

**“THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SHAPING SOCIETY”:** KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY  
**GAUTENG PREMIER, DAVID MAKHURA TO THE YOUTH MANAGERS  
FOUNDATION 2015 SERVANT LEADERSHIP AWARDS. THE PYRAMID  
CONFERENCE CENTRE. JOHANNESBURG.**

28<sup>th</sup> November 2015

Chairman of the Youth Managers Foundation, Mabutho Mthembu  
Managing Director and Members of the Core Team of the Foundation;  
MEC Panyaza Lesufi, MEC for Education in our province;  
Mr Wilfred Ngubane, founder of Ngubane & Co;  
Distinguished Representatives of the Partner Companies - Ngubane & Company,  
Shanduka Foundation, KPMG Foundation, Transnet Foundation and Adopt-a-School  
Foundation;  
Esteemed Learners and Young Leaders in whose name we are gathered here today;  
Fellow Compatriots:

We would like to thank the Youth Managers Foundation for inviting me to this  
auspicious ceremony of the 2015 Servant Leadership Awards.

I have been asked to speak on *“The Role of Youth in Shaping Society”*. This subject  
is very close to my heart as a former youth activist and student leader.

Let me state from the onset that we join you not as messiahs but as humble servants  
of the people of Gauteng. We are here as activists for positive change. We have  
decided to set everything aside because both education and the youth constitute the  
most important priority focus of our government.

Giving the youth hope is what we must be doing, every minute, every hour. Hope is a  
positive attitude about life - a belief that all of us are capable of realising our dreams  
and are able to be successful in life. To succeed, one must first dream about the  
kind of person you want to be and work hard to realise your dreams. But how do we  
measure success?

Success is being able to rise above the constraints of your family circumstances and immediate community in search of your dream. To succeed, you must see problems as opportunities, not as obstacles. You must create opportunities where others may have only seen problems. Your attitude must be that problems are there to be solved by somebody and that every problem is pregnant with promising possibilities.

Today we are here because a group of people have dared to dream about solving our country's educational problems. We are here to celebrate the inspirational and selfless work of our youth and to publicly recognise and acknowledge what might appear as a thankless job that is undertaken in relative obscurity.

Even though your work may appear to be thankless and obscure, you are contributing significantly to nation-building. You are shaping an attitude of self-reliance and cultivating a culture of service. Coming from the youth, this is both gratifying and inspiring work of nation-building that has drawn my attention. You are seeing our community problems as opportunity for you to serve your communities. Instead of throwing your hands in the air and complaining, you have decided to take positive action to make a difference in the lives of others.

We are deeply concerned by the sad reality of our time that young people are mostly affected by unemployment, among others. The World Economic Forum Global Risk 2014 Report, estimates that South Africa has the third highest unemployment rate in the world (after Greece and Spain), among people aged between 19 to 24 years.

It is also estimated that 70% of young people between the ages of 19 and 24 are not in formal employment. We are also troubled by the fact that although our country's secondary school enrollment stands at an impressive 90%, there are still more than 2 million young people between the ages of 19 and 24 that are neither in formal employment nor in an educational institution.

Equally, we today face a reality that the rising cost of higher education has not only prevented a large number of young people from accessing higher education, but also it has burdened a generation of South Africans with debt and limited prospects for finding employment.

We have come here to draw inspiration from your selfless and thankless work in communities. As leaders, we also want to be inspired so that we can inspire other citizens who might be drowning in strife and sorrow and are overcome by negative and depressing media stories that dominate public discourse.

I would like to appeal to young people and partnering organisations not to be discouraged by the fact that the positive work you do may never make its way into the newsrooms.

According to some of my friends who are editors and journalists, the media lives by the dictum that “good news doesn’t sell”. Consequently, we must understand that stories that inspire and build our nation will often not be reported in the media. What sells newspapers and media products is negative and depressing news.

It is for this reason that we spend more time engaging communities and interacting with sectors like yourselves so that we discover stories that give our nation hope and take them out there for the world to know.

