



BANA PELE LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

Johannesburg, [17 March 2025] – South Africa’s top leaders from government, business, and the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector gathered at the Bana Pele Leadership Summit to take decisive action toward achieving universal access to quality ECD by 2030. Co-hosted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), the Summit resulted in concrete commitments to strengthen public-private partnerships, drive investment, and ensure that every child in South Africa receives a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

Delivering the keynote address, President Cyril Ramaphosa underscored the urgency of this mission:

“We’ve seen time and time again how South Africa excels when we come together. We have consistently shown that we can solve difficult problems when we unite for a common cause.

We have an opportunity to rethink and restructure the entire ECD landscape, making it more effective, more inclusive, and more impactful than ever before.”

The Bana Pele Leadership Summit convened 170 senior leaders from government, the private sector, donor organisations, and ECE delivery partners. Discussions focused on three key pillars—expanding access to ECE, improving learning outcomes, and mobilising investment for sustainable growth. The gathering was a pivotal moment in aligning South Africa’s leadership behind a single plan to close the ECE access gap, improve quality standards, and secure long-term funding for the sector.

KEY OUTCOMES & COMMITMENTS FROM THE SUMMIT:

- **Adoption of the 2030 Bana Pele Roadmap:** The DBE-led plan was formally endorsed, with clear milestones set to expand ECD access and improve service delivery.
- **Strengthening public-private partnerships:** Leaders committed to deeper collaboration between government, business and social partners, building on successful public-private partnership models like the Mass **Registration Drive and ECD Outcomes Fund**.
- **Scaling ECE Infrastructure Investment:** A commitment was made to expand and improve ECE spaces by prioritising infrastructure investment, ensuring that more children can access quality early learning facilities.
- **Improved accountability and governance:** A Programme Management Unit (PMU) will track progress, drive implementation and ensure accountability across sectors, reinforcing shared responsibility for delivering results.



*Ms. Siviwe Gwarube - Minister of Basic Education
& Ms Nonkululeko Nyembezi: Chair of the Business Leadership SA*

Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube, highlighted the role of government in ensuring execution:

“By 2030, we want every child in South Africa to have access to quality early learning. But let me be clear—this is not about doing more of the same. It’s not just about more funding or more resources in a system that’s already under strain. This is about transformation. Impact. Results. It’s about fundamentally reshaping how we deliver early learning so that no child is left behind.”

Business leaders, meanwhile, acknowledged that investing in ECD is not just a social good, but a critical economic strategy that benefits the private sector as much as society.

Nonkululeko Nyembezi, BLSA Chairperson, reinforced this message:

“The business of business is not just business. It is also about building a sustainable future. To do that, we need to invest in children today. For too long, ECD investment has been uncoordinated, limiting its impact. Now, with the DBE’s leadership, we finally have a national investment plan to get behind.”

The Bana Pele Leadership Summit laid the foundation for a national ECD social compact, built on shared responsibility and collective action across all sectors. Over the next 12 months, a joint task force comprising government, business, donors and social partners will develop a

comprehensive resourcing plan to accelerate progress toward universal access. Leaders also committed to reconvening annually to review milestones, track impact and ensure accountability to the collective commitments that were made.

This landmark event reaffirmed that the future of South Africa begins with early learning—not just as a foundation for education, but as a strategic investment in breaking the cycle of poverty and driving economic growth. The commitments made today must now translate into action, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive.

The summit has catalysed new partnerships and collaborations with a clear agenda for what is to be done. The work over the next 12 months will be presented to the 2026 bana pele leadership summit to track progress and hold ourselves accountable to the mission. We look forward to reconvening in 2026.



2. CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

OPENING ADDRESS

Ms. Siviwe Gwarube - Minister of Basic Education

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

President of South Africa:

His Excellency. Mr Cyril Ramaphosa

THANKS

Mr Matome Chiloane – MEC for Education, Gauteng

PANEL: LESSONS FROM SOCIAL COMPACTS

Facilitator: Mr Siven Maslamoney - Bana Pele PMU

Mr Rudi Dicks - Head of PMO: Presidency
Mr Adrian Enthoven - BLSA Board Member

PANEL: INNOVATIONS: ECD OUTCOMES FUND

Facilitator: Ms. Tracey Henry - CEO of Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation

Ms. Milena Castellnou - CPO – Education

Outcomes Fund

Mr Ashor Sarupen - Deputy Minister of Finance

Minister Siviwe Gwarube - Minister of Basic Education

BUILDING THE ROADMAP TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS BY 2030

THREE PARALLEL COMMISSIONS:

PILLAR #1: INCREASING ACCESS

PILLAR #2: SHIFTING QUALITY
OUTCOMES

PILLAR #3: RESOURCING THE SECTOR
EFFICIENTLY

PANEL: BANA PELE ECD REGISTRATION DRIVE

Facilitator: Ms. Kulula Manona - Chief Director:

Foundations for Learning. National
Department of Basic Education

Mr Tebogo Chake - Bana Pele PMU

Mr Mosoue Sekonyela - Head of Government
Relations - Harambee

Ms. Phumelele Tloubatla - Director: ECD –
Gauteng Department of Education

Dr. Janeli Kotze, Acting Director: ECD, Dept.
of Basic Education

PLENARY SESSION

COMMISSIONS REPORT ON COMMON ROADMAP & Q&A

ADOPTION OF / COMMITTING TO THE ROADMAP TO 2030

THANKS

Ms. Simone Geyer – Deputy Director General,
Delivery & Support – Department of Basic
Education

CLOSING REMARKS

Ms. Nonkululeko Nyembezi - Chairperson of
Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA)



"I loved being 5,
but we all grow up and have
to do grown-up things.

I want to talk to you about
being the grown-ups
in the room."

*Ms. Siviwe Gwarube
Minister of Basic Education*

3. MINISTER'S OPENING ADDRESS

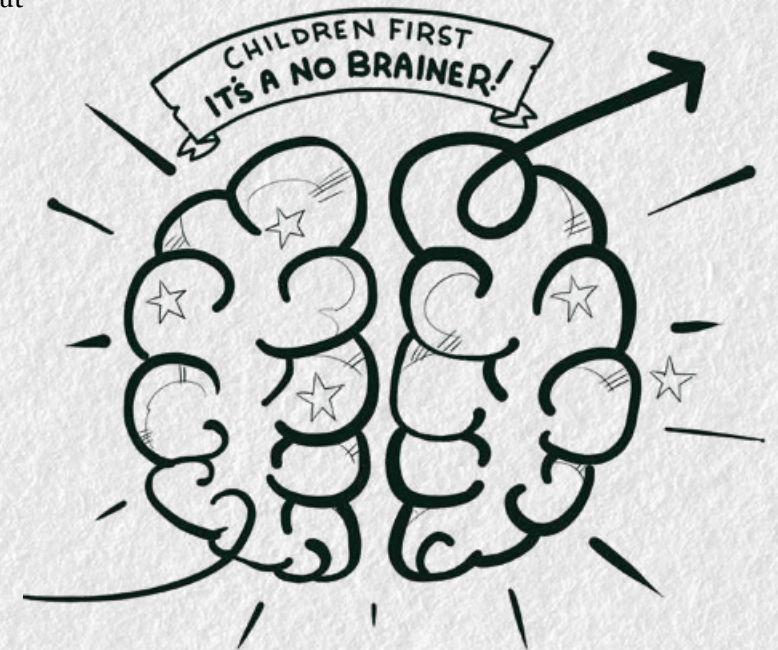
Ms. Siviwe Gwarube - Minister of Basic Education

Today, I have the privilege of talking to you about a topic that is close to my heart - the children of this country and how we put the children first, Bana Pele.

When I speak about the children of this country, I am speaking about the very future of our nation. And I believe that the way to put our children first is to give them the best chance at succeeding in life and research shows us that the best return on investment is in Early Childhood Development.

You see, when we talk about Early Childhood Development (ECD), we're not just talking about education - we're talking about the foundation for everything.

