

Dr Tirhani Mabunda Makhasa Speaking Notes

- Program Director;
- MEC Ishmael Kgetjepe and other government officials present here today, particularly;
- Mayor of Greater Giyani Municipality, other mayors present here and all councillors in our midst;
- TGH partners, particularly our international partner John Chan who came all the way from Singapore to be with us here today.
- All my friends and business associates present here today.
- Vaaka tiko va ka Makhasa

Program Director, my address will be very short. As you know, we have a function to run in Giyani when we leave here and still have to travel there.

MEC Kgetjepe, 42 years ago, I was a little 6 years old boy attending school in this village. I attended Sub A to Standard 5 here at Makhasa Primary School between 1970 and 1975. The conditions then were horrific. We had mud classrooms, and I can't even remember what we used for chairs and desks. Fast forward to 2017. I was so touched when I passed my PhD and remembered where it all started. I then decided to drive past here one weekend after attending an unveiling at Mashobye village.

By the way, I also visited Gidjana Secondary School at Magona village on the same day. That is where I attended Standard 6 to 8 between 1976 and 1988. The purpose of visiting my old schools was to reminisce about my formative years. The conditions at Gidjana Secondary School were reasonable. However, I was deeply touched by the conditions I found here, even though I didn't get into the school as it was weekend. I decided to do something about the situation. I asked my partner Eric Sambo and my brother Alson Mabunda to visit the school to determine the extent of the situation. The report they gave me was that the conditions were appalling. The roofs of two blocks of classes at the school were threatening to cave in. In fact, one of the blocks of classes was disused as it posed a safety hazard to the learners.

Program Director, I thought long and hard about the situation at my old primary school, and decided that I should make a small contribution. I then decided to intervene by renovating the block of classes we are handing over today.

MEC Kgetjepe, Tirhani Foundation has spent about R300k installing a new roof and ceilings, painting and doing other renovations so far. Our work here is not done. God willing, we will renovate the other classes. We also intend to donate furniture, both for the principal and teachers, as well as the students. After that, we will establish a partnership between Makhasa Primary School and Nyukani Education Centre, the private school me and my partner Eric Sambo built in Giyani. The partnership will involve exchange programs whereby our teachers and students will collaborate.

Program Direct, MEC Kgetjepe, L&G, we didn't renovate the block of classes at Makhasa Primary School because we have a lot of money. Instead, we did so because of our belief that education is the only equalizer in the world, not the lotto, not tenders, not marriage, not welfare grants, nothing else. I can attest to the power of education, a positive attitude and hard work as equalizers. As a first-generation entrepreneur, I am living proof that education has the power to change people's lives. What more proof of that do you need if a rural boy from Nkovani village can address you as a

PhD graduate here today, owning more than 15 companies which employ more than 2000 people who feed more than 10000 people?

Our intervention at Makhasa Primary School is akin to the choice we made to build Nyukani Education Centre here at Homu 14B. A friend of mine asked me why we built Nyukani in a rural area. Basically, the question was, "Why did you choose to invest in world class infrastructure and facilities in a rural area when I could have done so in urban areas where there is affordability to charge higher fees and earn more money?" In his Rat Race song, Bob Marley admonishes that: "Don't forget your history. Know your destiny". Our rural experience has taught us to return here to inspire others so that they too can also have the opportunity to conquer the world.

Program Director, MEC Kgetjepe, L&G, the only regret regarding my life journey is that it has been one of struggle, self-discovery and self-taught learning. My life story, just like any other baby boomer growing in South Africa in the 60s to date has been one of struggle. Struggle to get education, struggle to get work, struggle to venture into business, struggle for everything. Do my achievements, both academic and business, make me an exceptional person? The answer is a resounding no. Anyone with my background can achieve what I did.

The fact that the new South Africa has not created opportunities for ordinary children from rural backgrounds to get a chance to escape the vicious circle of poverty 22 years after the dawn of democracy is an indictment.

- How is it possible that a child attending primary school at Makhasa Primary School in 2017 faces the same odds for success educationally and socio-economically as I did in the 70s?
- How have we done so little, if anything to change the material conditions of people living in rural areas?
- How is it that 22 years after the dawn of democracy in our country the people attending school in rural areas who get lucky to escape the vicious circle of underdevelopment and poverty are still a rarity and exceptions?

Program Director, let me close by repeating Peter Benenson's quote on page 13 to the effect that: "It is better to light a candle of hope than to curse the darkness". The young children attending Makhasa Primary School are our candle of hope. We owe it to them to give them the best start in life.

Program Director, MEC Kgetjepe, L&G, please join us in lighting many more candles of hope. 42 years from now, when some of us will be dead, some of the children attending school at Makhasa Primary School should be building Universities and handing them over like we are handing a block of classes today.

I thank you.