scattered boulders stretch into the horizon. The view is dramatic, almost cinematic. From the lighthouse building, visitors are rewarded with panoramic views of vessels from around the world journeying across the Indian Ocean into the Atlantic.

With fierce storms, towering waves, and cross-currents, this was one of the world’s most treacherous maritime routes, with over 150 shipwrecks scattered along the coastline. To protect sailors, the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse was built in 1848.

Along the shoreline and foothills, Strandveld vernacular-style cottages – built by local fishermen and farmers – blend into the landscape, adding character to the coastal settlement and completing the picture of a community shaped by land and sea.

The surrounding land is part of the Cape Floral Kingdom, the world’s richest, which hosts over 2,000 indigenous plant species, including many unique coastal fynbos varieties

that grow nowhere else on Earth.

Recently, South African National Parks (SANParks), working with the Tourism Department, unveiled a new precinct around the lighthouse. The development includes a restaurant, interpretation centre and curio shop aimed at deepening the visitor experience.

Park manager Dhiraj Nariandas, speaking on the sidelines of the launch, said the precinct was designed to “tell a story” of the area and leave visitors with something tangible to take away.

“I want this precinct to be something that tells a story. If you take that narrative and experience the coastline, that is what is exciting about this precinct. It ties in the past ... it is about telling stories and creating memories.”

The interpretation centre itself presents layered histories of the region – from early Khoisan hunter-gatherer communities that followed animal migrations thousands of years ago to the ecological importance of the coastline and its breeding areas.

Exhibits combine photographs, visuals and digital media to help visitors understand how the landscape has evolved over centuries, including the establishment of the lighthouse and the human activity that shaped the coast.

Interactive QR codes allow visitors to scan and access digital reconstructions of life in the area thousands of years ago, offering a more immersive historical experience.

Agulhas National Park spans about 21 hectares and stretches roughly 72km along the coastline. Initially a small protected area of just four hectares, it was formally proclaimed in 1999 and later expanded by SAN-



Rugged beauty: Visitors to the Agulhas National Park get a close-up view of a wrecked ship; the new Interpretation Centre at the park; and the historic lighthouse that warns ships not to get too close to the shore. Photos: SANParks



Parks with support from conservation partners such as the World Wide Fund for Nature to protect wetlands, salt pans and fynbos vegetation.

At the southernmost tip, where the Indian and Atlantic oceans meet, a stone cairn and map monument mark the symbolic point of convergence – just a short walk from the new precinct.

While there are no Big Five safari drives here, the marine environment is rich and diverse. The park is home to what is often referred to as the “marine Big Five”: southern right whales, whale sharks, bottlenose dolphins, Cape fur seals and African penguins.

For Nariandas, the vision of the park goes beyond wildlife viewing – it is about interpretation and connection.

“That is the kind of story we want to tell here. When you walk with marine biologists or local guides, they open up this area and let it sing to you. It’s about appreciating the small things around here that tell their own story,” he said.

The park supports a range of habitats, home to more than 60 small mammal species and at least 36 bird species. Between May and September, seasonal wildflowers transform the fynbos into a vibrant display, attracting nature enthusiasts and birders.

Species such as the Cape sugarbird, southern double-collared sunbird and orange-breasted sunbird are commonly spotted.

For more active visitors, the park offers mountain biking trails, fishing, kayaking, e-bike routes and even paddleboard yoga experiences run by local operators.

Food in the area is rooted in coastal tradition, with small local eateries serving seafood dishes, each with its own local flavour, far removed from big franchise chains.

Visitors are advised to avoid the winter months due to strong winds and cold conditions, while summer brings peak tourism and the need for early bookings.

Advertorial



Honouring June 16: From the legacy of 1976 to building the future in 2026

DR FELLENG YENDE

As South Africa marks the 50th anniversary of June 16, 1976, we pause not only to remember the courage of the youth who stood up for their right to quality education, but also to reflect on how far we have come and how far we still need to go.

The youth of 1976 were not just protesting a system; they were demanding a future. Today, that future rests in our hands.

At FP&M SETA, we carry this legacy forward through a singular mandate: to develop skills, unlock opportunities, and empower young people to actively participate in building the economy of tomorrow.

Carrying the Torch: Skills as a Tool for Transformation

The story of June 16 is ultimately about access, access to education, opportunity, and dignity. In 2026, the conversation has evolved, but the goal remains the same: ensuring young people are equipped with relevant, future-fit skills.

FP&M SETA works across key sectors including fibre processing, manufacturing, clothing, textiles, forestry, furniture, leather, and related industries, ensuring that young people are not left behind in an evolving economic landscape.

Through learnerships, internships, artisan development programmes, bursaries, and workplace-based experience, we are creating pathways

for youth to transition from learning into earning.

Reaching the Youth Where They Are

Today's youth engage with the world differently. Information is fast, visual, and digital and we have embraced that reality.

FP&M SETA continues to leverage social media platforms to increase awareness, provide access to information, and connect directly with young people. Through platforms such as:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube

we are sharing opportunities, showcasing success stories, and simplifying complex information about

skills development into relatable, accessible content.

Our digital approach is intentional we are using the same tools that young people use daily to ensure that no opportunity is missed simply because information was out of reach.

Building for 2026 and Beyond: Occupational Qualifications Development

A critical part of shaping the future lies in ensuring that training keeps pace with industry needs.

FP&M SETA is actively driving the development of Occupational Qualifications, designed to:

- Align skills with current and

emerging industry demands

- Improve employability and workplace readiness
- Respond to technological advancement and sector transformation
- Support inclusive economic growth

These qualifications are not just academic frameworks they are practical, industry-relevant pathways that ensure young people are equipped for real jobs, real businesses, and real impact.

In doing so, we are not only preparing youth for employment we are preparing them to become innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders in their sectors.

Dr Felleng Yende is CEO of the FP&M Seta

Advertorial



MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Dr. Felleng Yende

"June 16 is not only a day of remembrance it is a call to action. The youth of 1976 fought for access to education; today, our responsibility is to ensure that education translates into opportunity. At FP&M SETA, we are committed to equipping young people with the skills they need to participate meaningfully in the economy and to shape the future of our country. As we look towards 2026 and beyond, we remain steadfast in building a skills development system that is inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the needs of our youth."

Dr. Felleng Yende



LOOKING AHEAD: • Fifty years later, the spirit of June 16 lives on in classrooms, workshops, factories, and digital platforms across the country. • At FP&M SETA, we are proud to play our part in ensuring that the youth are not only remembered but empowered. • Because the future of South Africa is not something we wait for. It is something we build together, through skills.

Real Impact: Stories of Transformation

At the heart of our work are the lives we impact

Rising Through the Ranks

Avhaphani Mmbengwa's Inspiring Journey



At FP&M SETA, we believe in the importance of investing in youth. This commitment is evident not only in our programmes and initiatives, but also within our own corridors.

Avhaphani Mmbengwa, who was employed as part of our security team, has shown remarkable dedication and perseverance. While working, she diligently pursued her Bachelor of Education in Intermediate Phase Teaching, demonstrating true resilience and a passion for growth.

She later joined FP&M SETA as an intern, where she continued to grow and develop her skills. Currently, she is working as a Marketing & Communication Administrator, a role that reflects her growth, professionalism, and commitment.

Her story is a powerful testament to the impact of hard work, determination, and the opportunities created when we invest in our youth. We are incredibly proud of her achievements and excited to see her continue to thrive.

I'm a Breadwinner Who Wins

Charmaine Ngomane's Journey with FP&M SETA



Charmaine Ngomane, 29, is from Kwabokweni in Ngodini. Despite a Bachelor of Communication from the University of Limpopo and three years of experience, she was unemployed for a year. As a mother of two boys, not providing for her family broke her heart daily.

Her life shifted with an FP&M SETA internship at River Sawmill. She knew nothing about sawmilling but embraced the learning curve. Through admin, finance, and sales training, she gained stability. Reliable payments meant she could put bread on the table and save to fix her home.

The program elevated her reception skills and taught her debits, credits, and customer service. Support from her seniors and HR managers made the workplace feel like home. It was conducive, educative, and exceeded her expectations.

Now advanced in reception, filing, sales admin, and finance, Charmaine was retained by White River Sawmill. She has a strong interest in sawmilling and is eager to learn more. The opportunity transformed her family. She calls herself a breadwinner who truly wins bread.

These journeys reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that every young person who enters our programmes leaves with more than just a certificate but with confidence, skills, and a clear path forward.

A Legacy That Lives On

As we honour the youth of 1976, we recognise that their fight created the foundation for the work we do today.

Their bravery demands that we do more than remember it compels us to act.

Phambili FP&M SETA. Phambili

Real Impact: Stories of Transformation

At the heart of our work are the lives we impact

From Learnership to Life Skills

How FP&M SETA Helped Shape Jonathan Witbooi's Career Path



Jonathan Azil Witbooi, a 26-year-old from Cape Town, is passionate about health, fitness, and personal growth. After completing a Diploma in Tourism Management in 2022 and gaining work experience, he joined a Business Administration NQF Level 3 learnership at SpecCon Holdings, funded by FP&M SETA.

Through the programme, Jonathan gained valuable skills in time management, communication, and computer literacy, supported by strong mentorship and a monthly stipend. The learnership positively shaped his confidence, work ethic, and career direction, opening doors to new employment and future

business opportunities. He is grateful to FP&M SETA for providing an opportunity that had a meaningful impact on his life.

Stitching Dreams into Reality

The Rise of Insane World Brand



At 23, Katjila Rakoma from Namakgale, Limpopo, has turned a passion for repairing denim into a growing brand, Insane World. His journey took shape after completing an FP&M SETA-accredited sewing programme with Chen Women Empowerment, where he gained both technical and business skills.

Featured in FP&M SETA's learner tracing docuseries, Katjila credited his inspiration to fashion icon Dr David Tlale — a moment that resonated deeply with leadership and led to him being invited to showcase his work at the FP&M SETA AGM.

What followed was life changing. After seeing his designs, Dr Tlale personally selected Katjila for an exclusive training programme at the David Tlale Academy, supported by Absa. Katjila's dream is clear: "To open a clothing factory in my community and create real opportunities for young people."

From Uncertainty to Opportunity

How FP&M SETA Helped Damian van Rensburg Build a Career in Administration



Damian van Rensburg's career journey changed direction after he joined an FP&M SETA funded training programme in Cape Town. Originally from Alberton, Johannesburg, Van Rensburg struggled to gain work experience after finishing high school and was unable to afford university studies.

Driven by a desire to work in Business Administration, he enrolled in the National Certificate in Business Administration Services (NQF Level 3) through SpecCon Holdings. The programme provided financial support, practical skills training, and mentorship, all of which helped him gain real workplace experience.

While completing his studies, Van Rensburg worked as a Facilitator Assistant at SpecCon Holdings, applying his administrative skills in a real training environment. Today, he is permanently employed in the same role and credits the FP&M SETA programme with giving him stability, confidence, and a clear career path.

Now looking ahead to further studies in Business or Project Management, Van Rensburg hopes to grow into senior administrative and coordination roles. His story highlights how targeted skills development and SETA support can turn potential into opportunity.

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SCAN THE QR CODE

For more information on FP&M SETA programmes, funded projects and opportunities, visit our website: www.fpmseta.org.za

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Advertorial

Building the bridge from education to employability in services

LEHLOGONOLO MASOGA

As we marked Youth Month, we were reminded of President Cyril Ramaphosa's call in his State of the Nation Address for a "skills revolution" to decisively address the persistent challenge of young people who are not in education, employment or training.

It is against the backdrop of the President's SONA that we, as the Services SETA, commemorated the 50 years since the June 16 Soweto Youth Uprisings.

June reminded South Africa and the world of the courage of the young people of 1976, who fought for the right to learn with dignity. However, fifty years later, the struggle facing many young people has changed, but it remains urgent. Today, the question is whether education, training and qualifications are opening real pathways into work, enterprise and economic participation.

For the Services SETA, this question sits at the centre of our mandate. Our work is about connecting young people, employers, training institutions and sector partners so that learning does not end at certification but leads to workplace readiness, employability and dignity.

The scale of the challenge is clear. Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey for Q1 2026 shows that 45.6% of young people aged 15 to 34 were not in employment, education or training. This is more than an unemployment statistic; it highlights a deeper gap between education, skills development and labour market participation.

The President's Youth Day message spoke directly about this challenge. He called for the country to move away from "training for training's sake" and to strengthen the link between colleges, employers and SETAs. This is particularly important for TVET Colleges and CET Colleges, which are critical parts of the post-school education and training system.

Last month, Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela underscored the government's seriousness in achieving a skills revolution. The Minister led a policy debate on Budget 17 of the department in the National Council of Provinces that set out a R149.2 billion allocation for the 2026/27 financial year and a R468 billion programme over the medium term aimed at "expanding access, rebuilding college infrastructure, and driving the country's skills revolution".

His words were telling and instructive. "The youth of 1976 fought for the right to learn. The youth of 2026 demand more: the right to skill, to innovate, to work, and to participate meaningfully in the economy of their own country. This budget is our answer to that demand."



Timely reminder: Lehlogonolo Masoga, Administrator of the Services SETA says learning should not end at certification but lead to workplace readiness, employability and dignity. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

Skills are not formed in classrooms alone. They are shaped in workplaces, industries, communities and enterprises. This is why the bridge between education and employability must be practical. It must include work-integrated learning, employer-hosted training, internships, learnerships, artisan development, occupational skills and structured workplace exposure.

“We must ... strengthen partnerships that move young people ... from potential to productivity — Lehlogonolo Masoga”

Investment in learning environments also matters
The Services SETA's R90 million investment in revitalising CET Colleges is one example of how the public skills pipeline can be strengthened. For many young people and adults, CET Colleges provide a vital pathway back into learning, skills development and future economic participation.
The services sector must also be recognised as a serious pathway for

tor where transformation and youth participation remain priorities, such interventions can create opportunities for employment, professional practice and economic inclusion.

Our PowerX² 20,000 initiative offers another important example of the scale of youth demand for workplace opportunity. The initiative is aimed at expanding internship opportunities for unemployed graduates. Early indications show that applicant interest has significantly exceeded the original target, subject to final verification and internal confirmation. This response confirms the urgency of the challenge, but it also highlights the role of employers.

If initiatives such as PowerX² 20,000 are to achieve their intended impact, employers must be willing to host graduates and provide structured workplace exposure. Young people cannot be expected to have experience if workplaces remain closed to them. The President's call to "hire for potential, not only for experience" is therefore not only a message of encouragement. It is a practical call to action.

Youth Month must leave behind more than commemorative messages. It must strengthen partnerships that move young people from classrooms to workplaces, from training to confidence, and from potential to productivity. Building that bridge is not the responsibility of young people alone. It is a national responsibility, and it requires all of us to open the pathways that will allow young South Africans to participate fully in the economy.

• **Lehlogonolo Masoga is the Administrator of the Services SETA**

Wide variety of job training offered

The Services SETA funds and oversees training for occupations across SA's service, business, and administrative sectors. Training is primarily delivered through learnerships, internships, apprenticeships, and skills programmes.

The key occupational fields covered include:

- **Business & Administration:** Human Resources (HR) practitioners, general business administrators, project managers, and office assistants.
- **Real Estate:** Property practitioners, estate agents, and real estate sales or property management professionals.
- **Hospitality, Travel & Tourism:** Hotel and lodge managers, travel agents, event planners, and customer service staff.
- **Personal Care & Services:** Hairdressers, beauty therapists, nail technicians, and spa workers.
- **Cleaning & Hygiene Services:** Commercial and domestic cleaners, laundry/dry-cleaning staff, hygiene specialists, and pest control operators.
- **Security & Safety:** Occupational health and safety practitioners, security personnel, and control room operators.



Real success: A Services SETA's skills development programme recently resulted in the graduation of 537 young certified real estate practitioners, reflecting a meaningful pathway into a professional sector. Photo: Vecteezy.com

- **Funeral Services:** Undertakers, embalmers, and funeral directors.
- **Marketing & Communications:** Call centre operators, customer care agents, and marketing assistants.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Start-up founders, small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) operators, and cooperative managers.



Advertorial

R90 million investment takes community learning to every province

AMANDA SITHOLE

Services SETA's R90 million investment in Community Education and Training colleges is a strong example of taking skills development closer to communities that are often left outside formal education and employment pathways.

The investment will be distributed across all nine provinces, with each province receiving R10 million to support CET development initiatives. The funding is aimed at infrastructure development, ICT capabilities and learning support, with a clear focus on expanding access to community-based education.

CET colleges occupy an important but often overlooked position in the post-school education and training system. They serve adults, out-of-school youth and learners whose ambitions may not yet find expression through universities or TVET colleges. They support second-chance learning, adult education and community-based skills development.

The rollout was marked by two key moments. The first was the launch of the Mlandeleni Community Learning Centre infrastructure upgrade project in Ndwedwe, KwaZulu-Natal, where Services SETA handed over R5 million to support the centre. The second was the formal R90 million cheque handover at Lovedale TVET College in the Eastern Cape during the launch of the National Adult Literacy for Empowerment Campaign 2026–2030.

The Mlandeleni Community Learning Centre has more than 1,000 students enrolled and offers adult learning programmes. It serves as a vital second-chance learning space for out-of-school



Community outreach: Dr Mimmy Gondwe launched the infrastructure upgrade to the Mlandeleni Community Learning Centre, when she was the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training

The National Adult Literacy for Empowerment Campaign aims to reach one million adult learners by 2030. It focuses on basic and functional literacy, numeracy, digital skills, financial skills, entrepreneurship and civic education, particularly in rural, mining and marginalised communities.

For Services SETA, the investment confirms a broader commitment to the public education system. It is not only about funding individual learners, but about strengthening the institutions closest to communities. It shows that skills development must reach people where they are, especially those who have been left outside traditional pathways.

Services SETA and UCT build Africa's future in skin and hair science

AMANDA SITHOLE

Services SETA's partnership with the University of Cape Town is more than an infrastructure project. It is an investment in African-led science, future skills and economic participation in the personal care industry.

Through a R100 million investment, Services SETA is supporting the development of the Africa Research Institute for Skin Health, known as ARISE, at UCT. The five-storey facility is designed to strengthen research, training and skills development in skin and hair health while expanding South Africa's capacity in cosmetic formulation, product safety, occupational skin health and industry-aligned training.

The sod-turning ceremony, held on 13 February 2026, marked the start of construction on a project that links science directly to skills development and employment opportunities. ARISE will be housed within UCT's Division of Dermatology and is expected to support greater student enrolment, broader short course offerings and the flagship Advanced Diploma in Cosmetic Formulation Science.

For Services SETA, the project reflects a deliberate move to support sectors with long-term growth potential. Skin and hair care form part of the multi-billion-rand personal care economy, yet African populations remain under-represented in research, product development and safety standards. ARISE responds to that gap by building scientific capacity on the continent and creating a platform for innovation, enterprise and employment.

Services SETA Administrator Lehlogonolo

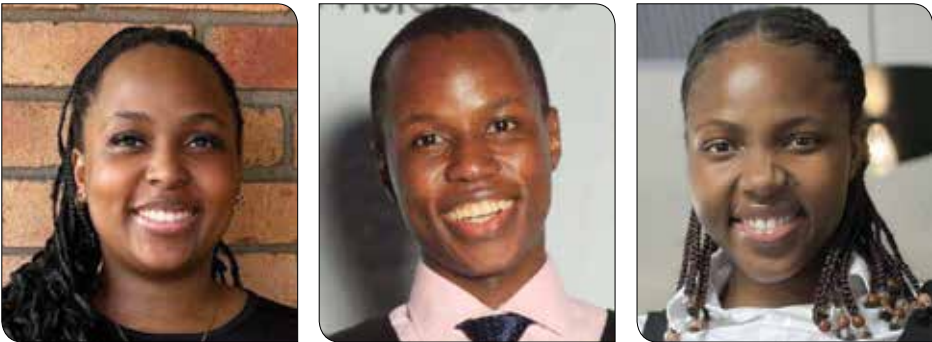


New capability: Sibusiso Dhladhla, Acting CEO of the Services SETA, said the ARISE institute will position SA as a leader in skin and hair science in Africa

Masoga emphasised that the project is not merely about constructing a building but about establishing a centre that advances research, supports transformation and opens opportunities for young people. Acting CEO Sibusiso Dhladhla described the facility as the start of a new capability for South Africa, one that can raise skills, protect consumers, support entrepreneurs and position the country as a leader in skin and hair science in Africa.

