

ADDRESS BY THE NATIONAL SKILLS AUTHORITY CHAIRPERSON - HWSETA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,
HELD AT LORD CHARLES IN SOMERSET WEST ON THE 28TH OF OCTOBER 2009.

Chairperson
Members of the Governing Board
Invited Guests
Staff of the Authority
Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades

It is an honour that I have this privilege today, to communicate my thoughts on a range of issues pertinent to the Sector Education and Training Authorities, and in particular, your authority, the HWSETA. I have chosen to share my thoughts with you on the role of SETA's in the context of building a strong skills development process. I must commend you though, for convening this annual general meeting and conference. It is timely given the issues raised by the Auditor General with regards to governance matters in SETA's and more importantly, to address some of the internal challenges related to cohesion and a common sense of purpose. It is through annual reflective processes and strategic planning that an organisation re-discovers its strategic relevance to the constituency it serves. What become more important beyond this process is to develop the necessary organisational instruments to carry the proposals arising from this exercise. I am confident having gone through your 2007/8 Annual Report that you will rise to the challenge.

Let me return to the topic at hand, the role of SETA's.

I must hasten to say that SETA's in spite of the criticisms that have been leveled against them in the past, have a very important and strategic role to play with regards to skills formation and changing patterns of economic growth and development in our society. Dr. Raymond Patel, the CEO of MERSETA captured this point and he asserts.

It was a response to this imperative that the establishment of SETA's was one of the democratic South African's answers to the question of how best to assist people realize the goals, how to fashion a new socio-economic fibre for the South Africa society and there by contribute to the process of excellence in thought, creativity and community spirit. The central values were to have people, workers, leaders and managers who have the required skills suited to their various functions. Who have the ability to learn new things and who can be responsive to change. This was the transformation paradigm that the country sought.

One of the weaknesses that we have to address going forward is communication with our stakeholders and the general public on what we do. To what an extent for an example, does the general public know you trained and skilled the thousands of South Africans now ensuring the health and welfare of our communities even towards the 2010 World Cup. Who communicates the message that had it not been for HWSETA, it would not have possible for the country to respond appropriately to the daily health care challenges that tends to undermine the gains made in the economy. In the recent past, the national Skills Authority (NSA) adopted a proposal to develop its own Marketing and Communication Strategy. This would entail among other things, communication strategy. This would entail among other things, communicating through the print and electronic media, the work that the National Skills Authority and SETA's do. Hopefully, with the relocation of SETA's to Higher Education and Training, this work will not be lost.

Transfer of Skills Development Act to Higher Education and Training.

The President of the Republic, Hon, Jacob Zuma announce in reconstituting the Cabinet of the fourth Republic that SETA's and levies will be transferred to Higher Education and Training. The issue of consultation with the National Skills Authority is no longer an issue now. What would become an issue, is which functions in the Department of Labour will be transferred to Higher Education. To illustrate this point, the Skills development Act as it stands goes beyond training. Whilst it includes SETA's and those other services which intentionally, and at ILO conventions on active labour market ministry programmes- such as employment services including the regulation of employment agencies, productivity and social plan, enforcement of compliance to labour standards within training. The point I am making, respecting the prerogative of the President to assign functions and responsibilities to various departments, is that this process as the NSA has agreed and communicated to SETA's, is that it should be undertaken based on this principles.

- Managing the transition without causing any major disruptions in the functioning of the NSA and SETA's.
- Ensuring that all stakeholders are part of the change, and are involved in the managing the transition.
- To provide strategic leadership as the NSA and SETA's in this process of change.

In this regard, we have the assurance of the minister of labour that all activities relating to SETA re-establishment, QCTO and establishment, NSF listing, Productivity SA establishment, NSDS III Development and launch, NSF Projects underway, learning programmes, Artisans and Indlela re-positioning should continue as planned until such time as the transfer or legislative amendments are affected. We are fairly confident at the level of the NSA that this transition will be managed in such a way that there will be no disruptions in the functioning of the SETA's.

Where are we now?

An inter-departmental Task Team has been established of the DoL and Higher Education and Training to look at various aspects of policy and legislative changes to effect the transition. The nature of its work entails:

- Crafting a Proclamation that was subsequently signed by the President to effect the transfer.
- To consider through a legislative process, which sections of the Skills Development Act will be retained in the Department of Labour. This process, once a draft legislation is in place, will go through the **NEDLAC** with constituencies represented.
- Third, there is an element of personnel in the Department of Labour that has to be considered.
- Forth, the element of co-ordination between Higher Education and Training and the Department of Labour post –legislation.

Professor Mehl makes this point in quoting a book, “Understanding Learning at Work” it says,

“Learning at work has become one of the most exciting areas of development in the dual fields of management and education. It has moved to become a central concern of corporations and universities, it is no longer the pre-occupation of a small band of vocational training specialist, and-

Today we see employees extending their educational capabilities in learning through their work. At the same time, opportunities and problems within work are creating the need for new knowledge and understanding.

In another literature, “Supporting workplace learning for high performance working” says;

“The worker is no longer the “consumer” of training, but he /she becomes an active agent in the process of learning. Learning is no longer clearly bounded and contained in the classroom to be transferred later to the workplace; rather it becomes embedded in the work organization and production process.”

What is my argument?

To be concrete and to move away from an argument. The skills that Sasol engineers have today to convert coal into fuel were not learnt at university, neither would you ascribe the skills that Denel engineers have to manufacture sophisticated ammunition to any university, from my trade union background, I interacted with Denel trade unionist whose skill to manufacture the

most sophisticated ammunition was learnt at the point of production. They could on their own, tell you what it entails to manufacture a pistol from assembling components to its final production. They could tell you what caused a misfire from a pistol. Once again, my argument, the knowledge and skills to become an engineer of all fields attained at the point of production, not in any academic institution. I urge you in your capacities as academics in the field of health and welfare, and as practitioners in the field of generating knowledge to engage with this healthy debate, "**where does the production of knowledge resides?**"

I want to argue in another debate on this matter, that knowledge produced at the point of production should inform innovations in academic learning. I would argue that academic is not only site of knowledge production, but society as a whole creates platforms and informal institutions for the production of knowledge and learning, to be blunt, the Secretary General of the ANC, would not have had his qualifications had it not been for the national union of Mineworkers, he learnt to appreciate and understand bourgeoisie economics at the point of negotiations. The list is long.

Going back to the abstract, what is going to confront us through into the near future is the ability as a nation to appreciate that whereas academic education has an important role in the Society, the production of knowledge, innovation and creativity in this day and age is derived at the point of production. In a very subtle way and probably not well thought and understood, it is possible that what we do today may and hopefully not, will tilt the balance of forces, to which direction, I am not sure I have read various articles in the commercial media directed to the Minister of Higher Education and Training in the recent past, none of them articulate the importance of engendering an "**intellectual parity between academic knowledge and learning and workplace and learning**" I have not heard of any society in the recent history that has changed the patterns of production through academic learning, on the contrary, it is the knowledge produced at the point of production that has shaped past and present innovations. I have deliberately avoided taking a position on these matters as the Chairperson of the NSA for strategic reasons. The culture of engagement in any society, and to be taken seriously lies with those who wield power and prestige. Unfortunately, some of us are in the fringes of the battles. With your knowledge and skills accumulated in the theatre of doing things, you better placed to articulate this argument.

I thank you,