

NECT  
+ NDP =



# THE NECT

A STORY OF COLLABORATIONS TO  
IMPROVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

an **NECT** Publication

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ten years ago, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was established with the aim of leveraging and coordinating partnerships and collaborations to support the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in its pursuit of the National Development Plan (NDP) goals for basic education.

As plans for the commemoration of the NECT's ten-year milestone took shape, a central question emerged: "What had the NECT accomplished in its first decade?" This question served as a guiding principle throughout the planning process.



The universal consensus from within the NECT and among its stakeholders was that the NECT had successfully and innovatively harnessed its social capital to effectively aid the country's advancement towards a more optimal education system. This project emerged as a pivotal outcome of the celebratory and commemorative programme. Themed "The NECT Story," the project was conceptualised to reflect on the NECT's first decade through the lens of those who know it best: from the initiators, staff, internal and external stakeholders to observers with an interest and involvement in the education system.

The NECT Story publication stands as a significant record within the archives of collaborative efforts and partnerships between the public and private sectors. Its origin can be traced back to a reflective process initiated by the Board of Trustees of the NECT as the organisation neared its first decade of operation. The inquiries that arose within the Board spurred this introspective journey. Questions like "How did we arrive at this point?" and "What lessons have we garnered throughout the years?" became catalysts for this contemplative endeavour. As the Trustees had actively participated in the trajectory from conceptualisation to execution, their responses to these queries have been crucial to the framing of the NECT Story narrative. Recognising the pivotal importance of preserving this narrative, they deemed it important to document these insights comprehensively. This documentation, they believed, would serve as a crucial source of understanding of the NECT for other stakeholders and contributors, offering a window into the accumulated wisdom harnessed over the past ten years.

As one would expect from a publication of this nature, the NECT Story has benefitted from the support, inputs and insights of many stakeholders, to whom we are grateful.

The founding Trustees who laid the foundation for the mission and vision of the NECT to translate the National Development Plan's intention into a tangible and effectively managed initiative, have played a vital role in the creation of this book. By

As plans for the commemoration of the NECT's ten-year milestone took shape, a central question emerged: What had the NECT accomplished in its first decade? This question served as a guiding principle throughout the planning process.



generously contributing their time and memories, they have enabled us to tell the story of the NECT with a sense of intimacy and depth of insight that is rare to find. The executive team and leadership of the NECT, led by Godwin Khosa as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), whose understanding of the different programmes and their genesis and impact provide a richness to the story that captured the essence of what the NECT set out to achieve. Stakeholders, who volunteered their time and historical reflections to share their thoughts on the NECT, enabled us to develop a story that is both reflective and informative in nature. From the stories of how they first interacted with the NECT to reflections on the various engagements they have participated in, we could easily map out the evolution of the organisation from its early days, through its learning and refining of its activities; and ultimately its emergence as the primary reference point for coordinating high-impact partnerships across business, labour, civil society and the government.

We are particularly grateful to the team from the Minister of Basic Education's office who have assisted in the coordination of engagements with the Minister to ensure her participation in this project, not only as the political principal and a Trustee, but also as a South African citizen whose passion for the education of the country's learners predates and transcends her official roles. The Trustees of the NECT – from the chairman Dr Sizwe Nxasana, Nkosana Dolopi, Basil Manuel and Professor Brian Figaji – shared invaluable insights about the organisation's history and how it has mastered the art of bridging historical divides across key stakeholder groups in order to create a platform of partnerships that has extended its reach and impact beyond its initial suite of programmes. The ability to tap into the collective wisdom of Trustees who have been there every step of the way enabled a deep exploration of each crucial phase of the NECT's journey and the lessons and challenges navigated over the years.

The development of this story took the form of interviews with various individuals whose insights form the nucleus of the NECT Story. These interviews were coordinated by Miss Cebisa Ncube, the Education Manager for the NECT and conducted by the Rito Group team made up of Sam Mkokeli and Khaya Sithole.

The interviews were also recorded and converted into a short documentary which was produced by the Junior Photography team of Joshua Muzekenyi, Hendrick Lekalakala, Khutsiso Tebele and Boitumelo Mudau.

# STORY WRITING

Following the interview process, a story writing process aimed at synthesising the collective insights and developing the narrative was led and managed by Mr Mongezi Masilela, NECT Senior Communications Manager and written by the Rito Group team made up of Mr Khaya Sithole, Senior Writer Rito Group, supported by Ms Bertha Dlamini, Rito Group Chief Executive Officer.

The NECT expresses its sincere gratitude to all contributors and stakeholders who supported the project and ensured its success.

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS AND PARTICIPANTS

Minister Angie Motshekga

Sizwe Nxasana

Godwin Khosa

Nkosana Dolopi

Basil Manuel

Professor Brian Figaji

John Thurlow

Professor Takalani Mashau

Tinyiko Nkunzana

Sesi Nxesi

Gail Campbell

Dr Granville Whittle

Paul Colditz

Vuyiswa Ncontsa

Professor Sarah Gravett

Kanyisa Diamond

Matakanya Matakanya

Professor Brahm Fleisch

**Focus group 1:** Dr Deva Govender; Mr Dhianaraj Chetty; Mr Fred Baron; Mr Godfrey Nkondo

**Focus group 2:** Mr Peter Kimingi, Miss Nonkosi Mangxangaza, Dr John Thurlow

**Focus group 3:** Miss Lebogang Maphela, Mr Duncan Hindle, Ms Kabelo Dambuza

Room to Read focus group

# ACRONYMS

ABT	Alternative building technology
BLSA	Business Leadership South Africa
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DIP	District Improvement Programme
DSC	District Steering Committee
ECD	Early childhood development
JET	JET Education Services
KZN	Kwazulu-Natal
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NDP	National Development Plan
NECT	National Education Collaboration Trust
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PSRIP	Primary School Reading Improvement Programme
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAFE	Sanitation Appropriate for Education
SGB	School Governing Body
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

# PREFACE

The NECT team has embarked on a reflective process to look back at the first decade of the organisation. In recognition of the fact that a wealth of collective insights, stories, reports, and memories have been accumulated over this period. Over the years, the organisation transformed from a broad idea into a working template, demonstrating what can be achieved when the spirit of patriotism and national imperatives are given space to thrive. Through engaging with internal and external stakeholders, including observers, supporters, and partners, it became evident that the NECT's distinguishing feature was its ability to harness the social capital of stakeholders to actively improve the country's education system. It was therefore befitting to adopt the theme of the ten-year commemoration as **"Social Capital Building for Educational Improvement."**

Just over ten years ago, the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was founded. The organisation – representing a collaboration between the state, business, labour and civil society – was an outcome of the realisation that the country's National Development Plan (NDP), needed serious partnerships in order for its ideals to be realised. The education chapter, which had been developed after deep and wide consultations with the South African community, was regarded as one of the critical pivot points for the country's entire development agenda.

Over the past ten years, the country's journey towards meeting the goals of the NDP by 2030 has gathered steam and the NECT has gained insights and lessons on social and educational interventions. Simultaneously the Department of Basic Education (DBE) – as the custodian of the country's education policy – has evolved and adapted to the nature of the challenges inherent in a system defined by multiple intersection points and significant levels of stakeholder interest.

As the first decade comes to a close, the NECT has put together this storybook in order to record and celebrate lessons and experiences. The process has primarily involved interactions and engagements with the various stakeholders that have been part of the journey. The story also references various assessments and reports that have originated from the activities of the NECT. These stories are the net result of reflections by various stakeholders and enable the NECT to capture the essence of its journey and partnerships.

The stories provide background on the founding of the NECT, the role of the key champions and collaborators in giving life to the NECT's mission, the role played by internal and external stakeholders in advancing the cause of the NECT, South Africa's future, and the deliberations that will shape the NECT's future.

The recollections seek to serve as a springboard to provide insights on how different stakeholders united behind a common purpose collaborated to advance the country. These recollections also serve to foreground the NECT's new

strategic shift towards its second decade of operations. The NECT's new strategy which has been designed to capitalise on existing competencies and capabilities and build a relevant and sustainable organisation, will be the guiding light for the organisation, the sector and the country at large up to 2030 and beyond.



*Education Dialogues SA, Freedom Park 2013*





## CHAPTER 1

# The genesis of the collaboration

- The founding of the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) was the net result of extensive consultations ignited by the publication of the country's National Development Plan (NDP)
- The NDP – as the national blueprint – challenged South Africans to work together toward the achievement of national goals
- Education stakeholders – led by the Leadership Collective – embarked on an extensive journey towards developing the blueprint for using collaboration as an instrument for implementing the NDP
- The convening of the 2012 Leadership Dialogue, which brought together various stakeholders across the public sector, the private sector and civil society, was instrumental in the founding of the NECT

## The fractured history of South Africa's education system mirrors the history of the country itself.



The nation's practices of marginalisation of black citizens socially, economically and politically was amplified in the design of the education system. The implementation of the homelands model, designed to exile black citizens to ghettos across the country, was complemented by the fragmentation of the education system which widened the divide between races and within races.

Before democracy, investments in education were tailored around racial divisions, where state contributions to the education of white children, were many times more than the contributions allocated to the education of black children. In 1994, the spending on white learners was 4.5 times the spending on black learners across the system. The impact of these resource inequalities had implications within the classroom and around the classroom where infrastructure and support systems were subject to poor investment.

At the point of the democratic transition, the country's education system was made up of broken, fragmented clusters of schools that dotted the landscape, with very little in the way of coordination and collaboration. As Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga reflected, the pre-democratic education system was splintered across 18 different systems, scattered in approach, coordination and resourcing.

For black homelands and townships, schools were not established as centres of excellence or for human development. Rather – as Sizwe Nxasana, the Chairperson of the NECT summarised – it was common for schooling to take place between 9 and 11 am which severely compromised important indicators like curriculum coverage, class discipline and culture. There were poor attitudes towards education across the Board. There was very little appreciation of education as a fundamental and critical element of human development. Schools were also not perceived as critical social assets. This remained the case even after the dawn of democracy.



*Mabitse Primary School in North West Province, Bojanala District 2018*

Investments in resources for the training of teachers and school support systems shared similar racial disparities, and the underinvestment in black learners transcended all aspects of the education system. It was only in the year 2000 that the public spending on learners was officially equalised. However, given the long-term nature of the disparities in resource allocation, clearing the backlog to correct this dire state and eventually see tangible results would take much longer to achieve.

To illustrate the great historical divide and its impact on transitions into higher education and ultimately access to the economy, Legodi (2001) records that the under-funding of black learners has been a persistent feature of South Africa's recent history. In the four decades leading up to 1994, the ratios of spending across racial lines indicated a commitment to invest more in white learners than any other race on a per capita basis.


Table 1: Per capita spending per learner across different racial groups at different time intervals

Year	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Ratio (White to Black spending)
1953-54	R17	R40	R40	R128	7,53
1975-76	R42	R150	R190	R591	14,07
1984-85	R214	R501	R905	R1 511	7,06
1988-89	R763	R2 127	R2 607	R3 554	4,66
1994	R1 817	R3 601	R4 422	R4 772	2,63

Source: Department of Education 1994 and Mohlamme 1990:31, cited in Legodi 2001:57



Legodi (2001:58-59) also indicates that the financing of school buildings was premised on a cost-sharing model, where School Boards were expected to raise 50% of the funds for proposed expenditure in order to get an equivalent subsidy from the state. Naturally, for black communities affected by poor employment and affected by the impacts of migrant labour, the ability to raise the 50% was simply non-existent. The consequence of this reality was a significant prevalence of Black children receiving education in substandard structures made of ‘wretched wattle and daub huts’, characterised by their grimy and dark with often with leaking roofs and lacking proper sanitation facilities. In numerous instances, classes had to be conducted under trees, in the open air (McConkey 1972:8-9, cited in Legodi 2001:58-59).



Until the early 1990s, most black schools were still without libraries, science equipment, playgrounds, electricity, indoor plumbing and running water which were considered essential in White schools (Murphy 1992:369). In some schools there was no chalk, paper, textbooks or desks for learners. Under such conditions it was hard, if not impossible to achieve high quality education.

Inequality in financial support had an impact on the provision of classrooms and educators. The facilities at Black, Coloured and Indian schools were inadequate.

The education-learner ratio reflected the same general pattern of inequality between the various racial groups in the early 1990s. Since the establishment of separate schooling systems for the various races the educator-learner ratio has never been the same for all racial groups in the country. In primary schools, the educator-learner ratio was 1:10 for White schools, 1:19 for Coloured Schools and 1:33 for Black schools (Mohlamme 1990:31). The average education-learner ratio at a Black school was very high despite a progressive decrease over the years, and it affected matric results for many years.

(Legodi 2001: 56-60)

Nkosana Dolopi, a NECT Trustee and Deputy Secretary General of South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), captured the problem statement accurately when he stated – “we were coming from a pre-1994 situation with an education system that was serving the interests of a few and excluding the majority of our learners. There is now an attempt to try to address all the bad things that existed before 1994 in terms of access into the education system”.

Sizwe Nxasana summarised the problem by reflecting on the prevalence of schools in poorer and remote areas and townships that barely covered 50% of the curriculum, which meant that learners would exit that system underprepared for the post-schooling system.

In 1994, the country produced just over 287 000 passes (58%) from the learners who sat for the matric exams. In that cohort, just 18% (88 500) achieved university exemptions. Within that group, an even smaller fraction of black candidates achieved matric exemptions and also passed the key subjects –languages, mathematics, and science. Given that there is a close connection between participation and success in these

key subjects and the transition to higher education; the poor participation rate of black students in higher education was not surprising, with just over 30% of the 490 000 spaces in higher education in 1994 occupied by black learners. Addressing this demographic anomaly and improving these indicators were critical for the long-term success of the education sector and the national human development agenda.

Over the first 15 years of democracy, some important gains were achieved across the system. By 2009, when the administration of Jacob Zuma took office and started the initial conversations about the development of a National Developmental blueprint, the fruits of the efforts of various stakeholders were evident. There was an increase in matric enrolments – to 581 000. This was matched by the increase in exemption rates to 20% (109 697 of the 552 000 students who wrote the exams). Between the years, the pass rate improved from 47% in 1997 to 73% in 2003. Whilst these gains were great, the differences in distribution of concentration of success indicators across the system – particularly between rural and urban provinces and schools – indicated that there were still challenges that caused concern amongst educational stakeholders.

Year	Candidates enrolled	Total passes	Pass rate	University exemptions
1994	495 408	287 343	58%	18%
1999	511 159	249 831	49%	12%
2004	467 985	330 717	71%	18%
2009	552 073	334 716	61%	20%

*Source: Department of Basic Education, 2013*

Subjects like Mathematics and Science play a key role in the transition into higher education as they are core to disciplines like medicine, engineering and accounting and important disciplines like teaching and nursing. These gateway subjects are regarded as critical conduits for the country's education system and hence high participation and success rates are critical for the country's skills development pathways. The picture of 2009, however, indicated that the country still had some significant work to do in driving up participation and success rates.

In 2009, Mathematics and Physical Science had 282 700 and 264 222 candidates enrolled. The pass rates were 28% for Mathematics and 50% for Physical Science. Given the need for high achievements in these subjects for some key professions and post-secondary education opportunities, the low achievement rates had long-term implications for the country's human development goals.



*Learners of Likhweti Primary School in  
Mpumalanga Province during National  
Reading Coalition (NRC) Mandela Day  
Celebrations in July 2022*





As Minister Angie Motshekga reflected later in her foreword to the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) Action Plan to 2019: Towards the realisation of schooling 2030, the racial disparities in participation and achievement across key subjects remain a challenge. For example, the technical and vocationally oriented subjects that were identified as key in building up the country's technical skills base were poorly adopted by black learners. Whilst 46% of white male learners took up at least one of these subjects in the period leading up to 2013, just 5% of black male learners did so.

