

OPENING REMARKS BY HE DEPUTY PRESIDENT DAVID MABUZA
HYBRID 4TH SUMMIT OF THE HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL,
ON 11 AUGUST 2021

Theme: “Skills Required for the 21st Century”

Programme Director,
Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation,
Cabinet Colleagues,
Delegates from Government, Organised Labour, Business and Broader Civil Society,
Invited Guests from the International Community,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

On this Women’s Month in our calendar, we extend warm greetings and best wishes to all participants at this 4th Human Resource Development Council Summit.

This Summit takes place two days after we commemorated Women’s Day, which is a reminder of what still needs to be done towards the full emancipation of women and fulfilment of the aspirations of those who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956.

In pursuance of their aspirations, we should consider how this Summit advances the struggle against poverty, inequality, patriarchy, prejudice, and exclusion of women, people with disabilities and key populations from accessing skills and broader development opportunities across all facets of life.

The Summit also takes place under unprecedented conditions presented by the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic that has disrupted many aspects of life including health, economy and livelihoods.

At an economic level, recent results from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey reveal that, in the first quarter of 2021, structural unemployment stood at 32.6 percent and this figure is worse amongst young people, standing at 46.3 percent and among university graduates at 9.3 percent.

These statistics are real and reflect faces of stifled and deferred dreams, hopes, opportunities and capacities. They are also an outcry of our country’s human wealth that is not fully explored. Notably, Statistics South Africa further tells us that from these statistics, young people and African black women in particular are the most vulnerable.

Whilst education remains a fundamental part of the solution to this problem, there are other contributory issues like access to healthcare, basic services and public transport that are equally important in improving these statistics for the better.

However, for this Summit we are limiting ourselves to ensuring that we agree on policies and systems that will improve educational outcomes, and also ensure that young people stay in school until they attain a qualification thereby placing them on an equal footing with their peers as they compete in the labour market.

Equally, we must address the issue of young people that drop out at various points of their schooling, prior to attaining their matric qualification. Failure to address these shortcomings, adds more numbers to the cohort of young people that are not in employment, education or training.

The implications of delaying this response are obvious. It means this is a cohort of young people robbed of practicing their natural talents. It means families are robbed of agents of change who could be contributing positively to uplift their families, their communities, our country and the world.

Our role as government, as civil society, organised labour and the private sector is to reverse and transcend these inequalities which threaten South Africa's social cohesion and nation-building project.

Without urgently and tangibly addressing inequalities in society, nation-formation becomes a statement of intention rather than a statement of fact!

Therefore, the organising theme of this Summit, which is "Skills Required For The 21st Century" is relevant in the South African context in ensuring that no one is left behind as we implement measures to rebuild and grow the economy.

In essence, this Summit should deliberate on how the Human Resource Development Strategy is recalibrated to be skills-based, innovation-led and entrepreneurial-focused, serving as an anchor for the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

As you know, the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is premised on reviving the economy devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic through investment in employment creation initiatives, building relevant skills and training for the economy, industries and jobs for the future.

It is encouraging that the objectives of this 4th HRDC Summit focuses mainly on:

- building the foundation and skills for a transformed economy and society, and
- building a capable and ethical developmental state.

These objectives are significant since the HRDC, as a multi-stakeholder advisory body, is uniquely positioned to ensure that we capacitate the unemployed, those in workplaces and those still in our schooling system, with requisite skills that can respond to new world realities and to make South Africa globally competitive.

As President Ramaphosa stated: "We are determined not merely to return our economy to where it was before the coronavirus, but to forge a new economy in a new global reality".

As such, ours as the broader HRDC family, is to use the Revised HRD Strategy to address four broad challenges of poverty and inequality, quality of education, absorptive capacity of the economy and social cohesion that will cumulatively contribute towards the attainment of the National Development Plan's outcomes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before deliberating further on this 4th Summit, let us reflect briefly on what was agreed to in 2018 at the 3rd HRDC Summit, to ensure that we underline policy and programmatic continuity, and avoid reinventing the wheel.

As social partners, we have to ask ourselves the question whether between the period of the last summit and this one, have we sizeably delivered on equipping and capacitating our young people with practical solutions.

In her closing remarks at the 3rd HRDC Summit, the then Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Naledi Pandor said:

“We need to offer practical opportunities for skills development to a very diverse range of young people and adults. Our partnerships must focus on critical literacy, numeracy skills and include occupational and professional programmes which lead young people into work and entrepreneurship positions. Our summits must provide hope to young people and must clearly indicate that we know their plight and we have solutions”.