At its core, ARISE shows Services SETA's role in building the industries of the future: investing in knowledge, strengthening institutions and creating pathways for young people to participate in high-value sectors.

Bursaries that do more than pay fees



Success: Beneficiaries of Service SETA bursaries Senamile Mdletshe, Ngobile Gambu and Tshepiso Jele

NTALO MANGANYI

Services SETA's bursary support tells one of the most human stories of impact: when financial pressure is lifted, young people can focus, complete their studies and begin building the futures they imagined for themselves.

The bursary stories show that funding does more than settle tuition accounts. It restores confidence, reduces anxiety and gives students the stability to perform academically.

For Ngobile Gambu from Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal, the support changed the direction of his life. Before receiving Services SETA funding, he worked week-ends as a bus conductor while studying towards an advanced diploma in ICT at the Durban University of Technology. The long hours made it difficult to rest and focus on his studies. When the bursary came through, the financial burden was lifted, and he could fully commit to his academic work.

Nqobile has since graduated and is now thinking beyond his own achievement. In his community, many young people still do not know that careers in app development, networking and IT support are within reach. He wants to guide

school leavers and eventually establish a tutoring centre offering IT, mathematics and English.

Senamile Mdletshe's story carries a similar message. Raised by a single mother, she worked while studying to help cover tuition, rent and groceries. The pressure affected her academics. Receiving a Services SETA bursary allowed her to resign from her job, focus fully on her studies and complete her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology and sociology at the University of Pretoria.

Tshepiso Jele's journey shows another side of the same impact. Financial constraints initially blocked her from studying law. After changing direction into marketing, she later needed support to complete her advanced diploma. Services SETA's bursary covered her tuition, enabled her to retrieve her academic records and gave her the stability to plan her next step. She is now studying commercial law through UNISA, moving back towards the field she first dreamed of pursuing.

Together, these stories show that bursary support is not only a financial intervention. It is a pathway intervention. It helps learners stay in the system, complete qualifications, and continue moving towards meaningful careers.

Real estate opens its doors to a new generation

AMANDA SITHOLE

The Real Estate Training and Placement Programme is one of the clearest examples of Services SETA's impact in linking training to industry participation.

On 14 March 2026, 537 young people received certificates at the Durban ICC after completing the Real Estate Training and Placement Programme. The programme was facilitated by Services SETA in partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, the Property Practitioners Regulatory Authority and Smile Property Group.

Over 12 months, the learners completed structured training, workplace exposure and industry examinations. Of the 537 graduates, 454 sat for the PPRA examinations and achieved a 99% pass rate. This result signals more than academic success. It shows that targeted skills development, supported by strong partnerships, can prepare young people to enter a regulated professional sector with confidence.

Services SETA Administrator Lehlogonolo Masoga said the programme demonstrated what targeted skills development can produce. By combining accredited training, workplace learning and professional certification, Services SETA is helping young people move from training into meaningful participation in the economy.

The programme also speaks directly to transformation in the property sector. Real estate has historically not reflected the full diversity of South Africa's talent. Through this programme,



Property pro: Njabulo Gule has opened his own Rawson franchise after completing the Real Estate Training and Placement Programme

young people, including women and persons with disabilities, are being supported to enter the industry as candidate property practitioners, with mentorship and industry guidance as they establish their careers.

The human stories make the impact even stronger. Njabulo Gule moved from civil technology into property, endured a year without making a sale, and later opened his own Rawson franchise. Xolile Hadebe spent eight years unemployed before the programme gave her practical workplace exposure and a route into the sector.

The KwaZulu-Natal results have also created a basis for national expansion, with Services SETA and PPRA set to continue rolling out the model in other provinces. This is not only a graduation story. It is a story about opening access, transforming an industry and helping young people build professional futures in real estate.

Tribute to a resilient and youthful spirit

MATUMA LETSOALO

Fifty years have passed since the youth of Soweto changed the course of South Africa's history, yet the questions they asked remain as relevant today as they were on 16 June 1976. What does meaningful access to quality education look like? How do we create opportunities for every young person to realise their full potential? And how do we honour the sacrifices of those who believed that education was worth fighting for?

As Youth Month draws to a close, we proudly publish this special commemorative edition marking the 50th anniversary of the June 16 Soweto Uprising. This milestone invites us not only to remember the bravery of the young people of 1976 but also to reflect honestly on the progress we have made and the work that still lies ahead.

The students who marched through the streets of Soweto did far more than reject an unjust education system. They challenged a system that sought to limit their aspirations and deny them the opportunity to shape their own future. Their courage became a defining moment in South Africa's democratic journey and reaffirmed the power of young people to influence the nation's direction.

Today, South Africa's youth face a different struggle. While political

freedom has been achieved, economic freedom remains elusive for far too many. Youth unemployment continues to rank among the highest in the world, leaving millions of talented and capable young people excluded from meaningful participation in the economy. At the same time, inequality, poverty, digital exclusion and unequal access to quality education continue to limit opportunities and deepen social divides.

These realities demand that we move beyond commemorating June 16 as a historical event. The spirit of 1976 calls on us to confront today's challenges with the same courage, urgency and determination. It also reminds us that young people should not only be the beneficiaries of education and economic policy but also active participants in shaping them. Their voices belong at the centre of conversations about education reform, economic growth, entrepreneurship, innovation, job creation and South Africa's future development.

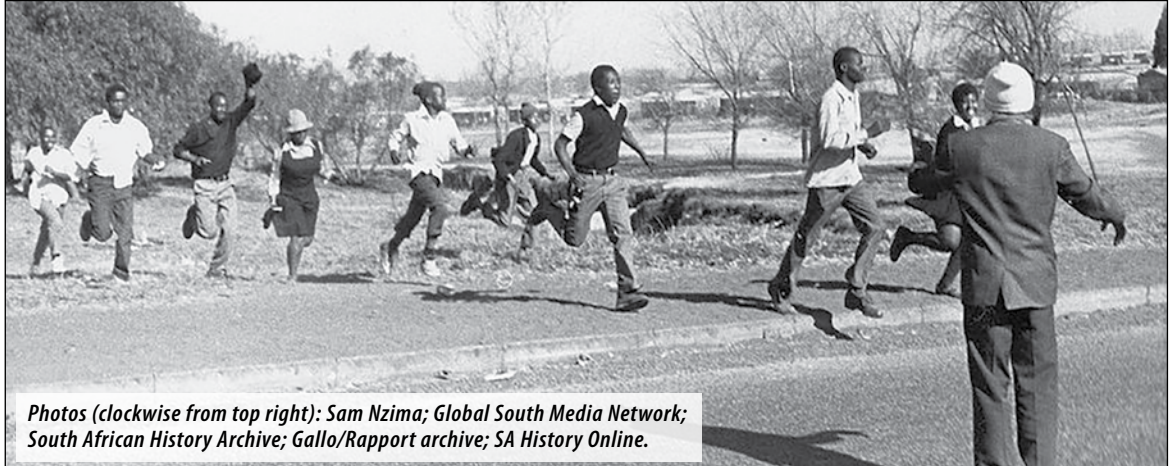
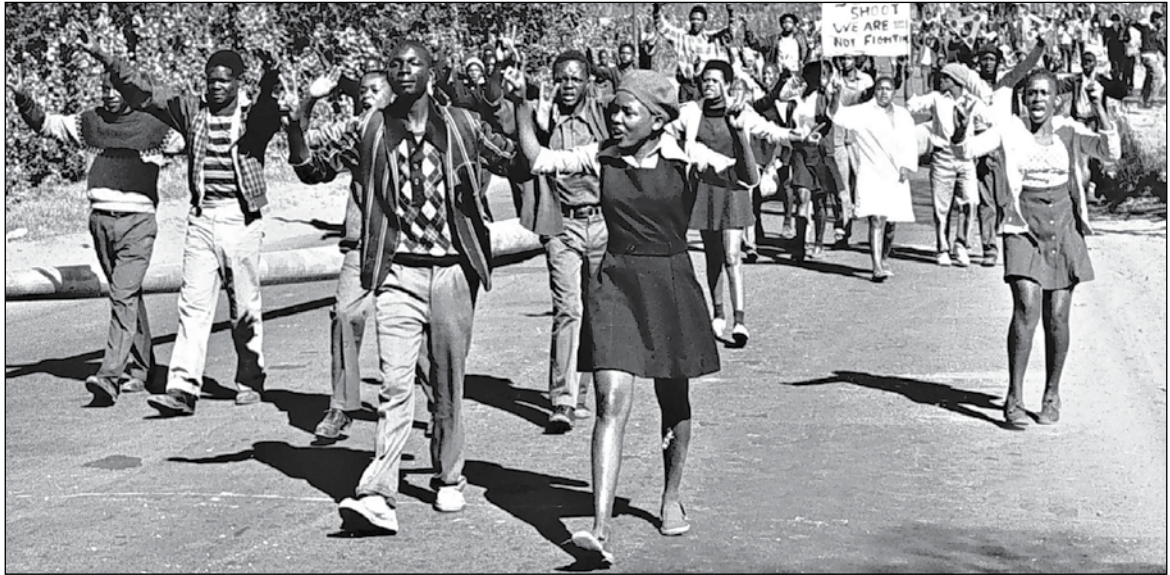
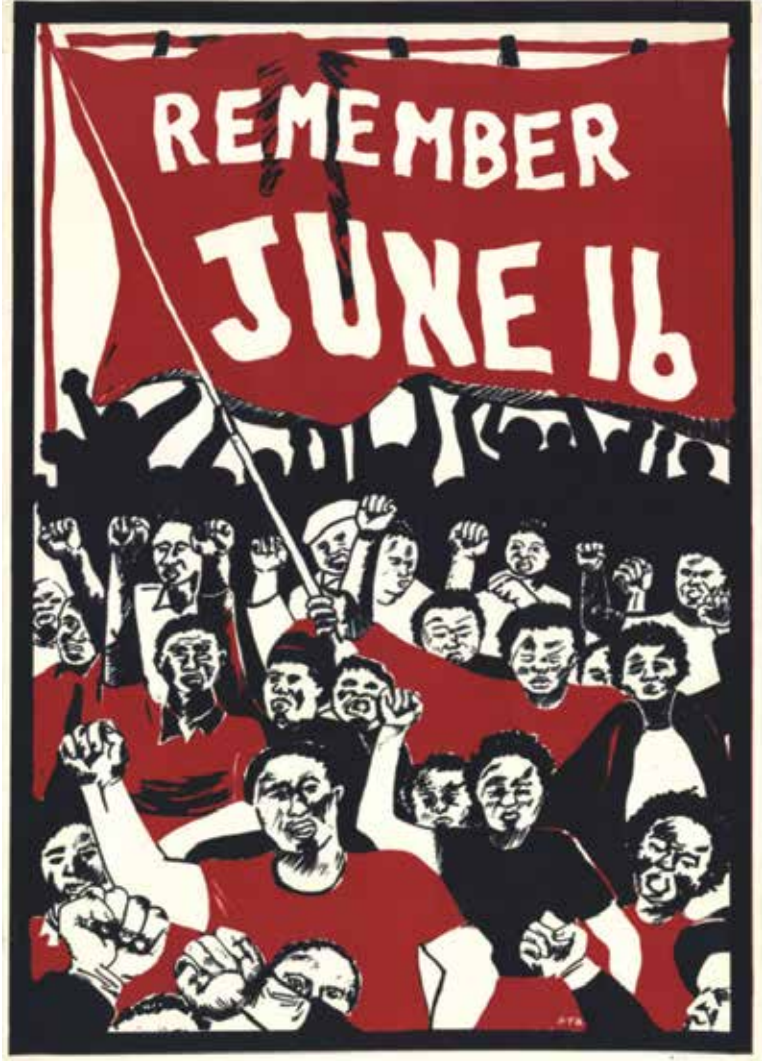
Education remains the most powerful bridge between potential and opportunity. However, education on its own is no longer enough. It must be accompanied by deliberate efforts to stimulate inclusive economic growth, expand access to skills development, embrace technological innovation and create pathways into

meaningful employment and entrepreneurship. The future of South Africa depends on whether today's youth are equipped not only to find jobs but also to create them.

In this special edition, we revisit the events of June 16 through the voices of those who experienced them firsthand. We honour the enduring contributions of leaders such as Seth Mazibuko and Sibongile Mkhabela, explore the life and legacy of Tsietshi Mashinini through Sam Mathe's compelling biography, and reflect on the spread of the student uprising beyond Soweto to communities such as Hammanskraal. These stories remind us that history is not confined to textbooks; it continues to shape the choices we make as a nation.

As we commemorate this historic milestone, let us ensure that the legacy of June 16 is measured not only by how well we remember the past but also by how boldly we invest in the future. The greatest tribute we can pay to the generation of 1976 is to build a South Africa where every young person has access to quality education, meaningful opportunities and the ability to contribute to a growing, inclusive and prosperous economy. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

Matuma Letsoalo
Chairman, Inside Education Foundation



Photos (clockwise from top right): Sam Nzima; Global South Media Network; South African History Archive; Gallo/Rapport archive; SA History Online.

The countdown to June 16 . . .

In this exclusive extract from Sam Mathe's book, Tsietshi Mashinini: Elusive Hero of Soweto, the award-winning journalist and author tells how Mashinini's proposal for a protest march on June 16 was accepted by about 500 delegates from different schools in the township

SAM MATHE

On Sunday, 13 June, about 500 students from different schools in Soweto met at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (DOCC) in Orlando East, one of the earliest sections in the township, with a rich history of anti-apartheid activism and pioneers in various fields. The DOCC ranks among Soweto's oldest landmarks and has gained a place in history as a space for artistic, sporting and civic activities.

Opened on 10 January 1948 in memory of Lt-Col James Donaldson, the centre hosted the first annual festival of the black arts in 1973, organised by Mdali (Music, Drama, Art & Literature), a cultural group founded in Alexandra by Mongane Serote and Molefe Pheto. It also provided a stage for leading jazz singers from the Sophiatown era, notably Dolly Rathebe, Dorothy Masuku, Thandi Klaasen and Miriam Makeba. (Following the 1976 uprising, Makeba would play a significant role in Tsietshi's life in exile.)

The DOCC was a creative space for prominent playwrights like Gibson Kente, Sam Mhangwane and Boikie Mohlamme – Soweto's 'big three' of black theatre whose works inspired a younger generation of dramatists, including Tsietshi Mashinini, Seth Mazibuko and Duma Ndlovu. And Nelson Mandela worked out and sparred in its gymnasium with famous fighters of the day, such as Jerry 'Uyinja' Moloi and Eric 'Black Material' Ntsele.

On this day, however, the students didn't gather there to watch a boxing match, although their meeting involved planning a fight; it was an unprecedented gathering to discuss how they could challenge the Afrikaans decree as well as other apartheid injustices.

For Tsietshi and the SASM leadership, the historic student summit

was also an opportunity to engage with the incident at Naledi High in a higher gear and galvanise students into protest action on a larger scale. About 55 junior and high schools were represented by at least two student delegates from each. Due to their political activism, there were more representatives from Naledi and Morris Isaacson.

There was an air of camaraderie, with students laughing and talking animatedly outside the venue just before they packed the hall. Six people were identified as police informers and politely asked to leave.

The proceedings were chaired by SASM executive members Tebello Motapanyane, David Kutumela and Zwelinzima Sizani. Seth Mazibuko, then a 15-year-old class prefect from Orlando West Junior Secondary School, was invited to update delegates about the state of affairs at his alma mater on the issue of Afrikaans and the boycott. This school had come to symbolise the protests against the Afrikaans-language decree.

A leading item on the agenda was the election of an executive, as police detention and harassment had caused some vacancies. Tsietshi Mashinini was elected as president, and Seth Mazibuko as his deputy. Murphy Morobe, another Morris Isaacson High student and Tsietshi's classmate, was elected treasurer. Zwelinzima Sizani, a former Orlando High student, was elected as organiser, and Sibongile Mkhabela (née Mthembu) as secretary – the only woman on the executive. They would form the SASM Action Committee, or simply, the Action Committee. This was suggested by Sizani in order to protect SASM against being banned.

Tsietshi Mashinini suggested that high-school students should stage a protest march on 16 June – the day on which mid-year exams were due

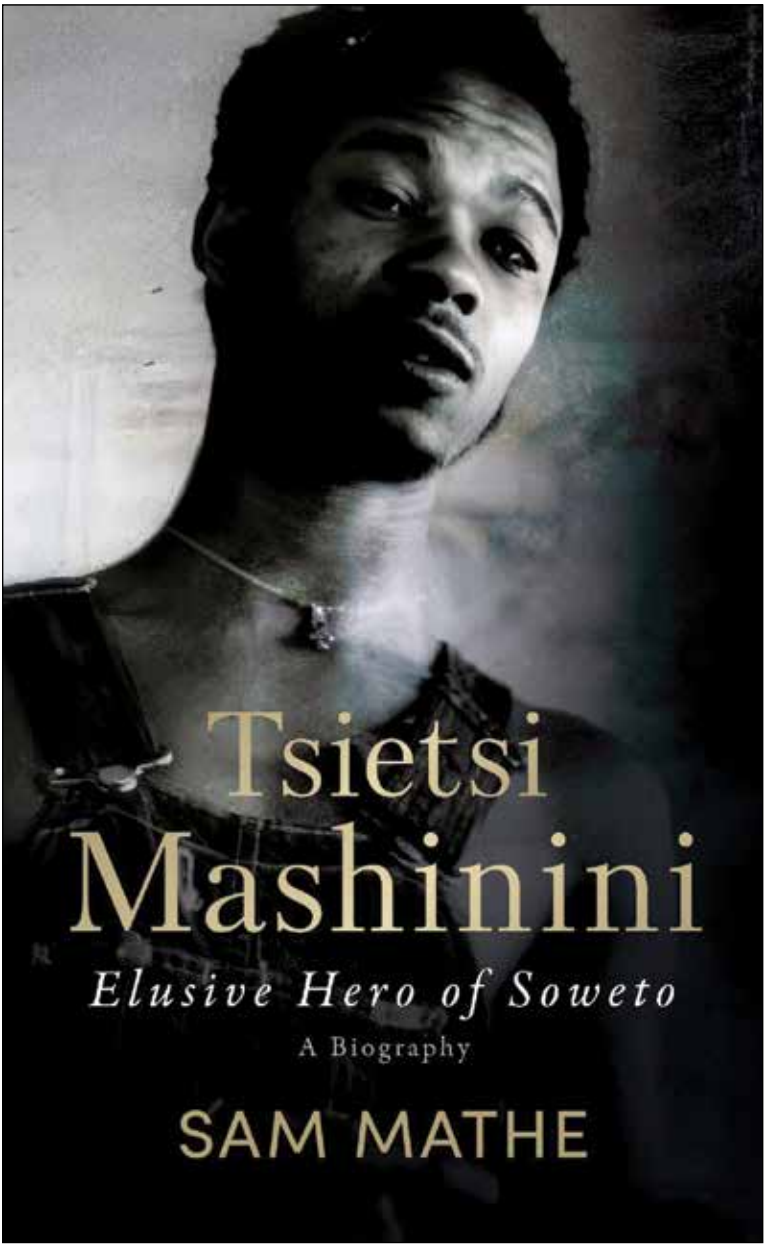
to start – in solidarity with their junior-secondary and higher-primary counterparts who had been boycotting classes for the preceding six weeks. His proposal was met with cheers of approval by the majority of delegates.

Motapanyane and other seasoned SASM members proposed a strike instead; in other words, a 'solidarity' boycott of classes and mid-year exams. But Tsietshi argued that boycotts had been tested and found to be ineffective. He cited the cases of the junior-secondary and higher-primary schools that had been boycotting classes since April. Although the students had made it clear that they were not prepared to accept the Afrikaans decree, authorities had remained unmoved. It was time to adopt a different strategy.

“Once inside the stadium, Tsietshi would read a memorandum of demands, including ... the release of all political prisoners.”

A mass demonstration in the full public glare would make it difficult for the authorities to victimise individual students. As long as the marchers remained peaceful and did not provoke the police, everything would be fine.

Tsietshi's proposal for a march two days later – on Wednesday 16 June – eventually prevailed and was approved by the majority of delegates. He and other Action Committee leaders spent the intervening days visiting schools to inform students and rally support.



