



## THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE

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*“Almost 2.8 million or 41.6 percent of people between the ages of 18-24 are neither in education nor in training or employment. This is not only “an educational problem, but constitutes a social and economic disaster”. Yet education is strongly connected to the idea of democratic citizenship, to the cultivation of a humane society and the defence, assertion and pursuit of citizen and human rights and active democratic participation. What are the consequences of the educational failures of our schooling and what does this mean for the kind and quality of citizenship that can be exercised by those that have been failed by our schools? Without effective interventions by government to improve the economic and social conditions of the poor and the unemployed, restricted educational opportunities and poor outcomes will be largely borne by these social groups. Unless we address our problems we will continue to deny millions of South Africans an education that develops their capabilities and affirms and advances their human and social rights. We will also block a key avenue to social transformation and development.”*

Looking at the state of basic education in South Africa and what he believes lies ahead, also with regard to its impact on higher education, Dr. Badat will make an example of the Keiskammahoe teacher professional development programme whereby Rhodes, through responsible community engagement, is helping to change the realities of the schooling system in a poor rural community of the Eastern Cape. It is hoped that the program will contribute to changing the overall education landscape and the prospects of promising students from poor areas as the model is applied to other areas.

He will advocate that early childhood education should be a policy priority and the causes and ways of redressing the major problems related to the successful completion of schooling to matric level. “Large parts of our schooling system continue to compromise the provision of high quality education to children and youth and thwart the realization of their potential. Our schools have major problems of drop outs, retention, progression and successful completion.” The result is an ever-widening gap between the grades of students from middle-class backgrounds who attend well-resourced schools and those from poor families attending poorly-resourced government schools in townships and rural areas.

The key challenge is to improve the quality of education in schools. Finances for equitable access for poor students, targeted nutrition programmes, facilities, toilets and the adequate remuneration of educators are all important. However, they are not enough for effective schooling and education. There are also a number of other vital conditions such as a culture of effective learning and teaching, and to restore this where it is absent. Key here is effective educational leadership and management by the national Department of Education, provincial ministries, district offices and especially school heads.

A second condition is “qualified, motivated, and committed teachers”, who are “the single most important determinant of effective learning”. A third is high quality learning material and textbooks. “Effective assessment is also at the heart of ensuring that learning is effective”, as is “developing robust monitoring and assessment systems to monitor student performance.” Finally, “the more schools are held to be accountable the more effective they are”, which raises the importance of school governing bodies. If these are the key conditions for effective education and schooling, to what extent are they in place in of South Africa’s schools?