In 2009, when President Jacob Zuma split the Ministry of Education into two departments – Basic Education and Higher Education – it enabled the new Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. Angie Motshekga, to lead a department with a focus on the foundational issues in the education system. As Minister Motshekga reflected “The split had the benefit of enabling a deeper focus by the new department on basic education matters which at any point in time covers over 12

million learners and over 400 000 teachers across over 20 000 schools”.

Another key development of the post-2009 period was the convening of the National Planning Commission (NPC). The NPC developed a Diagnostic Report that was published in 2011. In its reflections on education, the Diagnostic Report highlighted the following insights –

- Whilst universal access to education had essentially been achieved in the period from 1994 to 2009, the quality of education for poor children had largely stagnated and in some cases, failed
- Even though the overall pass rates at the matric level had increased to 68% by 2010, just 15% of that cohort actually achieved an average mark of 40% or more
- The increase in the professionalisation of teachers in black schools had been commendable. In 1994, just 50% of teachers in African schools had a three-year qualification. This had increased to 80% by 2010.
- Disruptions within the system were still too common and teachers in African schools were clocking an average of 3.5 hours of teaching time per day compared to 6.5 hours in white schools. Strike action consumed up to 5% of school time each year. Regular union meetings during school hours also drained more teaching and learning time – to the detriment of learners.
- Resource inequalities remained prevalent across the system and acutely affected black and poor learners. Based on available data, the number of schools without electricity stood at over 5 000, with 1 500 schools still without on-site toilets in 2010.
- Notably, it was identified that schools with good leadership teams exhibited better performance.
- The underfunding of early childhood education was at odds with policy commitments. Given the accepted links between the strong foundational base of early childhood education and long-term educational accomplishment levels, such underfunding risked undermining the entire educational mission.





The consequences of these issues and their accumulation over the years had led to great levels of dissatisfaction and public scepticism towards the DBE. Disruptions to the system like strike action and late delivery of materials and occasional reports of external union interference in the running of schools, led to interruptions and incidences of litigation against the department. Given the heightened public interest in education matters and the fact that basic education is a guaranteed entitlement under section 27 of the Constitution, any instance of disruption and litigation only widened the trust deficit between the public and the department, even before the merits of the litigation could be canvassed.

The relationship between the department and the teachers, similarly, exhibited longstanding tension points. According to Rossouw (2012), the period from 2007 to 2010 saw the largest and most extended strike actions in the history of the South African education system. Members of all teacher unions took part, their protest actions ranging from one day strikes, by some unions, to an extended strike of several weeks. The salary disputes were resolved when the unions accepted the salary increases that the government had finally offered.

These intersectional issues diminished the space for immediate improvements in education and squandered the country's opportunity to harness the constructive energies of different stakeholders toward the common purpose of a better education system.

These historical developments and trends formed the backdrop

of the development of the education chapter of the National Development Plan that was published in 2012. The NDP stated that -

*“By 2030, South Africans should have access to education and training of the highest quality’ leading to significantly improved learning outcomes. The performance of South African learners in international standardised tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access.”*

As with all public policy developments, the NDP was not without its sceptics, but it was universally regarded as the most powerful blueprint for the country's development prospects.

Some of the NDP's inspiring goals – particularly the commitment to ensure that 80% of learners pass Mathematics, Science, and Languages with at least 50% by 2030 and the need to achieve comparable performances in international benchmarks – reflected an ambition that was quite lofty in relation to the prevailing realities at the time. The gap between the national aspirations and the prevailing reality of the time is best captured by the snapshot of the system in 2012.

*Luwuvani Primary School in  
Limpopo Province, 2018*



*Table 2 – 2012 Matric Results*

<b>Total cohort – 511 152 learners</b>	<b>Maths</b>	<b>Science</b>
<b>Enrolments</b>	225 874	179 194
<b>Participation rate</b>	44%	35%
<b>Passes at 30% level</b>	121 970	109 198
<b>Pass rate at 30% level</b>	54%	61%
<b>Passes at 40% level</b>	80 716	70 076
<b>Pass rate at 40% level</b>	36%	39%
<b>Passes at 40% level as proportion of cohort</b>	16%	14%

*Source – DBE, 2013:11*

The low participation rates evident in this analysis must be contrasted against the NDP's target to increase the number of learners passing Mathematics and Physical Science to 350 000 and 320 000 by 2024 on the way to achieving the target of a 50% pass rate for 80% of learners by 2030. The NDP also proposed that 450 000 learners should pass Mathematics and Physical Science by 2030. As one can see, the gap between the planned outcomes and the then status quo would require significant and sustained efforts and resources over the period up to 2030. It is this type of challenge that would get the NECT started.

In a similar vein, the country's performance in the various international benchmarks tests that had been explicitly mentioned in the Diagnostic Report – SACMEQ (Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) alongside PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) – and which has lagged behind that of South Africa's peers, requires significant improvements if the benchmarks set in the NDP would be met by 2030.

The sobering picture of what needed to be done resonated with some influential stakeholders in society with longstanding involvement in matters of public activism, education and education policy. Given the resource limitations and competing priorities of the state, it became clear that the government on its own would not marshal enough resources within the planning horizon to address the multifaceted challenges underpinning the state of the education system.

This realisation that the achievement of the country's development goals would need the collective resources and expertise of all social partners to support the DBE led to the first tentative engagements involving the leadership of a collective of key role-players that would ultimately lead to the formation of the NECT.

After the publication of the NDP in August 2012, initial engagements involving Sizwe Nxasana, Godwin Khosa and Minister Angie Motshekga became the genesis of what would eventually become the NECT. Between August and December 2012, these three leaders formed a Convening Committee that initiated a conversation about how a model of partnerships and resource-sharing could be implemented within the basic education environment. The conversation immediately gravitated towards the identification of key



*Left to right: Mr Sizwe Nxasana (NECT Chairman); Hon Angie Motshekga (Minister of Basic Education); Hon Kgalema Motlanthe (Deputy President RSA); Bobby Godsell (NECT Patron); Dr Godwin Khosa (NECT CEO), during Leadership Dialogue, December 2012*

stakeholders that would have to be consulted in order to develop a blueprint for a future organisation.

As one would expect, the stakeholder universe for a system as intersectional and large as the basic education sector is rather wide. Fortunately, across the three initiators of the Convening Committee, deep collective insights about politics and policymaking, education and civil society, labour and business already existed, which made the process of creating the stakeholder universe quite seamless. Having established the broad framework of the collaboration model, the initiators embarked on a mission of identifying influential and distinguished South Africans from

across the business, civil society and education landscape to plant the seeds of the NECT conversation. In reaching out to citizens of influence with deep levels of expertise across different areas, the initiators wanted to widen the reach of the conversation and solicit the widest range of insights as building blocks of the NECT idea. Critically, the all-inclusive approach preferred by the initiators meant that the stakeholder canvas represented diverse organisations, viewpoints and philosophies, all united by the singular element of improving the country's education system.



That open-minded approach to the initial conversations was instrumental in canvassing a wide range of insights and opinions from different stakeholders.

The conclusion of this process was the creation of an expanded Convening Committee that included Dr. Futhi Mtoba – senior partner of Deloitte, Mrs. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka – the former Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Prof. Ihron Rensburg – the vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Ms. Thobile Ntola – the president of SADTU, Mr Basil Manuel – the president of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and Mr. Mugwena Maluleke – the secretary-general of SADTU. They all shared the view that the country's educational development goals were fundamentally important to the national agenda. Maluleke's role as the secretary-general

of the largest teacher union in the country ensured that the voice and views of teachers – who are fundamental role-players in the education system – would be embedded into the conversations about the development of the collaboration framework.

Guided by the NDP and the DBE's Action Plan Towards 2014, which served as the departmental blueprint for how the NDP could be implemented for the education sector, this expanded Convening Committee initiated a series of wide-ranging consultations across society that eventually culminated in the 2012 Leadership Dialogue. As part of this wide consultation process, JET Education Services (JET) prepared a deep-dive survey that was shared with education stakeholders across the board to gather a wide range of inputs and solicit opinions on some of the proposals for the development of the collaboration framework.

At the heart of these engagements was the acknowledgment that whilst the DBE is the custodian of the education system at large, it is the custodian of a system that belongs to the nation at large and has an importance that transcends political and ideological lines. Additionally, given the acknowledged realities of state resource limitations, the department on its own could not be expected to harness enough resources of a material and non-material nature to address all the key challenges that emerged from the broader social conversations and the NDP.

As Sizwe Nxasana – one of the convenors of the 2012 Leadership Dialogue and eventual Chairperson of the NECT clearly expressed in his opening address at the Dialogue – “This dialogue is meant to be apolitical and it recognises that education is a national priority, and therefore we hope it provides an opportunity for even those politically inclined organisations to explore joint societal actions, so we can begin to pull together. And hopefully, out of it, there are areas which may be very easy to fix, where we can actually get quick wins in terms of addressing some of the challenges that we have in the education space.”



That open-minded approach to the initial conversations was instrumental in canvassing a wide range of insights and opinions from different stakeholders.

In preparation for the Dialogue, JET, under the leadership of its then CEO Godwin Khosa, had embarked on a fact-finding process that included 32 interviews with individuals actively involved in education change initiatives through direct engagements and focus groups. Khosa's presentation at the Dialogue summarised the sum of inputs across 21 foundational issues that were raised by educational stakeholders. The issues covered matters within the education environment, educational policy, leadership and development, and physical and intellectual resources.

The map of 21 issues was further distilled into the six focus themes that would form the basis for further deliberations and engagements. It would be these themes together with the indefatigable efforts of the Leadership Collective embarking on a six-month journey of strategic planning, consultation and engagement that would give birth to the Education Collaboration Framework and lead ultimately to the birth of the NECT in July 2013.

## Six Focus Themes for Further Discussion at the Dialogue

- 1 Professionalising of the Civil Service**
- 2 Courageous Leadership**
- 3 Government Capacity to Deliver**
- 4 Resourcing: Teachers, Books and Infrastructure**
- 5 Community and Parent Involvement - State vs Public Schools**
- 6 The Role of Business and CSI Partnerships in Education**





*Choir during the Leadership Dialogue, December 2012*



## CHAPTER 2

# The evolution of collaboration

- The change to NECT evolves from an idea to a functional, operational platform for inter-sectoral collaboration and cooperation
- Its existence was made possible by the dedicated efforts of the Leadership Collective
- Bridging the historic trust gaps between government, business, labour and civil society was identified as a key condition for success for the NECT
- The inclusive nature of consultations and engagements enabled the NECT to break down silos across different stakeholders and emphasise the importance of working towards a common national purpose
- The NECT's initial blueprint – the thematic focus areas of the Collaboration Framework – achieved alignment with the national purpose by mapping its activities against the DBE's Action Plan 2014, which had been designed as the department's comprehensive response to the call to arms of Chapter 9 of the NDP

The 6th of December 2012 represented a pivotal moment in South Africa's education history.

The 6th of December 2012 represented a pivotal moment in South Africa's education history. The Minister of the DBE, Angie Motshekga, the Group CEO of FirstRand, Mr Sizwe Nxasana, and Godwin Khosa, the CEO of JET in their capacity as the Convening Committee, convened a Leadership Dialogue on The State and Future of Public Education in South Africa. The primary purpose of the Leadership Dialogue was to talk honestly about how to improve the education system in the country.

In preparing for the Dialogue, the Convening Committee invoked the spirit of cross-sectoral collaboration and consultation that had played a pivotal role in the fight against apartheid. The Dialogue brought together different groups of people who had a history of championing different ideas and beliefs and had worked in different operations and

*Former Deputy President Hon Kgalema Mothlante during the Leadership Dialogue, 2012*



organisations. What united them was that they all had a high regard for the role of education in reversing the persistent effects of apartheid. Before the Dialogue on the 6th of December, the Convening Committee collated contributions from a wide and diverse range of pre-dialogue contributors. The diversity of the pre-dialogue contributors included role-players in the academic and civil society arena – from universities, labour unions, school governing bodies, research bodies like Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), social rights advocacy groups like Section 27, the Children's Rights Centre and the Legal Resources Centre, and private sector leaders and political role-players including officials and MECs. This indicated the all-inclusive approach adopted by the Convening Committee of the Leadership Dialogue.

By putting together social partners with traditionally different political and ideological philosophies and convening a conversation around a common purpose of addressing the country's education system, the Leadership Dialogue broke new ground in social partnerships by enabling different stakeholders to talk transparently and honestly about ways of making the education system better.

*Hon Minister Naledi Pandor and NECT Patron Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka*



The conclusion of the 2012 Leadership Dialogue represented the initial step in an evolving journey towards the formation of the NECT. At inception, the process was guided by three critical reference points.

- The first was the NDP which called for government to “support collaboration between the business, academic and public sector”. This inter-sectoral cooperation to improve national educational outcomes that are responsive to community needs and the country’s national development agenda, was regarded as a critical enabler of the NDP.
- The second guidance document was the DBE’s Action Plan Towards 2014. This Action Plan represents the DBE’s comprehensive vision for how it planned to translate the NDP into actionable programmes. Given the wide array of responsibilities and challenges that the DBE had to address, the Action Plan has multiple objectives and incorporates short, medium and long-term outcomes structured around 27 goals.
- The third reference point was the Dialogue itself which had revealed that the range of issues that needed to be addressed was a matter of common consent amongst stakeholders. However, as all stakeholders agreed, the intention was never to replace the DBE but rather to offer complementary support.

The Education Collaboration Framework was born out of this process and sought to increase cooperation among the different stakeholders. Similarly, the intention was not to replace preexisting civil society and business projects and initiatives that were already underway in different forms. Rather, the big idea was to foster deeper coordination amongst stakeholders and also ensure that critical projects were embedded into the government’s reform agenda instead of being run as parallel initiatives far removed from the intentions and actions of the DBE.

The acknowledgment that various organisations had been doing stellar work was matched with the realisation that some initiatives were not reaching the impact and reach that was necessary due to the missing platform of a coordination structure. By creating a Collaboration Framework, the sum of discrete initiatives and new ideas would stand a better chance of improving the performance of partnership initiatives in terms of efficiency, impact, value for money and sustainability.