Revolutionary: Fifty years after the Soweto Uprising, little is known about its most iconic leader, Tsietshi Mashinini, who played a key role in instigating the protest which changed South Africa forever, only to flee the country and be mysteriously murdered. Mathe – who knows the Mashinini family and Tsietshi's widow and has their support – tells Tsietshi's full story for the first time in this book, published by Tafelberg, an imprint of Jonathan Ball Publishers.

There were also placards to be prepared for all the schools intending to participate. The routes and schedules for the march were meticulously mapped out so that at a particular time all schools would converge at Orlando West Junior Secondary – on the corner of Vilakazi and Moema streets – as a show of respect for and solidarity with the school that had started it all. Thereafter, the marchers would proceed down Vilakazi Street, into Khumalo Road over the bridge, turn left into Klipspruit Valley Road – popularly known as Killer Road, due to its frequent fatal car crashes – and end up at Orlando Stadium, the mecca of South African football.

Once inside the stadium, Tsietshi would read a memorandum of demands, including the abolition of Bantu Education and its odious policy of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in favour of equal education for all, and the right of students to be taught in their home languages as well as English, regarded as a gateway to educational and professional opportunities in South Africa and beyond.

The memorandum would call for the release of student detainees and others who had been arrested during the school boycotts and protests since April. These included Enos Ngutshane and a number of black consciousness leaders, including the SASO Nine. It would also call for the abolition of apartheid in favour of a constitution that would recognise the rights of all citizens regardless of colour.

Lastly, it would call for the release of all political prisoners in order to enable a new political dispensation based on dialogue between the government and authentic black leaders, as opposed to the puppet administrators known as 'chief ministers' in the homelands and township councillors.

After Mashinini's speech, the students would disperse, satisfied that they had made their point. The ball would then be in the authorities' court.

All this information and all these preparations had to be kept under wraps until the big day – a secret to be concealed from parents, newspapers, and, of course, the authorities.

Some participants said later that, after meeting at the stadium, the students intended to continue to the Department of Bantu Education's regional offices in Diepkloof, where they would hand over a list of demands.

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June 16, 1976: The day that changed

In this extract from Sam Mathe's biography, Tsietsi Mashinini: Elusive Hero of Soweto, he describes the chaos and violence that unfolded as thousands of students tried to march on Orlando Stadium, only to be met with police dogs and gunfire

SAM MATHE

A great deal has been written about that fateful day that changed the course of South African struggle history. In some instances, there have been conflicting narratives, depending on which side of the political fence the story was told. For instance, the official version from the police has always claimed that the students were the aggressors who threw stones at them before the first shot rang out. But this was contested by a number of eyewitnesses, including journalists. These conflicting and competing perspectives have been captured in various publications – notably the report of the Cillie Commission of Inquiry, published in 1980.

What is not in dispute, however, is the weather. By all accounts, it was a foggy and very cold morning, even by winter standards on the Highveld.

Pupils wore their school uniforms as if it were any normal day. Estimated at 20 000, columns of students from all corners of Soweto took to the streets. Brandishing crudely written posters, they sang and shouted slogans as they gathered at various assembly points throughout the township before the big march.

At Morris Isaacson High, the school bell rang as usual at 8am for the morning assembly. The assembly sessions were normally the responsibility of Norman Malebane, the deputy principal. But on that morning, a student, Tsietsi Mashinini, took over the august proceedings as he burst into the singing of 'Masibulele ku Jesu, ngokuba wasife-la' (Let's thank Jesus, for He died for us), an old isiXhosa Methodist hymn.

Malebane stopped in his tracks, bemused. He shook his head and laughed as he turned and walked back to the staffroom, where he joined his colleagues.

Mashinini broke another tradition when, instead of leading students in reciting 'The Lord's Prayer', he asked Thandi Mkhize, another learner, to sing Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, at the time

a hymn that was deemed by the authorities inappropriate to be sung in public.

Thandi was one of the female students who would take turns in singing hymns at assembly. That morning, she was expected to lead pupils in a church song as usual, but found herself in the uncomfortable position of singing composer Enoch Sontonga's banned anthem. The rest of the students took it up and belted it out with gusto. It stirred something deep in their souls: a yearning for a free and just society for all.

Soon after they had hummed the moving anthem's last note, Mashinini raised his right hand and, with a clenched fist, shouted, 'Power!' In response, a forest of fists punched the air as the students shouted back, 'It's ours!' in a chorus.

This was a peaceful march for a just cause, Mashinini told the students. The police would confront them and try to provoke them into behaving in an undisciplined fashion, but it was important that they act with restraint and maintain the moral high ground.

Thereafter, Mashinini, Murphy Morobe and other leaders led students through the gate, which bore a cardboard sign with the words 'No SBs [security branch police] allowed. Enter at your own risk.'

The atmosphere felt like that of a public holiday as the young marchers poured onto busy Mphuti Street. They turned right and faced the morning sun in the direction of Orlando Stadium, their intended destination. On their way, they collected students from other schools, including neighbouring Thesele Secondary in White City Jabavu, where two of the Mashinini brothers, Mpho and Lehlohonolo (Cougar), were scholars. They greeted motorists they encountered on the way with the Black Power salute.

At Mofolo Central, they paused outside Sally Motlana's Sizwe Stores, which would soon become a sanctuary and meeting place for Mashinini



Making their voices heard: Students march on June 16, 1976, carrying posters condemning the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Photo: SA History Online



Inspiration: The dramatic events of June 16 have inspired artists over the years, as seen in Sifiso Gumede's powerful 2017 linocut, Education Not Bullets. Photo: ArtbankSA

In Dube, near the vocational training school on Mncube Drive, a large Plymouth sedan came in their direction. The driver and all her passengers were white women, about five in all. Tsietsi and other older students in charge of the march marshalled the students to the sides of the road, allowing the vehicle to pass without incident. The students cheerfully waved at its occupants. Minutes later, a huge delivery truck with a white driver received the same courtesy.

However, this courtesy wasn't extended to Daniel Smit, inspector of black schools in the West Rand region. He was driving to Jabulani in the direction of Morris Isaacson High School when the marching schoolchildren stopped him, damaging his car. He was lucky to escape with minor injuries and managed to reach Jabulani, where he opened a case of assault and damage to property.

On their arrival at Orlando West High (Matseke), the Morris Isaacson



Inspiration: The dramatic events of June 16 have inspired artists over the years, as seen in Sifiso Gumede's powerful 2017 linocut, Education Not Bullets. Photo: ArtbankSA

crowd received a cold reception from MP 'Shumi' Mzaidume, a stern headmaster with a reputation for intolerance of student activism. His students were busy writing their first mid-year exam. He told the rowdy, uninvited guests that he did not appreciate any disruption from ill-disciplined learners who didn't know the purpose of schools.

However, when the Matseke students realised what was happening outside, they dropped their pens, tore up their exam papers and joined their visiting peers outside. Many converged on the school gate, and some even jumped over the fence in their eagerness to leave the school premises. There was a lively, carnival-esque atmosphere as students milled around, laughing, chanting and chatting excitedly.

At mid-morning, Lieutenant-Colonel Johannes Augustus Kleingeld, commander of the Orlando Police Station, led a 50-strong squad in a procession of four police trucks, two patrol

vans with dogs and three heavy-duty armoured vehicles to the learners' assembly point up the ridge across the stream separating the two Orlandos. Ironically, the students' march had been planned three days earlier, right under Kleingeld's nose – directly opposite the police station at the DOCC.

The paths of the students and the police crossed at the intersection of Klipspruit Valley and Khumalo roads, where Hastings Ndlovu would later be shot. Although the circumstances surrounding his killing are still sketchy, he is regarded as the first casualty of the uprising.

Majakathata Mokoena, a student leader from Orlando High, had to intervene to remind the students that theirs was a peaceful march; there was no need to risk the wrath of the police by damaging property.

Despite attempts by the police to dissuade the students from pro-

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the course of South Africa's history



Students march on the morning of June 16. Their optimism was soon shattered by the violence turned on them by the apartheid police. Photo: Courtesy Global South Media Network



Power! At morning assembly at Morris Isaacson High on June 16, Tsietsi Mashinini took over the proceedings from the school principal and after asking a student to lead them in singing the banned anthem, Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, he raised his right hand and, with a clenched fist, shouted, 'Power!' In response, a forest of fists punched the air as the students shouted back, 'It's ours!' in a chorus. Photo: SA History Online

ceeding further, they pushed ahead regardless and crossed the bridge into Orlando West. From the western direction, columns of marchers emerged from all corners of the neighbourhood, swelling the numbers in the vicinity of Matseke High and Phefeni Secondary School, near the home of the Mandelas, the Tutus and the Sisulus.

The clock struck ten, and the wintry air was thick with tension and expectation. 'Get that car out of here! They are coming,' a schoolteacher from Matseke High urged a driver from The Star newspaper. His passenger, Lucy Gough Berger, was a middle-aged white woman and a popular columnist. The teacher had a hunch that white lives would be in danger. He was proven right minutes later when the already tense situation spiralled out of control with the first shots fired by police.

More uniformed police – mainly white – and riot squad men arrived on the scene with dogs, mostly German shepherds. Joking, laughing and smoking, they took their positions in

a half circle and faced the students like an army preparing for battle, a small battalion in a sea of black faces displaying placards with slogans like 'Down with Afrikaans', 'Black Power', 'This is our day' and 'No to Afrikaans', while chanting freedom songs like 'Niyabasaba na? Hayi asi-basabi, siyabafuna' (Are you scared of them? No, we are not scared. We want them) and 'Senzeni Na?' (What have we done?), a haunting, mournful hymn steeped in the tradition of struggle songs and usually sung at funerals and night vigils. Others showed the police peace signs.

Someone remembered 'Mbhayim-bhayi' (Cannon), exiled singer Miriam Makeba's militant song. The rest joined in spontaneously and chanted it to their hearts' content. As the crowd grew bigger, the singing got louder, and the barking of the police dogs became incessant. Held securely on their leashes, the animals bared their canines and wagged their tails, as if understanding the significance of the day.

The bulk of the student crowd was concentrated at the entrance of Orlando West High, facing the police who were positioned about 80 metres up the street on the western side of Moema Street.

A group of curious residents – mostly women – gathered on the roadside across from the two schools. 'Are you going to kill our children?' one woman asked a black sergeant. 'No,' he replied calmly. 'The children are not fighting anyone. They are only demonstrating.'

The students were now singing 'Morena Boloka Sechaba sa Hesoi, the Sesotho version of the anthem 'God Save Our Nation'. Two policemen broke ranks and strode menacingly towards the students, who then started waving their hands, gesturing for the policemen to go away.

Without saying a word, one of

them picked up what might have been a stone and hurled the unidentified missile in the direction of the students. His colleague immediately followed his example with a number of teargas canisters.

Several demonstrators who stood in front and on the flanks of the crowd panicked and ran helter-skelter in all directions. As they scattered in retreat, one young woman stood her ground. She defiantly stepped towards the police and screamed, 'Shoot me! Shoot me!'

“Are you going to kill our children?” one woman asked a black sergeant. “No,” he replied calmly. “The children are not fighting anyone. They are only demonstrating.”

Taken aback by the unexpected bravery, the men in blue lowered their weapons in a gesture of capitulation. Emboldened by this incredibly courageous act, the retreating students regrouped and launched a frenzied counterattack on the police with a hail of stones.

The police raised their firearms again and aimed at the rampaging crowd. Bang! Bang! Bang! The loud sound of gunfire was matched by the children's heart-rending screams that pierced the cold morning air. A fleeing schoolboy was struck by a police bullet.

In the chaos and confusion of the situation, Antoinette Pieterse searched for her younger brother, Zolile Hector Pieterse. Earlier that morning, the 17-year-old Form II (Grade 9) pupil had seen him in the crowd and warned him not to roam



Memory is a weapon: This poster, titled Remember June 16, was produced by the Cape Youth Congress in 1987 to commemorate the 1976 Soweto Uprising. Photo: South African History Archive

around. She wanted to go back home with him after the march. The two siblings lived with their grandmother in White City Jabavu, where Hector was a Standard Five (Grade 7) pupil at Itshepeng Higher Primary School. But the previous night he had slept at his parents' home in Meadowlands.

Where could he be in this war zone? Had he managed to elude the bullets and find his way home? As these questions flashed across Antoinette's anxious mind, she saw a group of boys surrounding a youngster who lay injured on the side of the street. As she approached them, she screamed hysterically when she realised the injured child was Hector.

Suddenly, a lanky youth clad in faded denim overalls appeared out of nowhere, picked up Hector, and began to carry him down the street, with an anguished Antoinette jogging next to him. He was later identified as the 18-year-old Mbuyisa Makhubu.

Sophie Tema, a reporter for The World, was proceeding down the street leading from the Phefeni Clinic in a staff car driven by Stanley Mtshali when she saw the group coming towards them. She ordered Stanley to stop the car – a battered VW Beetle – so that they could take the injured boy to the clinic. Makhubu put Hector inside the car, and he and Antoinette climbed in, with Tema following them on foot.

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Preserving a legacy: Seth Mazibuko describes the 1976 Soweto student uprising as “the battle of the book versus the bullet that produced the ballot”. Photo: Facebook

The last unfinished march: Seth Mazibuko and the legacy of 1976

THEBE MABANGA

Seth Mazibuko, the youngest and one of the most recognisable leaders of the 1976 Soweto student uprising, was thrust into history by a seismic and tragic moment.

Fifty years later, he sees the anniversary not as a memorial alone, but as a chance to complete a generational mission: to preserve the legacy of June 16 and inspire young people to keep fighting for a better future.

This year, through the Seth Mazibuko Foundation, he helped organise the 1976@50 Conference, the first academic gathering dedicated to documenting, interpreting and showcasing the history and social impact of June 16 and its enduring influence on South Africa’s politics and society.

Speaking at a colloquium on the eve of the conference, Mazibuko said that in a democracy, “instead of throwing stones, we must be gathering stones to build the South Africa we want”.

He described the 1976 uprising as the work of “children who wanted to see change”.

Mazibuko had turned 16 the day before that fateful day. Born on June 15, 1960, and raised in Orlando East, he recalls that in those years one “had no choice” but to become politically active; the alternative, he says, was a life of crime or drifting into antisocial behaviour.

He credits the Black Consciousness Movement with giving his generation ideological direction after the ANC,

PAC, and other liberation movements had been banned.

The seeds of Black Consciousness were planted by Steve Biko, but they were also carried forward by figures such as Saths Cooper, Barney Pitjana and the late Stanley Ntwasa through church and civic structures. Biko’s call for self-reliance and psychological liberation, Mazibuko argues, remains unfinished business.

He believes the liberation of the mind should have been the foundation of policies such as Black Economic Empowerment but says it has not been fully realised more than three decades into democracy.

Mazibuko was present at the planning meeting on June 13, 1976, where students agreed on a peaceful protest three days later.

The march was meant to proceed to Orlando Stadium, but police violence shattered the plan before it could be realised. This year, organisers staged a commemorative march to symbolically “finish what we started”.

Another veteran of the uprising, Sibongile Mkhabela, told the colloquium that reflections on June 16 must remember “what the system did to people” and honour those who were jailed, tortured and killed.

She insisted that the uprising was never simply about Afrikaans as a language but about “the suppression of ideas”.

Mkhabela also stressed the need to recognise the central role of women in the struggle. Women leaders, she said, were not peripheral figures in

1976 but key organisers and actors whose contributions are too easily erased from the national narrative.

Participants at the colloquium argued that, despite June 16 becoming a national holiday, civil society has gradually been sidelined in discussions about how to carry forward the ideals of the uprising. The 1976@50 Conference aimed, in part, to bridge that gap.

“Some of us are disappointed in our democracy ... what we fought for has not been fulfilled.” — Seth Mazibuko

One theme explored at the conference was how the unrest spread beyond Soweto to Alexandra, Hammanskraal and Langa in Cape Town — echoing the way resistance had spread after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. A week after Sharpeville, PAC leader Philip Kgosana led a massive anti-pass march from Langa to Cape Town’s De Waal Drive, now renamed Philip Kgosana Drive. That tradition of mass mobilisation would later become central to the UDF-led resistance of the 1980s.

Mazibuko has spoken candidly about his disillusionment with aspects

of post-apartheid South Africa. In a recent SABC interview, he said: “Some of us are disappointed in our democracy. Many of us are moaning that what we fought for has not been fulfilled.”

He often describes June 16 as “the battle of the book versus the bullet that produced the ballot”. But he argues that beyond the right to vote, many constitutional promises remain unrealised for ordinary black South Africans. Through his foundation, he now hosts “Courageous Conversations for Courageous Activism” with young people, urging them to engage critically with the Constitution and the unfinished project of social justice.

For Mazibuko, inequality remains brutally visible. He says it pains him to see mostly black children dying in unsafe scholar transport accidents or from consuming contaminated food — tragedies, he says, that rarely afflict children in affluent communities.

A year after the uprising, Mazibuko was detained and held for 18 months in solitary confinement without charge. He was later prosecuted under the Suppression of Communism Act and spent seven years on Robben Island, where he studied toward a Bachelor of Education degree.

After his release, he dedicated his career to education, serving as a teacher, principal and later chief operating officer of the Moral Regeneration Movement.

Yet the trauma of 1976 never fully left him. He still recalls seeing alongside Winnie Madikizela-Mandela the bodies of slain students piled up at

Baragwanath Hospital. There is also a trace of survivor’s guilt in the way he speaks about his comrades: of the 11 accused who stood trial with him before being sent to Robben Island, only three are still alive.

Today, Mazibuko worries that South Africa has become “an angry nation”, pointing to xenophobic violence and the steady erosion of public trust in institutions. He says the country must return to a basic question: What was the struggle about?

At the same time, he wanted the 50th anniversary to mark a handover. He says he is ready to “pass on the torch” of activism and entrust the work of commemorating June 16 to a younger generation already working alongside his foundation.

The foundation now focuses on hunger relief, food insecurity, restoring a culture of teaching and learning, and supporting students who cannot afford tertiary education.

Mazibuko is also leading a campaign to find Mbuyisa Makhubu, the young man photographed carrying the dying Hector Pieteron in Sam Nzima’s iconic image of June 16. “Dead or alive”, he says, Makhubu must be found — whether as an elderly man somewhere in exile or as remains that can finally bring closure to his family and his generation.

For Mazibuko, that would help complete the mission of the children of 1976: to ensure their story is not only remembered but also finished with dignity.

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New book reframes the Soweto Uprising’s impact beyond June 16

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

On the morning of 16 June 1976, thousands of students marched through Soweto to Orlando Stadium in protest against the apartheid government’s decision to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools.

Conservative estimates found that the subsequent uprisings claimed at least 575 lives, including 451 people killed by police, with roughly a quarter of the victims under the age of 18, while a further 3,900 people suffered serious injuries.

Between 16 June 1976 and 28 February 1977, the police arrested almost 6,000 people on charges of public violence, riotous assembly, malicious injury to property, and arson. Just under half of the arrested people were under 18 when they were rounded up.

Yet as historian Dr Julian Brown argues in his new book, *Soweto Uprising: A Documentary History*, the events of 16 June were neither the beginning nor the end of the story.

“It is only when we see how the uprisings were not a single moment of resistance, but rather a series of new forms of protest, organisation, and commitment that erupted in many places and in many forms that we can begin to discern their significance,” Brown writes.

Published ahead of the 50th anniversary of June 16, his book seeks to recover a broader history of the uprising through an extensive collection of original documents, witness testimonies, newspaper reports, organisational records and archival material.

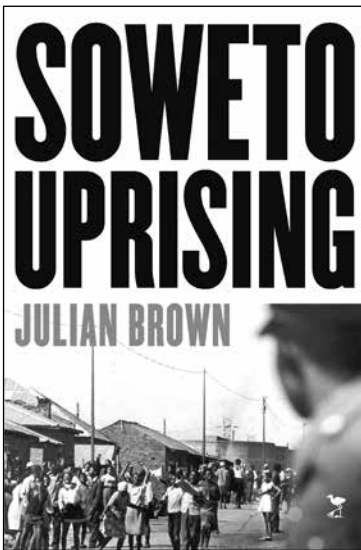
Brown, an associate professor at Wits University’s political studies department, sat down for an interview with Inside Education and explained why he believes the uprising must be understood as a national process rather than a single day of tragedy.