In "The Playground of life" Khalil Gibran wisely cautions us not only to "devote one hour to mourning and lamenting the stolen equality of the weak and unfortunate". We must take action to redress the very inequality that can become the heritage of future generations.

If we want to see rapid progress and take ownership of the development of our communities and families, we must roll up our sleeves, put on overalls and dirty our hands as citizens, civil society, communities and families. We cannot allow ourselves to drown in the river of negativity and ocean of despair. We can't just complain that things are not right and not good enough for many of our citizens who still live in conditions of extreme deprivation. We can't just lament that the youth are on drugs. We can't just mourn that a family member has died of a curable disease or has been killed in a carjacking incident. We cannot, as citizens of a free and democratic society, fold our arms and leave everything to government. In any case, government bureaucracy moves too slowly.

As the Premier of Gauteng, I have come here to join you because you are taking up a noble task of uplifting your communities and your schools. This is what true servant leadership is about: learning to serve and putting leadership skills and capabilities to the service of others.

I am here to commend the Youth Managers Foundation and all participating schools and sponsors for being a powerful example of what it means to be responsible and good citizens. We cannot turn a blind eye to your good work. Even though good work doesn't sell newspapers, it builds a nation, especially if it is undertaken by young people who are mistakenly called "born-frees".

We can only truly talk of "born-frees" when all our youth, regardless of family background, have ample opportunities to dream big with the full knowledge there is a real chance that their dreams can come true due to the conditions we would have created.

As a nation, the best investment we can ever make as a gift for future generations is an investment in quality education for every citizen. It is through education that we can guarantee all citizens equal opportunities to realise their full potential and achieve their dreams.

The importance of education is underscored by President Nelson Mandela when he said:

*"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another".*

Madiba goes further to say: "education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world".

I would like to draw your attention to the words of your Chairman, Mabutho Mthembu, who says something profound about the need to invest in human capital development and education of your people:

*“It is our strong conviction that it is not the mineral resources, neither gold, nor platinum, that is fundamental for the growth of our economy or the eradication of social ills that face us, even if our rivers were to turn into oil wells tomorrow, but it is the quality of the mentally liberated human capital that we produce as a country, that will shape the direction of South Africa and Africa.”*

To us this insightful statement by the Chairperson of the Foundation fittingly captures what the Youth Managers Foundation is all about. You are about unleashing the full potential of our young people, to be the best they can be and contribute to the development of our society. You are also about investing in our country’s future human capital, so that we can become the winning nation we all aspire to be.

Youth Managers Foundation is a catalyst for the development of young leaders of the future. In you we have a partner in building a society that values its youth, that partner is the Gauteng Provincial Government. We have decided to become your partner in mobilising the abundant talents and energy of young people to effect positive change.

We are particularly encouraged that the work you are doing goes a long way in giving young people, especially those from the townships and disadvantaged communities a head-start in life. You are instilling in them an understanding that they too are entitled to dream and to dream big.

You are giving hope to our young people; hope that a better tomorrow is indeed possible; that where they began in life should not determine where they end up. You have fully grasped the power of education to be an equaliser!

When young people decide to play an active role in society, they become a powerful force for economic development and positive change. Equally young people are full of ambition to change the world for the better; our responsibility is to support and nurture this ambition.

Throughout history young people have been in the driving seat and at the cutting edge of efforts to bring about societal change. Over many generations they have continued to change the course of history and write their own history.

Many of them have taken it upon themselves, as directed by Frantz Fanon, that “every generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover their mission, fulfill it or betray it”. Like earlier generations of youth, you are defining the mission for your generation and have become trail blazers who are showing the way even in the most difficult period in the long and troubled history of our nation.

In this regard we recall, among others, that it was a young African music composer, Enoch Sontonga, who at the age 24, composed the first verse and chorus of Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika. This song inspired the struggles to build the Africa we want, the Africa and South Africa of our dreams.

