

Remarks by Dr Lindiwe Msengana-Ndlela, Board Chairperson of the iKamvelihle Development Trust at the Nelson Mandela University (NMU) and Utopia Foundation launch of the Book Bag Project for Schools, 26 May 2021

**Theme:** The optimism of the mind and practical action in support of quality education

Chairperson, Dr Bruce Damons

Madame Vice-Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela University, Prof Sibongile Muthwa

Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Engagement and Transformation, Professor André Keet

Madame Executive Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr Muki Moeng

Mr Paul Surtherland, Chairman of the Utopia Foundation and Squaring the Education Pyramid Institute (STEPi)

Dr Ossie Franks and Dr Denver Webb of the Convergence Fund

Representatives of the Manyano Network of schools

Representatives of Parents, Principals, Teachers and Learners

I greet you all on behalf of the trustees and volunteers of the iKamvelihle Development Trust (iKamvelihle). We are a Non-Profit Organisation of volunteers who work with various organisations in order to support remote rural schools such as those located in Cala within the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

We meet today in the context of our continent's recognition of the month of May as Africa month. It is within that background that the theme of my input is: "The optimism of the mind and practical action in support of quality education." This approach is critical as we focus on the African child in our deliberations today.

As iKamvelihle, we applaud the Utopia Foundation for the work they do internationally and the collaborative effort in establishing this Book Bag Project. It is a project which seeks to provide learning materials to approximately ten thousand (10,000) primary school children, including those in disadvantaged schools such as children in Cala.

Chairperson

I would like to emphasise that behind the concept of our NPO's name, *iKamvelihle*, is a call for optimism, action and a better future. We are driven by the belief that through collaborations such as these with the NMU, the Utopia Foundation and the Community Trust on Fisheries, we can make a difference in the development of human capital in our country and continent.

In undertaking this kind of work, I would like to suggest to all who are here and those who are listening to this message. As Africans, we must inculcate a particular orientation in thinking about our purpose in life and what we do about it. Amongst other things, we must be deliberately optimistic about how we can contribute towards a better future. Firstly, in the way we collaborate in order to support learners and secondly, by inculcating the optimism of the mind in the learners themselves.

### **Those who support the learners**

I am talking about optimism about the ability of those involved in contributing to knowledge and development opportunities. This is about using our combined capacities, experiences, knowledge, and resource to practical effect and with greater impact than in the past.

In the different spaces which we occupy as well as in the various institutions that we represent, we have to act in more practical ways that can make a lasting difference in the lives of people, households and communities. This, in part is what is exemplified by this Book Bag project.

Chairperson

An optimistic orientation to education and development that does not look at poor communities with a strained eye of deficit and inability. Instead, it is an orientation that enables the institutions that are represented here, to support and most importantly to also learn from these communities. That is why it is so vital to involve parents in such projects, as exemplified by their presence in this event today. We need to have the eyes of the heart and the mind to see, building on “the possible” and not the impossible. This orientation is about embedding this attitude even in our organizational partnerships. We must capitalize on ability and potential despite the challenges that learners and teachers from these communities face.

### **The learners themselves**

Of greater importance is the sustained focus on the learners and learning. We hope that these efforts and more to come can help in inculcating imagination, vision, attitude in the mind of a young person. A belief that, despite their difficult circumstances, it is possible to use education as a tool to a better future. Is it not wonderful that a book and a teacher can help in developing such a conviction, an attitude and positive orientation towards life itself?

More of this orientation is required in the age of the Coronavirus pandemic and its aftermath not only this year but in the medium term. I am talking about books, an attitude, a conviction, a spirit and belief that a brighter future is possible. We must be resolute in finding ways to propel and sustain the mission of education for the young people of Africa.

## **Challenges**

Yes, there are challenges, we know this. Some are structural and some arise because of inaction and will by those who should act.

For instance, in the nearly five years of the partnership between iKamvelihle and the NMU, we have seen challenges such as lack of morale, technology and communication infrastructure, learning and teaching resources.

Consider these two questions:

- What is the percentage of learners in remote rural areas such as Cala that currently do not have access to a library corner, let alone access to a full school library, or a librarian, let alone a computer or other digital device?
- Do you know that there are teachers who have difficulty in waking up and going back to school, because of lack of resources and support for teaching and learning in deprived communities?

The answers to these questions will signal why we are grateful for this Book Bag Project and the impact it could have on the targeted schools. So much more needs to be done.

## **There are better things yet to come**

As I conclude, I call on all who can join us in this path, to find innovative ways of inculcating a culture of optimism, acting on the ground where the learners are and demonstrating visible results. I know that this visualisation is often difficult because of the kind of negative external messaging that is mostly negative and leads many people to points of paralysis.

Last week I was telling the VC, Prof Muthwa about one of the first students that was involved in our programmes in the first year of operation as iKamvelihle – Zusakhe - who passed his BSc degree with flying colours, majoring in Mathematics and Statistics. He has started work this year. He is just but one example out of many, that can infuse hope of a better future in younger learners from his village who will be receiving materials from this Book Bag Project that is being launched today.

Through this project and with access to books, these children will be able to read, learn, imagine, re-shape and possibly be able to create better futures for their localities, our country, our continent and our World.

We hope that this is the start of better things to come as you help learners attain *iKamvelihle* - a brighter future.

Thank you

[www.ikdt.org.za](http://www.ikdt.org.za)