This is where it all begins.



The first few years of a child's life shape who they'll become, not just as learners in school, but as citizens, as professionals and indeed as future leaders of this country.

Nobel Prize Winner - **Prof James Heckman**, made a powerful, yet simple observation that has stuck with me:

“Learning begets more learning, and skill begets more skill”.

The more we learn, the more we want to learn and the easier it becomes to learn. Success in foundational literacy and numeracy begets success in literacy and numeracy at all levels of education. The success of a human can be greatly augmented by the early acquisition of basic skills during childhood.

If I have not been simple enough, let me simplify it further.

The future of learning, the future of our economy, and the future of this country all begin with early childhood development. It begins with these first, deeply valuable years in a child's life.

In South Africa, we have nearly 7 million children between the ages of 0 and 5. And the truth is, a lot of them are not getting what they need. Around 1.3 million children in the age group of 3 to 5 are not attending any form of ECD programme.

The children who are not attending ECD are found mostly in poorer communities and this unequal access entrenches the inequalities that have come to define our country.

The difference between wealthier children and poorer children on being developmentally on track quality ECD is staggering. 8 out of 10 children in quintile five, the wealthiest of our schools, is likely to be developmentally on track at age 5, compared to only 3 out of 10 children in the poorest quintile who are developmentally on track. We are leaving too many of our children behind! This is deeply concerning.

As I mentioned earlier, research shows that a child's chance at a successful future can depend on the kind of start they get in life. To rescue the children of South Africa, we have set out on a strategic reorientation of the basic education sector towards foundational learning. So, we've set ourselves some goals, and one of them is as bold as it is audacious.

By 2030, we want every child in South Africa to have access to quality early learning. But let me be very clear: this goal is not about doing more of the same. It's not about simply throwing more money or resources into a system that's already under strain. No, this is about doing something impactful! Meaningful! Transformative!

This is about rethinking the way we deliver ECD?



How do we overcome the barriers of access and quality?

And how do we build the systems, structures, and partnerships that will give every child the foundation they deserve?

How do we think out of the box?

The first is to admit that we do not have all the answers as government and we must accept that we need to collaborate and work together with private and civil society partners to come up with a joint solution for the 1,3 million children in this country who do not have access to Early Childhood Development.

To get to where we want to be, we need something extraordinary - and that something is leadership.

Leadership as government, leadership as the social sector, leadership as funders.

Leadership, in this sector, is not just about making decisions - it's about having the courage to face the tough conversations.

It's about having the resilience to keep going when things get hard.

And it's about understanding that none of us can do this alone.



Leadership, to me, means creating collaborations that work. And if we're honest, collaboration is hard.

You know, in his biography, Abraham Lincoln talks about leading a **“team of rivals.”**

It's easy to work with people you like. It's easy when everyone agrees. But a **“team of rivals”** tests your emotional intelligence.

It asks: How do we build trust in the face of differences?

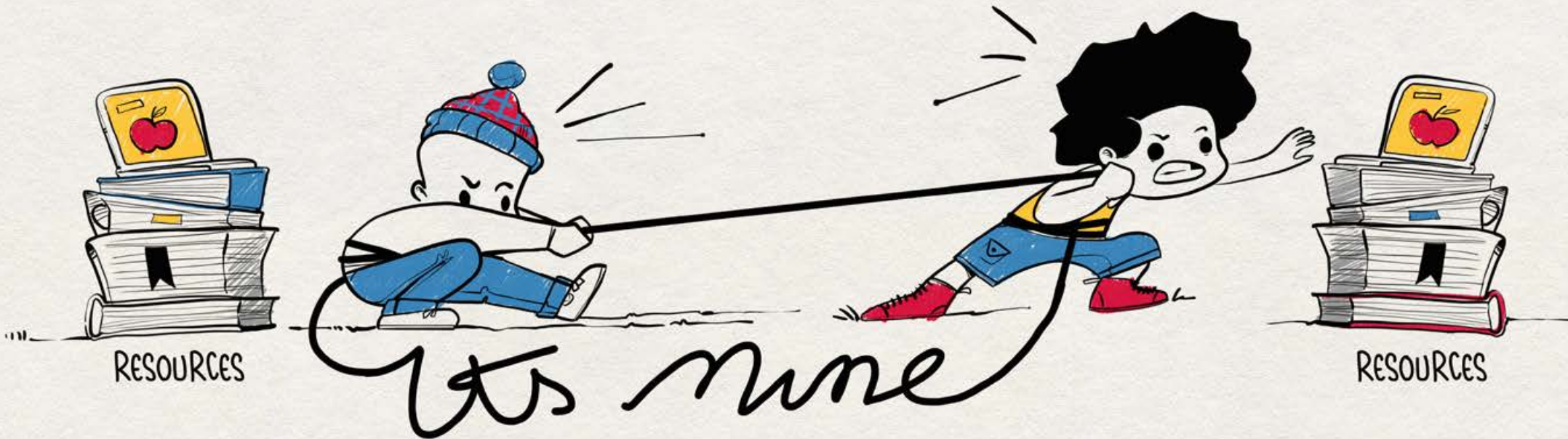
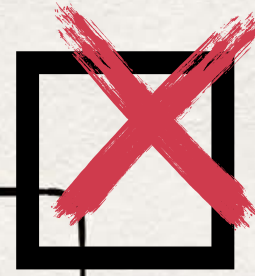
How do we come together when we don't always see eye to eye?

In this sector, we have to ask ourselves, how do we shift away from a competitive mindset rooted in scarcity to a collaborative one rooted in abundance?

We have so much potential if we can unite around a common goal.

