

**SPEAKER'S NOTES FOR MEC NM MOKOENA WHEN MEETING EXTERNAL  
BUSARY HOLDERS: CROCODILE COUNTRY INN, 06 JULY 2010**

Programme Director  
Senior Managers of the Department  
Our Esteemed Students  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you very much for taking this time in your holidays to come and meet with me here today. Programme Director, I wish to start by reminding all the Bursary Holders and the Mpumalanga community that skills shortage as one of the binding constraints to economic growth and social transformation it's a fact which must be admitted with emphasis. We have to overcome the shortage of suitable skilled labour if our dream of "improving the quality of life for all" is to be realized.

The current administration has committed itself to 5 priorities and these are: education, health, rural development and land reform, creating decent work and fighting crime. We have also added improving the effectiveness of local government.

We have placed education and skills development at the core of our work. We are very cognizant of the fact that education and skills development are critical for us to achieve the rest of the priorities including the millennium development goals.

We understand that we must invest on you the youth for you are the future leaders of this country. As the Honourable President Jacob Zuma said when he delivered his State of the Nation Address on 11 February 2010, "we need to invest in our youth to ensure a skilled and capable work force to support growth and job creation."

But also in the words of the late President of the ANC OR Tambo, he warned us many decades ago when addressing the Harare conference on education and I quote "any Nation which does not invest in its youth is not worth its future" end quote. As COGTA we found it appropriate to embrace the wisdom of the founding fathers of our liberation struggle at its centre was a better life for all.

In this context we also understand that the timing of our transition to democracy coincided with the acceleration of globalization characterized by the centrality of knowledge as the key to prosperity in a fiercely competitive global economy. Society that are reaping the benefits of globalization are those with the well developed human and intellectual capital.

In Mpumalanga Province like many parts of South Africa, we have the multiple blow of skills shortage, unemployment, poverty and poor service delivery at a centre of our challenges. Those who are unemployed turn to be unemployable which aggravate poverty levels and we are also unable to turn our Municipality around at the speed would have wished to be as a results of skills shortage.

It is also a fact that the restructuring of key sectors of economy has reduced the demand for unskilled labour making it mandatory for us to invest in education and training. Truth be told that the legacy of underdevelopment of the talent of the majority population is also at the heart of the growing inequality in our society.

Those who are skilled can sell their labour to a highest bidder whilst the unskilled go hungry. All this pointers are saying to us we must move from denial to acknowledgement and be open to new ways of tackling challenges including skills shortage.

But what does this context mean for you in your studies? It means that you have to take ownership of decolonizing your mind first, because a colonized mind is marked by “self doubt” whilst on the other hand decolonized mind makes you believe that the destiny of your future is in your hands,

it makes you ready to serve the nation, to be selfless, humbly, and most importantly patriotic to your country by making a difference no matter how small it is in improving the life of our people during and post your studies.

As a province we are still faced with the problem of insufficient skills especially in the specialized fields such as engineering, town planning and finance. This shortage of skills has led to serious challenges especially at local government, where the government interfaces with the people. Many of our communities are still not able to enjoy the services that they should be enjoying, 16 years into our democracy.

Many of our municipalities have been and still continue to be faced with hemorrhaging of skills, and we have not been able to replace these. Our province is considered very rural and as a result is not able to attract the required skills as many of the young people are attracted by the bright city lights.

As part of dealing with this problem, as a department we have identified some of the gaps and we have tried to plug them by providing bursaries to deserving students throughout the province. We have chosen you because we believe in you. We must create our own pool of expertise in the province from which we will be able to tap into for the skills that we need.

We know that just like us this province is very special to you and you will be prepared to serve it diligently. I must indicate that you are very fortunate to have been chosen amongst so many applicants, and I hope that you will seize this opportunity with both hands and will make the best of it.

You are the pioneers of a new era we are ushering into our department and the province. In years to come we will look back and say, you were the first group of our project.

We will be able to bench mark and take lessons from you which will benefit many others to come. So please remember that you will be monitored and supported closely and whatever you do will be used to bench mark for others yet to come.

I must also highlight the important window of opportunity that these bursaries will open for you. Education is a very integral part of our lives, and through it the sky is the limit.

Education is the key through which we can bring about a better life to ourselves and to our families. As President Nelson Mandela said “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mine worker can be the head of the mine, that a child of farm worker can become the President of a great nation.”

As you continue with your studies at you various centre’s of learning, please stay focused. Do not allow yourselves to be distracted by small things that could cost you your whole future. I know that you are young and will be exposed to many things that young people get exposed too, but I urge you to stay focused and not be distracted. Always remember and be guided by the fact that your families and the whole province is counting on you. We will be eagerly awaiting you to complete your studies and come work in this beautiful province of ours.

I will be doing a disservice if I do not warn you about what you already know namely the challenges of HIV/AIDS which has swallowed young promising graduates, remember you have a choice to make any decision about your life but you do not have a choice to the consequences of that decision.

The Department will continue to monitor your progress at your institutions of learning. I will also pay you visits at these institutions, just to see how you are doing. Perhaps we will have to look as department into how we can tap into some of your expertise when schools close, and how you can come a do some work in the department, so as to get some hands on experience. This is something that we will look into and if possible we will communicate this to you before the end of the year.

I am sure that you are all aware that you have entered into an agreement with the department and I must again put this into proper context the agreement you have entered into is not for the department as such but the department has contracted you on behalf of the people of Mpumalanga and South Africa.

In conclusion, let me once again take this opportunity to thank you for coming to this breakfast session as a first step in creating working relations. Remember an old Chinese saying which says “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. I wish you well in your studies.

God bless you.