We also recall another young man, Pixley ka Isaka Seme, who, at the age of 30, penned a profound article that changed the course of our history: “The Regeneration of Africa”. He delivered a powerful public lecture at Columbia University in the USA in 1906. His message, relayed more than a century ago, still remains relevant today as we work to build the Africa we want; a more integrated and prosperous Africa.

We will not forget the contribution of the youth of the 1940s who changed the course of the liberation struggle when they redefined the methods of struggle against the racist regime and called for mass mobilization and defiance and later armed struggle against an increasingly violent and murderous racist government. Among those young people are Anton Lembede, AP Mda, Willie Nkomo, Walter and Albertina Sisulu, David Bopape, Oliver Tambo, Motlalepule Chabaku and Nelson Mandela.

How can we forget the 1976 generation whose bravery and defiant spirit highlighted the destructive and lasting impact of Bantu Education. They faced trigger-happy and heavily armed racist police with their bare hands and took their destiny into their own hands. They changed the course of history.

We also remember the contribution of the Young Lions of the 1980s, whose death-defying and daring attitude forced the apartheid state to negotiate a peaceful settlement to end apartheid oppression.

We acknowledge the contribution of many young white South Africans who, in the 1970s and 1980s, took part in the anti-conscription campaign and joined the ranks of the student movement under the banner of NUSAS, in defiance of the apartheid state. They too took their destiny in their own hands. They changed the course of history.

At the dawn of freedom in the early 1990s to late 2000s, students made a call for free education up to tertiary level but they were not listened to. Young people of 2015 have amplified this call for free higher education in the recent #FeesMustFall nation-wide protests.

Education is the driver of any country's development agenda. Without good education, there can be no equal and dignified citizenship. Inequality, poverty and unemployment can only be overcome through investing in people and guaranteeing access to best educational opportunities to all our youth.

It is for this reason I support the #FeesMustFall campaign to open access to universities to all young people, who are academically deserving. Our country should provide free education to every young South African up to a first degree as a matter of priority in our development paradigm.

However, we must warn the students that using violence and burning down university property is self-destructive. Student must also not refuse to write exams. They must fight and pass at the same time. They must not cut their noses to spite their faces.

Personally, I know the agony and pain of growing up as a bright child from a poor family, not knowing whether you'll even have money to get to university. True freedom and democracy means we must take away this uncertainty and agony by guaranteeing every young person who performs well at school the certainty of access to the best higher education and vocational training opportunities regardless of family background.

True freedom and democracy also means making sure that we give our youth the type of education and training that prepares them fully for both work, self-employment and entrepreneurship.

We must also take away the anguish many university and college students go through after studying for three-four years without the certainty that you'll either get a job or be able to set-up a business.

The type of education we give to our young people should not only empower them with skills and knowledge but must also cultivate positive values that will enable them to be ethical and active citizens.

Young people must be taught to respect human life and value equality among all human beings regardless of race, gender, religion or ethnicity; they must be taught about human solidarity, service and caring.

Education must teach our children not to close their eyes to the suffering of other human beings and never to turn a blind eye to injustice; to work hard and make sacrifices if they are to realise their dreams; to know that there is more to life than what is in it for me and not to define who you are and to understand that who you are is a function of your value and contribution to society, not what you have.

Education must shape the critical attitude and questioning minds and to constantly ask themselves whether they know enough; and lastly, education must encourage our young people to love South Africa; be proudly African and be committed to work for change and serve the people of our country and continent.

Making the point about servant leadership, JF Kennedy, one of America's most inspiring leaders, challenged his fellow country men and women: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country".

This brings me to the significance of the Servant Leadership Awards which celebrate Servant Leadership. Today we come here to bear testimony to what you are doing to serve your country and communities.

It is said, to serve people, you must love them. To love them, you must know and understand them. To know and understand them, you must live amongst them.

I am convinced that you understand and are practising the positive values I have referred to earlier. By your actions and not just words, you are living a life of service at a very young age.