Having distilled the range of inputs into 21 key issues, the Dialogue secretariat and the Leadership Collective – made up of a number of individuals involved in the education sector working with the Minister of Basic Education – embarked on a process of firstly testing the alignment between the ideas articulated at the Dialogue, the NDP and the DBE’s Action Plan. Each of the resultant six themes addressed multiple issues and also served to guide the envisaged collaboration. The six resultant thematic areas found alignment with the key policy and programme documents of the state as outlined in the table below:



Theme	Alignment with Action Plan 2014	Role of Education Collaboration Framework
Professionalisation of the teaching service (Page 6 of the 2013 Education Collaboration Framework)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 14</b> – attracting a new group of young, motivated and appropriately trained teachers to the profession</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 16</b> – improve the professionalism, teaching skills, subject knowledge and computer literacy of teachers throughout their careers</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 17</b> – strive for a teacher workforce that is healthy and enjoys a sense of job satisfaction</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 18</b> – ensure that teachers cover all the topics and skills areas that they should cover within the school year</li> </ul>	<p>Supporting government to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up the framework and materials required to implement the Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development</li> <li>• Train teachers and support them in the classroom</li> <li>• Build capacity at school management and district levels to support and monitor teachers, with a specific focus on underperforming schools</li> <li>• Improve the effectiveness of teachers and education officials</li> </ul>
Courageous and effective leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 21</b> – ensure that the basic annual management processes occur across all schools in the country in a way that contributes towards a functional school environment.</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 22</b> – improve parent and community participation in the governance of schools, partly by improving access to important information via the e-Education strategy</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 23</b> – ensure that all schools are funded at least at the minimum levels as prescribed and transparent and efficient utilisation of funds</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 27</b> – improve the frequency and quality of the monitoring and support services provided to schools by district offices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver widespread training on good governance at school, district and provincial levels</li> <li>• Take actions to empower managers to make decisions and to be accountable for the decisions they make</li> <li>• Assist leaders to set examples and provide models of behaviour for officials and learners to follow</li> <li>• Review the institutional governance framework at schools</li> </ul>

Improving resourcing to create conducive and safe learning environments: teachers, books and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 19</b> – ensure that every learner has access to the minimum set of textbooks and workbooks required according to national policy</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 20</b> – increase access amongst learners to a wide range of media which enrich their education</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 24</b> – ensure that the physical infrastructure environment of every school inspires learners to want to learn, and teachers to want to teach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve maintenance, retrieval and utilisation of workbooks, textbooks and readers in schools</li> <li>• Develop a wide range of African language readers</li> <li>• Complement the provision of additional learning and teaching support materials</li> <li>• Develop and maintain an infrastructure demand and maintenance system that will inform infrastructure investments made by both government and its partners</li> <li>• Increase the provision of infrastructure and IT resources, prioritising libraries and science laboratories</li> <li>• Increase the provision and utilisation of IT resources for teachers and learners</li> </ul>
Community and parent involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 22</b> – improve parent and community participation in the governance of schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise the existing talent and capacity that exists outside the confines of the public schooling system to support schooling, particularly literacy, Maths and Science education</li> <li>• Rebuild public accountability through providing parents with checklists of what to expect from schools, teachers and learners and promoting advocacy programmes to reinforce the messages</li> <li>• Integrate aspects of active citizenship and ethics into programmes targeting teachers, school managers and governing bodies</li> </ul>

<p>Learner support and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 11</b> – improve the access of children to quality Early Childhood Development below Grade 1</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 25</b> – use schools as vehicles for promoting access to a range of public services amongst learners in areas such as health, poverty alleviation, psychosocial support, sport and culture</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan Goal 26</b> – increase the number of schools that effectively implement the inclusive education policy and have access to centres that offer specialist services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the provision of psychosocial services such as eyesight screening and psychological support</li> <li>• Complement nutrition in schools</li> <li>• Contribute to resourcing school sports and cultural activities</li> </ul>
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*Basil Manual (Executive Director NAPTOSA) and Mary Meltcalfe (Executive Director PILO) during the Leadership Dialogue, 2012*






Over the years,  
key stakeholders  
in government,  
business and  
civil society  
had grown  
apart as issues  
of common  
purpose were  
not being  
amicably  
addressed.

The 2012 Leadership Dialogue and the Education Collaboration Framework represented a move from distrustful engagements. The Leadership Collective team identified key individuals in the business, academic, civil society and political communities who would champion the mission of the NDP's call for inter-sectoral cooperation to improve educational outcomes.

After the Leadership Collective had communicated the various aspects of the work that would be necessary to create the Collaboration Framework, the need to establish a properly-resourced and well-governed structure became obvious. As founders of a new organisation that sought to bridge significant trust gaps across different stakeholders, the Leadership Collective was sharply aware of the need to take advantage of the networks and strong relationships that each stakeholder enjoyed in the public arena in order to create a strong public profile for the organisation.

Whilst the Minister of Basic Education fully endorsed the idea, it was regarded as important to widen the reach and secure support from other political role-players. The education system at large remains a national competency, and maintaining support from policymakers and lawmakers was regarded as a critical enabler of success. In identifying individuals who would be part of the process, great care was taken to ensure that the vision of the NECT was articulated well enough so that patrons and supporters were fully aware of the key mission and could more easily identify how they could harness their social and political resources to advance the cause of the NECT.

In a similar vein, the identification of business leaders and business groups that were approached by the Leadership Collective, ensured that the support required for the formation of the NECT should be realised in a short period of time. One of the most important actions undertaken by the Leadership Collective was to ensure the inclusion of key educational stakeholder groups in the development of the NECT blueprint. Given their roles in the governance of the education system, teacher unions and school governing bodies were part of the NECT from the onset. This approach was aligned with the idea of ensuring that initiatives to be



introduced under the umbrella of the NECT's activities would be deeply embedded into the system and not exist as parallel activities without the collective buy-in of all key stakeholders. As the representative group for big business in South Africa, Business Leadership South Africa (BLSA) was a critical stakeholder whose inputs were solicited through strategic consultation meetings involving Bobby Godsell (Chairman of BLSA), Mark Lamberti, (Executive Committee member) and Thero Setiloane, Chief Executive Officer of BLSA and the Convening Committee. The buy-in from big business was important as the involvement of business as support partners with high levels of innovation and acceleration would be instrumental in coordinating the collaboration space between government and social partners.

The Leadership Collective also acknowledged the fact that the country's political leadership had explicitly stated a commitment to addressing the challenges in the education system. In his 2008 address at the ZK Matthews Memorial Lecture at the University of Fort Hare, President Kgalema Motlanthe called for the country to "improve the quality of its education system and address the mismatch between the needs of the economy and the content of our education". In his inaugural State of the Nation Address in 2009, President Jacob Zuma stated that the government's key priority for the five years of the fourth democratic administration was that schools would be turned into thriving centres of excellence. It was in light of this sense of goodwill and these commitments at the political leadership level that the Leadership Collective extended its consultations process to include briefings to the then-Deputy President Motlanthe and President Jacob Zuma at the Presidential guesthouses in Cape Town and Pretoria to articulate the vision of the Education Collaboration Framework. The buy-in from the Presidency was unequivocal and enabled the Leadership Collective to complete the consultation loop that had been initiated in the middle of 2012.

At the conclusion of the consultative process, the NECT was registered as a trust whose primary function was to be the instrument of implementation for the Education Collaboration Framework.

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For advocacy, a group of patrons with significant public leadership roles was selected and accepted the roles. The patrons were then-deputy chairperson of the National Planning Commission and current President of the Republic of South Africa – Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, Bobby Godsell – an esteemed business leaders and then-chairman of Business Leadership South Africa, James Motlatsi, a former president of the National Union of Mineworkers, and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, a former deputy president of the Republic of South Africa and founder of the Umlambo Foundation.

When Minister Motshekga reflected on the choice of these leaders as patrons of the NECT, she highlighted the significant roles they had played in the country's education agenda even before the NECT was formed. President Ramaphosa's role as the Deputy Chair of the National Planning Commission meant he already had an intimate understanding of the clarion call to action from the NDP. Having interacted extensively with the work of the Umlambo Foundation, Minister Motshekga regarded Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka's work in the various civil society organisations working towards addressing tensions around HIV/AIDS when she was in the Presidency as critical to the type of work the NECT wished to conduct in

the education space. The chief advocates for the NECT – Mr. Sizwe Nxasana, Mr. Godwin Khosa and Prof. Ihron Rensburg – had already established strong public profiles in the education and business leadership sectors.

The NECT's governance model required a Board of Trustees to be appointed to oversee the organisation. The Trustees – most of whom have remained part of the organisation for the past ten years – had expertise and insights into the key focus areas of the NECT and the elements that needed to work collectively in order to put the NECT action plan into action.

The diversity of views and perspectives within the Board, increased the capacity to think strategically and deliberately about the work that needed to be undertaken. In order to maintain the consultative reach that had been harnessed during the 2012 Leadership Dialogue and in the Education Collaboration Framework, the NECT also planned to introduce a National Education Council that would be made up of members of the following structures –

- The academic community
- Government and statutory bodies
- Labour organisations
- Independent sector schools
- Civil society organisations
- Trusts and foundations
- Youth organisations

Upon reflecting on the efficacy of the model, the NECT shifted towards the introduction of a Dialogue Programme to focus on strategic issues. It rolled out District Steering Committees (DSCs) to maintain a consultative model. Such structures mirrored the diverse range of stakeholders that the National Education Council structure had envisaged.

For the operational elements of the NECT model, Godwin Khosa's work at JET and his work undertaken in leading the secretarial work of the Leadership Dialogue and later on, the NECT Board, made him the natural choice for the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the NECT. Armed with a robust advocacy, oversight and governance model, the NECT was now ready to spring into action and support the country's mission towards improving its educational outcomes.

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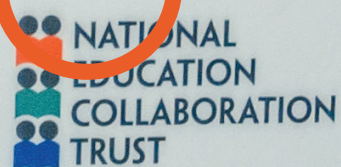


*NECT initial Board of Trustees, Patrons and Industry leaders during the leadership dialogue at the Presidential Guest House, 2012*



*NECT Trustees and Partners during NECT Annual Report Launch at Sasol Head-Office, 2019*

NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
COLLABORATION  
TRUST



## CHAPTER 3

# Harnessing social capital to drive the NECT's mission

- Focus on the political and policy issues associated with the formation of the NECT
- Focus areas – formation of public-private partnerships and promoting collaboration between the state and private sector
- Embracing the role of complementary agents in the education system



*Minister Angie Motshekga*



In addition to matters of poor coordination, the NECT also identified the prevalence of negative perceptions about the public education system and government at large as disincentives to resource mobilisation and cooperation.

Minister Motshekga captures this by reflecting on the trust deficit that prevailed and led to polarisation between government and social partners. In this case, business leaders who usually focus on value for money tend to worry about putting financial resources into the big government pot where it becomes difficult to track and accountability mechanisms aren't linear. To get to the bottom of these perceptions, the NECT incorporated difficult conversations about these issues into its Leadership Dialogue and beyond.

One of the critical outcomes of the discussions that took place in the initial Leadership Dialogue of 2012 was the realisation that the bedrock of the education system was black middle-aged women, predominantly teaching in primary schools. These women were critical assets for the education system and the country at large. As Godwin Khosa emphasised in the 2012 dialogue, the perception that teachers were merely lethargic and disengaged underperformers within a dysfunctional environment was not true. In fact, schools were generally more functional than they had been before 1994 and the majority of

JUNIOR JOURNALIST  
cyrilramaphosa@citypress.co.za

A general strike by public service workers looks set to go ahead as South African trade unions this week moved to declare a deadlock after the last round of negotiations with the department of public service and administration failed to yield the desired outcome.

Government is understood to have doubled down on its stance that National Treasury had no money to pay for public sector salary increases.

According to the unions, government's only "revised offer" came in the form of a proposal that funds currently allocated for pay progression, resettlement costs for workers relocated to another province and daily allowances should no longer be paid out. Instead, those funds would be channelled towards the salary increases that are being demanded by public sector workers.

The proposal has been described by Public Servants Association (PSA) general manager, Reuben Moleka, as "absurd" and amounting to "nothing more than a mere shifting around of funds" to no real benefit for workers.

"Labour thus rejected the employer's offer and jointly indicated that a deadlock had been reached. The dispute resolution processes, as per the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council constitutional provisions, will now be followed," Moleka said.

"It is important to ensure that this procedure is followed meticulously to avoid delays that could derail the dispute process, bearing in mind that public servants should have received salary increases on April 1."

"The employer further proposed a review of all allowances and the leave dispensation of public servants as it believes that there are too many leave categories and allowances for public servants. The PSA was, however, adamant that the union would not agree to reduce any benefits that public

# Civil servants gear up to STRIKE

Mchunu is adamant that Treasury has **no money** for salary increases as the country faces a myriad of challenges

servants were currently entitled to. These benefits were achieved through years of intense negotiations."

Moleka added that the PSA had advised the union's more than 235 000 members to prepare for industrial action to secure a decent salary increase and protect existing benefits.

The PSA, other trade unions affiliated to Cosatu, and the Federation of Unions of SA (Fosasa), had tabled a salary increase proposal linked to inflation plus 4%.

The demand is higher than February's 2.9% inflation rate and the SA Reserve Bank's forecast of an average of 4.2% inflation this year.

Other demands included a R2500 housing

allowance and a payout of 12% of a public servant's salary if they are affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the department reiterated that salaries were paid by Treasury, whose stance is that there are no funds to foot the bill for any sort of increase. Treasury blamed this on South Africa's poor economic condition.

## THE STANDOFF

At their last meeting on April 15, the department formally tabled a 0% offer, effectively meaning that

public servants would not be getting any salary increases for a second year in a row.

Unions did not accept this, saying it was a slap in the face for workers who had been at the forefront of fighting the pandemic. They were expecting a revised offer from government during negotiations on Friday, which lasted long into the night.

Instead of getting their way, unions told City Press that they were subjected to "a lecture on patriotism" and were told how they ought to look out for the interests of the country's citizens instead of just those of their members.

What was also puzzling for the unions was that local government authorities made an offer of 2.8%, while

on mass action. While public sector unions affiliated to Cosatu and Fosa have not specified when the strike is likely to take place, Moleka told City Press it would be in June.

This was because the unions needed to consult with their members, then deliberate among themselves before the national mass action could go ahead, he said.

December Masuku, Nelson's deputy general-secretary, said: "These workers were supposed to receive these salaries this month, and this has not happened. And on top of this, the increases they were meant to get last year were never honoured."

Masuku said that, after failing to reach an amicable solution after 21 days of negotiations, the unions were left with no choice but to declare a deadlock.



NOT BUDOZI  
Senzo Mchunu



READY TO DOWN TOOLS  
Reuben Moleka

**MCHUNU WEIGHS IN**  
After bending over backwards and securing public servants inflation-busting salary increases for more than a decade, which accelerated the deterioration of the focus, Public Service and Administration Minister Senzo Mchunu has now drawn a line in the sand.

Mchunu, to the frustration of the unions, briefed the media on the eve of the final round of negotiations this week, restating National Treasury's stance that there was no money for any salary increases.

Mchunu said there was "no plan B for us [the department]; we only have one plan and there are no funds".

As a result, the minister said he had informed government negotiators to highlight to the unions' representatives that there were other interested parties in the public sector wage negotiations, beyond the unions and the department, such as "the country's citizens and their interests".

# Back to school for a day makes all the difference

Ordinary citizens can become involved in education

A NATION'S history may be written in books, but a nation's future is written on the chalkboards of its schools. What happens in the classroom today determines what will happen in our country tomorrow. In recognition of this reality several hundred volunteers from a number of prominent South African companies went back to school last week as part of the "Back to School for a Day" initiative launched by the Adopt-a-School Foundation. These volunteers are at the forefront of an effort to involve South Africans in the education of our children.

They visited more than 50 schools around the country, reaching over 25 000 pupils. They were involved in a variety of activities that ranged from career guidance, planting trees, cleaning, donating books, organising literacy programmes, and holding discussions on HIV/Aids. Some companies hosted community awards ceremonies, honouring those who have demonstrated a commitment to improving education in their

## Another view Cyril Ramaphosa

Businessman and politician



communities. There were workshops on technology, and learners were introduced to careers in steel, logistics, food, banking, mining, law and other areas of business.

Through their efforts, these volunteers have made the important statement that education is a societal issue. The state of education affects everyone because it is so closely linked to the country's growth and development. Every citizen has a direct interest in seeing the quality and accessibility of education improved. As these volunteers have demonstrated, there is much that ordinary citizens can do to contribute towards realising such improvements.