“The more we focus on the public holiday ... the easier it is to treat the protests that continued in Soweto as an afterthought, to ignore the fact that Cape Town, Bonteheuwel and other parts of the Cape erupted in August and September of that year; that Gqeberha, that Durban, and areas around what were [the homelands of] Bophuthatswana and QwaQwa all saw mass student protests, mass police violence, and significant individual deaths over the course of the next six months,” he said.

Brown warns that the emphasis on a single day risks obscuring the protests that continued throughout 1976 and into 1977, confining the fo-



Historian Dr Julian Brown argues in *Soweto Uprising: A Documentary History* that the events of 16 June were neither the beginning nor the end of the story.



cus to Soweto only and reducing the restructuring of resistance to a single confrontation between students and police.

“What I’m trying to do with this book is to simultaneously provide a narrative that guides readers but also to put in front of people sources from the time so that they can hear and see the voices of activists and individuals and ordinary witnesses in their own words, which is what allows us to see something that often gets highlighted in more processed and analysed histories, which is the odd and idiosyncratic details that are specific to one person’s experience but not necessarily to everybody else’s.”

Among the most memorable discoveries were deeply personal accounts of violence and solidarity and “a great deal of disturbing material”.

Brown recalls one testimony involving a young activist who watched a woman help schoolchildren recover from tear gas exposure before being shot in front of them.

He notes that the uprising left behind an extraordinary documentary record but warns readers about the limits of historical memory.

“We have no idea what, for example, Hector Pieteron felt, because he died in June; we have no idea why so many people participated and what their experience was. We only know what survives,” he said.

A major point of the book is its reassessment of the role played by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).

Brown argues that the BCM’s intellectual and organisational influence has often been acknowledged in passing but insufficiently integrated into mainstream narratives of 1976.

The book’s opening chapter traces the emergence of Black Consciousness from university campuses in the late 1960s and its spread into

township schools. The philosophy appealed to the youth, and Soweto proved especially fertile ground for these ideas.

“The ideas and ideals of Black Consciousness and the institutions that supported it became central to the development of the political consciousness of the youth in Soweto,” he writes.

Another recurring theme is the political sophistication of the students who led the uprising.

“We have a tendency to remember it [June 16] both as a tragedy, because of the deaths of young people who were killed before their lives could develop, and we have a tendency to think of it as a purely educational struggle,” he said.

“The uprisings were not a single moment of resistance”

Brown locates the protest as a breaking point of a longer process of attempts at countering the ravages of apartheid instead of a single exceptional event.

“It did not suddenly emerge in June. The circular from the Department of Bantu Education came out in 1974, with 1976 being the year in which it [Afrikaans as a medium of instruction] was to be implemented. Throughout late 1974 and 1975, parents and teachers’ organisations and principals all tried to use official means to roll back this policy. It’s only after the failure of petitions and other forms of above-ground politics



Tragic death: The image of a fatally wounded Hector Pieteron, carried by a distraught Mbuyisa Makhubu and flanked by Hector’s devastated sister, Antoinette, has become an iconic reminder of the human cost of the June 16 1976 Soweto uprising. Photo: Sam Nzima

that 1976 came about,” he said.

While the decree of 1974 acted as a catalyst, Brown argues that students quickly connected educational grievances to broader questions about apartheid, economic inequality and political exclusion.

“The marches that followed on June 17th, 18th, 19th and throughout the rest of the year were in part about the language issue but increasingly about everything to do with the Bantu education system as it was at the time and about the grotesque violence of the police in response to the student march,” Brown said.

“In other words, by August and September that year, school students, a whole new generation of activists, were connecting specific educational problems with broader apartheid policies and with the economic structures of South Africa and were trying to protest against all of them,” he said.

As South Africa marked 50 years since the uprising, Brown believes the central lesson remains relevant.

“Our democracy is founded on the unplanned, unthought, spontaneous uprisings of ordinary citizens; it was not planned from above. It is not defined by its governmental structures, as important as those are. It is defined by the willingness of ordinary

people to put their lives on the line for democracy,” he said.

Brown argues that the struggle of 1976 was fundamentally about participation, dignity and the right of ordinary people to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

He hopes readers will recognise the intellectual depth of the young people who led the uprising.

“I think it is worth repeating that the sophisticated analysis that the youth, school children in their late teens and early twenties, had of the connection between education and capital, between the labour market and politics, between social segregation and intellectual segregation, is one that we need to recapture for ourselves,” he said.

“Everybody is capable of complex, sophisticated thought, and we very often forget that young people are as capable of that sophistication as those of us with multiple degrees after our name,” he added.

The work restores complexity and nuance to an event that is often reduced to a single photograph, a single day and a single place.

Rather than simply commemorating the past, Brown invites readers to encounter it anew through the words of those who lived it.

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From Soweto 1976 to #FeesMustFall

A dialogue on 50 years of youth struggle, education and unfinished change

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

Fifty years after the Soweto Uprising and a decade after the height of the #FeesMustFall movement, academics, activists, and former student leaders gathered at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) earlier this month to reflect on the enduring role of young people in shaping South Africa's future.

Opening the event at the HSRC offices in Cape Town, researcher Dr Angélique Wildschut said the dialogue was intended not only as a commemoration of the past but also as a forward-looking conversation about the future of education, skills and youth development. "This collaboration is intentional. Since this conversation seeks to look back and reflect, it is important that it is also forward-looking and places the relevance of this particular occurrence within the context of a better future for African youth," she said.

The event, titled "Soweto 1976 Meets #FeesMustFall: Youth Dialogue on Past and Present Struggles", brought together veteran 1976 activist Sibongile Mkhabela, #FeesMustFall leader Nompandulo Mkhathshwa, University of Cape Town SRC member Kgabo Molepo, and HSRC researchers Professor Sharlene Swartz and Dr Adam Cooper.

The discussion explored the connections between the 16 June 1976 uprising against Bantu education and the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction; the 2015-2016 #FeesMustFall protests for free and decolonised higher education; and the challenges confronting young South Africans in 2026.

One of the most powerful interventions came from former Soweto Students' Representative Council and South African Students Movement leader and Soweto uprising veteran Sibongile Mkhabela, the only female member of the "Soweto 11" who was arrested and tried by the apartheid state.

In a recorded interview played during the session, Mkhabela argued that the generation that inherited democracy had failed young people.

"We should be on trial as a generation. We've had the opportunity to do better for young people, for our children, for our country. We haven't done as much as we're capable of," she said.

Mkhabela criticised what she described as an overly utilitarian education system that prioritises economic productivity at the expense of critical thinking, creativity and citizenship.

"We haven't demanded the best of ourselves. And as a result, we have not asked the best of our children if you're looking at the schools and how they're performing," she said.

Drawing parallels between apartheid-era education and contemporary schooling, Mkhabela argued that today's system risks reducing young people to "servants to the market" rather than developing them as engaged citizens capable of interpreting social problems and shaping society.

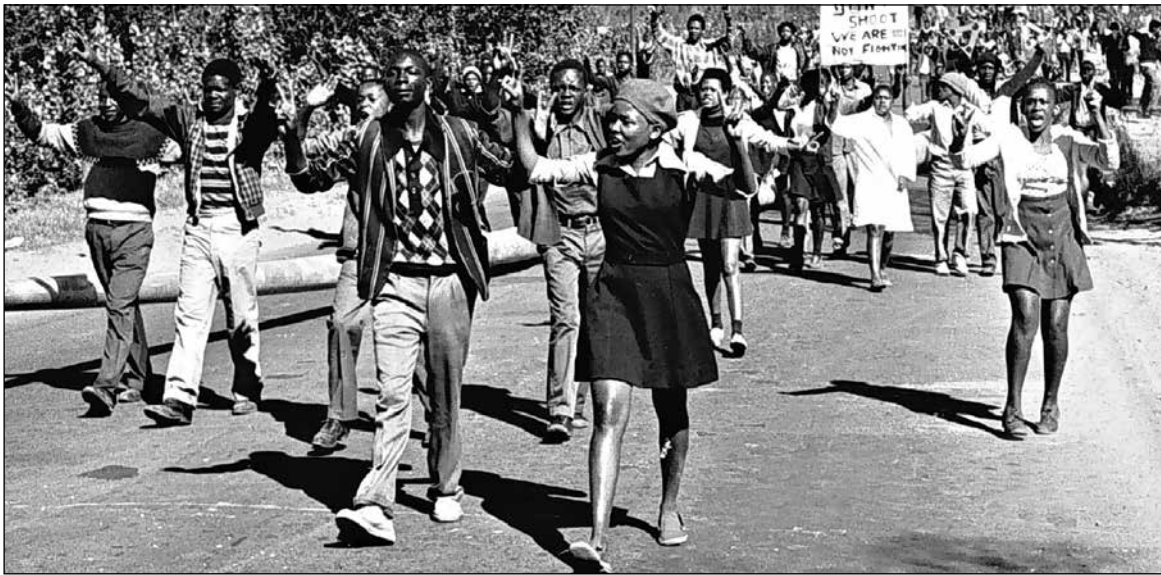
Reflecting on current conditions, Mkhabela said South Africa had failed to provide many young people with access to arts, culture, music and sport, which all provide critical thinking skills.

"We had the opportunity, and we still do have the opportunity. So if I were a young person today, I would say that we have squandered huge opportunities for our young people. But I don't think it's too late. I think it can still be done," she said.

Former ANC MP, Wits SRC President and #FeesMustFall leader Nompandulo Mkhathshwa drew direct links between the 1976 uprising and the student protests that erupted four decades later. She argued that both movements challenged systems that limited the prospects of black youth.

"They were not just fighting against being forced to be taught in a language that was not their home language. They were fighting against a system that sought to reduce young black people to being of a particular class in society, to contributing in inferior spaces in society. And so when you think about Fees Must Fall and its call for free education, which was initially a call for a 0% fee increment, it wasn't just about the numbers," she said.

Likewise, #FeesMustFall was never simply about tuition fees only. "It was about how access enables us to ensure that young people have access to an education. Part of it was to say it must be a decolonised quality education. We don't want to have access to an education that's not going to enable us to participate effectively and meaningfully in



Making history: Students from Soweto march on June 16, 1976. Photo: SA History Online



The panellists in the dialogue (top row from left) were Nompandulo Mkhathshwa, Prof Sharlene Swartz, Sibongile Mkhabela and (bottom row from left) Dr Adam Cooper, Dr Angélique Wildschut and Kgabo Molepo. Photos: HSRC; Mkhabela, courtesy of YouTube

the economy," she said.

While acknowledging the expansion of student financial aid since the protests, describing the growth in funding support as one of the #FeesMustFall movement's major achievements, Mkhathshwa said the struggle for meaningful and decolonised education remained unfinished.

To achieve the vision imagined by the youth of 1976, she said, the country would need to address deeper structural inequalities.

UCT Clinical Psychology MA student and SRC member Kgabo Molepo reflected on how activism differs in a democratic South Africa compared with apartheid.

He noted that while today's youth enjoy constitutional freedoms unavailable to the 1976 generation, the struggle has become more complex. "For them, the enemy was clear. They were openly repressed. But for us now, it's bureaucracy and a different type of fight," he said.

Molepo warned that democracy can create the illusion that change happens automatically. "It doesn't happen automatically. We need to put in the work for things to change," he said.

He maintained that protests remain necessary but argued they must be linked to longer-term legal, institutional and policy strategies. Molepo reflected on the opportunities and limitations of social media activism.

While digital platforms make mobilisation easier, they can become performative if campaigns fail to produce concrete outcomes. "Viral posts are there, but afterwards, we just back off," he said.

Reflecting on the tactics used during #FeesMustFall, Mkhathshwa said student activists deliberately sought innovative forms of protest. But Mkhathshwa emphasised that successful activism extends beyond demonstrations. "The post-protest work is so important because that's what translates into policy reform," she said.

She described the painstaking process of ensuring agreements reached during protests were properly implemented through university governance structures. Looking back, she identified unity across political lines as one of the movement's greatest achievements.

Professor Sharlene Swartz presented research on social restitution and public attitudes towards addressing the legacy of apartheid. Her findings showed that support for addressing historical inequalities has grown over the past decade, particularly among younger South Africans.

"Gen Z, young people who are 14 to 29, those young people that Mam Sibongile was referring to, you're the ones who are saying we actually want to do something about it," she said.

Swartz highlighted the stark racial inequalities that continue to characterise South African society, noting that white South Africans enjoy living standards comparable to those of some of the world's wealthiest nations, while black South Africans rank closer to those of developing countries. "It's that gap, for me, that needs more discussion, more conversation," she said.

Swartz rejected suggestions that race should no longer feature in public debates. "When there are no

more differences, we can stop. But if it's going to take another 20 or 30 years, we're going to keep talking about the differences," she said.

Dr Adam Cooper focused on youth unemployment and the enduring legacy of apartheid's economic structure.

He argued that South Africa's economy remains heavily influenced by historical patterns rooted in mining, energy and racial exclusion.

"That structure of a very limited informal economy ... still defines the kinds of livelihoods available to young South Africans. And I think we really need to understand that history rather than just try and change the numbers," he said.

Cooper said young people remain "at the back of the queue" in the labour market despite often being better educated than older generations.

To address unemployment, he proposed a three-pronged strategy centred on self-employment, public employment and structural economic transformation. The dialogue ultimately revealed striking continuities between 1976, 2016 and 2026.

While the forms of struggle have evolved (from confronting apartheid laws to challenging university fees, unemployment and inequality), the underlying demand remains the same: a society in which young people have genuine opportunities to shape their own futures.

Fifty years after the Soweto uprising and 10 years after #FeesMustFall, the panellists agreed that South Africa's youth remain at the forefront of demanding that the promises of freedom, education and equality become a lived reality, and not just a promised vision.

June 16 @ 50

Sarafina! brings the spirit of 1976 back home

CHARMAINE NDLELA

As South Africa marked 50 years since the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976, the spirit of the generation that challenged apartheid's education system returned to the stage with *Sarafina! The Homecoming* at the Soweto Theatre.

More than a musical, the production served as a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by thousands of young people who demanded dignity, equality and the right to quality education.

Through song, dance and storytelling, audiences were transported back to one of the defining moments in South Africa's history, when students took to the streets to reject the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and challenge the injustices of Bantu education.

The atmosphere inside the theatre was charged with emotion as performers brought to life the hopes, fears and determination of a generation that refused to accept oppression.

Running from May 8 to 31, *Sarafina! The Homecoming* formed part of the national commemorations marking five decades since the uprising.

The production unfolded just kilometres from Morris Isaacson High School, one of the schools at the heart of the 1976 protests.

Choreographed by Nompumelelo Gumede-Ngema, the 2026 revival reimagines the classic musical for a new generation while honouring the courage of the youth who helped shape South Africa's liberation struggle.

As part of this year's commemorations, Soweto Theatre announced the return of original *Sarafina!* cast member Khanyo Maphumulo on June 16.

Maphumulo was only 14 when she performed the role of Magundane and became renowned for the powerful vocals that carried the story of the 1976 generation to audiences across the globe.

Created by the late Dr Mbongeni Ngema in collaboration with jazz legend Hugh Masekela, *Sarafina!* remains one of South Africa's most enduring cultural works. Decades after its debut, the musical continues to resonate across generations.

The production also paid tribute

to Ngema's legacy, highlighting the power of art to preserve history and inspire social change. Through *Sarafina!*, Ngema gave a global voice to the anti-apartheid struggle and immortalised the courage of young people who stood up against injustice.

Veteran actor and theatre practitioner Mpho Molepo returned to direct the production for a second consecutive year following his acclaimed 2025 staging.

Speaking to *Inside Education*, Molepo said the themes explored in *Sarafina!* remain as relevant today as they were five decades ago.

"People always ask what *Sarafina!* is about, and I keep saying it is about young people at a particular moment in history. But it also speaks to the present. The youth of today must continue asking how they can change the material conditions of their lives," he said.

Molepo acknowledged the progress made since the dawn of democracy while noting that significant challenges remain.

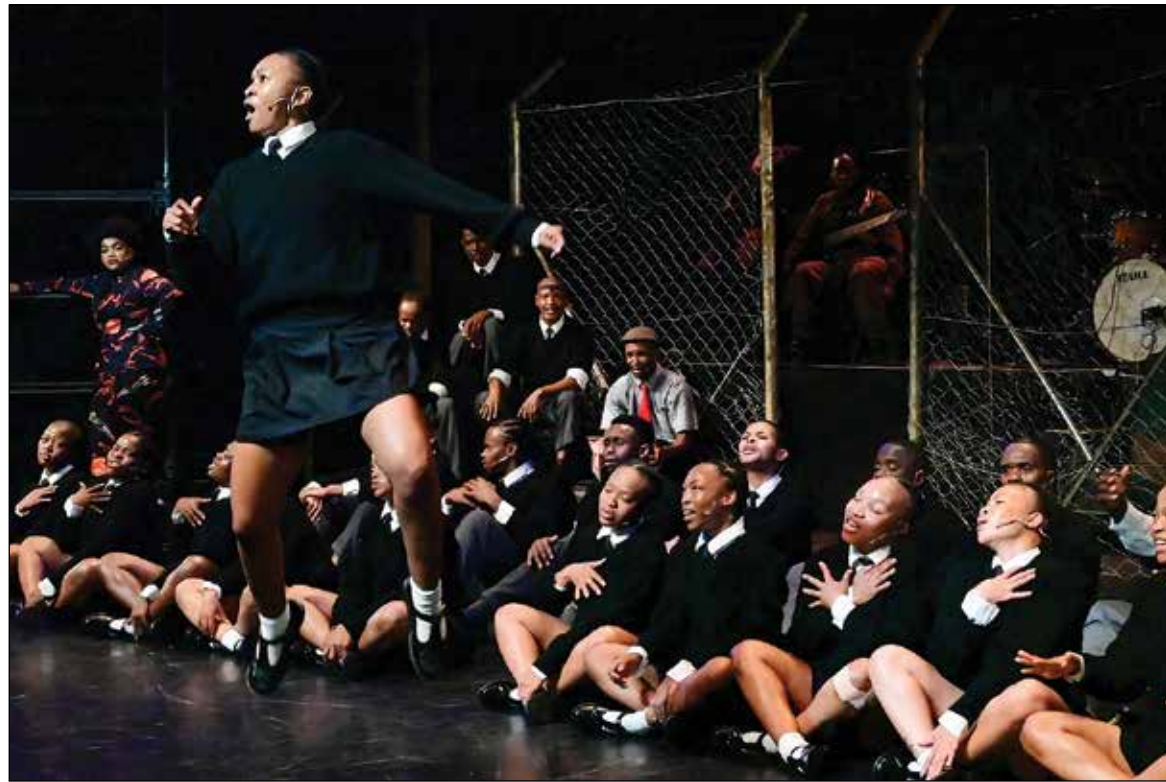
"Since 1994, the country has moved forward in making education accessible. While there may still be shortcomings within the system, access itself was almost unimaginable for many during apartheid," he said.

Drawing parallels between the 1976 generation and contemporary student movements, Molepo pointed to campaigns such as #Rhodes Must Fall and #Fees Must Fall as evidence that young people continue to challenge inequality and demand transformation.

