



**STATEMENT BY  
THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**TO THE 56<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON  
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT:**

**ON**

**“Population, Education and Sustainable Development”**

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**DELIVERED BY:**

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**Deputy Permanent Representative**

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates

My Country aligns itself with the statement delivered by Cuba on behalf the G77 and China.

Allow me to congratulate you and the Bureau on your election and thank you as well as the Secretariat, for the preparations and organisation of this session. This year's theme '*Population, Education and Sustainable Development*' comes at an opportune time for South Africa and I believe other countries with youthful populations. This is a moment to pause and reflect on our progress in realizing opportunities presented by this 'demographic window', especially in the aftermath of the global COVID-19 Pandemic which invariably hindered much of our efforts.

South Africa reconfirms its commitment to invest in and improve the educational outcomes for our young people as per our Constitution which sees education as a key element of Basic Human Rights. We furthermore commit to building a population that is educated, healthy, adequately skilled and gainfully employed. We also endeavour to provide the space for the youth to be innovative and entrepreneurial as a vehicle to job creation and to ensure that they create sustainable livelihoods and participate in the mainstream economy. In this way, we can achieve our commitments and ensure that sustainable development occurs.

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, our government has invested a significant proportion of our country's GDP in education and worked towards ensuring an inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. We accomplished this by improving the quality, accessibility, availability and affordability of education from early childhood through to adult education, with an emphasis on gender-sensitive and vocational education and the promotion of women's educational opportunities at the tertiary level.

We have had remarkable success over the years with the majority of learners aged 7 to 24, (76.3%) attending educational institutions. We have also achieved gender parity in education. In fact, our efforts to improve women's opportunities at the tertiary level paid off remarkably, South Africa has a higher Gender Parity Index for the enrolment of females in all three Post-School Education and Training institutional types (namely, Higher Education Institutions, TVET Colleges and Community Education and Training Colleges. This is the case in both public and private Higher Education Institutions.

Some existing challenges however remain. COVID-19 also, not only slowed the pace of our progress, it exacerbated existing and emerging challenges and led to new ones. In 2020 the proportion of individuals not attending school increased intensely among children who are 6 years and below. The percentage of children who did not attend any education institutions also increased from 10,9% in 2019 to 37,7% in 2020, before declining to 19,4% in 2021.

The decline in school enrolment can be attributed to COVID-19. Many schools, particularly in deep rural areas and poor households were not ready or equipped for alternative schooling methods such as remote teaching or online learning during the lockdown. This situation exacerbated the obvious socio-economic disparities in the country's schooling environment. It also intensified the existing hardships of already poverty-stricken families and communities.

We believe that education transcends matters of access, but serves further as a tool that cuts across all sectors and one that should be used to tackle existing societal inequalities and bring about sustainable development through social justice. South Africa has several strategies that tackle the intersectionality of social ills.

Given the high levels of child poverty and hunger in South Africa, our National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) for example, was established to provide daily meals to children attending public schools, including Early Childhood Development Centres, across the country. Its objectives are to improve the health and nutritional status of school-going children and to improve learners' school attendance, attentiveness, and educational outcomes. Almost 10 million children across the country are receiving adequate meals through this programme and ensures that no child goes hungry.

South Africans who are Not in Education, Employment or Training, also known as NEET increased from 38.8% in 2014 to 46.3% in 2021 with the majority (85.8%) being African and females constituting more than half (55.7%).

This figure is alarming as it poses the risk of us not tackling and halting intergenerational poverty, inequality, unemployment and low levels of skills development – all of which have a negative effect on South African youth and our ability to realize a demographic dividend for the country.

Initiatives to address NEET include our National Student Financial Aid Scheme, which was established by government to assist students with academic ability from poor and disadvantaged families with loans and bursaries to attend universities and public TVET colleges throughout the country.

National Student Financial Aid Scheme disbursed a total of R20,6 billion (1.1 billion USD) in 2018, increasing to R27.7 billion (1.5 billion USD) in 2019 and R47.3 billion (over 2.5 billion USD) in the 2022 financial year to deserving poor students who would otherwise never be able to study at tertiary level.

Initiatives to tackling youth unemployment, include the Presidential Employment Stimulus, a state-run initiative launched in 2020 to create 800,000 job opportunities by the end of March 2021, and to accelerate the labour market's recovery after it was devastated by Covid-19. Harambee, initiative was established in 2011 in partnership with the private sector. The program provides first-time jobseekers with skills needed

to unlock jobs and break down the barriers that keep millions of young South Africans unemployed.

In line with the Programme of Action agreed upon at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, one of the major strategies of the South African Population Policy is the promotion of “responsible and healthy reproductive and sexual behaviour among adolescents and the youth.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) was introduced in 2000 with the aim to equip adolescents and teenagers with the relevant skills, knowledge, and proper understanding of their own sexuality in relation to societal expectations. CSE forms part of the school curriculum and falls within the subjects of Life Orientation and Life Skills.

Existing policies and programmes which can be seen as complimentary mechanisms towards the implementation of the CSE programme include but are not limited to , the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Framework Strategy; the National Strategic Plan on HIV/TB and STIs (2017-2022) which recognizes CSE as the cornerstone for adolescent prevention of HIV and STIs; the Integrated School Health Policy; the National Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy in Schools (2017-2022); the Department of Basic Education National Policy HIV, STIs and TB; Measures for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy; the National Youth Policy (2015-2020); the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 and the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005).

Following on the two reports from the High-Level Commission on the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25 follow-up in 2021 and 2022, which advocate for using a Sexual and Reproductive Justice (SRJ) perspective to overcome all barriers to realising rights and achieve bodily autonomy, gender equality and the empowerment of women and thus achieve sustainable development - the South African Government and partners embarked on a rigorous programme of unpacking and understanding SRJ in the South African Context, including the critical role Comprehensive Sexuality Education plays therein. We did this through the hosting a series of Sexual and Reproductive Justice seminars across the country which culminated into a National Conference which involved several stakeholders including Civil Society, Business, Academia, and all spheres of government. The learnings from this journey will feed into the development of a National Sexual and Reproductive Justice strategy.

To conclude chairperson, South Africa is committed to providing an inclusive and equitable quality education as well as promoting lifelong learning for all. We do this through investing in quality education that is accessible, available and affordable – from early childhood to adulthood. In this way, we tackle intergenerational poverty as well as build a nation that is educated, healthy, adequately skilled and gainfully employed. This will also ensure that we realise the demographic dividend and attain

sustainable development as per our commitments, our Constitution and our Population Policy.

I thank you.