It is envisaged that the "Back to School for a Day" initiative will be an annual event on the first Friday of May, with a call to South Africans to go back to school to enrich the lives of pupils by sharing their time, compassion, skills, knowledge and resources. Just one day of collective action can have a huge, life-changing impact on pupils. Not only do they benefit directly from the interaction with people with a variety of skills, backgrounds and insights, but the experience has a deeper significance. It affirms the value that society places on the success of each pupil. It offers them recognition

encourage inspiration morale of t recognise t appreciates

Yet the b initiative e an annual e is a compel all citizens involved in sustained b Motshekga Education, "Research learner ach dependent support an involvem members o

It is criti take greate Where the educati Where their parents sh efforts to a they should people who children in engaged. T skills, reso within the l that can be improve ed

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## Old news article clips

teachers were committed to doing good, especially when working with children who had just started school. This clearly contradicted the prevailing narrative that teachers were underqualified and lacking commitment.

In the past, teacher training colleges produced the bulk of teachers for the education system. This practice existed before 1994 and continued until the teacher colleges were merged into other institutions as part of the broader higher education reform. Under this old model, the continuous professional development of teachers was not regarded central to the education system. Given the inevitable changes that occur in an education system over time, the

ability to empower teachers along the journey was and still is an important element of managing the development of the education system.

In the 2012 Leadership Dialogue, Sizwe Nxasana emphasised the importance of the professionalisation, not just of the teaching profession but also of partnerships, as a necessary step towards building a capable state. This was echoed by Godwin Khosa, who indicated that the initial information-gathering process undertaken by JET, had highlighted the professionalisation of the civil service as the second big issue identified by education stakeholders. This was linked to the human resource dimension, where a feeling prevailed that the role of the South African Council for Educators should be revisited and amplified in order to protect the teaching profession.

SADTU's then-president, Thobile Ntola, also recognised the importance of professionalisation in unions for improving educational outcomes.

During the initial discussions, it became evident that the stakeholders involved in the education system possessed significant social capital within their respective areas of influence. Unions played a crucial role in advocating for and supporting teachers, with their negotiating powers representing the collective interests of the

teacher body in policy and strategic matters. School governing bodies also held considerable sway in the education system as a key element of school governance. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) having worked extensively in the education system, had established important relationships with schools and districts at the grassroots level.

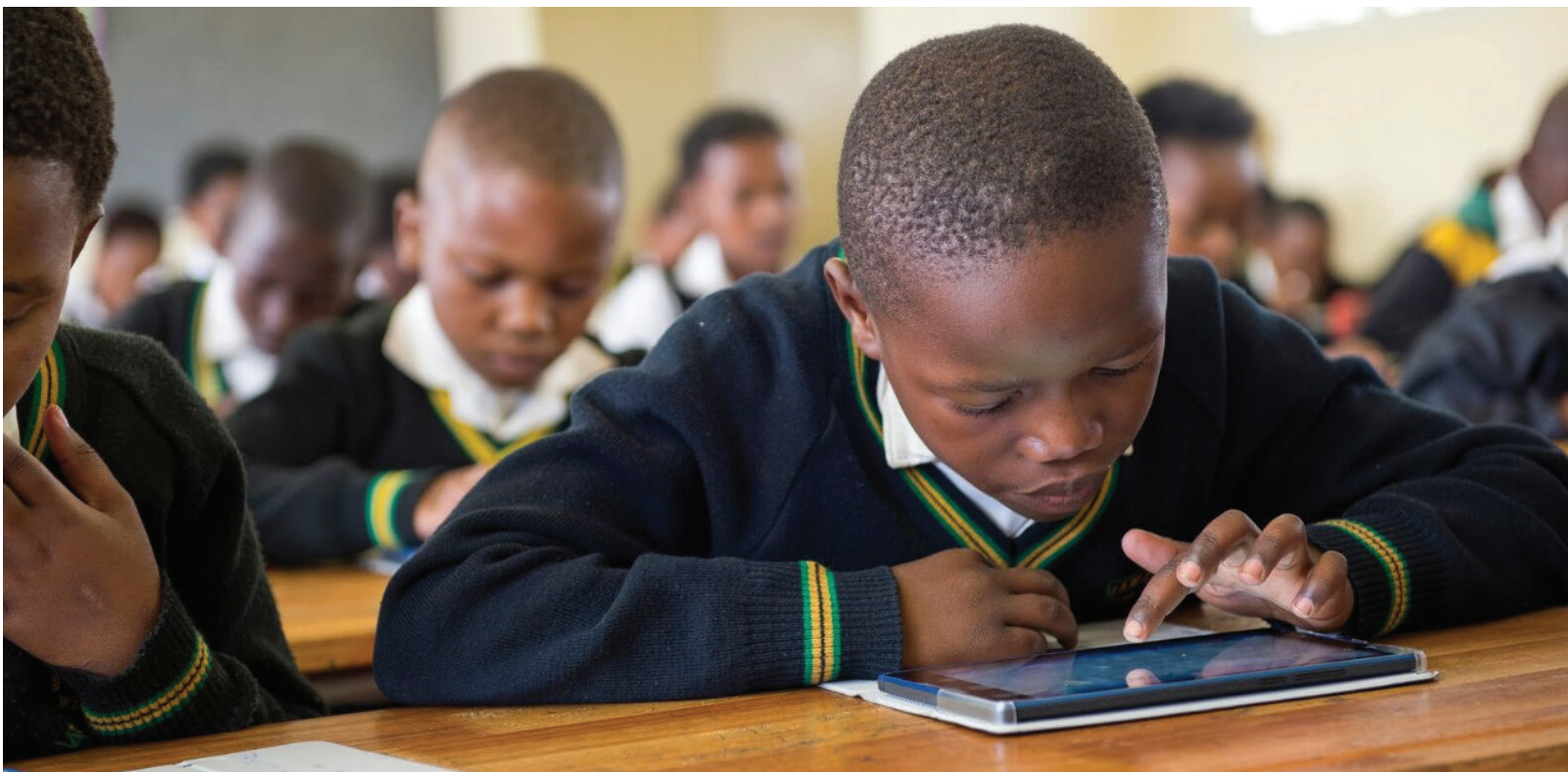
Traditionally, the relationships among government, labour, NGOs, business and other social stakeholders have been marked by a lack of mutual trust. This trust deficit primarily stemmed from differing ideological and practical perspectives on how to address crucial issues in education. For instance, business, with its abundant resources, might propose a particular model for implementing important initiatives that significantly differs from the government's own approach. This divergence could be attributed to their respective *raison d'être* – a government department holds collective responsibility for the entire system, whereas a private organisation has the freedom to define its own mandate for educational improvements. When there is no consensus on fundamental issues, there is a high risk of resources being scattered, with each stakeholder allocating them based on a narrow rather than a comprehensive mandate. As a result, the cumulative efforts would yield minimal substantive improvements in the overall system.

In line with the explicitly stated recommendation of the NDP on cross-sector collaboration, the NECT identified the breaking down of the social silos as critical to the pursuit of

common goals. Whether one identified the political capital of Minister Motshekga and the policy and administrative capacity and expertise of Bobby Soobrayan as the Director-General of the DBE, the business and social influence of Futhi Mtoba, Mark Lamberti and Sizwe Nxasana, the deep educational insights of Ihron Rensburg and Professor Brian Figaji, the transcendental influence of union leaders like Nkosana Dolopi, Basil Manuel, Professor Takalani Mashau, and the leadership experience and expertise of Godwin Khosa, the need to convert it all into a common melting pot of collective influence could only be achieved through a structure like the NECT.

When critical stakeholders speak past each other on matters of national concern, the risk of negative engagements and retreating back to the silos is escalated. As one union leader put it during the 2012 Leadership Dialogue, one of the responsibilities of union leaders is to advocate for and defend the interests of their core constituency. If a major education stakeholder issues a public statement with highly negative connotations about union members, the instinctive reaction for union leaders is to defend the interest of the members. This escalates into a public engagement that may not mirror the more measured reflections that happen away from the public eye. Up to today, the NECT provides a platform for education stakeholders to deliberate on issues of divergence substantively before they become part of a public fallout.

When there is no consensus on fundamental issues, there is a high risk of resources being scattered, with each stakeholder allocating them based on a narrow rather a comprehensive mandate.



As a newly established organisation in the education sector, the NECT couldn't afford to take a long route to build social awareness and public credibility. Instead, it relied on leveraging the existing social influence of its key partners and collaborators to accelerate its journey towards gaining public legitimacy. This was especially crucial considering the involvement of the DBE and the use of public resources. This all meant that an element of public scrutiny into the affairs of the NECT was to be expected, and hence its governance and accountability systems needed to be fit for purpose from the outset.

To bring together various stakeholders and promote the mission and visibility of the NECT, Godwin Khosa highlighted the importance of aligning unions, civil society, business, government and labour towards a common goal. However, the NECT recognised this challenge as one they had to continuously master. The NECT established principles to guide its interactions with stakeholders, improving the chances of maintaining relationships and executing its plans.

Commenting on his ten years as the CEO of the NECT, Khosa reflected that the successful coordination of stakeholders with different viewpoints relies on humility, patience and courage. These qualities are crucial in preserving relationships, especially considering past issues of trust. Khosa intimated that it was and

remains important for the NECT to listen to business and their valuable solutions while addressing the concerns of other stakeholders who may feel anxious about new initiatives. This approach helps maintain strategic relationships.

Khosa, along with Sizwe Nxasana and Minister Motshekga, believe that the NECT's existence as a platform for deliberations has brought greater stability to the education system. It has helped prevent strikes, reduce mistrust and foster a better understanding of each stakeholder's interest in the success of the country's education system. The NECT's long-term strategy for and investment in building social capital proved successful during the Covid-19 crisis, as NECT became the primary reference point for coordinating national activities and ensuring educational continuity.

In summary, the NECT's ability to bring stakeholders together, guided by principles of humility, patience, and courage has positively impacted the education system. It has minimised conflicts, built trust and played a crucial role in navigating challenges, including the Covid-19 crisis.

The benefits of collaborative efforts in intervening within large systems are multifaceted and far-reaching. Professor Sarah Gravett, the Dean of Education at the University of Johannesburg, emphasised that the establishment of the NECT was crucial for facilitating meaningful conversations and promoting a shared understanding of critical education issues. Through dialogues and inclusive voices, the NECT fostered coordination and consensus.


Professor Brian Figaji, the former Vice-Chancellor of Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Trustee of the NECT, highlighted the gradual elimination of territorial thinking among stakeholders as a significant change brought by the NECT. Figaji reminisced that initially, some stakeholders doubted the feasibility of working with the DBE, but the NECT successfully convinced businesses and civil society about the benefits of collaboration. The involvement of respected businessman Sizwe Nxasana as the Trust's Chairperson lent credibility to the NECT, while the commitment of the Minister and the Director-General Bobby Soobrayan signalled the DBE's dedication and the fact that the NECT was regarded as an important institutional partner. Collaboration with trade unions was driven by a shared commitment, which proved crucial for their involvement.

This dedication to building social capital around the NECT played a pivotal role in establishing it as a key player in the education system over the past decade. The NECT's leadership was instrumental in creating the National Association for Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE), a self-sustaining platform that enhances collaboration between NGOs and the DBE. According to Miss Vuyiswa Ncontsa, when the DBE wanted to create a platform for various NGOs to collaborate more effectively with the DBE, the NECT was a leading voice in establishing the NASCEE.

The genesis of the process was the realisation that whilst there were quite a number of NGOs in the education space working towards the common goal of improving education outcomes, there were three main challenges that NGOs in the sector faced. These were –

- The persistence of legacy challenges within the education sector
- The diversity in function, focus, purpose and approach of the non-profit entities working in the sector
- The accelerating pace of change in the non-profit sector






In spite of the long history of NGOs in the education sector, it was clear that the sector lacked a strong voice with which to engage government and donors from a position of strength. This put NGOs individually and collectively at a disadvantage. The high cost of internal management and governance resources like back-office support and oversight structures means that many NGOs do not have strong internal capacity to amplify their work. In response to this challenge, a group of collaborators, including Old Mutual, the Zenex Foundation, JET Education Services, the DBE and the NECT, introduced a joint initiative aimed at ultimately creating an umbrella structure for NGOs in the education sector.

In the initial Education NGO Leadership Summit convened by the NECT and held in March 2016, over 100 delegates representing government, unions, NGOs and the private sector deliberated on issues of common consent in the education NGO space. In her keynote address, Minister Motshekga had highlighted the importance of NGO involvement in the education sector by stating “Government benefits a lot from the excellent work that the NGO sector does; and when we need distinction in our work we look to the NGOs to provide the cutting edge”.

Godwin Khosa has also emphasised the importance of conversations amongst NGOs, the private sector funders and government. Khosa stated “There is clear an unequivocal support for the role that the NGO sector plays in the implementation of the NDP”. Beyond the NGO Leadership Summit, the NECT commissioned a paper that reflected on the historical role of NGOs and proposed new roles within the education space. The paper – authored by John Volmink and Lynn van der Elst (2017), emphasised that the role of NGOs in supporting national development priorities remained critical and found support in the NDP which states that NGOs play a crucial role as social partners. The paper also called for the ‘measures to regularise and systematise the education-focused social compact through the establishment of a national collaborative initiative...tasked with bringing together all stakeholders to drive efforts at improving learning outcomes in schools, starting with the worst performers’ (Volmink & van der Elst, 2017:11).

It was on the back of these developments that the NASCEE was successfully established with the primary vision to organise education sector NGOs around the priority areas in education and work towards building a high-quality, equitable education system for all South Africans. The NECT contributed technical resources through funding the research paper that became instrumental in the process of translating the deliberations of the NGO Leadership Summit. Godwin Khosa and Vuyiswa Ncontsa regard the NECT’s role in the formation of NASCEE as an important illustration of the NECT’s leadership role in the education NGO community. The NECT also contributed seed funding towards the capacitation of the NASCEE secretariat as the organisation found its foot as the new umbrella body for NGOs in the sector. In reflecting on the importance of the creation of the NASCEE platform, Vuyiswa Ncontsa regards this as an example of the NECT using its significant clout and credibility to assist the broader civil society sector and by extension, the education sector, where all these organisations were making a contribution.

It was on the back of these developments that the National Association for Social Change Entities in Education (NASCEE) was successfully established, with the primary vision to organise education sector NGOs around the priority areas in education and work towards building a high-quality, equitable education system for all South Africans.



## Drawing NGO partners together to harness the power of collectivism - the NECT's role in the formation of NASCEE

NECT's collaborative  
framework was recognized as  
the quintessential model for  
fostering ideal partnerships  
among NGOs.

In 2016, the NECT applied its insights in creating another collaborative structure for the benefit of the country's education system.

- The establishment of NASCEE saw NECT's multifaceted involvement, encompassing strategic planning, coordination and financial support.
- The NECT played a central role in organising the inaugural Education NGO Leadership Summit held in Benoni in 2016.
- NECT's collaborative framework was recognised as the quintessential model for fostering ideal partnerships among NGOs.
- The initial funding for the NGO Leadership Summit was provided by NECT as seed capital.
- The NECT initiated the commissioning of a paper titled "The Evolving Role of 21st Century Education NGOs in South Africa: Challenges and Opportunities."
- This document continues to serve as a crucial point of reference for the education sector's NGO community, offering invaluable insights for optimising the impact of various programmes and endeavors on the education system.
- The NECT considers this contribution a pivotal aspect of promoting the national capacity-building principles advocated in the NDP.

These developments, along with the embrace of the NECT by social partners, demonstrate the positive impact of the social capital building programme initiated ten years ago that has resulted in a massive positive social dividend for the country.