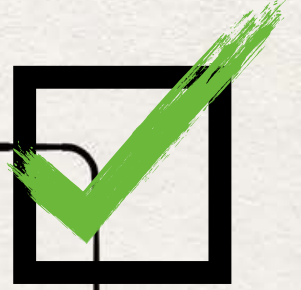


COMPETE



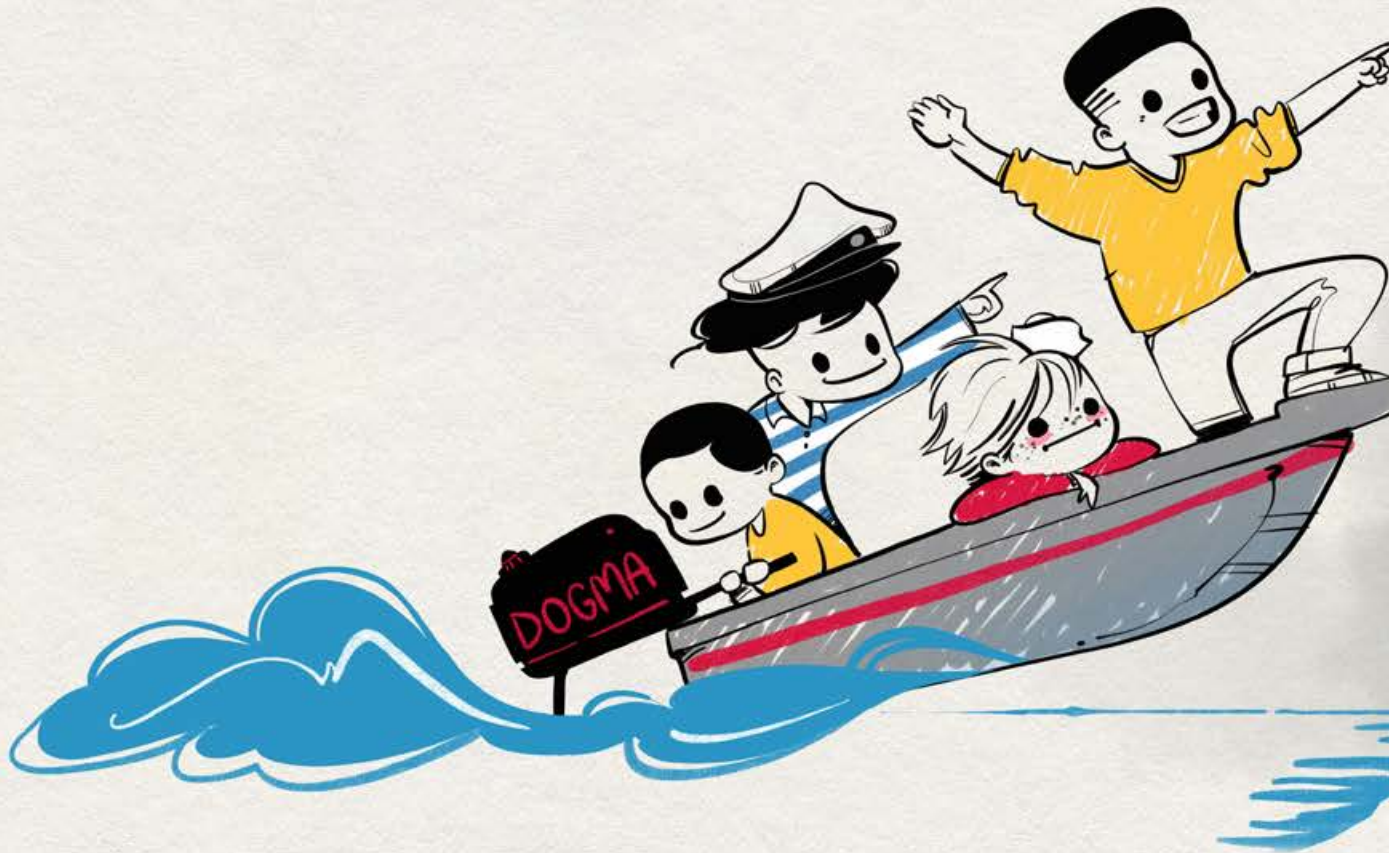


COLLABORATION





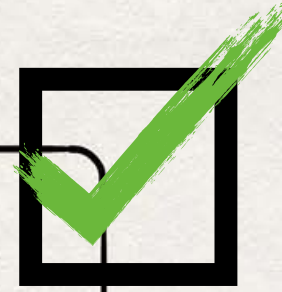
I KNOW THE WAY



Stick to the Plan



AGILITY



AUDACIOUS
GOALS



In trying to reach audacious goals, we are entering uncharted territory. And uncharted territory requires agility - the ability to adapt.

Things are going to change.

We're going to face challenges that we've never faced before.

And when we do, how willing are we to change our minds?

How open are we to learning from our mistakes and evolving as we go?

It's not easy. We all have our deeply held beliefs, our ideas.

But sometimes, we have to be willing to let go of what we know in order to make room for new solutions.

How much personal change are we willing to embrace?

How much collective learning are we ready for?



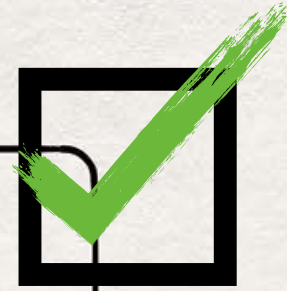


I HAVE A SOLUTION





INNOVATION



BE IN LOVE
WITH THE
PROBLEM
NOT THE
SOLUTION



And this is where innovation becomes critical. We're not talking about tech or gadgets in labs here. We're talking about the determination to seek better ways to solve problems.

Innovation means letting go of the old ways of doing things that haven't worked.

We can't keep doing what we've always done and expect different results.

We need to innovate in our thinking, our collaboration, and our solutions.

There's no step-by-step playbook for quality access to early learning for 1 million children. We're writing that playbook today.

It's time for new ideas, new methods, and intense learning.

And that requires humility - the humility to admit when we're wrong and the courage to change direction when we need to.

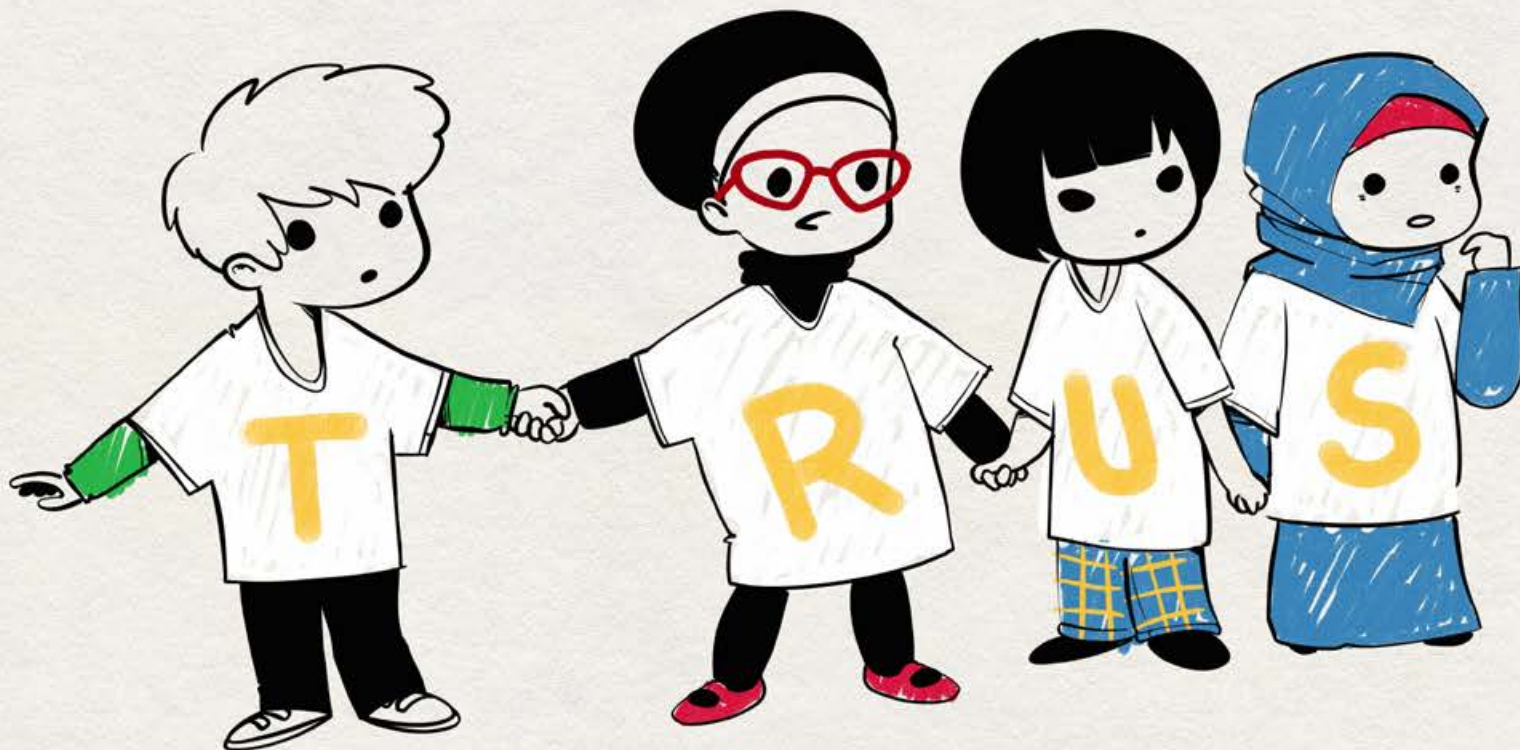
We can't cling to old ideas simply because we're comfortable with them.



MISTRUST

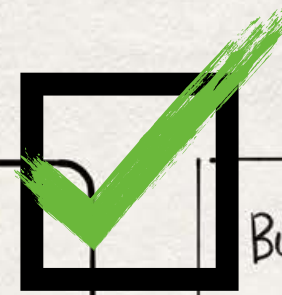


...
GO ALONE!
...





TRUST



...
BUT IF YOU WANT TO GO
FAR.
GO TOGETHER!