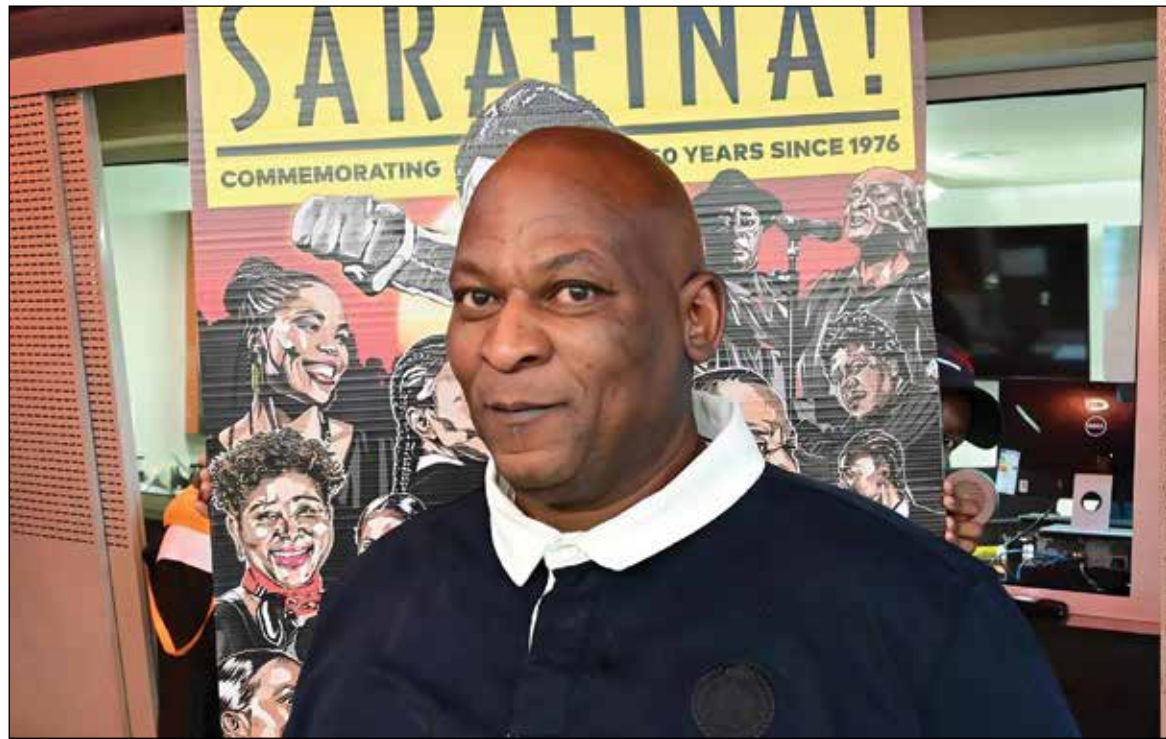
"For me, those movements reflected the spirit of 1976. Young people are still questioning the system and demanding change. Those who sacrificed their lives during apartheid would be proud to see a generation continuing that struggle," he said.

Molepo also underscored the enduring role of theatre in society. "Theatre allows us to reflect on who we are as a society. It can educate, mobilise and inspire change. I do not think anyone can walk into *Sarafina!* and leave unchanged, especially young people who may not know this history."

For 26-year-old ensemble performer Thembi Ngwenya, being part of the production has been both emotional-



Charged with emotion: The Sarafina! performers brought to life the hopes, fears and determination of a generation that refused to accept oppression. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Topical: Sarafina! director Mpho Molepo said the themes explored in Sarafina! remain as relevant today as they were five decades ago. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni

ly demanding and deeply meaningful.

"There are moments when I become so emotional that I struggle to sing. It is such a beautiful story to be part of because it carries so much pain, anger and resilience," she said.

“Those who sacrificed their lives during apartheid would be proud to see a generation continuing that struggle. — Sarafina! director Mpho Molepo”

Ngwenya believes that while educational opportunities have expanded significantly since apartheid, many learners and students still face barriers. "The system is better than before, but there are still challenges. Some

students believe they have funding only to discover years later that their fees have not been paid. Those realities are heartbreaking," she said.

For her, performing in *Sarafina!* is a way of honouring those who paved the way for future generations.

"What makes me proud as a young person is being able to tell the story of those who came before us and fought for the opportunities we have today."

The Soweto Uprising was never solely about language policy. At its core, it was about dignity, identity and the belief that young people had the right to shape their own futures.

Before thousands of students marched through the streets of Soweto on June 16, 1976, they had already overcome fear, intimidation and the harsh realities of apartheid rule. Their courage helped alter the course of South African history.

Fifty years later, South Africans continue to honour the learners who fought for freedom, dignity and the right to quality education.

While many challenges remain

within the education system, one of the most significant gains since 1976 has been the recognition of learners' linguistic rights. Unlike during apartheid, when Afrikaans was imposed as a medium of instruction, South Africa's democratic Constitution recognises 12 official languages and protects the right to receive education in the language of one's choice where reasonably practicable.

In recent years, the Department of Basic Education has expanded Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education, enabling learners to continue learning in their home language beyond the Foundation Phase while gradually strengthening their English proficiency.

Sarafina! The Homecoming reminds audiences that the struggle of 1976 was not simply about rejecting Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. It was about affirming the right of every child to learn, dream and succeed on their own terms — a message that remains as relevant today as it was half a century ago.

June 16 @ 50

The bitter, brutal story of 1976 comes to life on stage in Rise '76

Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni's adaptation of Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu's book humanises the tragedy without cheapening it

SANDILE MEMELA

Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni, director of the acclaimed stage play *Rise '76: The Story of June 16th*, is a superstar who has risen to staggering heights.

The young, multi-award-winning director was always going to meet history with ambition.

Her stage adaptation of historian Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu's book, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter Memories of June 1976*, is soul-stirring theatre.

Its outstanding achievement is that it does what 33 years of commemoration have often failed to do: it humanises the tragedy without cheapening it. That is storytelling with muscle, research, insight and moral courage.

To understand Rise '76, you must first understand Sifiso Ndlovu. He is a product of the student uprisings himself. A child of 1976 who, from Bantu Education schools, went on to study history at the universities of Natal and Wits to fulfil a mission: to tell a more comprehensive story of the uprising.

A professor of history at UNISA, Ndlovu is also a member of UNESCO's Scientific Committee responsible for updating the General History of Africa series.

In his book, Ndlovu challenges the dominant narrative that students were the sole leaders of the resistance.

He argues, with archival rigour, that June 16 was not made only by placards and petrol bombs. It was made by parents who sheltered chil-



Rising star: Writer and director Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni has received widespread praise for her stage play. Photo: X

dren, principals who tried to mediate, teachers who were expelled for defiance, school boards who wrote letters, journalists and editors who risked careers, and community members who carried the wounded.

Above all, Ndlovu transcends partisan politics. He refuses to hand June 16 over to any political party as property. He insists on a human record. Parents, principals, teachers, black police, white doctors, nurses, and Broederbond inspectors are all placed in the same frame.

That is intellectual courage. That is history as it was lived, messy and shared.

There is an intuitive link between Ndlovu and Mashifane wa Noni. The play is an intergenerational encounter between a child of 1976 and a child of a child of 1976.

The historian gives facts and context. The artist gives breath and blood. Together, they resurrect a national memory that politics has flattened.

Rise '76 honours Ndlovu's mission completely. It does not reduce 1976 to Hector Pieterse, Tsitsi Mashinini, and police bullets. Instead, it brings the full cast into the room.

The production traces the buildup with patience. Problems started in 1974. By February 1976, tension was simmering. Then the textbooks arrived in Afrikaans. Teachers were ordered to teach maths and science in a language they barely spoke. Students refused to learn. Empty classrooms became classrooms of resistance.

The audience feels the frustration before they feel the fire. That slow burn is Ndlovu's scholarship translated into stage time.

Most crucially, the play avoids divisive, partisan point scoring. In an era where every historical event is claimed, Rise '76 refuses. It does not turn June 16 into ANC property or Azapo property. It treats it as a human catastrophe. That is brave and faithful to Ndlovu's method.



Speaking truth to power: Lead actor Alex Sonó plays Bafana, a student poet, who is killed for his words.

His book insists that history is made by people, not slogans and symbols.

Meneer De Beer, the hardline Afrikaner school inspector carrying out the Broederbond's wishes, is not a cartoon villain. He believes in order and language survival.

“
[Ndlovu] insists that history is made by people, not slogans and symbols.
”

Alfie Ndlovu, the school principal, a character torn from life, can speak Afrikaans and tries to mediate by encouraging teachers to use English to teach Afrikaans. He is pragmatic, not heroic.

Teachers are divided. Some comply, some resist and are expelled. That division reflects the real dilemma of black educators caught between survival and solidarity.

The most striking characterisation is that of the black police offi-

cer. He raids houses to arrest Bafana Buthelezi, a composite of Mashinini and Seth Mazibuko, and displays brutality for his superiors' approval.

Yet when confronted to explain his behaviour later, he says: “Betrayal is survival. I, too, must feed my family.” That line is uncomfortable because it is true. Many people can relate.

Ndlovu forces us to ask what makes an oppressed man become the fist of the oppressor. The play does not easily condemn but makes us think.

Even white police and doctors get interiority. Kleynhans, who killed Lesley Hastings Ndlovu on June 16, is shown traumatised by his act. White pathologists and black doctors and nurses at Baragwanath Hospital are depicted as overwhelmed by blood and injured children.

Violence dehumanises both the victim and the one holding the gun. Showing that human side to violence is rare on South African stages, and it matters.

Rise '76 treats Ndlovu's work with respect. It is fact-based and accurate. It resurrects details often omitted: the June 13 strategic planning meeting that resolved the march would be peaceful. The role of radical poetry as “inflammatory”

material that invited police attention. Testimonies from the Cillie Commission. The ratio of 48 police against over 2,000 students.

We learn the agony of Sam Nzima, whose photograph of Hector destroyed his family life and career.

Above all, we see the black woman kneeling in pain, a visual that centres the overlooked trauma of black mothers. We see an uncle searching for a four-year-old lost in chaos while the mother keeps her pain silent.

June 16 was not only students with placards, either. It was children, homes, futures interrupted.

The depiction of June 16, where Ndlovu was killed first, is vital. Many productions jump to Pieterse. Rise '76 shows escalation. We learn that 176 students died that day across Soweto. The number is spoken, not shouted. That restraint makes it heavier.

The production is raw and riveting. Acting is tight. Space becomes a classroom, police van, hospital, and kitchen. Sound and movement carry tension. Poetry that got Bafana killed is performed with urgency. When Bafana dies “for poetry”, we understand why the state feared words. It still does.

For some, the play is too long. The

June 16 @ 50



Counter memories: Historian Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu with journalist and author Sandile Memela.

comprehensive detail that makes it rich also makes it heavy. Cillie Commission excerpts, teacher debates, and hospital scenes are all valuable, but they slow the momentum. A sharper edit would let emotional peaks land harder. Riveting should not mean exhausting. Yet there is a 15-minute interval, and the work remains powerful to the end.

“
This is the theatre South Africa needs: research-driven, morally complex, and rooted in human experience.
”

The production presents hard, cold facts with minimal analysis or interpretation. That is a strength and a limit. Strength, because it avoids lecturing and lets viewers conclude. Limit, because younger audiences unfamiliar with 1976 may leave moved but unclear about structural forces: Bantu Education, labour needs, Black Consciousness, and Frelimo rallies. A

few framing moments via narrator or projection could contextualise without preaching. Maybe.

For the first time in decades, a mainstream stage work depicts the

tragedy of imposing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction without slogans. It shows language as a weapon of policy. That is urgent today when debates on language, curriculum,

Book Review: Malume's Painting: The 1976 Student Uprising

Journalist, communication strategist, men's health advocate and prolific author Sandile Memela has woven his real-life encounters of the Soweto Uprising into an educational and inspiring graphic teen novel called *Malume's Painting: The 1976 Student Uprising*.

“The children must know their history to define a new future for themselves,” Memela says of his motivation to write the book, which tells the story of Bhekisizwe, an activist who returns to South Africa from exile following the fall of apartheid.

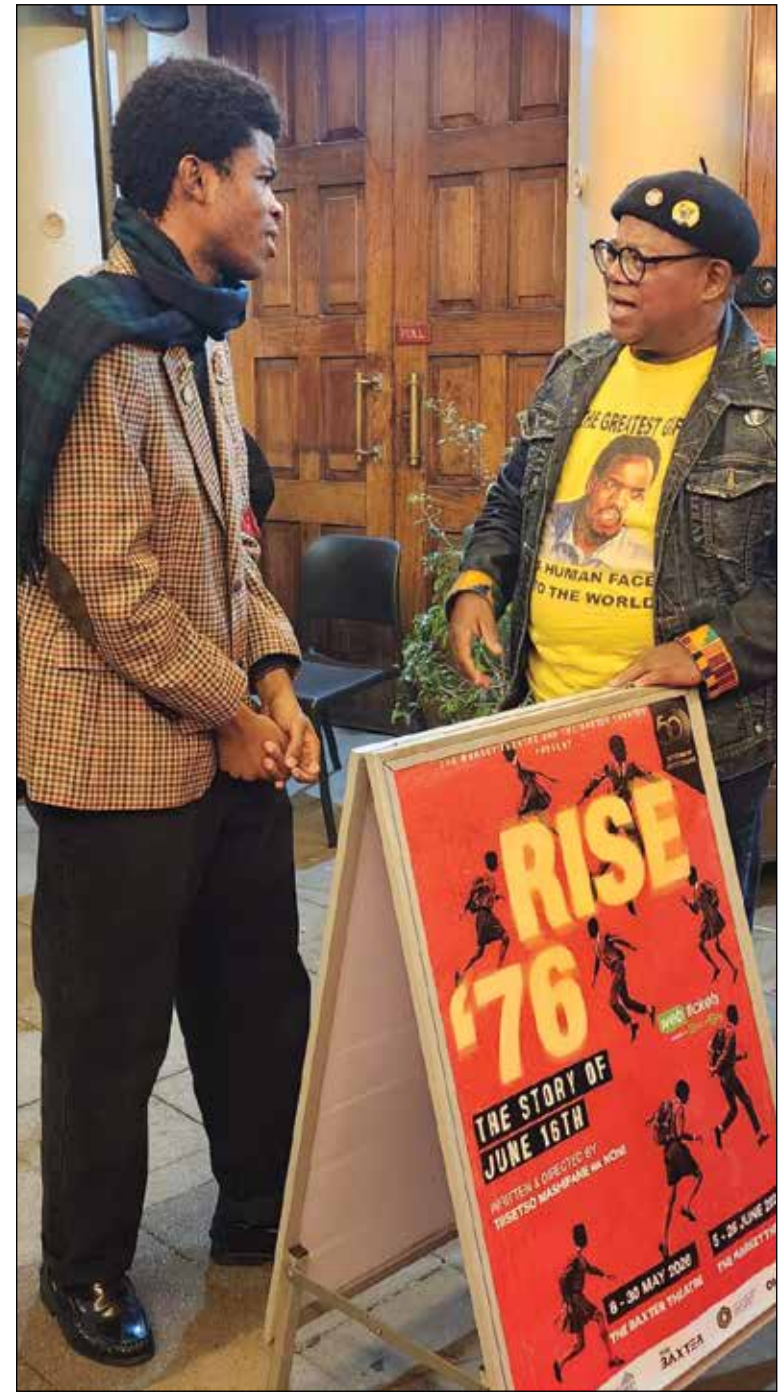
He reconnects with family, including his sister Zoleka and her children. He quickly realises that the children are disconnected from the history of the struggle and ensconced in comfortable suburban life.

Through his painting and teaching, he sets out to correct this anomaly and fill a void with an important record of history.

The story, beautifully illustrated by Mpumelelo Ndlovu, is told in a crisp, lucid and easy-flowing, age-appropriate manner and contains salient observations and lessons about the vagaries of township life and the changes South Africa has undergone to become a democracy.

Memela dedicated the book to his twin sisters, Busisiwe and Ntsiki Memela, who were student leaders during the uprising and went on to become operatives in the ANC's military wing, uMkhonto weSizwe.

It is a worthy read for any teenager who needs an accessible record of this important history. — THEBE MABANGA



Talking shop: Lead actor Alex Sonó and Sandile Memela.

and decolonisation are alive. Rise '76 reminds us that language policy is never neutral. It shapes who learns, who leads, and who is buried.

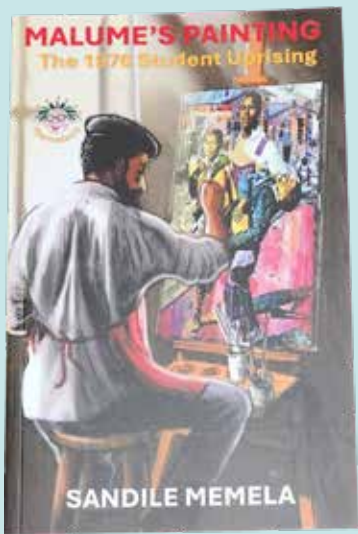
The play also intervenes in mem-

ory. By showing black police, principals, and parents who disagreed, it complicates “us vs them”. It shows oppression works by recruiting the oppressed. That lesson is painful but necessary for accountability and healing.

Rise '76 is an outstanding production. It is great storytelling because it trusts the audience. It does not manipulate. It presents, contextualises, and balances. It honours teachers who wanted to teach, students who refused to learn, police who needed to feed families, and parents who buried children.

Yes, it may be a bit too long. But it is soul-stirring and historically responsible. It honours Ndlovu's intellectual labour by making his counter-memory live. It honours the dead by refusing propaganda. It honours the living by showing trauma inherited by all.

This is the theatre South Africa needs: research-driven, morally complex, and rooted in human experience. If you care about history, language, and how ordinary people get caught in political machines, see this play. Take your children. Take your students. June 16 was not just a date. It was a wound. Rise '76 does not bandage it, but opens it so we can see clearly and maybe finally heal.



Good read: Sandile Memela's book, illustrated by Mpumelelo Ndlovu, tells of an activist who returns from exile and sets out to teach his sister's children about the history of June 16, 1976.

The story behind ‘Soweto Blues’

Miriam Makeba’s famous song about the June 16 uprising

GWEN ANSELL

Miriam Makeba sang a famous song about the June 16, 1976, Soweto Uprising.

The song was called Soweto Blues and its opening lines go:
*The children got a letter from the master
It said no more Xhosa, Sotho, no more Zulu
Refusing to comply, they sent an answer
That’s when the policemen came to the rescue
Well, the children were flying, bullets, dying
Oh the mothers screaming and crying
The fathers were working in the city
The evening news brought out all the publicity
Just a little atrocity
Deep in the city*

The song recalls the events of that day when schoolchildren, marching peacefully in Soweto to protest the imposition of Afrikaans as an official language of instruction, were shot down by the police of the apartheid regime.

“There’s nobody ... who made the world more aware of what was happening in [apartheid] South Africa than Miriam Makeba.” — Hugh Masekela

The system’s architect, Hendrik Verwoerd had declared that black children must never be educated above the level of “hewers of wood and drawers of water”. Soweto Blues is one of the two compositions most closely associated with the events of June 16. The other, Isililo (Tears of Soweto), from Sakhile, was written in retrospect, in 1982, as the group’s co-leader, saxophonist Khaya Mahlangu, reflected on his nightmare memories of Soweto on that day. But Soweto Blues was written as the news of the massacre reached the world. The story of the song is a



Voice of protest: Miriam Makeba travelled from her home in exile in Guinea in 1977 to record ‘Soweto Blues’ in Kumasi, Ghana, with Hugh Masekela and Stanley Kweisi Todd. Photo: Miriam Makeba Foundation

story of solidarity with the struggle against apartheid across the African continent.

Ask who composed the song, and the answer is likely to be trumpeter Hugh Masekela and/or his ex-wife Miriam Makeba. The song, officially released in 1977 by Makeba, is best-known in the version released on her 1989 album, Welela.

The lyrics are instantly recognisable as being penned by Masekela the rhymers – “Just a little atrocity/ Deep in the city”.

But the melody tells a bigger,

pan-African story. It was co-written by the trumpeter and guitarist Stanley Kweisi Todd, founder of the Ghanaian ensemble Hedzoleh (“Freedom”) Sounds.

Masekela was introduced to the West Africans by Afrobeat legend Fela Kuti in 1973, and the collaboration produced three albums led by his name: Introducing Hedzoleh Soundz (1973); I Am Not Afraid (1974); and The Boy’s Doin’ It (1975).

But there were other collaborations between Kweisi and Masekela,

too, including the 1977 You Told Your Mama Not to Worry, which was recorded in Kumasi, Ghana, with Kweisi as co-producer.

Makeba came from her exile home in Guinea to record; there were compositions by Masekela and Todd, tunes adapted from tradition, and a title track about exile composed by South African singer and songwriter Letta Mbulu. Soweto Blues closed the A-side. The original album, regrettably, is hard to find.

The 1976 uprising sparked in Soweto but spread across the coun-

try, from the urban settlements of Langa and Gugulethu in the Cape to the rural villages of the North West province. Parents scoured mortuaries for their dead children, many of whom had apparently been shot in the back. Nobody knows precisely how many died, but the national figure is estimated to be well more than 700.