## Collaboration with partners in the NGO sector – the symbiosis between the NECT and Room-to-Read

When interviewed about the NECT's "big picture role" in the education civil society space, Room-to-Read – an organisation in the education NGO community – regards the NECT as an important vehicle for NGO players to engage the Department and deliberate on issues around the country. Room-to-Read's footprint across different districts, and its access to international networks make it a strategically important NGO partner for the NECT.

Reflecting on the NECT's willingness to work with other partners in the NGO sector, Room-to-Read's Vanessa Frances (Room-to-Read Country Director) and Jacqui Dornbrack (Literacy Director) stated that the NECT has been a collaborative partner in key projects where Room-to-Read's capacity and expertise in reading and literacy has been harnessed to support NECT programmes. The implementation of the National Reading Champions initiative provided an opportunity for the NECT to work with Room-to-Read in order to support the programme of promoting a culture of reading and encouraging children to read by engaging them in reading for enjoyment. The partnership between the NECT and Room-to-Read is a mutually beneficial relationship that enables the organisations to work towards a better-coordinated support system for the education sector.

Catherine Ngwane – the Programmes Operations Director at Room-to-Read, recalls the initiative in 2020 where Room-to-Read used its networks to acquire books which were shared with other NGOs in the education sector. In this initiative, the NECT received 20 000 books from Room-to-Read. The NECT then distributed these books to the various programmes and initiatives it was involved in. The relationship between the NECT and Room-to-Read includes the sharing of

technical resources and insights. Vanessa Francis has been involved in different initiatives at the NECT since 2014 in an advisory capacity and also contributes to development of materials like the resources developed for the National Reading Champions programme.

When the NECT conceptualised the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme programme, Room-to-Read shared its insights on decodable literacy skills development with the NECT to assist in the development of the programme. This has enabled the NECT to continue its longstanding practice of engaging and learning from other NGO roleplayers and also enabling them to lead initiatives as implementation agents.

The implementation of the National Reading Champions initiative provided an opportunity for the NECT to work with Room-to-Read in order to support the programme of promoting a culture of reading and encouraging children to read by engaging them in reading for enjoyment.

*NECT staff during Summer School, 2023*

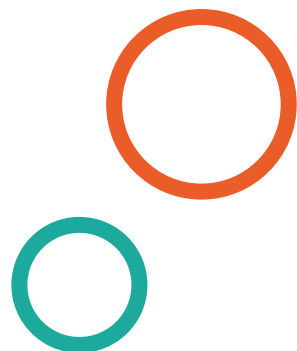


## CHAPTER 4

# Internal Capacity: the cornerstone of the NECT

- The formation of the NECT included individuals with notable profiles in the public sphere whose advocacy for the NECT entrenched its public visibility and credibility
- The NECT achieved successes through partnerships with sector experts and internal capacities that have been built up and continuously refined since inception
- Individuals like Dhianaraj Chetty, Duncan Hindle, John Thurlow and others played significant roles in deepening the NECT's internal capacity
- The organisation recognised the importance of building internal capacity as a critical success factor
- Only after establishing internal capacity did the NECT differentiate itself from other organisations attempting educational interventions





## The middle of 2013 represented a watershed moment for the NECT.

Having completed the groundwork for establishing the founding principles of the organisation, the NECT needed to get on the ground and start working. As a new organisation, the NECT naturally anticipated some school fees would be paid particularly in finding the right people for the type of organisation it was envisioned to be. As Vuyiswa Ncontsa – (who was then with the Alma Philanthropies and USAID) indicated during her reflections on the NECT's first decade, the donors who form the nucleus of the NGO sector funding model place a high emphasis on the integrity of the accountability structures of funded organisations. For new organisations, a lack of a track record limits their capacity to engage in substantive fundraising activities and delays the rollout of even the most well-intentioned initiatives.

The relationship between teacher unions, government and society has not always been a linear one. During times of disputes that led to strike action, significant disruptions in the system affect all stakeholders and result in the loss of teaching and learning time.

For the NECT, the solution to this hurdle was the onboarding and involvement of individuals with strong reputations as custodians of institutional accountability in various spheres. It also became clear that the social legitimacy enjoyed by the individuals involved in the formation of the NECT needed to be embedded in the NECT's governance and oversight model. Futhi Mtoba – a seasoned chartered accountant and senior partner of the local arm of the international accounting firm, Deloitte, came with a stellar track record in the governance and financial oversight of organisations. Equally, Sizwe Nxasana as a former auditor and CEO of large, listed companies provided in-depth insights into the management of large budgets and putting together the right oversight mechanisms that would meet the expectations of the donor community.

The involvement of senior business leaders such as Mark Lamberti was instrumental in addressing the natural anxieties associated with new organisations. These were especially acute for the NECT given its unusual relationship with the public and private sectors. As articulated by Bobby Soobrayan – then-Director-General in the DBE – during the 2012 Dialogue, civil society had a role to play working with government to eliminate inequalities, improve performance, improve teaching practices and learning in the classroom in response to specific challenges. The dual accountability mechanism – where government is accountable to society at large and its support partners – would remain an important part of the NECT model as it enables the support for the DBE on critical decisions. The inclusion of Professor Brian Figaji, who was extensively involved with several Boards of development organisations and corporations such as JET Education Services, the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) and Nedbank, brought additional diverse secondary networks to the NECT in his capacity as a Trustee. This meant that the commitment made in the 2012 Dialogue to develop an inclusive organisation was implemented in the NECT’s operational model.

The relationship between teacher unions, government and society has not always been a linear one. During times of disputes that lead to strike action, significant disruptions in the system affect all stakeholders and result in the loss of teaching and learning time. It takes long periods to recover lost teaching and learning time. Strike action creates instability in the system, and this should be avoided. As the NECT’s activities were envisaged to be deeply embedded into the existing system, the buy-in of teachers as critical stakeholders was fundamentally important. Labour union representatives on the NECT governance structures serve as the primary sounding board for the discussion of initiatives that have a direct impact on the classroom experience. These representatives also ensure that the key messages around proposed initiatives are properly canvassed with the union membership prior to the initiatives being rolled out within the NECT table prior to their rollout.

SADTU and NAPTOSA, represented by Nkosana Dolopi (SADTU Deputy Secretary-General) and Basil Manuel

(NAPTOSA President) respectively, played a crucial role in the NECT governance model. They ensured that the teaching community understood the NECT initiatives and facilitated proactive engagements between the DBE and the unions. This collaboration led to improved relations, stability, and fewer disruptions in the education system. The positive effects of this collaboration extended beyond the NECT’s programmes to the overall relationship among key players in the education system.

JET, then led by Godwin Khosa, played a vital role in providing secretarial support during the consultative process that led to the formation of the NECT. This highlighted the importance of the insights gathered by JET, which would greatly influence the operational roadmap of the NECT. The role of JET was enabled by an initial investment of R1,2 million by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation for the preparations of setting up the NECT.

The initial Board of Trustees represented a blend of the core stakeholder groups, the sectoral and institutional experience and intellectual wisdom that provided the NECT with a solid leadership and governance footing from inception.

Stakeholder group	Trustees	Credentials
Business	Sizwe Nxasana	CEO of FirstRand and chair of FirstRand and Zenex Foundations
	Mark Lamberti	CEO of Imperial Group
	Futhi Mtoba	Senior Partner, Deloitte
Civil Society	Professor Brian Figaji	Former Vice-Chancellor, CPUT
Labour	Basil Manuel	President of NAPTOSA
	Nkosana Dolopi	Deputy Secretary-General of SADTU
Public sector	Minister Angie Motshekga	Minister of Basic Education
	Paddy Padayachee	Acting Director-General, DBE
Executive	Godwin Khosa	Former CEO of JET (founding secretariat of the NECT)

The varied experiences of the initial Trustees allowed the organisation to quickly benefit from the Trustees' wide range of knowledge. This enhanced the NECT's ability to establish effective operational and management systems right from the beginning.

In his 2014 report as chairman, Sizwe Nxasana highlighted that the Board of Trustees took the agreements made in 2013 and promptly turned them into a functioning institution. This meant creating systems, programs, relationships, and achieving significant outcomes.

Godwin Khosa was tasked with immediately forming a team of leaders and workers who would be responsible for laying the groundwork of the organisation.

Finding the actual physical blocks – the location of the NECT offices – involved weekend drives across the city until the location in Centurion was identified as the ideal space for a new organisation. The location between the seat of government – where the policy mantle is located – and the business hub of Sandton, where so many of the institutional partners to be harnessed were to be found, was as appropriate as one could get. Fortunately, Centurion is also quite accessible by road and the Gautrain.

The initial vision of the NECT imagined a lean and effective organisation where the office would seek to coordinate and oversee the implementation of national and district programmes rather than creating a large organisation that would duplicate capacity that already existed across the education ecosystem. The Education Collaboration Framework initially made provision for an organisation led by two or three experts who would be supported by financial and administrative staff. The big idea behind this model was to enable the NECT to learn from experts on the ground by working with organisations already involved in activities, particularly at district level.

By the end of its first 18 months as an operating organisation (December 2014), the NECT had a staff complement of 16 including senior specialists, trainees and support staff.

Peter Kimingi – the founding Chief Financial Officer – and Nonkosi Mangxangaza, the office manager and personal

assistant to the CEO, remembered the early days as a period of excitement and natural anxieties. Having been given a mandate by the Board to put into action the NECT's programmes, the early work involved establishing key relationships across the ecosystem. The relationships with districts – where the bulk of the NECT's work was to be directed – were critical in establishing the legitimacy of the NECT on the ground.



*Chairman of NECT Mr Sizwe Nxasana*



John Thurlow, a long-standing member of the organisation, vividly recalls the initial day in January 2014 with a sense of excitement. As a senior education specialist, Thurlow was eager to start applying profound educational insights to shape the mission statement of the NECT and develop its foundational programmes. By finding suitable partners to act as implementation agents, the NECT ensured the smooth running of its programmes while simultaneously mapping out its internal capability framework.

Deva Govender, one of the first people to join the NECT, recalls the paradox of ambition and complexity around its establishment. “If we look back over the past 25 years, it’s clear that there was always an interest and investment in improving education; of how political leaders, I think, were understood and remained acutely aware about the importance of education for economic development,” he said.

“So, you will notice that the national budget has always been heavily focused in allocating funding for education. It remains a priority sector. For its part, the NGO sector has always worked with government from the early years after democracy in 1994, in fact even before 1994, when certain countries who were sympathetic towards apartheid South Africa, made investments in the NGO sector.”

Pulling the NECT together was complex, says Govender.

“As with any company or organisation, the early days are quite difficult because

you’re still finding your way, you’re trying to figure out how to run the organisation; how structures should be designed and what kind of people should interact through the organisation. We grappled with all that.”

Over time, the NECT has transformed from an organisation primarily focused on five core programmes outlined in the Education Collaboration Framework to a larger entity with a significantly expanded team. This growth has led to a substantial increase in its capacity to implement programmes. A key factor contributing to the development and evolution of the NECT’s programmes has been the stability in leadership both within and around the organisation. According to John Thurlow, the leadership of Godwin Khosa over the past decade has played a vital role in avoiding strategic disruptions that often accompany frequent leadership changes. Khosa’s willingness to tackle difficult conversations and address critical issues head-on is considered a fundamental driver of the NECT’s success.

The importance of stability is illustrated by the fact that since 1994, the changes in education MECs across the different provinces have had an impact on long-term planning and relationship building. As Minister Motshekga stated, education systems are rather monolithic creatures of scale, where even the most marginal changes require patience, resources and commitment. Changes in the system naturally take years to filter into the system at large and then be properly evaluated for effectiveness. A five-year period is not sufficient

A key factor contributing to the development and evolution of the NECT’s programmes has been the stability in leadership both within and around the organisation.





to conceptualise, consult and implement large-scale changes in the system. A long-term planning and evaluation model is needed to avoid frequent changes that are disruptive to the system and the learning pathway of learners.

The NECT benefits greatly from the stability of its Board of Trustees, which highlights its unique advantage in terms of leadership continuity within and around the organisation. Having the Minister as a Trustee since its inception has fostered a deep relationship between the NECT and the Department. This has allowed the NECT to develop a comprehensive understanding of the country's policy direction and how any policy changes would impact its mission and programmes.

Moreover, the enduring nature of this high-level relationship has ensured that even during leadership changes in provinces, there is sufficient institutional knowledge within the family of the national education department. This facilitates a seamless transition and comprehension of the NECT's work for new MECs, Heads of Departments (HODs), and district leaders.

Furthermore, the ongoing involvement of the Department's Director-General in NECT structures, from Bobby Soobrayan to Mathanzima Mwel, ensures a close relationship

between the NECT and the Department. It also promotes continuous alignment between the Department's objectives and the NECT's programmes. Of cardinal importance to the relationship between the NECT and the Department is Dr Granville Whittle – the Deputy Director-General: Social Mobilisation and Support Service, DBE – who has served as NECT champion within the DBE across the terms of three Director-Generals and ensured continuity in the relationship and the understanding of the NECT's programmes by other internal stakeholders within the DBE. The strength of the relationship and alignment between the NECT and the DBE has also been bolstered by the Minister's 14-year tenure which has enabled continuity not only in the relationship between the organisations but also fostered policy continuity.

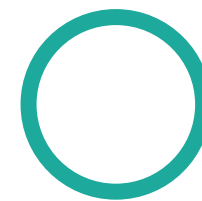


Under the consistent leadership of Sizwe Nxasana as the chairperson of the Board, the NECT has maintained strong and transparent engagement with big business. This has enabled ongoing support for the organisation. Since 2012, the NECT has firmly believed in the pivotal role of teachers as the cornerstone of the country's education system. Recognising that teachers are the daily custodians of the education system, their awareness of and embrace of the NECT programmes are essential for the success of the organisation. Senior union leaders like the SADTU President Magope Maphila and Secretary-General Mugwena Maluleke continue to play a pivotal role in getting teachers to support the work of the NECT.

The inclusion of NAPTOSA and SADTU representatives on the Board has allowed the NECT to leverage its social credibility and establish its legitimacy within the education system. As emphasised by Godwin Khosa in 2014, the NECT's theory of change revolves around collaborative efforts to invest in relevant learning and teaching resources, technical expertise and social capital to enhance learning outcomes in schools. This approach has resulted in additional resources that have improved the overall teacher experience, including physical assets such as learning and teaching materials as well as professional development initiatives. The involvement of SADTU and NAPTOSA in the NECT has proven to be a highly effective collaboration strategy.

Internally, the NECT's leadership stability is reflected in the long tenure of Godwin Khosa, Nonkosi Mangxangaza, Deva Govender and John Thurlow – who have been there practically since inception – and the long service of staff members who, even after having moved on to other avenues, remain an integral part of the NECT family.

After assembling the team in 2014, the focus shifted towards translating the five educational programmes outlined in the Education Collaboration Framework of 2013 into actionable initiatives. This was done to breathe life into the six themes that had emerged from the Framework, and the rollout of these initiatives was finally prepared.



The NECT benefits greatly from the stability of its board of trustees, which highlights its unique advantage in terms of leadership continuity within and around the organisation.

*Dr John Thurlow joined the NECT in 2014*









## CHAPTER 5

# From idea to implementation

- The NECT's mission is to mobilise national capacity to assist government to achieve distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvements in education
- Since January 2014, the innovations and approaches of the NECT have been tested in 415 Fresh Start Schools (FSS), where high dosage intervention and support is provided. The FSS serve as sites for testing the innovative approaches and intervention models before system-wide replication and institutionalisation. The District Improvement Programme (DIP) accounted for over 90% of the NECT's expenditure in 2014 and 2015 and has remained the flagship programme of the NECT throughout its first decade
- Over the years, the NECT has evolved into a strongly capacitated institution capable of delivering a wide range of initiatives with a sense of agility and effectiveness that helps the education system to continuously improve



As an organisation founded on the principle of collaboration to bring together the collective strengths of government, business, labour and civil society, the NECT crafted a mission statement that resonates with this principle.