CHANGE HAPPENS AT THE SPEED OF TRUST



You've heard the saying, "***change happens at the speed of trust.***"

In the ECD sector, trust is not just important - it is everything.

How do we build trust in this sector?

How do we ensure that parents trust us?

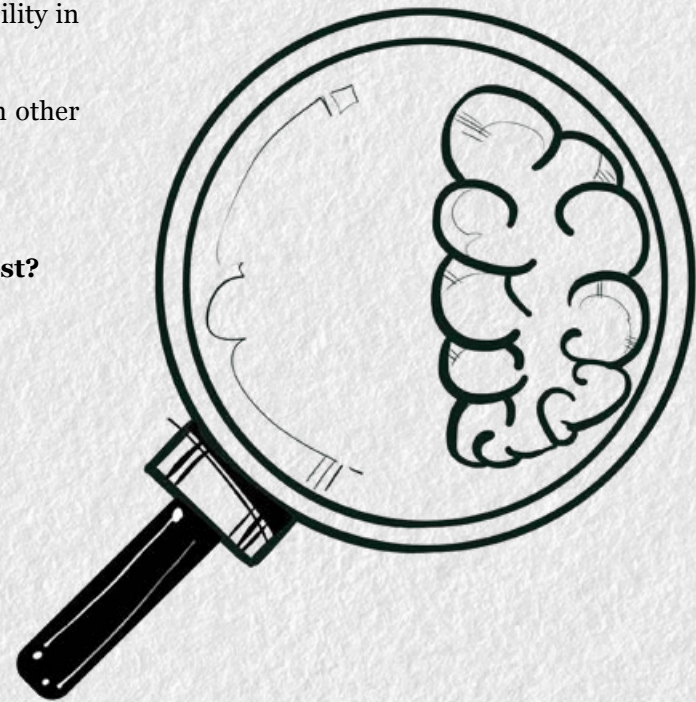
We have to remember that the reason we're in this room, the reason we're working together, is that parents trust us to get it right for their children. And that trust is not just about accountability in government.

It's about how NGOs, donors, businesses, and every single player in this sector holds each other accountable.

How do we hold ourselves accountable?

How do we make sure that the system works for the people who need it the most?

Not for some, but for all.





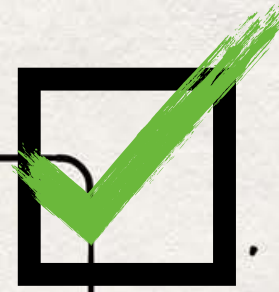
I'M VERY SUCCESSFUL



NE NEVER
FAILED!



RESILIENCE



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FAIL

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FAIL!



SUCCESS IS A
LOUSY TEACHER.
IT SEDUCES SMART
PEOPLE INTO THINKING
THEY CAN'T LOSE.





Look, let's be real here. This mission will be hard.

There will be setbacks, obstacles, and tough days. We will face headwinds, and some of us may feel like giving up. I want us to remember that we can't stop.

No matter how hard it gets, we must keep moving forward, together.

We need resilience, and we need to support each other, because when we do, we'll get there.

We also need courage.

If you're not scared by this mission of universal access to quality early learning by 2030, then maybe you're not truly on board with what we're trying to achieve.

With over 60% of Africa's population under the age of 25, the potential for growth, for innovation, and economic development is immense.

Our continent will be home to the largest workforce by the year 2060.

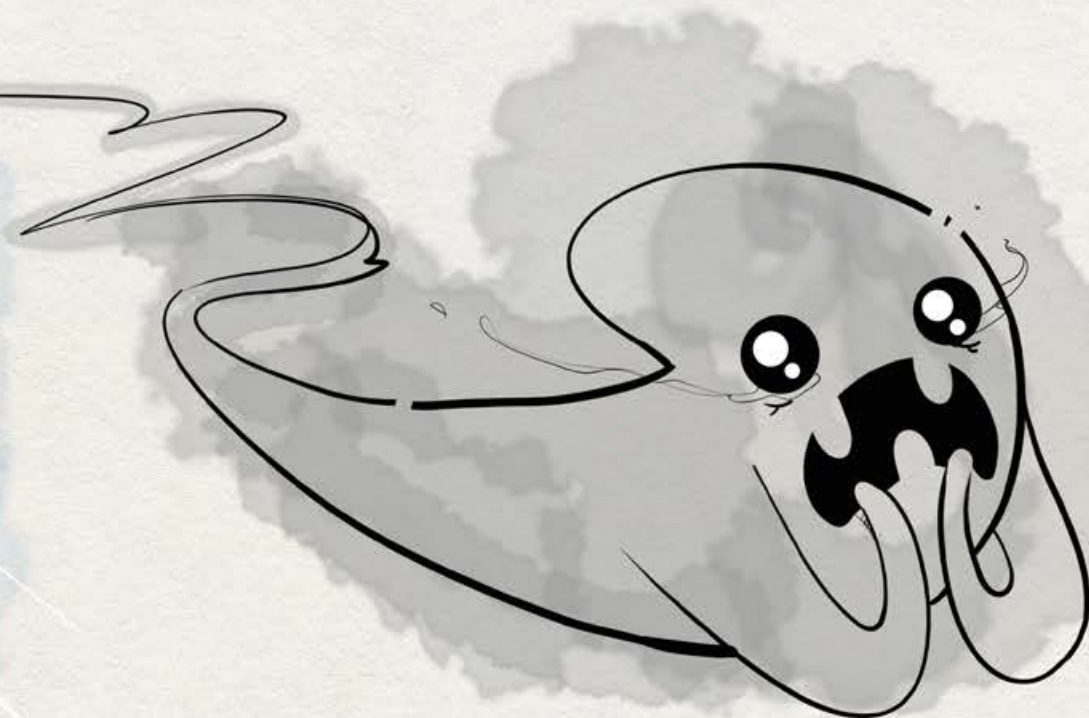


FEAR OF FAILURE





COURAGE



However, this potential can only be realized if we make the right investments in our youth - starting with their earliest years.

The time to alter the future history of our continent is now.

It will not be easy, but it will be well worth it!

As Nelson Mandela once said,

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.”

We are climbing a mountain - a formidable mountain. But it's in facing that fear, in feeling those sweaty palms and racing hearts, that we will achieve the impossible.

So, as I stand before you today, I ask this:

Are you ready to embrace collaboration?

Are you ready to trust each other and have the courage to push forward, no matter what?

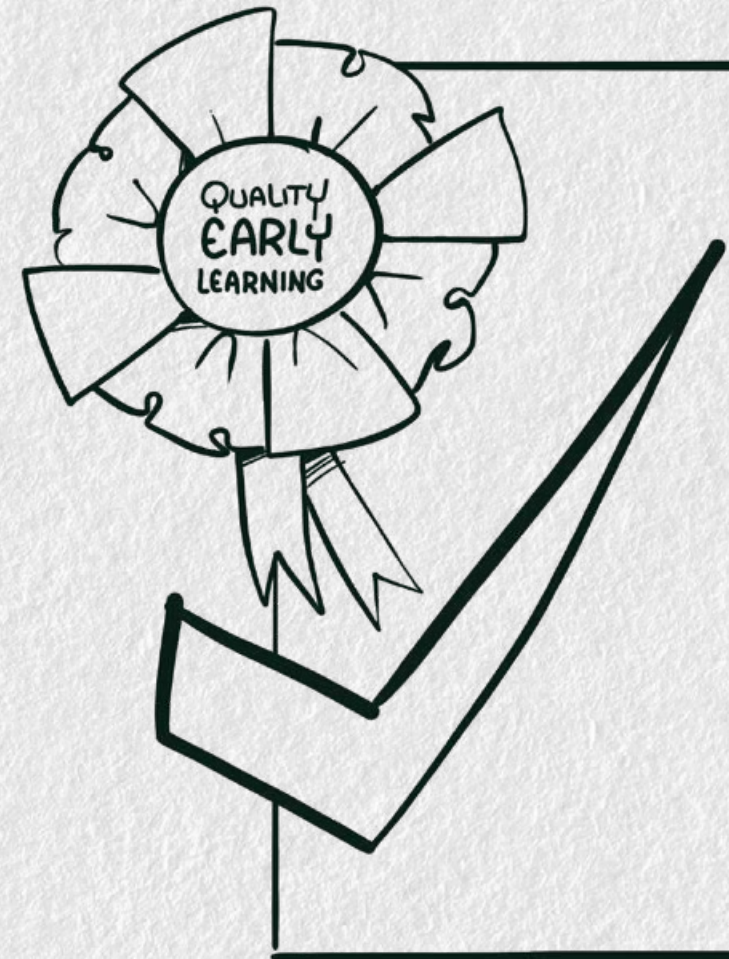
The road ahead will be tough, but we will travel it together.