And just as the rising itself cannot be narrowed to what happened in Soweto – even if the name “sells” – so the song paying tribute cannot be confined to South Africa alone. It came from a trumpet player exiled in the US, a singer sheltered in Guinea, and a musician born in Ghana.

Half a century later, the song’s words still hold lessons about the events of June 16. The story of its creation teaches too: about a shared African history in which borders did not define humanity.

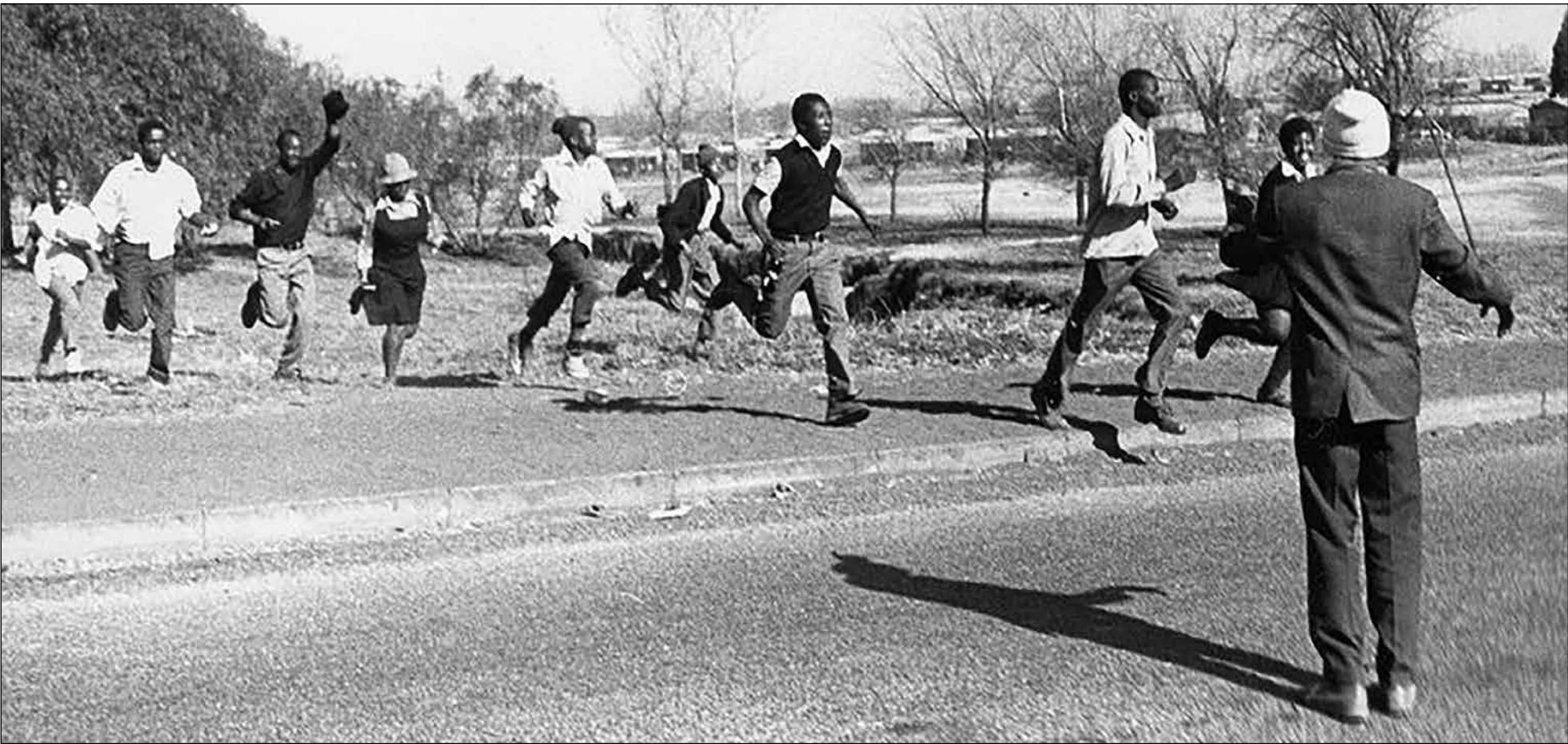
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Gwen Ansell is a Research Associate of the Gordon Institute for Business Science at the University of Pretoria

Legacy of an icon

In an article on *The Conversation* website titled “The legacy of iconic singer Miriam Makeba and her art of activism” in March 2022, Nomfundo Xaluva, Senior Lecturer at the South African College of Music at the University of Cape Town, described Makeba (1932-2008) as “a stalwart and an icon of African liberation and identity”.

Below are some excerpts from Xaluva’s article:

- “Her legacy carved the way for future generations to live a life of authenticity, fearlessness and bravery.”
- “She contributed to black people’s struggle for liberation and defended the integrity of African identity and artistry while living in a land absent from her ancestry.”
- “Despite being banned from her home country for her outspokenness and resistance to apartheid, Makeba went on to build an illustrious international career, performing on some of the world’s most prestigious stages.”
- “Makeba would describe life in apartheid South Africa when introducing her songs and would use every opportunity to address inequality.”
- “Her artistry was a lantern that burnt vigorously through one of the darkest eras in history.”
- “She fought more with her ‘artivism’ than many a man did with their armed weaponry.”



Nationwide struggle: Students protesting during the June 1976 uprising in South Africa. Photo: Gallo Images / Rapport archives

It wasn’t just Soweto in flames ...

Remembering the forgotten student uprising in Hammanskraal

PRECIOUS MASHABA

The study of South Africa’s 1976 student uprisings has traditionally focused on the events that unfolded in

Soweto on June 16, 1976. While this focus is understandable given the scale and symbolic significance of the events there, it has often overshadowed the experiences of students in other parts of the country.

My research project on the student protests that took place in Hammanskraal on 21 June 1976 emerged from an interest in understanding how the uprising spread beyond urban centres and how students in rural and peri-urban communities experienced and responded to apartheid education.

The process of conducting this research highlighted the importance of local histories in broadening historical understanding and revealed both the opportunities and challenges associated with reconstructing under-documented historical events.

One of the most interesting aspects of this research was reconstructing the events that unfolded on 21 June 1976 at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie Secondary School in Temba. Oral testimonies revealed that students learnt about the Soweto uprising through newspapers that circulated among learners after being brought to school by teachers.

After reading reports of the demonstrations in Soweto, students began discussing their own frustrations with

the Bantu Education system. Isaac Thage recalled how students gathered after assembly and refused to proceed to their classrooms. What followed was a spontaneous decision to set fire to the school building.

The burning of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie was particularly significant because it demonstrated the extent to which the Soweto uprising had inspired students beyond major urban centres. The events in Hammanskraal revealed how information travelled rapidly across communities and how local students interpreted national developments through their own experiences of educational inequality. The protest was not merely an act of solidarity but also a response to the conditions that students faced in their own schools.

The testimonies collected during this research further revealed that student grievances extended beyond the Afrikaans language issue. Participants frequently discussed overcrowding, corporal punishment, poverty and the perceived irrelevance of aspects of the curriculum.

Josias Rangwashe, for example, reflected on how students questioned the usefulness of subjects that appeared designed to prepare black learners for subordinate positions within society.

He recalled questioning the value of subjects such as agriculture that seemed designed to prepare black students for a life of labour rather than meaningful opportunities for

advancement. Such sentiments reflected a growing awareness that education under apartheid was intended to reproduce inequality rather than overcome it.

Although the protest began at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie High School, its impact was soon felt at neighbouring schools, including Ratshepo Middle School in Kudube. At the time, Ratshepo occupied a unique position within the educational landscape of Temba. Owing to accommodation shortages, the school shared premises with Kudube Lower Primary School while new buildings were being constructed elsewhere.

Students increasingly linked their everyday educational experiences to the broader structures of apartheid oppression. — Precious Mashaba

June 21 proceeded as usual, and there was little indication that the day would become one of the most memorable in the area’s history. However, the atmosphere changed dramatically when students from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie arrived at the school after setting their own school alight.

According to oral testimonies collected during this research, the students from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie approached Ratshepo from the back of the school, using footpaths that allowed them to

avoid the police who had already been alerted to the unrest. Their arrival created confusion among the students at Ratshepo, many of whom had only heard rumours about the burning of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie. The sight of fellow students arriving in large numbers transformed what had been an ordinary school day into a moment of political awakening.

According to one person’s oral testimony, “when the pupils came [from Kgetsi-ya-Tsie], they did not come chanting or fighting; they came in silence. At the back of the school’s toilets, by the school fence, there was a small passage that people used to walk to the (Kopanong) station between the Apies River [Tshwane River] and the school. They gathered there. I can’t say Kgetsi-ya-Tsie’s pupils threw stones to attack the school. What happened was that a group of Form 3 (Grade 10) went to the fence and started talking to the pupils on the other side of the fence.”

Shortly after the students arrived at Ratshepo Middle School, the police appeared on the scene. Having already responded to the unrest at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie, they were determined to prevent the protest from spreading further. Faced with the presence of the police, students scattered in different directions, bringing the confrontation at Ratshepo to an abrupt end. In the aftermath of the unrest, Ratshepo Middle School was closed for several months.

The arrival of the Kgetsi-ya-Tsie students did more than disrupt classes; it created an opportunity for students at Ratshepo to voice frustrations that had been building for years. The protest became a platform through which students could challenge an

education system they regarded as inferior and discriminatory.

In this respect, the events at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie and Ratshepo mirrored developments occurring throughout South Africa, where students increasingly linked their everyday educational experiences to the broader structures of apartheid oppression.

The study of the Hammanskraal student protests contributed to a deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences that characterised the 1976 uprising. Importantly, the research revealed that the students of Kgetsi-ya-Tsie were not the only young people in Hammanskraal who actively resisted the apartheid education system.

Student unrest affected several schools across the region, including Sekitla High School in Mathibestad, where approximately 200 pupils were arrested and imprisoned for several months following incidents of property destruction.

By examining these lesser-known episodes alongside the events at Kgetsi-ya-Tsie and Ratshepo, my study highlights the widespread nature of student resistance in Hammanskraal and challenges narratives that focus exclusively on major urban centres.

Recovering these local histories not only broadens our understanding of the 1976 uprising but also ensures that the experiences of communities often overlooked in historical scholarship are recognised and preserved.

• Precious Mashaba is an MA history student at the University of Pretoria. Her research focuses on student politics and overlooked histories of resistance during apartheid.

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UNISA is helping shape Africa's future

Professor Puleng LenkaBula aims to strengthen collaboration between the continent's universities

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

As the first woman to lead the University of South Africa (UNISA) in its 148-year history, Professor Puleng LenkaBula has become one of the continent's most influential voices in higher education..

Now, her appointment to the board of the African Association of Universities (AAU) offers an opportunity to advance UNISA's interests and also a broader vision for Africa's scientific, educational and economic future.

LenkaBula views her selection as recognition of UNISA's longstanding contribution to higher education and an opportunity to strengthen collaboration among African universities.

The AAU board, she explained, oversees and shapes the scientific agenda of universities across the continent, including universities of technology, research-intensive institutions, virtual universities and open distance learning institutions.

For LenkaBula, the appointment comes at a crucial time for a continent with the world's youngest population.

"It's also important because this is the continent with the most youthful dividend, meaning that measurement of how you optimise the talents, the skills, the expertise, but also the aspirations of youth and young adults through education, knowledge, science and participation in higher education."

She sees her role as an opportunity to showcase UNISA's achievements while sharing lessons from South Africa's higher education and innovation systems with institutions across the continent.

LenkaBula believes UNISA's influence stretches far beyond South Africa's borders.

She pointed to partnerships across the continent, including support for higher education development in Ethiopia and Eritrea, while noting that many open universities have drawn inspiration from UNISA's model.

"If you look at all the open universities on the continent, most draw their models or support from the University of South Africa," she said.

She added that institutions such as the Open University in the United Kingdom, India's Indira Gandhi National Open University and the Turkish Open University have adopted approaches pioneered by UNISA.

With more than 400 member institutions spanning different regions and language groups, LenkaBula hopes the AAU will increasingly recognise the value of open distance and e-learning universities, which have often been overshadowed by traditional institutions.

"UNISA has demonstrated that it can be a comprehensive university with strength in technology, research and the ability to operate at scale," she said.

Central to LenkaBula's vision is the belief that African universities must play a leading role in addressing poverty, economic development and technological interdependence.

She believes existing partnerships between UNISA and the African Union, supported by a memorandum of understanding, can help advance the continent's Agenda 2063 aspirations.

Among the priorities she identified are aviation, maritime studies, space sciences and digital sovereignty.

"We also need to strengthen the blue economy or marine aspects of our sciences to resource societies in strengthening their economies," she said.

"It's time Africa invests in developing its own infrastructure, algorithms and software systems to protect its interdependence and security."

“It’s time Africa invests in developing its own infrastructure, algorithms and software systems to protect its interdependence and security. — Prof Puleng LenkaBula

According to LenkaBula, dependence on foreign digital platforms presents risks to Africa's sovereignty and long-term development.

Beyond academia, LenkaBula's worldview has been shaped by extensive engagement in international ecumenical movements and global advocacy work.

She has worked with the World Council of Churches on issues of

poverty, ecology and justice and has received training within the United Nations system focusing on ethics, gender equality and economic justice.

Through her AAU role, she hopes to challenge perceptions about women in leadership and advance a culture of dignity and inclusion.

She also stressed the need to confront patriarchal violence, gender inequality and femicide, arguing that universities have a responsibility to advance the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls through education and scientific innovation.

LenkaBula believes the continent's most urgent challenge is investing more aggressively in higher education infrastructure, research facilities and laboratories.

"I think the most urgent intervention is to invest in higher education financing, infrastructure and laboratories to address underdevelopment and foster innovation," she said.

While acknowledging South Africa's investment in higher education and student support through NSFAS, she argued that more resources are needed to strengthen critical scientific disciplines.

She also called for a more balanced approach to international mobility, rejecting the notion that Africans

should feel confined to the continent while cautioning against unchecked brain drain. "When people leave, we must ensure they bring back knowledge, languages, cultures and values that enrich Africa," she said.

For her, the goal is to "Africanise the world" while ensuring that global experience ultimately contributes to Africa's development.

LenkaBula's confidence in UNISA's future is underpinned by the institution's recent achievements. The university now serves more than 423,000 students across South Africa and beyond.

UNISA contributes 10.3% of South Africa's higher education research output, ranks second nationally in research production and remains a leading producer of doctoral graduates.

The institution has also maintained unqualified audits for five consecutive years and grown its asset base from R6 billion in 2021 to nearly R30 billion.

"We are very proud of our academicians and those who support them for reclaiming this position," she said. The university has also directed significant resources towards student support, contributing R400 million last year to assist postgraduate and undergraduate students facing financial hardship.

For LenkaBula, these achievements demonstrate what universities can accomplish when they take ownership of their future.

Rather than waiting for governments or private investors to lead, she believes African universities must become catalysts for development, innovation and social transformation.

"I'll project some of this advocacy within the board and in the programmes and operations of the AAU so that we strengthen how universities

are partners to our societies in shaping futures, in changing the plight of poverty, activating the talents, expertise and commitments of youth and young adults, and enabling them to be agents of change," she said.

Continental reach: Prof Puleng LenkaBula, UNISA's Principal & Vice-Chancellor, has been appointed to the board of the African Association of Universities. Photo: UNISA/X

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Why Ma Vesta Smith matters

Unsung activist deserves recognition 50 years after June 16

MARIA SURIANO

While many men are remembered as heroes of political struggles, women seldom get enough attention. Vesta Smith is a good example. I have written her biography, and with the Soweto youth uprising in mind, I tell a bit in this article about the activist affectionately known as Ma Vesta.

Why is Vesta Smith important?

Vesta Smith was a community activist who dedicated her life to the anti-apartheid struggle, social justice, non-racialism and gender equality.

She participated in key events in South Africa's history, attending the Congress of the People in 1955, where the Freedom Charter was adopted, and the historic 1956 Women's March. Two decades later, during the Soweto uprising, Ma Vesta became a trusted mentor to younger militants.

Her political work happened largely outside formal politics. It was grounded in building non-racial and inter-generational networks of care and solidarity. She hid students in her home while they were on the run from the security police and supported the families of political prisoners. She paid the price with four months in prison.

Ma Vesta's story contributes to efforts to uncover the radical ideas, practices and key figures behind the students' protests. These helped pave the way for South Africa's democratic transition and continue to echo in today's student struggles for decolonisation.

Ma Vesta's passionate, community-based activism matters because it reveals the importance of "everyday politics" — the small acts of resistance, often outside official politics, that foster personal and collective emancipation.

This invites us to reconsider the dominant narrative of the liberation struggle, long centred on prominent male leaders and party strategies.

Who was Vesta Smith?

Born in Johannesburg in 1922, she was forcibly relocated in 1941, along with her mother and sisters, to Noordgesig. She lived there until her passing in 2013. Segregation laws governing residential areas reserved this small section of Soweto for poor townships classified as "coloured". She was born into a stable family.



Trusted mentor: Vesta Smith provided practical help, political guidance, and emotional support to student activists in 1976. Photo: Courtesy Smith family

Her father, Stephen Mpama, moved in the circles of Johannesburg's black intelligentsia. Her early life was marked by hardships after his premature death in 1927. Inner-city cosmopolitanism shaped her non-racialism, and daily racial discrimination informed her refusal to be subservient to white people.

From the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, she worked consecutively for the South African Council of Churches, the South African Committee for Higher Education and the Legal Resources Centre. Although formally an administrator at these progressive organisations, Ma Vesta relentlessly pursued social justice by mobilising her broad political networks.

In the 1980s, she connected legal advocacy to black townships through advice centres, while participating in key anti-apartheid campaigns. After 1994 and the first democratic elections, she advocated for women's empowerment and poverty alleviation in the townships.

What are the key takeaways?

Drawing on personal conversations with those who knew Ma Vesta and on archival sources, private papers and press coverage, the book is structured around four key themes.

First, her activism was grounded in her faith — fighting injustice was a spiritual duty. Her work within the Young Women's Christian Association from the 1960s onwards pioneered the idea that Christianity and political activism should be intertwined.

Second, Ma Vesta's politics were non-sectarian. Although aligned with the ANC resistance movement, she was a "bridge-builder". She connected the struggles of the 1950s to those of the 1970s and 1980s as well as activists across generations, townships and ideologies.

Third, non-racialism was central to her political work. The formal and informal, secular and religious connections she forged over time reflected this belief. In the 1970s, her rejection of apartheid categories matched the Black

Consciousness Movement. The book traces her friendships and shifting relations with white liberals, alongside her understanding of her blackness.

Fourth, looking beyond prominent leaders reveals the pivotal yet under-recognised contributions of black women who worked on the ground. What dominant historical accounts leave out about everyday politics deserves closer examination.

What was her impact on young militants?

During the 1976 uprising, Ma Vesta emerged as one of the senior activists who provided practical help, political guidance and emotional support to student activists. This was regardless of their political affiliation.

Many young militants who encountered her in 1976 and afterwards describe her as a formative influence. She helped shape their political thinking and sustained them through difficult times.

She built networks with fellow anti-apartheid activists across generations. This brings into view a political world of friendships and mutual support. What emerges is a collective political biography, but also an intimate portrait. Locating her in Noordgesig extends our understanding of June 1976 beyond its epicentre in Soweto.

Why has she been overlooked?

Ma Vesta's absence from academic and popular accounts of the liberation struggle reflects broader patterns in how this history has been written.

First, scholarship has focused mostly on male leaders, their strategies and political organisations. It has overlooked community activists and organic intellectuals, particularly black women outside formal leadership structures. Ma Vesta's politics were not defined by rigid allegiances. So, figures like her are harder to categorise and less visible in such accounts.

Her erasure may also be attributed to her refusal to accept racialised politics and apartheid racial classifications (black, white, coloured, Indian). This sits uneasily with recent efforts to celebrate iconic struggle figures from coloured communities as "coloured", a framing she herself would have rejected.

Lastly, she was disillusioned with the unfulfilled promises of the ANC government that won democratic power in 1994. This may have also contributed to her being marginalised.

It's important to restore Vesta Smith to her rightful place in South African history. Not as a footnote to more famous figures, but as a central example of how grassroots activists can become extraordinary agents of change and liberation.

But recovering this story is not only about correcting the historical record and advancing epistemic justice. It also speaks to pressing contemporary concerns. Her Christian-based activism offers a counterpoint to the recent resurgence of narrow identity politics in the country.