The essence of the NECT's mission statement is that the NECT's aim is to mobilise national capacity to assist government to achieve distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvements in education. Harnessing the collective commitment and social capital of the various partners and stakeholders remains central to the NECT's ability to deliver on its mission statement. Throughout its history, the NECT has acknowledged that the government remains the primary custodian of the education system and that other role-players like business and civil society have elements of diversity, flexibility and innovation that can be used to support government. Whilst this principle was harnessed and committed to in the process of the formation of the NECT, replicating it in the NECT's operational model was necessary in order to achieve alignment between the mission statement and the culture of the organisation.

By the beginning of 2014, the NECT had transformed into a fully functional organisation, complete with a physical location, dedicated staff and a strong commitment to driving positive change in the education system.

The NECT management team further distilled the six themes contained in the Education Collaboration Framework into the programme of implementation. This would become the foundation for the operational model. Over the course of its first year, the NECT developed a five-pronged programme matrix that was made up of the following pillars –

1. District (schools) intervention
2. Systematic intervention
3. Innovative interventions
4. Social investments (local projects)
5. Education Dialogue SA

For each of the five pillars, the NECT developed a programme action plan with objectives, targets and deliverables. This resulted in an initial programme matrix that can be illustrated as follows:

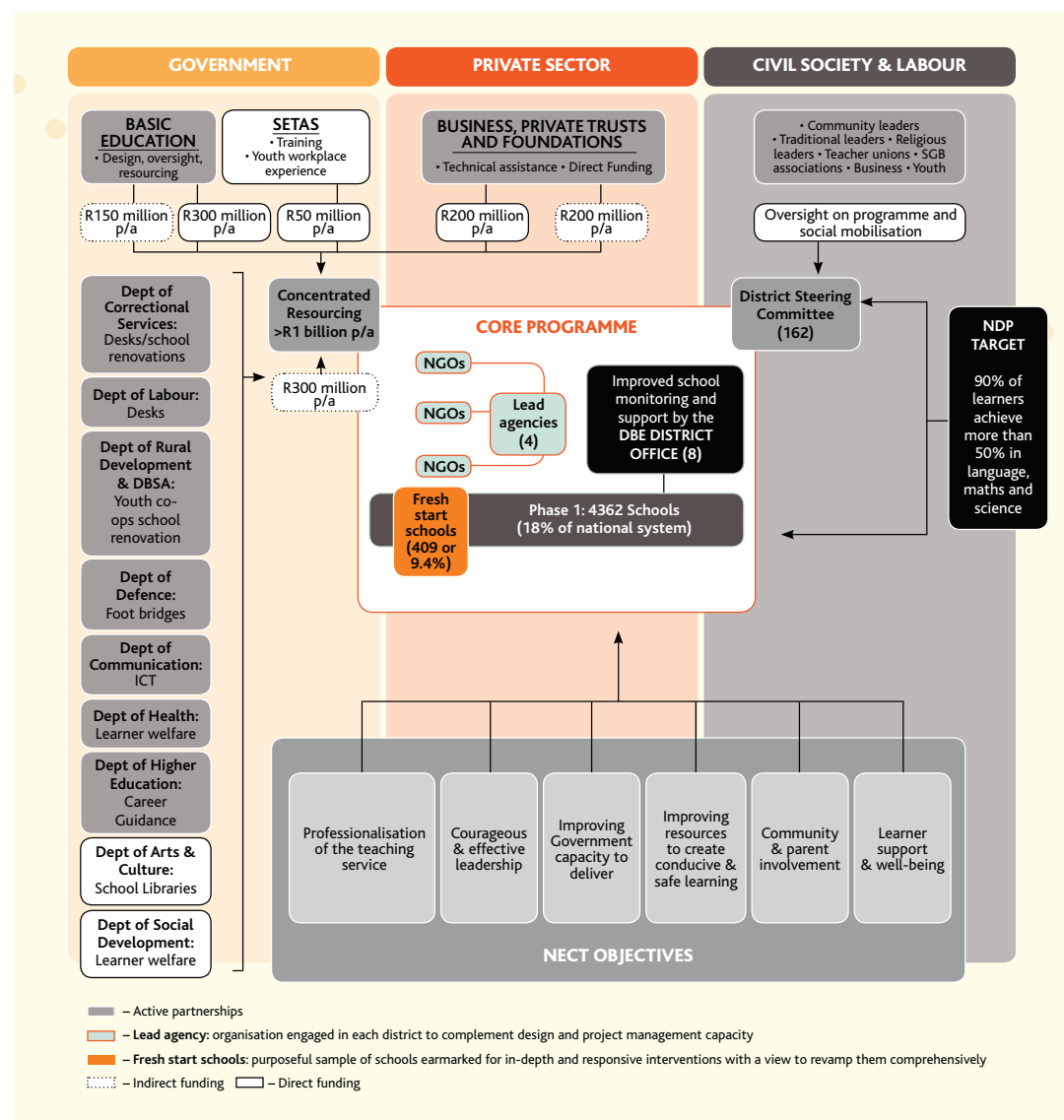


As a newly established organisation, the NECT did not have a widespread national presence that covered the entire school landscape. Therefore, collaborating with existing institutions and organisations already active on the ground was crucial for the NECT to learn from their insights into different aspects of the education system. The NECT recognised the importance of understanding contextual and local issues in various school environments, as it was vital to ensure that planned initiatives were embraced by key stakeholders and not hindered by implementation challenges.

To facilitate its initial efforts, the NECT enlisted the support of multiple consortia that had an established presence in the education landscape. These consortia were selected based on their expertise in designing, coordinating and co-managing other stakeholders such as NGOs and district offices to deliver the programmes. Additionally, the consortia were chosen for their capacity to implement initiatives themselves, ensuring effective execution of the NECT's programmes.

The allocation of the work across the agencies was as follows:

The NECT recognized the importance of understanding contextual and local issues in various school environments, as it was vital to ensure that planned initiatives were embraced by key stakeholders and not hindered by implementation challenges.



Source: NECT 2012 leadership dialogue on education

The selection of implementation and management agencies with extensive experience in working with districts nationwide was a significant priority. This was because the NECT aimed to collaborate with NGOs already involved in various programmes. These agencies needed to demonstrate a history of designing, coordinating, and co-managing other NGOs, as well as having the capacity to implement initiatives themselves. Nonkosi Mangxangaza and Godwin Khosa played a crucial role in establishing stakeholder relationships and promoting the image of the NECT, resulting in increased visibility and awareness of the organisation throughout the country.

To strengthen its dedication to collaboration, the NECT encouraged and expected the contracted implementing agencies to allocate at least 40% of their budgets towards engaging with other NGOs and service providers. This approach aimed to foster partnerships and ensure the NECT’s programmes had a clear sense of purpose and intention for all stakeholders. As a result, by the end of its first year of operation, the NECT had developed a structured framework with six key objectives, designed relevant programmes, and facilitated partnerships that aligned with its mission.

Districts	Agency Name	
Libode and Mt Frere in the Eastern Cape	Education Excellence Consortium (EEC)	18 Education NGOs Directors: M. Potterton, M. Dikotla, L. van der Elst, N. Mabude and B. Chinsamy
Vhembe and Waterberg in Limpopo	Deloitte	Professional services firm. Member of Deloitte Touche Tohamatsu Ltd
Pinetown and Uthungulu in KwaZulu-Natal	Programme for Improving Learning Outcomes (PILO)	Directors: M. Morobe, K. Gordhan, N. Galombiik, V. Wedekind, M. Metcalfe
Bojanala in the North West and Bohlabela in Mpumalanga	PWC consortium	PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Class Act, PSA, Penreach College and North-West University
National project management agent	JET education services	Registered NPO


All the lead agencies are expected to engage other NGOs and service providers for not less than 40% of the budgets allocated for the delivery of the intervention.

The collaborative approach in the change and programme theories is carried through into the governance structure of the NECT, in which both the patrons and the trustees are representative of the key stakeholder groups.

HOW DOES THE NECT MODEL DIFFER FROM PAST PROGRAMMES?


1

It consolidates and builds on the past lessons about improvement that have been driven by the private sector, Government and international donors




2

It is a direct response to the National Development Plan




3

It is integrated into Government planning. To this end, the NECT has been accepted as one of the five pilot projects of Government's Medium Term Strategic Framework, 2014 – 2019.




4

It combines Government resourcing of education with private investments and social capital in order to drive tangible and sustained improvement




5

It champions organised utilisation of public and private resources aimed at education improvement




6



It is endorsed and supported by all the teacher unions



7

It has a dedicated structure that publicly accounts to its funders and stakeholders






A key component for ensuring organisational effectiveness is the monitoring and evaluation pillar, which enables the organisation to consistently assess its programmes and track progress toward both its organisational objectives and national goals. This crucial tool allows for ongoing monitoring of initiatives and ensures alignment with broader objectives, fostering accountability and transparency within the organisation. By regularly evaluating performance and outcomes, the organisation could identify areas of success and areas that require improvement, allowing for strategic adjustments and informed decision-making. The monitoring and evaluation pillar serves as a valuable mechanism to keep the organisation in check and optimise its impact on the intended beneficiaries and the wider community.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are crucial for the NECT to ensure that its programme design aligns with the organisation's purpose. It allows for regular assessment of progress and challenges, especially considering the time-bound nature of the NDP and the lengthy implementation periods required for interventions to permeate the education system. This process keeps stakeholders well informed about the NECT's activities.

By regularly evaluating performance and outcomes, the organisation could identify areas of success and areas that require improvement, allowing for strategic adjustments and informed decision-making.

The NECT distinguished itself as an organisation through a unique model that deviates from previous practices in the education sector. Key elements of the NECT's model include:

- Building on past improvements driven by the private sector, government and international donors.
  - Developing programmes that directly align with the goals outlined in the NDP.
  - Integrating programmes into government planning, serving as a coordinating conduit and complementary agent for the DBE. This inclusion in the government's Medium Term Strategic Framework for 2014-2019 was an immediate benefit.
  - Combining government resources with private investments and social capital to drive tangible and sustained improvements.
  - Gaining endorsement and support from all teacher unions.
  - Cultivating a culture of accountability by maintaining transparent and public accountability to funders and stakeholders.
- 

These actions allowed the NECT to significantly expand its reach and influence across various stakeholders in the education sector. By the end of 2014, the impact of the NECT's efforts could be measured through the following indicators:

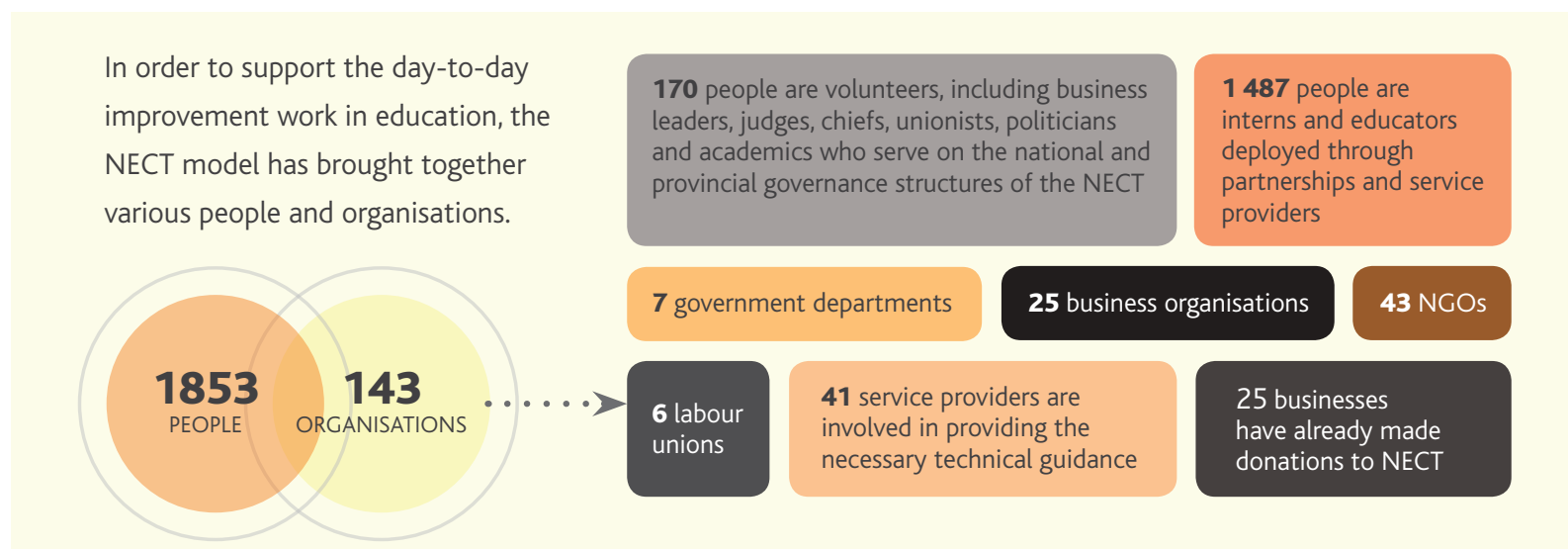
The NECT brought together 143 organisations and 1 853 people in its first year.

The wide and inclusive nature of its stakeholder base was as follows:

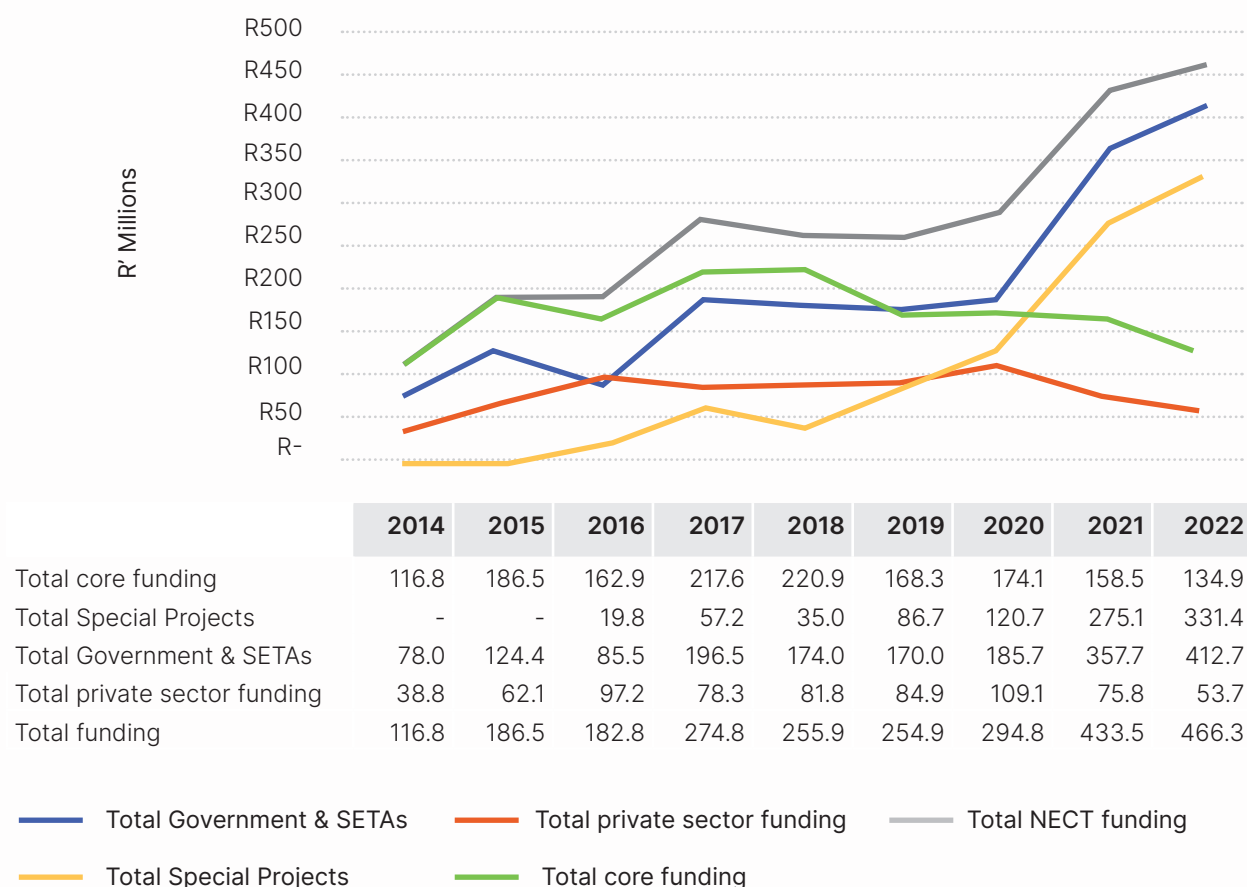
- 6 labour unions
- 7 government departments
- 25 business organisations
- 25 businesses making donations to the NECT
- 41 service providers
- 43 NGOs
- 170 people as volunteers serving on national and provincial governance structures of the NECT
- 1 487 people as educators and interns deployed through partnerships and service providers

These early successes allowed the NECT to enhance stakeholder awareness and establish legitimacy among other participants in the education sector. Quite importantly, the resources required to chart the NECT's operational roadmap were provided by various stakeholders who had committed to supporting the organisation to find its feet. The FirstRand Foundation, as an institutional and funding partner for the NECT, enabled the organisation to invest in the development of its own operations and also build the type of governance and operational infrastructure that would be instrumental in unlocking funding and support from other partners down the line. The funding of the internal operations allowed the NECT to start building internal institutional insights that would eventually enable it to balance the functioning of its programmes and initiatives between external partners and internal resources.