This assertion remains correct, for if we are to recalibrate our human resources development efforts to be skills-based, innovation-led and entrepreneurial-focused, we must be deliberate in implementing resolutions that we take at each Summit. That is why at the end of this Summit, we need to emerge with a concrete plan of action that will demonstrate measurable progress by the time we meet for the next Summit.

In our view, the HRDC is a critical component in these matters to ensure that, amongst others:

- it seamlessly integrates and steward pragmatic initiatives between government and social partners,
- it maximally convergences the deployment of resources and capacities to achieve better outcomes, and
- it is a preferred platform for sharing best practices in order to, ultimately, address equity and redress in skills training and retraining in the 21st century.

Programme Director,

It is encouraging to learn that this Summit will focus on building the foundation for a transformed economy and society centred on, for example, early childhood development as well as on NEDLAC resolutions.

We presume there will also be strategic and thematic continuity between this 4th Summit and previous Summits in areas of:

- implementing pathways and partnerships between training institutions, labour and industry,
- integrating entrepreneurship into curricula in order to grow job-creators as opposed to job seekers, and
- sharing best practice and thus emphasise evidence-based decision-making.

Building and rebuilding skills required for the 21st century necessitates that South Africa and the African continent leverage on opportunities presented by global challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, to leapfrog our capabilities and industrialise through among others, local manufacturing of vaccines in order to respond to current pandemics and any similar pandemics in the future.

As South Africa under the coordination of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Covid-19 Vaccines, we are seeking to maximise opportunities for collaboration with partners in research and development in the region and in BRICS countries.

This will expand existing capacity for vaccine development and manufacturing, thereby benefiting our country and the continent, which currently has the least access to Covid-19 vaccines.

Already, this initiative is bearing fruits as the country hosts the first vaccine technology transfer hub that will immensely contribute in overcoming the current Covid-19 pandemic and respond to future health emergencies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Discussions on skills for the 21st century also talks to suitably responding to the dictates of the changing world of work that is shaped by realities of automation, artificial intelligence and robotics.

The Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution made recommendations that are focused on investing in human capital development and future industries. Similarly, the National Youth Policy also echoes the fact that 4IR should be seen as a cross-cutting pillar across sectors and institutions.

In this regard, the HRDC has an important facilitating role to play, working with social partners, to ensure that there is high absorption capacity of young people and women, and set-asides in sectors such as agriculture and agro-processing, mining, tourism, oceans economy and service industries.

However, all these may remain a pipe dream in the presence of a moribund incapacitated highly bureaucratic state that is not result oriented. The building of a capable, ethical and developmental state is therefore equally critical to the fulfilment of the goals we set ourselves to achieve in this summit.

It is thus reassuring that Day 3 of this Summit, will be dedicated to discussing pragmatic pillars on building a developmental and capable state. To drive required reforms that meaningfully contribute towards economic recovery and reconstruction, we must prioritise improving public service delivery and administrative capacity.

In this instance, public service innovation would be needed to provide:

- practical solutions to address and unlock service delivery challenges,
- alternatives for state capacitation in a context of diminishing financial resources, and
- avenues to build public trust and address governance deficit that prompts service delivery protests.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need also to be alive to the fact that no single one of us, including Government, may alone succeed in the task of building skills required for the 21st century. We can only win by valuing the role of solidarity between government, organised labour, organised business and civil society.

It is only when we actively and meaningfully work together in supporting the work of the HRDC that we can ultimately set the economy on a high-growth path, which also combines growth with equity and redress. A business-as-usual attitude is no longer tenable.

We are required to emphasize a transdisciplinary approach that seeks to transcend the artificial barriers between government and industry that integrates outcomes from the public and private sectors, and seeks to close the structural gaps between market demands and societal needs.

The growing numbers of young people not in employment, education or training, as well as the events of the recent riots are a daily reminder of the existential task demanded from all of us.

The recent riots in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provinces is also a reminder that our efforts in a Covid-19 pandemic environment of “building back better”, should be anchored on:

- ensuring the security of persons, property, essential services and business,
- establishing with all organs of the state, a coordinated effort in rebuilding the economy,
- focusing on the re-ignition of township and rural economies for employment and entrepreneurship creations, and
- addressing the generalised anxiety induced by the unrest by rolling out social cohesion and moral regeneration programmes.

In the final instance, the fruits of democracy would be incomplete unless the youth and women have access to opportunities in order to lead the lives they desire. The past 27 years has given us ample lessons to draw on and decide what works and what does not so that we improve our present circumstances and shape a better future for our country and the world. This collective task falls on our generation’s shoulders to address and we dare not postpone it.

Allow me to wish this 4th Human Resource Development Council Summit success, and we look forward to receiving the implementation plan from the deliberations of this Summit.

Thank you very much.