During South Africa's first major xenophobic attacks in 2008, she called a Johannesburg radio station to question assumptions of national superiority over other Africans. She never grew tired of addressing issues of social justice.

Her commitment to community empowerment after 1994 is also a reminder that the democratic transition was only one step in the struggle for equality and dignity. Above all, her life shows that transformation is often driven by those who work in the background.

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Maria Suriano is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

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‘Giving jobs, not looking for them’

Entrepreneurship education drive aims to turn SA learners into job creators

JOHNATHAN PAOLI

South Africa’s push to embed entrepreneurship throughout the education system is gathering momentum, with officials, universities and policymakers arguing that entrepreneurial thinking must become a core part of learning if the country is to address persistent youth unemployment and prepare learners for a rapidly changing economy.

The Basic Education Department (DBE)’s Entrepreneurship Unit Communications Manager, Moeketsi Nchoba, sat down with *Inside Education* to discuss how entrepreneurship education (EE) holds the potential to fundamentally reshape opportunities for young people by equipping them with skills that go far beyond starting businesses.

“The potential is genuinely transformative. South Africa has over 60% youth unemployment among 15–24 year olds, and that’s not just an economic crisis, it’s a human dignity crisis. EE addresses it at the root,” Nchoba said.

“When done well, EE doesn’t just prepare young people to find jobs; it prepares them to create value in whatever path they choose. A learner who leaves school curious, resilient, collaborative and confident in their own agency is equipped for employment (‘intrapreneurship’), further study, entrepreneurship (for-profit business), and active citizenship (social entrepreneur). Those aren’t separate tracks, they’re the same foundation,” he said.

Nchoba emphasised that entrepreneurship education is not intended for a small group of aspiring business owners but for all learners across the country.

“What’s exciting is that the research shows these capacities aren’t fixed; they can be deliberately developed in every child, across every subject, from Grade R to Grade 12. We’re not talking about a programme for a select few. This is for the child in a rural Eastern Cape classroom just as much as one in a Sandton school,” he said.

On the role of educators, Nchoba argued that schools require teachers and entrepreneurs working together to cultivate entrepreneurial mind-sets.

“The combination is where the magic happens. Teachers are irreplaceable. They hold the daily relationship with learners, they understand the curriculum, and they’re the ones who create the conditions for deep learning over time,” Nchoba said.

“The ideal model is a genuine partnership with entrepreneurs as guest voices, mentors, or problem-posers who enrich what teachers are already building.—
Moeketsi Nchoba

At the same time, he said entrepreneurs bring practical experience and serve as relatable role models for learners.

“When a young person sees someone from their own community who looks like them, who faced similar obstacles, and who built something, that’s a powerful moment for self-efficacy,” he said.

Nchoba said the ideal approach involves entrepreneurs acting as mentors, guest speakers and problem-solvers within learning programmes rather than making occasional appearances.

“The ideal model is a genuine partnership with entrepreneurs as guest voices, mentors, or problem-posers who enrich what teachers are already building,” he said.

Looking ahead, he said 2026 represents a major expansion phase for entrepreneurship education initiatives.

Nchoba outlined a “few key things on the horizon”, including provincial



Reaching out: The Chairperson of the Inside Education Foundation, Matuma Letsaalo, and Higher Education and Training Minister, Buti Manamela, at the Foundation’s National Education Summit in April. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Team effort: Entrepreneurship education holds the potential to fundamentally reshape opportunities for young people by equipping them with skills that go far beyond starting businesses. Photo: Vecteezy.com

policy dialogues in all nine provinces following the inaugural National Policy Dialogue last year, expanded teacher development programmes, and strengthened partnerships with universities.

“The overarching goal remains unchanged: every South African school implementing EE as a genuine part of how teaching happens, not as an add-on, by 2035,” he said.

The DBE’s entrepreneurship agenda has its roots in the E3 initiative (Entrepreneurship, Employability and Education), which emerged from several national policy frameworks, including the National Development Plan (NDP).

The NDP identifies education as a key mechanism for enhancing the entrepreneurial capacity of the country and calls for educational programmes that promote entrepreneurial thinking among learners.

The E3 initiative began in 2018 with 73 pilot schools introducing project-based learning methodologies designed to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, reflective learning and the development of 21st-century skills.

The programme later expanded to additional schools and was conceived as a long-term transformation strategy aimed at changing how teaching and learning occur across all grades and subjects.

Its ultimate objective is to produce a generation of engaged, innovative and self-reliant citizens capable of contributing to South Africa’s economic development.

The initiative seeks to ensure that learners leave school with problem-solving abilities, entrepreneurial competencies and the confidence either to continue their studies, enter employment or establish their own enterprises.

Former DBE Deputy Director-General for Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring and current Free State Education MEC, Dr Mamiki Maboya, described the programme as a platform for integrating

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World class: Learners from the Pace Commerce and Entrepreneurship School of Specialisation in Jabulani, Soweto, performed well recently at the Young Entrepreneurship Programme (YEP), coming in third among world contenders. Photo: Eddie Mtsweni



Not too young: Entrepreneurship education can be deliberately developed in every child, across every subject, says the DBE’s Entrepreneurship Unit Communications Manager, Moeketsi Nchoba. Photo: Vecteezy.com

21st-century skills throughout the curriculum.

“Our value proposition is that we provide the platform for all education initiatives working with DBE schools who are striving to bring 21st-century skills into the pedagogy,” Maboya said.

She explained that learners are encouraged to identify needs, develop solutions and create projects that address real-world challenges.

“From a young age, learners will grow their empathy, become caring, and develop a continuous problem-solving mindset that is driven by what they care about,” she added.

The growing focus on entrepreneurship education was reinforced by Higher Education and Training Minister Buti Manamela during his keynote address at the Inside Education Foundation’s National Education Summit in Sandton on 20 April.

Addressing delegates, Manamela argued that South Africa’s education

system must move beyond preparing learners solely for traditional employment.

“For too long, our education system has been designed to prepare young people for employment. But the reality we face today is stark: There are not enough jobs to absorb them. So we must build a system that not only prepares job-seekers but also produces job creators,” he said.

The minister highlighted efforts already underway within the post-school sector, noting that all 50 public Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges now offer entrepreneurship programmes and that more than 47,000 students participated in such programmes during 2024.

However, he stressed that entrepreneurship education extends beyond business training.

“Entrepreneurship is not simply about teaching business skills. It is about building a capability, a mind-

set and a confidence to act,” he said.

According to Manamela, three key ingredients are necessary for entrepreneurial success: exposure, opportunity and confidence.

“Exposure means real experience, students running real businesses, making real decisions, and facing real consequences. Opportunity means access to markets, to funding, and to systems that are not closed off to new entrants. Confidence means networks, mentorship, support, and the belief that success is possible,” he said.

The minister also warned that entrepreneurship cannot flourish without broader economic reform.

“Entrepreneurship will not thrive in an economy that is structurally closed. For millions of young people outside formal employment, this is not an optional extra. It is a pathway to survival and to dignity,” he said.

Complementing the DBE’s efforts is a major new initiative led by Universities South Africa through its Entre-

preneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) programme.

Launched in October 2025 and funded by Absa Bank, the Entrepreneurship Education in Schools Initiative seeks to integrate entrepreneurial competencies into teacher education programmes at South Africa’s public universities.

“Entrepreneurship is not simply about teaching business skills. It is about building a capability, a mindset and a confidence to act.” —
Buti Manamela

The initiative is built on the belief that entrepreneurial thinking must be cultivated from the earliest stages of education and that teachers play a critical role in this process.

A recent report coordinated by the University of Pretoria’s Professor Melodi Botha found that 24 public universities currently offer pre-service teacher education degrees, providing a substantial platform for embedding entrepreneurship into teacher training.

The programme’s objectives include developing a national framework for entrepreneurship education in teacher training, standardising entrepreneurial competencies, building educator capacity through train-the-trainer workshops, and establishing a national network of “entrepreneurship champions” across higher education institutions.

According to the initiative’s concept note, compiled by USAf Entrepreneurship Director Dr Edwell Gumbo, entrepreneurship education is being positioned as a strategic response to South Africa’s unemployment crisis and broader economic challenges.

“By targeting foundational levels of education, this initiative aligns with national priorities to foster skills development, promote innovation, and enhance youth employability. It marks a critical shift towards building an entrepreneurial culture across the entire education continuum, from school to university and beyond,” Gumbo wrote.

The document argues that entrepreneurial competencies such as creativity, opportunity recognition, innovation, resilience, financial literacy and problem-solving should be integrated throughout teacher education curricula.

The initiative will follow a three-phase implementation model.

The first phase focuses on developing a national framework through collaboration between entrepreneurship experts, education specialists and policymakers. This framework will define the entrepreneurial competencies that should be embedded in pre-service teacher education programmes and provide guidance for implementation.

The second phase centres on stakeholder engagement through colloquia and roundtable discussions where education leaders, curriculum experts and entrepreneurship specialists will review, validate and refine the framework.

The third phase consists of regional train-the-trainer workshops aimed at developing a cohort of entrepreneurship champions within faculties of education. These educators will then support the broader integration of entrepreneurship education within their institutions.

Expected outcomes include a nationally validated framework, improved entrepreneurial teaching methodologies, stronger institutional commitment to entrepreneurship education and enhanced collaboration between universities, government departments and industry stakeholders.

The concept note argues that embedding entrepreneurial competencies at the teacher-training level represents a long-term investment in South Africa’s future.

By equipping educators with the tools to foster innovation, creativity and problem-solving among learners, the initiative aims to create a generation of young South Africans capable not only of seeking employment but also of creating opportunities for themselves and their communities.

As the country celebrates Youth Month and entrepreneurship education gains traction across schools, universities and government policy, advocates believe it could become a central pillar in efforts to build a more inclusive, innovative and economically resilient South Africa.

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Paying respect: President Cyril Ramaphosa lays a wreath at the Hector Pieterse Memorial Site in Soweto to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1976 youth uprising. Photo: GCIS

President outlines government’s plans to boost youth employment

State undertaking far-reaching reforms to improve economy

CYRIL RAMAPHOSA

Fifty years ago, the youth of 1976 stood up against injustice and demanded the right to learn, to dream and to determine their own future. Their courage helped open the doors of freedom. The responsibility of our generation is to ensure that those doors lead to opportunity. The youth of South Africa rose up to reject an education system that sought to keep them in servitude and deny them the opportunity to realise their potential. Exactly 50 years later, as young South Africans, you face a different challenge: finding your place in an economy that has for too long kept its doors closed to you. We know that for many young South Africans, the promise of democracy can feel distant when jobs are scarce, when opportunities seem out of reach and when qualifications do not always lead to employment. Many of you are working hard, applying for jobs, pursuing training and seeking opportunities, only to face disappointment. We hear these frustrations, and we under-

stand that they are real.

Inclusive economic growth is essential if we are to tackle youth unemployment in a meaningful and lasting way. That is why we are investing in a massive infrastructure programme and undertaking far-reaching reforms to make our economy more competitive. We have embarked on a second ambitious investment drive, raising R890 billion in new investment pledges in the last year. However, these efforts will take time to translate into jobs. And even as the economy grows, young people may still find it difficult to participate in that growth. That is why we have been investing in programmes that give you access to learning and work opportunities, skills, experience and an income. One of our most successful programmes has been the Presidential Employment Stimulus, which was launched at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Today, that stimulus has created in excess of 2.5 million work and livelihood opportunities. More than eight in ten of these opportunities have gone to young people, and two-thirds to women. It has enabled

the most rapid expansion of public employment in our history.

While these numbers are impressive, what really makes this initiative stand out is the impact that it has on the prospects of those involved and the contribution it makes to the areas in which they work.

“Your country sees your potential and will work with you to ensure that you realise it.” — President Cyril Ramaphosa

Last year, through the Basic Education Employment Initiative, 200,000 unemployed young people provided valuable support to nearly 22,000 schools in remote villages, townships, dense inner cities, special needs classrooms and farm schools. The programme is giving young people their first foothold in the world of work while strengthening the foundations of learning in the schools that need it most. The Social Employment Fund, another successful programme, offers part-time work for young people in social

development programmes in areas like education, food and agriculture, health care, environmental improvement and safety. Because it is part-time, participants get regular and predictable income while spending the rest of their time looking for work, exploring business opportunities or improving their skills. Alongside these public and social employment programmes, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention is steadily dismantling the barriers that keep young people locked out of the labour market. Through the SA Youth online platform, more than 5.7 million young people are now able to search for opportunities, overcoming some of the impediments that often hold them back, such as transport and data expenses. To date, the intervention has facilitated access to over 2.3 million earning opportunities. The revitalised National Youth Service has placed more than 132,000 young people in paid service to their communities. These are young people learning the dignity of work while giving back to the society that raised them. The Youth Employment Service, which is a business initiative, places young people in quality year-long work experience opportunities in companies across the country. We are also pioneering smarter ways of spending training funds. The Jobs Boost Outcomes Fund pays for

training for young people only when they are placed in a real, quality job. It is a model that demands results. Behind every one of these numbers is a young person whose dignity has been restored, whose confidence has been renewed and whose horizon has broadened. Although these opportunities are mostly short-term, there are thousands of stories of young people who have used them as a stepping stone towards finding a permanent job, starting a small business or studying towards a new career. The value of these opportunities can be measured not merely by what young people earn while they’re in the programme but by what they leave with: skills, experience, self-esteem and a sense of purpose. Much work remains. The scale of the challenge demands that we sustain and deepen these efforts. Every company, every department, every organisation and every South African who is able to open a door for a young person must do so. Your country sees your potential and will work with you to ensure that you realise it. Let us together build a South Africa in which every young person finds their place in an inclusive economy and in a thriving society.

• Cyril Ramaphosa is President of South Africa

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Entrepreneurship takes centre stage

SA’s 26 universities can turn entrepreneurial vision into economic and social reality

GCINA NHLEKO

When Dr Phethiwe Matutu, CEO of Universities South Africa, took the stage at the recent Entrepreneurial Executive Leadership Workshop 2026, she delivered a direct yet powerful message: entrepreneurship is no longer a peripheral activity but the central lens for teaching, research, and community engagement. Beside her, Mahlubi “Chief” Mabizela, Director of Operations and Sector Support at Universities South Africa, set a tone of disciplined leadership as MC, reminding delegates: “This is a leadership room, and over the next two days, leadership in action will matter most.” Behind the scenes, Dr Edwell Gumbo, Director of Entrepreneurship at Universities South Africa, had spent months architecting a vision to transform entrepreneurial intent into tangible student impact across all 26 public universities. The result was the most consequential Entrepreneurial Executive Leadership Workshop to date, a workshop that decisively pivoted from discussion to implementation, from policy to measurable outcomes. The Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education programme, implemented by Universities South Africa in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), continues to play a catalytic role in transforming South Africa’s 26 public universities into entrepreneurial and innovation-driven institutions. As the primary funder and strategic partner, the DHET has provided the sustained backing necessary to move beyond pilot projects toward systemic reform. This support enabled the 2026 workshop to address head-on the inefficiencies, weak ecosystem coordination, and limited impact metrics identified in previous years. International expertise brought a fresh perspective. Dr Tonny Omwansa, CEO of the Kenya National Innovation Agency, shared how East Africa’s startup resurgence occurred when Kenya stopped asking “what does the policy say?” and started asking “what does the market need?” He challenged South African universities to embrace innovation optimally by enabling students to test business ideas without bureaucratic delays. Prof Ceri Nursaw, CEO of the National Council for Entrepreneurship

Education in the UK, added a global observation: “Universities are great at starting things and limited at sustaining them.” These insights helped delegates see that while challenges are universal, South Africa has a clear pathway to becoming a leader in entrepreneurial education. Private sector partners demonstrated their commitment to moving beyond rhetoric. Fanus Basson of Absa Group reinforced that industry partnerships must be intent-driven: “We are here to build pipelines. A student with a prototype needs a pathway to market, not just a pitch competition.”

“Our students are makers. We need to teach them how to sell what they make.” – Prof Simphiwe Nelana



Leadership in action: Participants at the workshop celebrate a successful event. Photo: USAF



Entrepreneurial future: Academics at the 2026 Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education Entrepreneurial Leadership Workshop discussed ways of cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset to benefit students at South Africa’s universities. Photo: Vecteezy.com

the only currency that matters.” Prof Bulelwa Nguza-Mduba from the University of the Free State called for breaking down silos: “To foster an entrepreneurial environment, we must integrate entrepreneurial thinking into all departments.” In a technology transfer masterclass, Anita Nel, Director of Innovus at Stellenbosch University, offered a powerful metaphor: “Most universities sit on a goldmine of intellectual property but lack the pickaxe of commercialisation strategy.” She provided a practical framework for turning research assets into revenue-generating ventures. Communities of practice sessions, chaired by Prof McEdward Murimbika, Director of the Wits Centre for Entrepreneurship, featured honest critiques that opened the door to genuine reform. Prof Evelyn Derera from the University

of KwaZulu-Natal challenged her peers: “We publish papers on SMEs, but we never start one.” Prof Rendani Maladzhi from the Durban University of Technology shifted the conversation from academic outputs to economic outcomes, warning: “Without impact metrics, policy is merely poetry. We measure how many papers we publish on SMEs, but we don’t measure how many SMEs we actually create.” By the workshop’s close, concrete outcomes had emerged:

- Accountability metrics for measuring entrepreneurial outputs complementing academic publications;
- Cross-university partnerships to break down silos of innovation;
- Industry pipelines connecting student prototypes to market pathways; and

- Policy reforms embracing innovation for students.

As delegates stepped out into the Cape winter sunshine, the feeling was not one of an ending but of a new beginning. Dr Edwell Gumbo’s closing words captured the moment perfectly: “We have spent two days moving from policy to impact. But the real work begins on Monday morning. The question is not about inspiration; it’s about what you will implement.” With the funder’s support, international benchmarks, industry pipelines, and committed higher education leaders now aligned, South Africa’s 26 universities have never been better positioned to turn entrepreneurial vision into economic and social reality.

• Gcina Nhleko is the Corporate Communications Manager at Universities South Africa

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PROFILE

The rise of Godiragetse Mogajane

From bicycle courier to logistics empire

LEVY MASITENG

When Godiragetse “Godi” Mogajane began delivering food by bicycle in Hammanskraal in 2021, few could have predicted that within a few years he would be leading one of South Africa’s fastest-growing logistics companies.

Today, the 27-year-old entrepreneur is the founder and chief executive of Delivery Ka Speed, a logistics company operating across Gauteng, Limpopo and the North West. The business employs hundreds of young people and provides services to major retail, e-commerce and courier brands.

What started as a response to a local challenge has

evolved into a business aimed at connecting underserved township communities to the mainstream economy.

“I saw that people in Hammanskraal were often excluded from delivery services because many areas were unmapped or considered difficult to reach,” Mogajane said. “Instead of seeing a challenge, I saw an opportunity to create something that would serve our communities.”

Armed with a bicycle, a cell-phone and determination, he began taking food deliveries

every orders through WhatsApp. The service quickly gained traction as residents embraced a delivery option that understood local streets, landmarks and community dynamics.

As demand grew, Mogajane expanded beyond food deliveries. Today, Delivery Ka Speed operates as a full-service courier and logistics company, facilitating deliveries for leading e-commerce platforms and consumer brands while helping bridge the gap between national retailers and township consumers.

The company’s growth has been rapid. It now operates five warehouses across three provinces and manages a fleet of more than 150 drivers delivering parcels daily to township communities.

Within six months of launching, the business had fulfilled more than 6,500 orders and generated its first R1 million in revenue.

In 2024, Delivery Ka Speed expanded into more than 20 townships across Gauteng, Limpopo and North West, strengthening its position in the township logistics sector.

The expansion has continued in 2026 with the opening of new collection and logistics points in Polokwane, Soweto’s Bara area and Soshanguve, bringing courier services closer to residents and small businesses.

Winning ways: Godiragetse Mogajane has garnered numerous awards and says: “It is beautiful to see my dream and my team’s hard work come alive.”



Keep on truckin: Godiragetse “Godi” Mogajane “saw an opportunity to create something that would serve our communities”, and it’s been a rip-roaring success.

Mogajane said the new sites form part of a broader strategy to establish a nationwide township logistics network.