During its initial ten years, the NECT adopted a funding approach that combined resources from both the public and private sectors. These funds were utilised for both essential operations and specific projects. Notably, certain specialised initiatives such as the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) project required substantial financial investments due to the significant expenses associated with their execution.



## Government and private sector funding trends 2014 - 2022





### NECT Funding trends for period 2014 - 2022

The importance of business contributions and support for the NECT is linked to the organisation's founding principles and commitments.

At the launch of the NECT in July 2013, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa convened a business leaders' breakfast where over 300 business leaders were provided insights into the formation of the NECT. During the engagement, Ramaphosa reflected on historical collaborative structures like the Joint Education Trust which had, in 1992, been supported by 14 businesses that committed R500 million in funding for the work of the Trust. Ramaphosa invoked the same commitment

to doing good for the country that had existed in 1992 to promote the idea of business supporting the NECT in 2013. In Ramaphosa's words, the R500 million provided to the Joint Education Trust in 1992 could be estimated to be worth R2 billion in 2013 terms and that should serve as the benchmark for the funding the NECT needed to galvanise in order to execute its work.

The diverse funding base and the strong support from business meant that the NECT's funding model mirrored its mission statement and galvanised resources from across the board that could be pooled together to drive high-impact initiatives.



Over the past decade, around R2 billion has been raised from the public and private sectors to support various initiatives ranging from long-term systemic programmes to short-term and crisis interventions.

The allocation of resources during the inception phase, reflected the NECT's key focus areas. The focus on district development, which targets the prisms of proximity to the grassroots of the education system and building long-term capacity reflect the NECT's commitment to investing in the long-term sustainability of the education system. This flagship programme was allocated 87% of the NECT's spending in the initial phase and would continue to enjoy the bulk of the budget allocation for the first few years of the NECT.

By the end of its first year, the NECT had accomplished significant milestones in its core programmes. Notably, the DIP was successfully implemented in eight districts spanning five provinces. This programme impacted 4 362 schools, accounting for 18% of the total school population.


From January to December 2014, the NECT implemented its innovations and approaches in 415 FSS. These schools served as testing grounds for high-intensity interventions and support, allowing the NECT to refine its innovative approaches and intervention models before scaling them up system-wide. The DIP constituted over 90% of the NECT's expenditure during 2014 and 2015. Remarkably, this programme had a wide scope, impacting over 2 million learners in the education system.

In line with the NECT's ethos of developing capacity within the education system, the operating model does not only involve lead agencies and implementation partners but also taps into the skills and resources of community members.

To foster local-level engagement and involvement in education, the NECT established District Steering Committees (DSCs) in the eight participating districts. These DSCs were designed to mirror the NECT's own collaborative model and consisted of representatives from diverse stakeholders, including businesses, unions, academic institutions, school governing bodies, youth leaders, traditional leaders and religious leaders. Each committee brought their unique social capital and perspectives to the table, ensuring a comprehensive community-driven approach to addressing educational challenges.

The inclusive nature of this model was designed to maximise the legitimacy of interventions and also revive the longstanding culture of community involvement in the education of society. The DSC's role was framed across three performance areas – social transformation, governance and education.

DSCs undertook their activities under the three areas as follows –

- **Social transformation** – ensuring the active involvement and participation of stakeholders in programme activities in a plan funded by the NECT.
  - **Governance** – regular meetings to keep stakeholders informed and engaged and to hold the District Lead Agents accountable.
  - **Educational** – exercising oversight and the securing of conditions for success.
- 



*Ed-hub dialogue taking place in Sandton, 2019*



*I am a school launch in partnership with SADTU in Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2022*



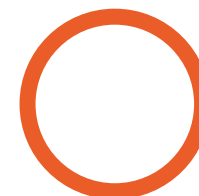
*Education Dialogue on Decolonisation of Education in Gauteng, 2017*

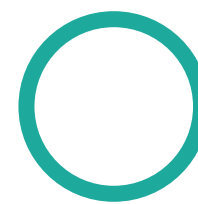
In the words of Godwin Khosa, the CEO of the NECT:

*“The social transformation role is a response to the call of the National Development Plan to facilitate greater parental involvement in the education of their children (NPC, 2012: 365). This role also ties in with the President’s assertion that education is a societal matter and therefore has to be of importance to all citizens. The social-transformation role is associated with obligations on the part of the parents and accountability on the part of teachers, and the intersection of these two objectives. The District Steering Committee is expected to mobilise parents to act in terms of their obligations and accountability, as summarised from the National Development Plan. (NECT Integrated Report, 2014)”*



*Launch of the Fort Beaufort District Steering Committee, 2022*





The implementation of the DSC model is viewed by the NECT as a crucial factor in its subsequent success. This model facilitated widespread awareness and adoption of interventions within communities. The DSCs, being closer to schools and communities, provided the NECT with valuable insights into unique and specific challenges that could affect the implementation of initiatives in different environments.

In adopting the DSC model, the NECT was inspired by the commitment of key stakeholders to the QLTC. In 2008, government had launched the QLTC as a “call to individuals and organisations to assume responsibility for contributing towards; improving the quality of education, inform citizens about the importance of education and their roles, mobilise communities to support schools, teachers and learners; improve the quality of education for all children – especially the poor – and demonstrate this improved quality through better learner achievements”. In essence, the QLTC was to be implemented as a vehicle to support the provisioning of quality learning and teaching in schools.

In 2012, SADTU had affirmed its commitment to the QLTC and called for the campaign to be led by the President of South Africa. But as Minister Motshekga highlighted to Parliament in August 2018, the “QLTC is a campaign not a department programme and as a result there is a lack of structures to ensure its full implementation”. The effect of this is that initiatives like the NECT’s DSCs provide an element of

structure to the QLTC model that enables various community stakeholders to respond to the call of the QLTC by taking up roles within the DSC. The broad and inclusive nature of DSCs aligns with the QLTC in ensuring that education is centralised as a community initiative where the collective resources of all stakeholders are brought to the table to continuously engage on issues affecting and impacting schools within the communities. This once again demonstrates the NEC’s ability to translate big policy visions to actionable outcomes that are grounded in best practice and include key education stakeholders from across the spectrum.

Simultaneously, the NECT’s proximity to important national stakeholders like the DBE and major businesses ensures that the inputs and insights of DSCs influence significant national discussions regarding the country’s education system. This sense of collaboration and engagement between the NECT and diverse stakeholders enhanced the organisation’s operating model and ethos. It also represents an iteration of the implementation of the organisation’s mission statement.

Holistically, the NECT’s programme matrix reflects an importance balance of the key initiatives that had been identified as key to delivering on the bigger promise of driving education reform and improvements.

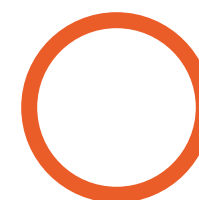
This sense of collaboration and engagement between the NECT and diverse stakeholders enhanced the organisation’s operating model and ethos.





	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3	Programme 4	Programme 5
	District Improvement Programme	Systemic Interventions	Innovation	Local Projects	Education Dialogue SA
<b>Teacher professionalisation</b>	x	x	x		x
<b>Courageous leadership</b>	x	x	x		x
<b>Resourcing of education</b>	x				
<b>Improving government capacity</b>	x	x			x
<b>Parent and community involvement (including DSCs)</b>	x				
<b>Learner and teacher welfare</b>	x	x			

The NECT's original programmes served as the foundation of its work, and as its reach and social capital grew and became deeply ingrained in national education discourse, the NECT would continue to develop and pilot programmes that emphasised the vital importance of cross-sector collaborations in pursuing national objectives



*Luvuvuani Primary School, Limpopo 2018*






## CHAPTER 6


# Evolution of programmes

**Deepening impact – how the NECT’s work with teachers and learners builds capacity in the education system**

- Over the past ten years, the NECT’s programmes have been rolled out gradually and incrementally across the country in line with the mission to drive education reform and improvements
- The flagship programme – the DIP – remains the most comprehensive instrument for executing the NECT’s mission and the country’s goals in the NDP.
- In this chapter, we look back at the impact of the NECT’s work in mobilising national capacity to assist the government to achieve distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvements in education
- The testimonial of Tinyiko Nkuzana – a beneficiary of the NECT’s programmes in Limpopo and a winner of the 2022 Heroic Women Award in Academia and Education for her work as the District Director for Education in the Capricorn South District – and the case study of Mt Ayliff Junior Secondary School in the Eastern Cape are used to illustrate the impact of the NECT’s work since 2013



Over the past decade, the NECT has initiated and implemented programmes informed by its mission statement, influenced by insights and discoveries gathered from its ongoing work and motivated by the need to see distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvements in the education system.



The fundamental driver of the NECT's activities – capacity building across the sector – remains the guiding principle underpinning all activities and programmes. Some of the most critical programmes that the NECT has run since 2014 relate to teacher professionalisation, the National Reading Coalition, and the rollout of innovative tools to assist teaching and learning.

These programmes have been run across provinces, districts and schools in line with the NECT's plan to reach as much of the education system as possible. The schools and districts programme, which has been the flagship initiative of the NECT since 2014, represents the greatest intersection of the various themes that the NECT identified as far back as 2013 and continuously seeks to address. One testimonial that perhaps best captures the essence of the NECT is the story of Ms. Tinyiko Nkuzana, who was honoured in 2022 as one of the Heroic Women in Academia and Education.



*Ms Tinyiko Nkuzana for the Limpopo  
Department of Education*

Tinyiko Nkuzana embarked on her professional journey in 1995 as a teacher in the Limpopo Province. Starting as an entry-level teacher during a period of systemic shifts from fragmentation to unification, she experienced first-hand the lack of on-boarding and support systems for new teachers. Instead, they were thrown into the deep end without proper guidance.

Although equipped with academic knowledge on what to teach, they struggled to seamlessly transition into mentorship and support programmes that would help them effectively apply their knowledge in the classroom. Essential tools and techniques for planning and managing the school environment were not integrated into the fabric of the education system.

Additionally, the absence of opportunities for learning through observation and tapping into the expertise of subject advisors hindered the development of critical classroom skills.

As a consequence of these circumstances, the education system suffered from suboptimal performance and a deficient culture of excellence. The NECT's assessment of districts across the country in 2013 revealed the extent of this suboptimal performance.

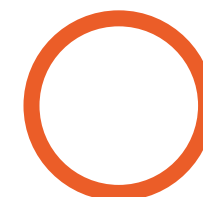
The NECT's assessment found that, the country's education system had 86 districts which could be classified as follows –


- 31 districts in the poor performing category and covering a population of 3.3 million learners (27% of the learner population)
- 38 districts in the medium-performing category and covering 50% of the learner population
- 17 districts in the high-performing category and covering 23% of the learner population

The largest number of poor-performing districts were located in the Eastern Cape (16) and Limpopo (7)


As the districts represented the most practical subsection of the education system around which improvement interventions could be organised, getting them to work better was critical to the NECT's success. In 2013, the NECT committed to improving 40 districts over a period of ten years. This would ensure that the number of poorly performing districts would decrease from 37% to less than 10% and the number of medium level performing districts would increase from 43% to 60%.

It was in the rollout of the DIP in Limpopo where Tinyiko first interacted with the NECT. As a teacher and administrator with a decade of experience in the education system, Tinyiko was uniquely placed to assess whether the introduction of the NECT into the education system made any changes.





Teachers have wholeheartedly celebrated the invaluable support offered by the NECT through its exceptional tracking tools. With these tools in their arsenal, teachers have been able to elevate their planning capabilities to new heights, surpassing previous limitations. The impact of the NECT's district improvement programme in Vhembe is a great case study of the NECT's work. This programme specifically focused on underperforming schools, prioritising the training of essential stakeholders whose dedicated efforts within the educational realm directly influence academic outcomes. The NECT's unwavering commitment to empowering teachers and fostering educational excellence has left an indelible mark on the teaching community. Through ongoing surveys and engagements, the DIP is continuously highlighted by teachers and principals as a critical conduit for unlocking potential in their schools and districts.



“We are profoundly grateful for the positive impact that has unfolded within the community as a result of the concerted efforts of all stakeholders, including the NECT. This transformative collaboration has fostered a remarkable sense of stability, extending its reach even to esteemed figures like Indunas and makgoshi, who now recognise the critical role they can play in supporting the education of learners within their immediate communities. The astounding progress witnessed in the district's overall performance, particularly in the matric results, evokes immense gratitude. With over 10,000 learners achieving bachelor passes in 2021, the district has soared to the pinnacle of success, securing the coveted position as number 1 in the province. This outstanding achievement can be attributed to the unwavering dedication and stellar work of all stakeholders within the Limpopo education system, as well as the invaluable support provided by the NECT. The depth of our gratitude knows no bounds as we reflect upon this collective triumph and the boundless opportunities it creates for the future generations of learners in our community.”

Let's celebrate the remarkable story of Mt Ayliff Junior Secondary School in the Eastern Cape as a testament to the transformative work of the NECT in the education system. Situated within the Ntsizwa Circuit of the Alfred Nzo District, which encompasses over 600 schools, this school's journey

exemplifies the power of collaboration with the NECT.

When the NECT implemented its interventions in Vhembe and Waterberg, Tinyiko was working as a circuit manager and possessed a profound understanding of the leadership and support deficiencies prevalent in these districts. Reflecting on the NECT's involvement in the districts, she highlights the initiatives targeting teachers and subject advisors as transformative measures that would have greatly benefited her own journey into the teaching profession had they been available when she started in 1995.