We will build a future where every child gets the quality early learning they deserve.

Together, we will put the children of this country first.

Bana Pele!

Thank you very much.





4. KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**President of South Africa:
His Excellency. Mr Cyril Ramaphosa**

Minister of Basic Education, Ms Siviwe Gwarube,

Deputy Minister of Finance, Mr Ashor Sarupen,

Director-General of the Department of Basic Education, Mr Mathanzima Mveli,

Chairperson of Business Leadership South Africa, Ms Nonkuleleko Nyembezi,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all here today because of our shared belief in the profound importance of Bana Pele – putting children first.

This belief is the cornerstone of our vision for a brighter future for South Africa.

It is because of this shared vision that we unite and collaborate today, committed to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to learn, grow and thrive by the age of five.

Our immediate focus is to extend access to early learning to every child. It is one of the most powerful levers we have to unlock the potential of our nation.



We recognise today that investing in ECD is not just about education. It is about shaping the next generation of skilled, capable and entrepreneurial citizens who will drive our economy forward.

Early childhood development provides children with the foundational skills they need to build a successful future. It helps to break the cycle of poverty that is handed down from one generation to the next. Early childhood development is about giving children from all backgrounds the opportunity to grow into confident, capable citizens who contribute positively to society.

Children who receive a strong start are more likely to succeed in school and the workforce, reducing societal costs in areas such as healthcare, crime prevention and welfare.

A research report published to coincide with Brazil's G20 Presidency, estimated that in South Africa, an investment of 2.1 percent GDP in universal childcare could have supported 10.5 million women to join the workforce over three years.

Because of the profound effect that ECD can have on social well-being and development, we have decided to put our children first. Last week, the Minister of Finance announced an additional investment of R10 billion in ECD over the next three years.

We are all aware of the statistic that 80 percent of children in South Africa are unable to read for meaning by the age of 10. Early childhood is critical for developing foundational skills such as language, literacy and numeracy. The experiences and interactions children have can significantly influence their future learning potential.

This is why ECD must be treated as an urgent priority.

We therefore welcome this wonderful initiative for business, civil society and government to work together to shape the future of early childhood development in our country. This initiative will assist the strategic reorientation of the basic education sector to strengthen foundation learning.

The benefits of universal access to ECD extend beyond the education of the child. It helps to empower families to break free from the effects of poverty.

The initiative also emphasises the importance of early childhood development in a child's life, a period critical for cognitive and emotional development. By focusing on comprehensive early childhood care and education, we can mitigate the disadvantages faced by many children due to poverty and lack of resources. This holistic approach will ensure that children not only receive education but also proper nutrition, healthcare and a safe environment.

Investing in ECD yields significant economic returns. Studies have shown that every rand spent on early childhood education can save up to seven rands in future costs associated with remedial education, social services and criminal justice. The ripple effects of a robust ECD system are felt across generations, fostering a cycle of opportunity and growth.

We are determined that every child, regardless of their background or location, must have access to quality early education. It is for this reason that the Department of Basic Education launched the Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive last year. We call on all ECD programmes to register with the Department so that all our children can receive the start in life that they need and deserve.



We've seen time and time again how South Africa excels when we come together. We have consistently shown that we can solve difficult problems when we unite for a common cause.

The Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive is an example of cross-sectoral collaboration at work. We have an opportunity to rethink and restructure the entire ECD landscape, making it more effective, more inclusive and more impactful than ever before.

As South Africans, we have a clear goal for all our children: access to quality early learning opportunities for an additional 1.3 million children by 2030. This is why we are here today. We need to create a collaborative framework for ECD. One that brings together government, business, donors, ECD workers and all other social partners. This framework must ensure that all role-players work together at both the provincial and municipal levels to improve access to quality early childhood education.

Today, we have come together to explore new public-private partnerships, share innovative solutions and improve the community-based initiatives that are already making a difference.

As we move forward, we must remember that there is no greater cause than uniting for the benefit of our children.

Our future as a nation depends on the children we raise today. We must commit to creating an environment where every child, no matter where they come from, has the opportunity to learn, to grow and to succeed.

Let us join hands and work together, as a united force, to achieve our shared vision of universal access to quality Early Childhood Development. By doing so, we will not only secure the future of our children. We will secure the future of South Africa itself.

I thank you.

THANKS

Mr Matome Chiloane – MEC for Education, Gauteng



5. STRONGER TOGETHER

HOW COLLABORATION CAN UNLOCK UNIVERSAL QUALITY ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

**By Ms. Siviwe Gwarube: Minister of Basic Education
& Ms Nonkululeko Nyembezi: Chair of the Business Leadership SA**

South Africa stands at a pivotal moment in its commitment to Early Childhood Development (ECD). The national budget tabled earlier this month, marked a historic moment for the ECD sector, with Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana committing a record R10 billion over the medium term to expand access and raise the per-child subsidy for the first time in six years. While this investment is a long-overdue boost, government cannot close the gaps alone.

A Social Compact for ECD would provide the necessary structure to drive systemic and sustainable change. It would establish a clear roadmap, sector-wide commitment and joint accountability. By pooling resources and expertise, this model ensures that investment translates into real, measurable impact.

This week, the Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap Leadership Summit, co-hosted by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA), brought together the country's key leaders in ECD to formalise this commitment, align efforts, and set clear milestones on the road to universal quality access for all 3 to 5-year-olds.



The Need for a Social Compact in ECD

ECD is one of the highest-yielding investments a nation can make. Research shows that every rand spent on early learning generates long-term economic returns, including improved education outcomes, reduced welfare dependency, and a more productive workforce.

Beyond child development, ECD is a powerful driver of gender equality. Affordable early learning programmes could enable up to 2 million women to enter or remain in the workforce, while the sector itself employs over 200,000 people, primarily Black women. Expanding access would create thousands more jobs, particularly in underserved communities.

Yet, access remains deeply unequal. More than a million children, mainly in low-income and rural areas, are still excluded from quality early learning opportunities. To bridge this divide, government and NPOs must take a targeted, data-driven approach, ensuring that subsidies reach those who need them the most.

At the same time, South Africa's ECD landscape is highly fragmented. Thousands of dedicated practitioners and community-based organisations - the backbone of the existing system - provide critical services, but many struggle with inconsistent funding, infrastructure constraints, and a lack of formal recognition. Without structured coordination, progress is slow. The Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap is potentially a game changer to drive universal quality access by establishing clear structures for joint action.

Lessons from the Bana Pele Mass Registration Drive: A Proof of Concept

A key example of this approach in motion is the Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive, which has already demonstrated how a social compact of structured public-private collaboration can accelerate progress in the ECD sector. Spearheaded by the DBE, the initiative has aligned government subsidies, donor contributions, and private sector investment to unlock financial capacity for thousands of ECD centres, many of which previously struggled to meet registration requirements.

The drive leverages modern technology through a multi-channel platform for registration, alongside grassroots engagements with NPOs and government district offices. This has streamlined bureaucratic processes, making it faster and easier for centres to formalise, access infrastructure support, and work towards full compliance. Over the next year, the DBE aims to bring thousands more centres into the formal network, ensuring that more children benefit from structured, quality early learning.