“Our Soweto point is more than just a pickup point — it’s a logistics breakthrough,” he said. “Designed specifically for the unique needs of township communities, this is the first of many points we’re rolling out across the country.”

“Success is never measured only by profits.” — Godiragetse Mogajane

One of the company’s flagship initiatives is a rent-to-own scooter programme that enables delivery riders to become owners of their vehicles after 18 months. Delivery Ka Speed also creates opportunities for drivers who already own vehicles, helping young people generate sustainable incomes.

“Success is never measured only by profits,” Mogajane said.

His innovative approach has attracted national recognition.

In 2022, Mogajane won the Entrepreneurship To The Point Future Table Competition, securing R50,000 in funding and R100,000 worth of business support.

Two years later, he won three ma-

jor honours at the Township Economy Awards: Youth Entrepreneur of the Year, Male Entrepreneur of the Year, and the Transport and Logistics Award.

“It is beautiful to see my dream and my team’s hard work come alive, creating opportunities for young people and bringing essential logistics services to underserved township communities,” he said.

Delivery Ka Speed’s ability to navigate areas often overlooked by traditional courier networks has helped it establish a distinct niche in the logistics sector. The company has increasingly positioned itself as a business-to-business logistics partner for retailers and organisations seeking access to township markets.

Despite the rapid growth, Mogajane remains committed to the vision that inspired his first bicycle delivery.

His mission, he said, is not only to move parcels but also to move communities forward.

As South Africa marked Youth Month, his journey serves as a reminder that innovation does not always begin in corporate boardrooms. Sometimes it starts on the dusty streets of a township, with a bicycle, a dream and the determination to solve a problem others have overlooked.

From delivering meals in Hammanskraal to building a logistics network spanning multiple provinces, Mogajane is proving that South Africa’s young entrepreneurs are not waiting for opportunities — they are creating them.

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PROFILE

From humble Hammanskraal to the spotlight

How Pogiso ‘PJ’ Mokoto is stitching her way to success

LEVY MASITENG

At 33, Pogiso “PJ” Mokoto has turned her passion for fashion and beauty into a thriving business, proving that talent, determination and self-belief can create opportunities beyond one’s circumstances.

The fashion designer and makeup artist from Refentse RDP in Hammanskraal has built a growing reputation through her business, FAIRBOXpro, which is known for its bespoke fashion designs and professional makeup services.

Speaking to Inside Education, Mokoto said one of the defining moments in her career came when she was selected to design an outfit for South African media personality and entrepreneur Boity Thulo.

The opportunity arose through an organisation that promotes locally produced goods and services. When organisers needed a designer, a friend recommended Mokoto.

“I was super excited,” she said.

For Mokoto, dressing a celebrity of Thulo’s stature was more than a professional assignment. It was an opportunity to showcase her creativity and demonstrate that talent from township communities can compete on a national stage.

“It was a great experience, worth it and a big opportunity for me to show my talent,” she said.

While many people recognise her for her fashion and makeup skills, Mokoto said building a successful business required more than technical expertise.

Before launching FAIRBOXpro, she “had to learn how to work with people and how to manage a business effectively before starting one”, she said.

Mokoto’s journey began with formal studies in fashion design, graduating in 2013. Since then, she has built a loyal client base by prioritising communication and customer satisfaction.

“I discuss with my clients what they want and what would be com-

fortable for them,” she said.

Listening carefully to clients and understanding their needs before offering professional advice has become one of her defining business principles.

Her expansion into makeup artistry came naturally after she identified a gap in the market.

“I noticed that after making an outfit, my clients needed to go look for someone who could do their makeup. That is when I decided to learn how to do makeup,” she said.

Today, FAIRBOXpro offers both fashion and beauty services, providing clients with a convenient one-stop experience.

“I love what I do, and I do it with passion.” — Pogiso “PJ” Mokoto

Although much of her support comes from outside her immediate community, Mokoto remains focused on growing her business. She credits her progress to self-motivation and a strong belief in her abilities.

“I inspire myself. If I do not push myself, it is not going to work, even if the next person does it,” she said.

Her designs cater to clients of all ages and are worn at weddings, matric dances, birthday celebrations and formal events.

Mokoto also wears her own creations, using herself as a walking advertisement for her brand.

“I love what I do, and I do it with passion,” she said.

Her dedication has inspired many young people in her community, although she remains modest about her achievements.

While honoured by the recognition, she believes there is still much



Stunning creations: Pogiso ‘PJ’ Mokoto shows off her dressmaking and makeup design talents.



more she wants to accomplish.

Looking ahead, Mokoto hopes to take FAIRBOXpro to the next level by opening a dedicated studio.

“The feeling of opening the door to my own studio would be great,” she said.

For now, she remains focused on ensuring every client leaves with a product they love.

Despite the challenges of entrepreneurship, her commitment to quality and customer satisfaction remains unwavering.

As South Africa marked Youth Month, Mokoto’s journey stands as an example of how passion, resilience and self-belief can transform a dream into a successful enterprise.

From the streets of Hammanskraal to dressing one of the country’s most recognisable personalities, her story is a reminder that success can begin wherever opportunity meets determination.

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PROFILE

Khojane Morai: ‘Self-reliance is the best tribute to the youth of 1976’

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

Actor and entrepreneur Khojane Morai believes the most meaningful way for young South Africans to honour the legacy of the 1976 generation is through self-reliance, entrepreneurship and economic independence.

Morai said earlier generations fought for political freedom, while today's youth face the challenge of building sustainable livelihoods and creating opportunities for themselves.

“You can't always be a ‘yes man’. If someone wants you to work overtime or come in before 8 o'clock, and you're always going to say yes, that's not how the economy grows,” he said.

“The only way to do that is by creating more businesses. You'd rather fail in your own thing than join five or six generations of a company that has existed.

“I'm not saying that's wrong for people to do. All I'm saying is that if you are going to honour those who died for our independence and our freedom, you'd rather build something than join what's always been there.”

Youth Day commemorates the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976, when thousands of pupils protested against the apartheid government's decision to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. The protest was met with police violence and became a defining moment in South Africa's liberation struggle.

“June 16 means a lot to me. There are so many young lives that were lost in 1976,” Morai said.

“Some sacrificed their education, and some sacrificed their lives just to fight for freedom.”

Born into a royal family in the Eastern Cape, Morai grew up between Mthatha and Matatiele before moving to Johannesburg to pursue a career in acting.

Although his parents were not directly involved in the events of 1976, he said family experiences of apartheid-era hardship shaped their understanding of the struggle and influenced the lessons they passed on to him.

Morai recalled experiencing racial bullying while attending a multiracial school “because of my skin colour and who I am,” he said.

He said some people questioned whether he belonged at the school, but the sacrifices of the 1976 gen-



eration had helped secure greater freedoms and opportunities for young South Africans today.

Morai's acting career gained momentum in 2019, and he has since appeared on television and streaming platforms, including Mzansi Magic, Showmax and Netflix-linked productions.

He is known for his role as Nolo in the SABC2 telenovela *Lithapo* and has appeared in productions such as *Umbuso*, *Intlawulo*, *Forever Yena* and *White Lies*.

Morai said the film and television industry continues to play an important role in educating young people about apartheid and preserving

“Do something for yourself and don't rely too much on what others might say ...” — Khojane Morai

the memory of the 1976 uprising.

He cited *Studying Under the Barrel of a Gun*, a recent film centred on

student resistance during apartheid, as an example of how contemporary storytelling can help younger generations understand the sacrifices of the past.

“Storytelling was one of the art forms used to relay messages, so art has always been used as a form of activism to a certain extent,” he said. “I believe that even now we are able to tell stories and inform people through our art forms.”

Morai is currently hosting an independently financed podcast, *The Master Key*, featuring professionals from the entertainment industry, and is working on a fashion collaboration with a prominent local designer.



Dressed for success: Actor and entrepreneur Khojane Morai says young South Africans must take greater control of their financial futures.

He said young people must take greater control of their financial futures, particularly at a time when youth unemployment remains one of South Africa's most pressing challenges.

Morai also argued that many political leaders underestimate the economic value of the arts and creative industries. Greater investment in film and television, he said, could stimulate economic growth while creating sustainable opportunities for young creatives.

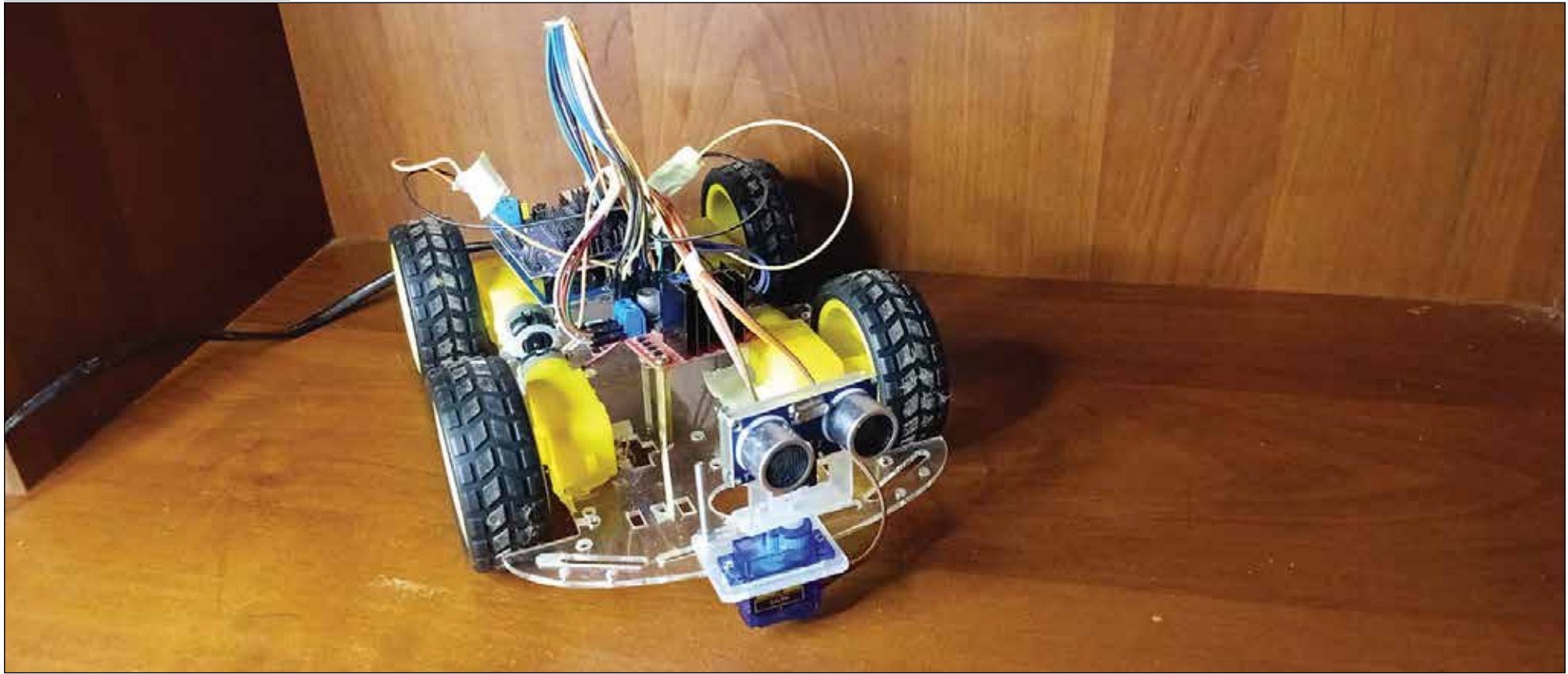
South Africa's cultural and creative industries are increasingly recognised as contributors to economic growth, job creation, skills development and social cohesion.

Looking ahead, Morai said he hopes the next decade will see young people create their own opportunities through determination and self-belief.

“Do something for yourself and don't rely too much on what others might say, because if you wait for people, you'll always be disappointed,” he said.

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PROFILE



Prototype: Matlou had to teach himself coding, electronics, artificial intelligence concepts and problem-solving skills while balancing schoolwork and examinations to develop the NaviBot.

Learner builds AI-powered robot to aid visually impaired people

LEBONE RODAH MOSIMA

A Limpopo high school learner has developed a robotic navigation device aimed at helping visually impaired people move more safely and independently, earning him top honours at a youth innovation competition.

Monyebodi Lefa Matlou, a Grade 11 learner at Radira Secondary School, won the Ultimate Techno Propeller award at the Nka'Thuto EduPropeller awards ceremony in Mokopane in April for his invention, Navi Bot.

The prototype uses sensors and programmed decision-making to navigate obstacles and provide real-time support for visually impaired users.

Nomalungelo Gina, the Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, said the competition marked the culmination of a year-long innovation programme in which learners were mentored to identify community challenges and develop practical solutions.

Matlou said developing the robot in a rural school environment came with significant challenges, including limited access to robotics components, sensors and reliable internet connectivity.

“One of the biggest challenges was limited access to advanced technology and resources,” he said.

“As a Grade 11 learner in a rural schooling environment, it was difficult to get robotics components, sensors and reliable internet access for research and programming.”

He said he had to teach himself



Bright spark: Monyebodi Lefa Matlou won the Ultimate Techno Propeller award for his invention, Navi Bot.

coding, electronics, artificial intelligence concepts and problem-solving skills while balancing schoolwork and examinations.

“Another challenge was testing and fixing the robot because some components did not always work correctly, which required a lot of patience and troubleshooting,” Matlou said.

Despite the obstacles, he developed a working prototype capable of moving independently and avoiding obstacles. “Navi Bot is still at the basic prototype stage,” he said.

“The project is still being improved to make it more accurate, reliable and user-friendly.”

Matlou said the device has not yet undergone full testing with visually impaired users and would require additional funding, mentorship and technical support before it could be commercialised.

“Financial support would help cov-

er production costs, better sensors, batteries, AI systems and manufacturing,” he said.

“I would also need partnerships with schools, disability organisations and technology companies to test and refine the product with real users.”

He hopes to add advanced artificial intelligence capabilities, voice assistance and improved object-recognition technology while eventually patenting the invention and launching a technology company focused on assistive robotics.

“The goal is not only to generate income, but also to make the invention sustainable so it can continue helping more people and funding future innovations,” he said.

Nka'Thuto co-founder Thandeka Mhlanga said the EduPropeller programme follows a funnel-based model that begins with about 600 learners from six schools in Limpopo before narrowing participants down to a final bootcamp cohort.

“The most recent impact study, conducted five years ago, found that approximately 40% of programme participants pursued STEM-related fields after completing high school,” Mhlanga said.

She acknowledged that securing funding remains a challenge because the programme combines science, technology, entrepreneurship and youth development, making it difficult to fit within traditional corporate funding categories.

Mhlanga added that intellectual property protection forms part of the bootcamp curriculum, with learners receiving training on protecting, managing and commercialising innovations.

The Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) said Nka'Thuto provides rural and township learners with opportunities to develop STEM, innovation and entrepreneurial skills while tackling local challenges.

The department said the programme has reached tens of thousands of learners since 2017 through its activation and innovation expo phases, although only a small number advance to the bootcamp stage.

“I want to create technology that solves real-world problems and improves lives.” — Monyebodi Lefa Matlou

The DSTI said school-level data from participating communities indicates increased uptake of STEM subjects and improved academic performance among learners who complete the programme.

“School-level data indicates a noticeable increase in STEM subject uptake among learners, suggesting that the programme is contributing positively to learners' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics pathways,” it said.

The department invests about R1.8 million annually in Nka'Thuto and says the programme reports twice a year through the National Science and Technology Forum.

While Nka'Thuto has helped learners develop innovative concepts, the DSTI acknowledged that resource constraints currently limit its ability to support inventions through full product development and commercialisation.

To maintain momentum after the bootcamp, the programme establishes Innovation Clubs at participating schools where learners continue developing skills in coding, animation and digital technologies.

The DSTI said its long-term goal is to strengthen pathways connecting school-based innovation with universities, incubators, innovation hubs and entrepreneurship support programmes.

“Many former participants and winners of the programme are currently completing tertiary studies, entering the workforce or exploring entrepreneurial opportunities,” it said.

Sport



Easy does it: SA Rugby has a new policy that children under the age of nine can only play non-contact rugby. Photo: Chengelo School/Facebook

New rugby rules for kids aim to keep them safe: what does the research say?

SHARIEF HENDRICKS

My son, aged five, has just started school at Wynberg Boys Junior, a school based in Cape Town's southern suburbs with a strong record of playing rugby.

Like most rugby-loving families in South Africa, we hope our child discovers the pleasures of the game. We would like him to enjoy the sport, but we want him to do it in the safest way possible.

As a contact sport, rugby has the potential to result in some serious injuries if players aren't properly prepared and supervised. Full contact tackle rugby involves repeated dynamic physical-technical contests for the ball and territory, which expose players to injury.

In South Africa, SA Rugby, the governing body for the sport, has a new policy that children under the age of nine can only play non-contact rugby. Non-contact rugby incorporates all the core elements of rugby, like running, catching, passing and decision-making, but it is done without the repeated physical-technical contests of the tackle.

Age categories under 8 and younger are not allowed to engage in full-contact tackle rugby and should play tag rugby and SA T1 Rugby, a version of World Rugby's globally endorsed non-contact game.

The non-contact game is designed

for all ages, sizes and abilities, including children and first-time players. The new standards apply to all schools, clubs and associated members working in youth rugby. Before playing full-contact tackle rugby, though, players will have to build the necessary skills and confidence to contest the tackle.

I am an injury prevention and player welfare researcher at the Health through Physical Activity, Lifestyle and Sport Research Centre at the University of Cape Town and a visiting professor at Leeds Beckett University.

I am also a research consultant for sport governing bodies, including SA Rugby and World Rugby. Recently, with my co-author Stephen West from the University of Calgary, I published a paper outlining the current policies in different countries for introducing contact in youth sports.

The article weighed up the potential risks and benefits of an earlier versus later introduction to contact and described what needs to be considered when designing policies for this. We concluded that the introduction to contact should be a gradual, clearly defined process. It should build physiological, psychological and technical competencies to perform contact safely and optimally.

We think the new SA Rugby policies are an evidence-based investment in our children's long-term rugby partic-

ipation. The rules are catching up with those of other rugby-playing nations. By giving young players the cognitive, physical and technical foundations they need, we are making the game more sustainable, more enjoyable and safer for the next generation.

In this research, we highlight that early exposure to a range of movement experiences may develop skill capacities that facilitate the learning of more advanced skills.

“

“We are making the game ... enjoyable and safer for the next generation.” — Sharief Hendricks

”

Research has shown that significant developmental improvements in cognitive processes, such as processing speed (reaction time) and executive function, occur between the ages of five and seven years, and children become more interested in structured, rule-bound play.

We argue that contact skills can be introduced between the ages of 7 and 11

years. We also highlight that before any sport-specific techniques are introduced, players need to condition themselves for contact through skills such as falling, grappling and wrestling. These fundamental movements serve to prepare players for contact, for example, how to break a fall or physically engage (push, pull, drive, or let go of) another player.

Players also need to learn how to carry the ball into contact and tackle.

Training environments should be designed to provide adequate skill development, which prepares players for the demands of tackle-contact rugby.

Coaches should understand the game demands for their age group to manipulate training to achieve specific learning objectives. For instance, in junior rugby, children tend to cluster around the ball – what we call the “beehive effect”. Our research shows this creates tackle patterns that are different from those in the adult game, with junior rugby involving more jersey pulls and arm tackles than direct front tackles.

Coaches can use this insight to adjust field size to control contact speed and introduce rules that encourage evasion over confrontation.

With input from leading researchers, practitioners and coaches in rugby, our research group developed a tackle-training framework to help coaches and trainers.

For example, it provides a guide

for how coaches can progress players from environments that are low-speed, controlled and structured to environments that are more representative of game situations.

This is how families can also help prepare children for the joys of tackle rugby:

- Allow them to participate in a range of sports;
- Expose them to forms of physical contact such as wrestling and grappling in the form of play, and activities that develop their landing, falling and rolling skills;
- Encourage collision play with padded or cushioned equipment; and
- Explore sports that specifically promote body control and awareness in controlled contact situations, such as karate.

Of course, children develop at different rates, and many factors influence when a child is ready for contact. This is why a standardised, progressive approach benefits everyone.

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- **Sharief Hendricks is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Human Biology, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town**