From experience, I must share with you a secret of happy living: nothing is as satisfying and fulfilling as living a life of passion for people and service to other human beings. Our lives are meaningful and fulfilling only when they enrich the lives of others.

No well-paying job, ownership of a thriving and top performing JSE-listed company or occupying a top position in politics can make you happy unless you use such resources and positions to make a difference in the lives of others. To love your country, community and family means to measure your life and legacy in relation to making a difference in their wellbeing and progress.

You have demonstrated beyond doubt that you understand this philosophy of life. This has been made possible by the fact that you love your fellow learners and your communities.

Mabutho and the Youth Managers Foundation core team, I must commend you and your team for showing a deep commitment, knowledge and understanding of the issues that constrain your communities. Your selfless service, unconditional love and deep knowledge are candles that light the lives of your fellow learners illuminated even in the darkest of the valleys they find themselves in.

The work you are putting into the development of your schools and communities forms the roots which must and which will flourish. Your profound deeds and selfless service are helping to usher in a new era - an era of pride being given back to our communities. This is an era in which the education of the black child is also a function of self-liberation, self-motivation and self-empowerment, instead of waiting for hand-outs.

The Youth Managers Foundation has shown that you have the power to define your own destiny and shape the future you want. You are showing us the adults, what the youth of 1976 did, that you have the intrinsic power to bring about change. It is because of you, I have great hope for the future of our country.

You give us hope. When I gaze into the future, I see a country of empowered and active citizens who take part in every work that seeks to influence their future.

I see a future free from poverty, inequality and unemployment. I see a future quality education system which is accessible and prepares our youth to be innovators and entrepreneurs who build businesses and create jobs; entrepreneurs who don't only make billions of dollars but give hope to billions of the earth's inhabitants who suffer from living meaningless and desperate lives.

You give us hope. When I glimpse at the future through the lenses of hope that you have given to me today, I see a not so distant future wherein government is about serving the people; a future wherein corruption and incompetency will not be tolerated in any part of our country, in any party or organisation. This is the future that is beckoning and taking root in Gauteng.

You give us hope to dream even bigger and work harder to build a Gauteng of our dreams where all people will enjoy a better life and live peacefully and harmoniously as equals.

You give us hope to build a modern education system that deploys the best technology and knowledge to educate our children as citizens of the world.

The classroom of the future, the paperless classroom, is a dream we are willing to champion. Given the fact that young people in South Africa are highly technological - 88% of those between 15 and 34 years living in areas with access to a telephone line, a cell-phone or internet access – we must use technology to deliver education because this is the best and most accessible to excite young people.

Accordingly, we are investing heavily in the rollout of broadband connectivity and free wi-fi in all cities of Gauteng. Currently, many young people spend all the money we give them buying data bundles for communication because there is no wide connectivity.

The future we are building is centred on the needs of young people. Our future will be shaped and driven by innovation and technology, and youth are innovators by nature. You are the future and the future of our country is in your hands.

We are here as servant politicians who humble themselves before the people and are driven by the principles of servant leadership. We are neither arrogant nor corrupt. We represent a dream team of highly competent and responsive activists in government.

We are inspired by you to work for the people, not for ourselves. By your deeds and the little steps we are taking in Gauteng, a new dawn is unfolding right now, right now.

You are not asking what your country can do for you. Rather, you are answering the call to contribute in shaping our beloved country, South Africa, one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

You are taking significant steps to change a culture of waiting for the government to do things for people, instead of getting people to do things themselves.

I would like to congratulate all the winners. I am fully inspired and I will go out there to inspire more people, young and old, to serve with honour and distinction.

Personally, I will also rededicate myself and my team in the Gauteng Provincial Government to serve the people of our province with utmost dedication, honour and distinction.

Let's continue to make being educated cool and service to communities fashionable. Let us continue to make the investment in human capital and education of the African child the number one development priority of our nation.

Today, you have given us hope that, much as today is better than yesterday, tomorrow will be better than today.

God Bless Africa! God Bless You!

Thank you.