Similarly, the R600 million Education Outcomes Fund is pioneering blended financing models, showing how government and donors can co-invest in measurable improvements in ECD. Unlike traditional funding, this results-based funding mechanism pays for outcomes rather than simply funding inputs such as infrastructure or materials.

These successes must now be expanded, refined, and embedded within a long-term framework, guaranteeing that investment in early learning is sustained, scalable, and impactful beyond individual projects. Achieving this requires a shift in how business engages with ECD.

The Private Sector's Role: Moving Beyond CSI

Historically, private sector involvement has largely been philanthropic, with companies investing in early learning through Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives. While commendable, these efforts are often short-term and disconnected from broader national strategies.

A structured Social Compact builds on the evolving role of business in ECD, moving beyond charity to recognising it as a strategic driver of growth. More companies are embedding early learning initiatives within their workforce development and job creation strategies, ensuring that ECD is integrated into broader national planning efforts for long-term sustainability.

From Concept to Action: A Roadmap for Implementation

For ECD reforms to succeed, business leaders and social partners must align behind a unified, government-led strategy rather than fragmented efforts. The DBE-led Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap provides this framework, ensuring that all contributions, whether financial, technical, or operational, serve a shared vision.

To translate this vision into action, a long-term resourcing plan that goes beyond government funding is essential. Strengthening the ECD Outcomes Fund and formalising private sector contributions through structured co-financing models will be critical to securing the investment needed to scale and sustain quality ECD services.

Expanding access, however, must not come at the expense of community-driven ECD initiatives. For decades, women in underserved communities have provided early learning through small, informal centres. The DBE recognises these women-led ECD micro-enterprises as vital to the care economy. Instead of stifling them with over-regulation, the focus is on unlocking their potential through subsidies and streamlined registration, ensuring financial and social capital work together to drive systemic impact for children.

The Bana Pele Summit: A Defining Moment for ECD Investment

The Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap Leadership Summit provided a critical platform to formalise the Social Compact, secure buy-in from key stakeholders, and establish a concrete implementation plan.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform South Africa's early learning system. By embracing a Social Compact that unites government, business, and civil society, we can build a foundation for universal, high-quality ECD access—one that delivers tangible benefits for children, families, and the economy as a whole.

LESSONS FROM SOCIAL COMPACTS

Mr Siven Maslamoney - Bana Pele PMU

Mr Rudi Dicks - Head of PMO: Presidency

Mr Adrian Enthoven - BLSA Board Member

BLSA Board member Adi Enthoven: “We’re learning that there are 5 ingredients to an effective social compact:

1. This must a national and urgent priority for government and social partners.
2. There must a common plan owned by the government that social partners must get behind.
3. There must be execution muscle for this plan – typically a Prog Management Unit.
4. There must be fierce accountability for delivery.
5. There must be trusted partnership between / amongst individuals on the teams.



6. FROM ALLOCATION TO ACTION

MAKING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT BUDGET COUNT
By Dr. Janeli Kotzé, Acting Director for Early Childhood Development,
Department of Basic Education & Zaheera Mohamed, CEO of Ilifa
Labantwana

The 2025 National Budget marks a long-overdue turning point for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa. After years of advocacy from social impact organisations, Minister of Finance, Mr Enoch Godongwana, allocated R10 billion over the medium term to the sector, the largest investment in ECD to date. For the first time in six years, the per-child subsidy paid to ECD providers will also increase, rising from R17 to R24 per day over the next three years. This could enable up to 700,000 additional children from low-income households to access subsidised early learning programmes.

While this is a significant milestone, it still falls short of what is needed to reach every child by 2030. Without sustained investment and stronger systems, many young children will continue to miss out on the opportunities that could shape their future success.



Why Early Learning Matters

The first five years of a child's life are widely recognised as the most important period for brain development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and well-being. Yet more than 1.1 million children aged 3 to 5 in South Africa do not have access to ECD services and just 4 out of 10 are developmentally on track by the age of five. As a result, a significant number of learners enter primary school at a disadvantage, increasing the likelihood of poor foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Quality early learning changes this trajectory. It boosts school performance, supports working families, and creates jobs in the care economy. Research shows that every R1 spent on ECD can yield up to R17 in long-term returns including improved academic outcomes, higher lifetime earnings, and reduced social spending.

ECD is also a powerful gender equity lever. The sector already supports over 200,000 jobs, mainly held by Black women, and reaching universal access could double this number. Affordable early learning could also enable up to 2 million mothers to enter or remain in the workforce.

Investing Where It Counts

The boost in the per-child subsidy is a necessary adjustment, but it is still well below the level required to deliver quality services. A more realistic target, one that allows providers to cover essential costs such as nutritious meals, trained practitioners, and safe learning environments, would be R32 per child per day by 2030.

And to ensure the most vulnerable benefit first, government and non-profit organisations (NPOs) in the sector must adopt a population-based planning approach, using data to identify communities with the greatest need and prioritising them for subsidies and support.

Building a System That Works

For providers, access to public support has long been hampered by complex regulations. Many are caught in a catch-22: without registration, they can't access subsidies but without subsidies, they can't meet registration requirements.

The Department of Basic Education is addressing this through the Bana Pele (Children First) Mass Registration Drive. Already, over 2,600 ECD programmes have been formally registered through the new process. Using the new eCares digital platform and a conditional registration process, centres can now become eligible for funding while working toward full compliance. The DBE aims to onboard thousands more over the coming year, bringing more providers into the fold and improving access for children nationwide.

The new conditional registration process, facilitated through the eCares (early childhood administration and reporting system) platform, allows ECD centres to enter the system, receive financial support, and work toward full compliance at a much more efficient and faster pace. Over the next year, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) aims to bring thousands more ECD centres into the formal network.

Partnering for Impact

Even with the R10 billion allocation in the medium term, public funds alone are not enough to meet the sector's full financial demands. Estimates suggest that at least R20 billion per year is needed to cover the operational costs of providing quality early learning opportunities for all vulnerable children in South Africa.

That is why public-private partnerships are critical. The ECD Outcomes Fund, a collaboration between the DBE, National Treasury and a coalition of funders, is an innovative financing model that blends public and private investment. Backed by R300 million in government funding and R260 million from donors, this results-based model pays for measurable outcomes like improved learning and development, not just inputs such as books or buildings.

Beyond funding, the private sector can contribute to infrastructure, training, and systems innovation. Policy mechanisms such as tax incentives or BEE scorecard recognition can also encourage longer-term investment.

The Road Ahead

The 2025 Budget is a meaningful step, but the true test lies in how the commitment is implemented. Real progress depends on smart spending, strong systems, and shared responsibility.

At the recent 2030 Bana Pele Leadership Summit, leaders from government, business, and civil society rallied behind a common goal: universal access to quality ECD. The Roadmap sets the path forward centred on putting children first, aligning efforts, and investing in solutions that work.

Turning financial commitments into everyday impact will take collective effort. But the reward is clear—a stronger, more inclusive future starting with South Africa's youngest citizens.

ECD OUTCOMES FUND PANEL

Ms. Tracey Henry - CEO of Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation

Mr Ashor Sarupen - Deputy Minister of Finance

Ms. Siviwe Gwarube - Minister of Basic Education

Ms. Milena Castellnou - CPO – Education Outcomes Fund

Deputy Minister of Finance Ashor Surapen “The great value of the ECD Outcomes Fund is that the money follows the child [not the input costs].”

The ECD Outcomes Fund, to be launched later this year is a R600m results based financing platform that is 50% funded by National Treasury together with Lego Foundation, Yellowwoods/This Day, Standard Bank Tutuwa, Oppenheimer Memorial Trust and First Rand Education Foundation



7. CLOSING ADDRESS

Ms. Nonkululeko Nyembezi
Chairperson of Business Leadership SA

Minister, special guests, ladies and gentlemen!

Champions for children

In 1923 while we were digging for gold, diamonds, iron ore, a 5-year-old roamed the veld in a little village in Mvezo.

That child grew up to lead us from the impossible into the hopeful.

We owe our summit today in no small part to that 5-year-old.

You know who I am referring to.

The troublemaker.

Rhlihlala the child.



Today there are a little more than 1 million 5 yr olds across the breadth of our beautiful country. The future leaders, and talent of careers we can't even imagine yet, are in this cohort of children.

Our wealth is today in early learning centres of very different shapes and sizes across the country. We need to ensure that there are more and better places for our 3-5 yr olds.

An investment in the early years will reap the richest rewards for us. This is beyond the ROI that Heckman calculated. What economists can't count is the leadership capital & social capital this generation will offer to our future.

But economists can calculate the investment case for early learning is clear. Research indicates that for every R1 invested in ECD can yield returns of up to R7 over the long term through improved educational outcomes, higher productivity, and reduced welfare costs.

South African business invest R11bn per annum in education. We need to challenge ourselves on how much are we spending on the early years. And it's encouraging to see that we as the private sector are partners with Treasury on the ECD Outcomes Fund. This is the kind of substantive partnership South Africa needs.

The business of business is not just business. Our business is to also ensure a sustainable future for the next 100 years and more. We are persuaded that investment in the early years makes sense.

For many years, this sector was un-coordinated, and the impact of investments were not always optimal.

Now with the DBE's leadership we are seeing the country's investment plan for children emerging. This is government at its best. Not trying to control everything but inviting us all to partner to achieve the best for our children. We will get behind this coherent plan for systemic change for children.

Today you all challenged yourselves to get beyond your programmes and your favourite ideas and to get behind a coherent roadmap to 2030. People often associate the private sector with people like me - I'm the chairman of a big bank. And our formal economy is an important part of who we are as a country. But our economy also has an informal sector.

The early childhood and care economy is not a charity case. Parents invest R14bn per annum in fees. And we now have a significant lift in government subsidies. Then there's support from the private sector too. This is at least a R20bn economic sector. This is an important part of our economy the women who run these thousands of enterprises are also the private sector.

The future of work may look like digital jobs, but it's the informal economy that will our people out of unemployment. ECD is a job creator. This is why it's very encouraging to see that the DBE is embracing an open system for delivery.

The instinct of governments all over the world is to regulate & stifle the informal economy. A few years ago, the BLSA was part of a programme to create resilient ECD enterprises. But it was impossible to get these enterprises registered with government and provide state support. The DBE has heard the message and has embarked on a Bana Pele mass registration drive to support this sector.

It's encouraging to see a social compact between the DBE and non-government sector partnering to drive this registration campaign. This is the kind of thinking and systems approach we need to get to universal quality access.

Government subsidies for enterprises is not unique for ECD. The government uses subsidies in the formal economy to incentivise growth. The subsidy and the ECD Outcomes Fund are examples of smart ways for government to support a sector run by women carers and women-owned enterprises yes, there are a few men too.

With the Minister in the lead, the private sector is ready to support and enable this systemic story of impact and transformation. It's a vital part of our reform agenda in the country.

We need one roadmap, a united sector willingness to roll up its sleeves to get it done for the children. As the BLSA we're proud to co-convene this summit.

This is the start of a new way forward for ECD.

We will gather once a year to check on our progress, to hold ourselves accountable to our promises and help each other meet this incredible mission.

Let's put children first. Bana Pele.





Ms. Nonkululeko Nyembezi
Chairperson of Business Leadership SA



Grace Matlhape
CEO: SmartStart



Nompumelelo Mokou
Executive Policy & Marketing
BLSA



Ms. Kulula Manona
Chief Director: Foundations for Learning
National Department of Basic Education



Mr Tshepo Mantje
Coordinator: Real Reform for ECD

BANA PELE MASS REGISTRATION DRIVE PANEL

Facilitator: Ms. Kulula Manona - Chief Director: Foundations for Learning, National Department of Basic Education

Mr Tebogo Chake - Bana Pele PMU

Mr Mosoue Sekonyela - Head of Government Relations - Harambee

Ms. Phumelele Tloubatla - Director: ECD – Gauteng Department of Education

Dr. Janeli Kotze, Acting Director: ECD, Dept. of Basic Education

Gauteng Dept of Ed ECD Director, Phumelele Tloubatla:
“Before that mass registration drive we could manage to register 200 sites per year. Since the MRD, we have registered more than 2000 in 7 months. This new registration system is a game changer for us.”



Mr Tebogo Chake - Bana Pele PMU, Ms. Phumelele Tloubatla - Director: ECD – Gauteng Department of Education, Ms. Kulula Manona - Chief Director: Foundations for Learning, National Department of Basic Education



8. RESOLUTION

ECD LEADERSHIP SUMMIT - TAKEAWAYS & COMMITMENTS

This document summarises the vision and context, our role as partners, and our commitment as leaders

1. THE VISION FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO ECD BY 2030

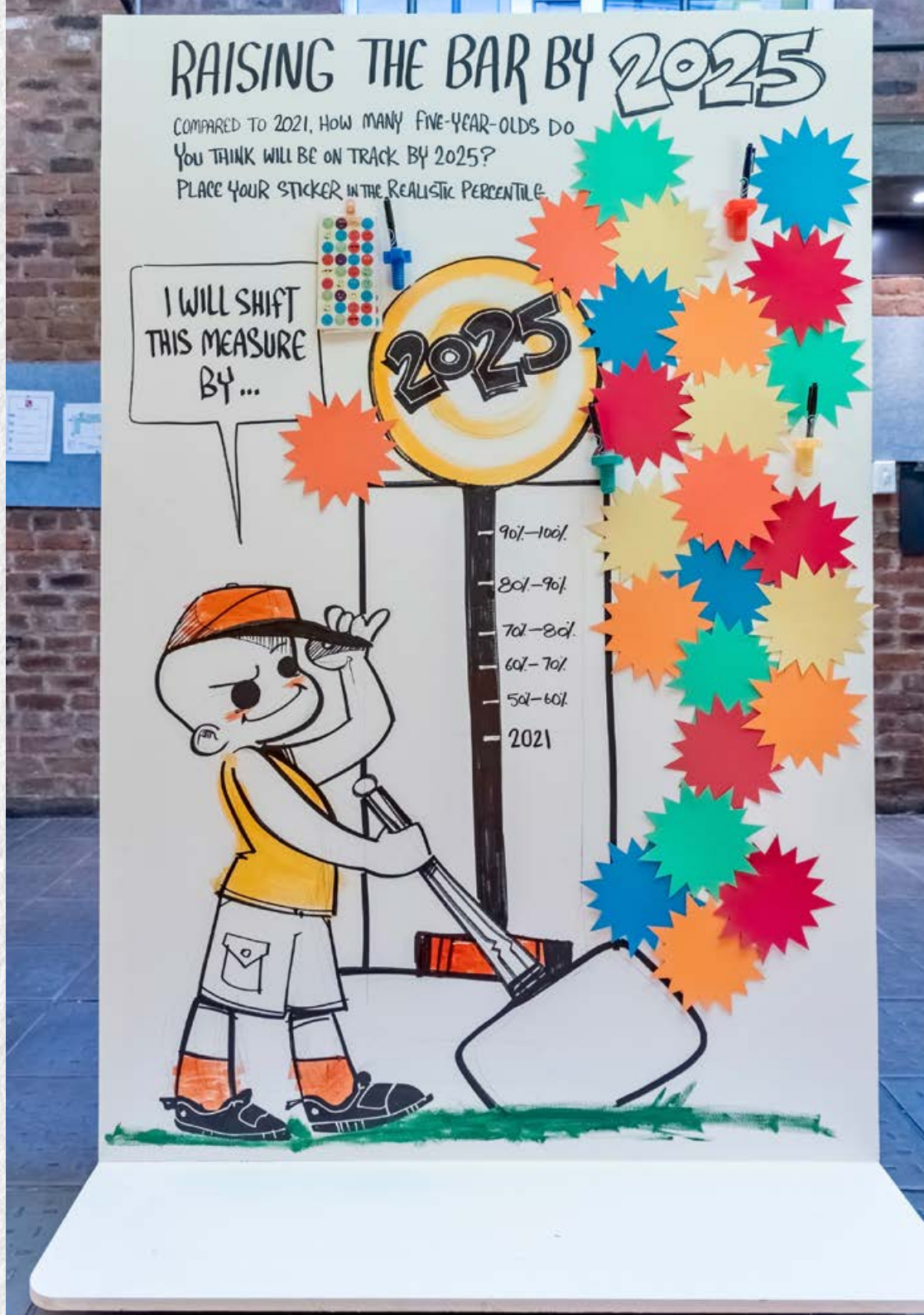
The Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap describes the vision of universal access to quality ECD, focusing on the most vulnerable. Considerable political backing of this vision was expressed at the Leadership Summit by the:

- **Minister of Basic Education, Siviwe Gwarube:**
 - o The early years shape a child's future and, by extension, the future of South Africa. Our vision is that **every** child should experience this investment
 - o By extension, we must intentionally focus on forgotten and marginalised communities.
 - Massive developmental disparities exist – 8/10 children in affluent communities are developmentally on track, while only 3/10 in poorer communities meet milestones.
- **President of South Africa:**
 - o The country should have prioritised ECD 30 years ago, but the second-best time is now.
 - o ECD is a powerful tool for breaking cycles of poverty and inequality. It is not just a tool for education, but for shaping our nation.
 - o The government's commitment is evident in the R10 billion allocation to ECD in the 2025 national budget.
 - o ECD transcends politics – it must be a unifying national priority.
 - o Investment impact: Every R1 spent on ECD yields R7 in long-term economic returns.





Ms. Simone Geyer
Deputy Director General, Delivery & Support
Department of Basic Education



2. CONTEXT FOR OUR VISION: BARRIERS TO UNIVERSAL ACCESS & HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

The majority of children in South Africa do not have access to high-quality ECD in South Africa. The Bana Pele 2030 Roadmap explicitly states the goal of increasing access to ECD for 1.3 million children by 2030. Registration is the first systemic unlock needed to achieve the vision of universal access to quality ECD. However, one of the biggest challenges is for existing programmes to get registered, due to registration barriers at the local government level.

To overcome this, funding & data-driven decision-making need to include:

- o Evidence-based financing models (such as results-based financing) which can attract more funding.
- o Tracking long-term outcomes (not just short-term outputs) is essential for sustainable ECD success.

The 2025/2026 national budget significantly invests in ECD after successful lobbying by the DBE and the sector, allocating R10 billion over the medium term. In this context of considerable government investment paired with considerable barriers, our role as partners and leaders in the sector becomes critical.

3. OUR ROLE AS PARTNERS IN ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL ECD

Government, Business, Civil Society & Labour Must Collaborate

- Business is a co-custodian of the democratic project and must invest in early learning.
- Partnerships should align with the government's existing ECD strategy rather than operating in silos.
- Trust and accountability mechanisms (formal and informal) are critical for successful partnerships.
- Political leadership is essential in guiding and sustaining ECD initiatives.

Achieving increased access to ECD further acts as an economic driver

- Thousands of jobs can be created in the ECD sector, primarily for women.
- ECD unlocks talent and potential, fuelling broader macroeconomic growth.

4. WHAT WE, AS PARTNERS AND LEADERS OF THE ECD SECTOR, COMMIT TO:

Putting the children of South Africa first.

- Staying the course to shift the needle in the future. We acknowledge that there will be few “easy wins”, and we commit to the long-term investment and hard work that will produce lasting results.
- Strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration by working together across sectors, including government, business, corporate, civil society, and labour to accelerate ECD access.
- Aligning our efforts with national plans to ensure efficiency and sustainability, acknowledging that this may require us to set aside some of our own agendas in the spirit of collaboration.
- Increasing investment by using our respective spheres of influence, big or small, to increase funding to support ECD programmes, recognizing the long-term economic and social returns.

- **Increasing investment in ECD further by:**

- o Supporting that results-based financing should be explored as a tool for sustainable ECD funding.
- o Aligning my organization’s strategies and support to galvanize around the 2030 ECD roadmap.

- **Improving access & removing barriers by:**

- o Advocating for policy and regulatory changes to simplify ECD programme registration (including centre, non-centre, home-based and mobile).
- o Supporting local government capacity-building to ease compliance burdens for practitioners so that children can benefit, and to ensure that ECD targets are included in IDPs and other planning processes.
- o Strengthening collaboration and coordination with Provinces.

- **Driving Evidence-Based Decision-making by:**
 - o Using data and research to strengthen advocacy, policy, and funding efforts.
 - o Developing systems to track short-term and long-term outcomes, ensuring effective interventions, aimed at improving quality.
- **Ensuring Child-Centred Approaches By:**
 - o Keeping the child at the heart of all initiatives.
- Building the sector as an attractive and supportive environment for young people looking for work by professionalising the workforce, for work and business opportunities.
- Striving towards a fairly compensated and appreciated ECD workforce, both for those currently working and those who will join.
- Systematically improving the quality of ECD programme delivery to ensure a reduction in the proportion who are falling far behind on their developmental milestones.
- Increasing demand for ECD services through public communication and information, and through improving affordability.







CONCLUSION

Achieving universal access to ECD by 2030 requires collective action and long-term commitment. South Africa's future depends on investing in its youngest citizens today. Let's unite across sectors to make this vision a reality.

Further questions from the cocreation process:

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION:

1. As a sector, can we define the proportion of every rand invested allocated towards the children?
2. What terminology should we use and be consistent with as a sector?
3. After these agreements, what are the activities we can agree to implement?
4. Do we want to say that we want to include men in the ECD economy and the economy of care?
5. How do we increase business incentives for investing in ECD?

9. KEY COMMITMENTS

2030 BANA PELE ECD ROADMAP COMMITMENTS

MILESTONES TO INCREASE ACCESS THROUGH NEWLY ESTABLISHED ECD PROGRAMMES

- **Target: Access for additional 200,000 children per year (1 million by 2030)**
- **Enablers:**
 - o 200,000 practitioners and up to 115,000 new venues (in the next 5 years)
 - o ECD to be a priority in all provincial strategies
 - o Children's Amendment Bill tabled in Parliament
 - o New frameworks for government-partner delivery (PPP mechanisms)
 - o Roll-out of eCARES to track numbers and progress
 - o Increased number of NGOs working to expand access
 - o Increased number of ECD programmes registered (MRD roll-out)
 - o Municipal red tape reduced
 - o Subsidy value and reach increased
 - o Aligned messaging and demand-building



MILESTONES TO IMPROVE QUALITY IN ESTABLISHED ECD PROGRAMMES:

<i>Levers</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Targets</i>
Quality People	A competent and qualified workforce within clearly defined career paths in ECD	• 50% of Principals have undergone Leadership training and demonstrate competence. • 50% of Practitioners at registered ELPs have undergone a minimum accredited course.
Quality Programme Delivery	Standardised regulation that governs quality of Early Learning Programmes	• 50% of early learning programmes adopting a quality curriculum with guiding resources.
Engaged Caregivers	A comprehensive Road to school and health booklet	• All caregivers equipped to make informed choices to access quality ELPs and continued development.
Quality Child Outcomes	Reduce the Red – leave no child behind	• 30% less children FALLING FAR BEHIND (red zone) for emergent literacy and language, emergent numeracy, fine motor co-ordination and visual motor integration. • 10% increase in children ON TRACK for emergent literacy and language, emergent numeracy, fine motor co-ordination and visual motor integration (green zone).































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