The effectiveness of these initiatives is exemplified by the fact that even after a lengthy tenure in the education system, Tinyiko still found them to be informative and empowering when they were introduced. These initiatives provided her with valuable insights into how teachers can enhance their interactions with students, schools and teaching materials. They equipped her with essential knowledge and strategies for effectively managing various aspects of the teaching process, enabling her to improve the overall educational experience for her students.

Tinyiko found the support of the NECT to be a major step forward in improving outcomes for the education system. In the Capricorn South District – where Tinyiko now serves as the District Director – the grassroots support

provided by the NECT has injected a new sense of collective responsibility for schooling.

An example of the importance of the NECT's work is mirrored in the fact that even in her current position as a District Director, Tinyiko finds the skills acquired through NECT's initiatives to be immensely valuable. A cause for celebration arises when she reflects on the seamless support provided by the NECT to new teachers entering the system. With their unwavering dedication, the NECT extends a guiding hand to ensure a smooth and confident transition for these educators. This empowering and supportive approach has far-reaching benefits, not only for the teachers themselves but also for the eager learners who thrive under their guidance and the schools that flourish as vibrant centres of knowledge.

The NECT's commitment to nurturing the growth and success of both individuals and educational institutions is truly praiseworthy and worthy of celebration. Tinyiko also regards the implementation of the DSC model as instrumental in galvanising collective support for the education system from various stakeholders around the community.



The transformation of Mt Ayliff School serves as a resounding celebration of how collaboration with the NECT can uplift an educational institution.

### Mount Ayliff Case Study

When the NECT embarked on its initiatives in the district, they crossed paths with Mt Ayliff School. Prior to the NECT's intervention, the school faced numerous challenges, with key learning fundamentals operating below the necessary standards expected in functional schools. Infrastructure deficiencies persisted, as the school was still constructed with mud when the NECT's involvement began. Moreover, within the classrooms, crucial indicators such as curriculum coverage and the number of teaching days fell below acceptable levels. With a mere 30% curriculum coverage and 140 teaching days instead of the optimal 170, the school was far from reaching its full potential. Significantly, the absence of tracking and monitoring tools meant that key stakeholders, including the school management team and circuit managers, were unaware of these gaps, as the means to consistently and transparently track progress did not exist.

Nevertheless, the school had earned a well-deserved reputation within the community for its discipline, attendance, punctuality and dedicated teachers. This distinction made Mt Ayliff School the preferred choice for many parents and learners. Thanks to the NECT's unwavering support, the school's principal, Ms. Gxarisa, deputy principal, Mr. Phephu, and Mathematics teacher and Head of Department, Ms. Pikwa, received invaluable tools and varying levels of assistance. Ms. Pikwa, in

particular, benefited from quarterly training provided by the NECT, equipping her with the necessary skills and preparation to excel in teaching.

The transformation of Mt Ayliff School serves as a resounding celebration of how collaboration with the NECT can uplift an educational institution. Through the NECT's guidance and support, the school has overcome challenges, empowered its dedicated educators and become a beacon of excellence for the community. The success of Mt Ayliff School is a testament to the tremendous impact that can be achieved when passionate individuals work hand in hand with organisations like the NECT to unlock the full potential of education. As the training was rolled out by the NECT at the circuit level, it enabled Ms. Pikwa to learn directly from the NECT material and also learn from colleagues from different schools whose shared insights deepened her understanding of how to manage the daily teaching experience. The material developed by the NECT in collaboration with the DBE wasn't just limited to the training programmes. Learning programmes were made available in both hard copy and electronic format and provided Ms. Pikwa with continuous access to the materials.

The benefit of the NECT's intervention wasn't just limited to Ms. Pikwa only. Mr. Phephu, the deputy principal of the school, stated that after the NECT's involvement in the school, he suddenly had more meaningful engagements about the improvement of teaching in

Ms. Pikwa's class and how her teaching of Mathematics could be improved. The NECT's interventions clearly transcended the personal development of Ms. Pikwa and became a critical tool for the school management team to support teachers better. Mrs Gxarisa, as the principal of the school, was able to finally have access to granular data regarding curriculum coverage gaps and teaching time gaps across the school at large. Within a period of just three years, these granular insights had been translated into an action plan that saw the curriculum content coverage almost doubling by 2018.

The Mt Ayliff story reaches its pinnacle of celebration through the profound impact it has had on the learners within the school and the broader district. Anelisa Bekisifo, who joined the school in 2015, coinciding with the NECT's partnership, stands as a shining example of a direct beneficiary of the NECT's transformative programmes.

In 2015, Anelisa's educational journey would have been limited, with curriculum coverage reaching a mere 30% at best. Her experience with writing and Mathematics would have been confined to the bare minimum, devoid of the opportunities to engage in sentences of increasing complexity or tackle challenging mathematical problems. Rather, she would have been exposed to simple and short written sentences and elementary-level Mathematics tasks.

However, the winds of change brought by the NECT swept through Mt

Ayliff School, illuminating a new path for Anelisa and her fellow learners. With the NECT's support, their educational experience underwent a remarkable transformation. The once limited curriculum coverage expanded, empowering them to explore a diverse range of subjects and delve into increasingly complex topics. Anelisa's writing skills blossomed, allowing her to craft sophisticated sentences that captured her thoughts with clarity and eloquence. In Mathematics, she conquered intricate problems that challenged her analytical abilities, propelling her toward mastery of the subject.

Anelisa's journey is a testament to the immeasurable impact that the NECT's programmes have had on individual learners. Through unwavering commitment to educational excellence, the NECT has opened doors of opportunity and ignited the flames of intellectual growth within Mt Ayliff School. Anelisa's story represents the countless successes that have emerged from the partnership between the NECT and the school, offering hope, inspiration and boundless possibilities for learners across the district.

When the NECT's partnership with the school started, it provided structured learning programmes that were designed collaboratively by the NECT and the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education. Such programmes were instrumental in assisting Anelisa and other learners to ramp up curriculum



*Anelisa and her grandmother*

The Mt Ayliff story reaches its pinnacle of celebration through the profound impact it has had on the learners within the school and the broader district.

coverage in a manner that ensured the complete coverage of the foundational issues and the move towards issues of increasing complexity appropriate for her grade. This meant that historical gaps in curriculum content coverage were now better understood and addressed thanks to the NECT's tools.

In addition to their invaluable work directly within the school, the NECT extended its interventions to the support system surrounding Mt Ayliff, creating a comprehensive network of transformation. The subject advisors assigned to the school were equipped with specialised training through the Subject Advisor Capacity Building Initiative, which included instruction on implementing Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs). This comprehensive training resulted in significant improvements in the competencies of the subject advisors, enabling the district offices to plan and operate at a level of excellence previously unattainable.

A shining example of this progress can be seen through the dedication of Ms. Figlan, the Mathematics subject adviser for Anelisa's school, and her supervisor, Mrs. Sisilana. They actively participated in the NECT workshops and training sessions consistently from 2016 to 2018. The assessments they

conducted before and after their training demonstrated remarkable enhancements in their content knowledge and a deeper understanding of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) model.

The positive outcomes of their improved competencies reverberated throughout the school, much to the delight of the principal. The enhanced quality and scope of support provided to Ms. Pikwa, the Mathematics teacher and Head of the Department, had profound ripple effects within the school. The concerted efforts of the subject advisors and their elevated expertise not only uplifted Ms. Pikwa's instructional practices but also bolstered the overall educational experience for all learners.

Through the collaborative efforts of the NECT and the subject advisors, a harmonious tapestry of support and growth was woven, benefitting Mt Ayliff School in immeasurable ways. The principal rejoices in witnessing the positive spinoffs that have emerged as a result of the improved quality and depth of support, setting the school on a path toward unparalleled success. The unwavering commitment of all stakeholders involved has proven that, through collaboration and targeted interventions, the educational landscape

can be transformed and the potential of both educators and learners can be unleashed to its fullest extent.

These spinoffs were also evident at the circuit level. Mr. Maselane, the circuit manager, also attended NECT training and workshops focusing on the roles and responsibilities of those charged with supporting schools. The breadth of the training provided by the NECT covered the following areas –

- Skills and tools on how to monitor and advise schools like Mt Ayliff on curriculum coverage
- How to establish Functional Curriculum Management structures in schools
- How to track curriculum coverage on a weekly basis
- Managing learner health and wellbeing
- Engaging schools in data dialogues to enhance learner performance and monitoring time-on-task in all schools using data on attendance, punctuality and protection of the 170 hours of learning

*Anelisa in class*



Since its introduction in 2014, the DIP has become the cornerstone of the NECT's remarkable work. Tinyiko's story and the Mt Ayliff case study serve as powerful testimonials, exemplifying the profound impact and wide-ranging influence of the NECT's initiatives. These success stories demonstrate the transformative potential that can be achieved when the NECT's interventions are replicated across the entire education system.

By replicating these interventions on a broader scale, the NECT fortifies its mission to strengthen and empower the education system. This ongoing commitment to capacitating the system ensures that the NECT remains steadfast in its pursuit of educational excellence. The compelling narratives of individuals like Tinyiko and the remarkable achievements witnessed in schools like Mt Ayliff motivate and inspire the NECT to continue its transformative work, leaving an indelible mark on the education landscape as a whole.

In terms of the Education Collaboration Framework of 2013, teacher professionalisation, community and parent involvement, resourcing, and improving capacity were some of the foundational themes. In its work with teachers and subject advisors, the NECT implements the dimension of teacher professionalisation.

Initially, this took the form of capacity-building initiatives like continuous training for teachers, focusing on teaching Maths with understanding and training teachers on teaching reading and numeracy. Over the years, this has evolved to include training opportunities that result in the allocation of continuous professional development (CPD) points for participants. This model is regarded as critical for achieving the professionalisation and the individual upskilling of teachers. For a profession that historically suffered from stigmas around the competency of teachers as practitioners, the move towards continuous learning and accredited professional programmes represents the most significant departure from the situation that existed before the NECT was founded.

Tools like planners and trackers provided to teachers have enabled teachers and school management teams to improve the management and coordination of their daily activities and brought necessary structure to the daily grind of the classroom experience.

The compelling narratives of individuals like Tinyiko and the remarkable achievements witnessed in schools like Mt Ayliff motivate and inspire the NECT to continue its transformative work, leaving an indelible mark on the education landscape as a whole.

The impact of these activities on the system is reflected in the following summary of data collected for the NECT’s five-year and ten-year snapshots

Focus area	Principle	Reach 2018
Professionalisation of teaching	<p>The stellar work done in teacher professionalisation in the past ten years includes the following highlights –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training teachers on teaching methodology (the art and craft of teaching)</li><li>• Training teachers on the PSRIP which is aimed at assisting teachers to apply innovative ways to facilitate reading for meaning at foundational levels</li><li>• Harnessing skills in balancing curriculum coverage and the optimal use of teaching periods</li><li>• Providing well-developed toolkits and resources including planners, trackers, lesson plans, teacher guides and learner materials</li><li>• This has seen an increased incidence of the effective use of toolkits which has translated to better curriculum coverage, teachers teaching at the right pace, pitch, and sequence and an overall increase in the quality and quantity of teaching and learning</li><li>• The capacity-building initiatives for principals – conducted in conjunction with unions like SADTU and NAPTOSA – are instrumental in improving union capacity in professional work, building better relationships between the education departments and the unions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 83 219 teachers reached through the learning programmes initiated by the NECT aimed at helping teachers teach better and more effectively</li><li>• 20 549 teachers reached through the PSRIP</li><li>• 6 008 130 toolkits supplied</li><li>• 1 444 Union Collaboration Programme schools reached</li><li>• 12 300 School Management Team members capacitated on curriculum management</li></ul>

Focus area	Principle	Reach 2018
<b>District Improvement</b>	<p>The expanding reach of the DIP, continues to be a sense of pride and motivation for the NECT.</p> <p>The programme's coverage over the past decade has enabled it to directly impact millions of learners across the system improve the professional standards of teaching and drive better performance across districts. Over 90% of schools and 115 000 teachers have had direct exposure to the DIP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16 District Plans developed from a model focused on identifying and documenting key performance areas and indicators (Fundamentals of Performance)</li> <li>• 35 district offices and management teams reached by the Fundamentals of Performance</li> <li>• 671 subject advisors Reached</li> <li>• 1 711 district officials participating in District Profiling and Planning</li> </ul>

Focus area	Principle	Reach 2018
<b>Parental and community involvement and learner welfare</b>	<p>The increase in the number of parents working collaboratively with schools in supporting the education of learners represents the best evidence of how the NECT's model has managed to revive the involvement of all stakeholders in the education system in line with the call to action of the NDP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 715 parent volunteers reached</li> <li>• 3 933 learners reached</li> </ul>

Focus area	Principle	Reach 2018
<b>Stakeholder mobilisation</b>	<p>The DSC model remains the most comprehensive tool for translating the involvement of multiple stakeholders into an accountability compact that allows all key stakeholders to understand their roles in fostering stability and success in the education system, reinforcing the social legitimacy of the NECT's work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 District Steering Committees</li> <li>• 320 District Stakeholders Committees reached and trained</li> </ul>

The deepening reach of the NECT is reflected in the progress made between 2018 and 2022 which is captured as follows –

Focus area	Achievements (2022)
<b>Teacher professionalisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 25% (103 641) teachers have been reached across all 9 provinces</li> <li>Over 22 812 (91%) of schools have been reached across all 9 provinces</li> </ul>
<b>Courageous and effective leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A total of 16 511 school managers capacitated on curriculum and learning management across 4 provinces</li> <li>Over 70% (53) districts reached through the District Development Programme</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A total of 5 126 toilet seats provided to 460 schools across 3 provinces</li> <li>35 million teacher and learner support materials printed and distributed across the country</li> </ul>
<b>Community and parent Involvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 140 dialogues and stakeholder engagements hosted since 2014</li> <li>27 000 parents and community members reached through the reading advocacy initiatives since 2019</li> </ul>
<b>Learner support and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 687 community and school-based beneficiaries capacitated to provide psychosocial support to learners and teachers</li> <li>A total of 1 917 learners reached through the Ubuntu Youth Leaders Programme</li> </ul>

*Source: 2022 Master Report*



Such progress has been achieved in spite of a number of unprecedented interruptions to the system that threatened to undo the significant gains made in the sector since 2013.

The lessons learned by the NECT during its initial years of operation have become invaluable, especially considering the unprecedented healthcare and social challenges that emerged between 2020 and 2021. These challenges posed a serious threat to the substantial progress achieved in the education sector since 1994. In the face of these unexpected and disruptive events, the NECT demonstrated remarkable leadership, agility and efficiency, becoming a steadfast force that the sector, the country and the world at large needed during a period of immense disruption and uncertainty.



The NECT's readiness and ability to navigate these black swan events have been instrumental in preserving and advancing the gains made in education. The NECT's resolute commitment to excellence and adaptability and innovative approaches ensured that the sector remained resilient and responsive to the rapidly evolving circumstances.

As we reflect on these extraordinary times, it is clear that the NECT's expertise, dedication and unwavering support have proven indispensable. The NECT's ability to rise to the occasion during a period of unprecedented challenges has solidified its position as a beacon of leadership and transformation in the education landscape.

Looking ahead, the lessons learned and the strengths honed by the NECT during this period of upheaval will undoubtedly continue to shape its impactful work. With the continued leadership role the NECT plays, the education sector can navigate future uncertainties and emerge even stronger, equipped to tackle new challenges and ensure quality education for all.








# CHAPTER 7

## Confronting black swans

### **How the NECT responded to the great interruptions in the education system and supported Education Improvements**

The NECT is steadfast in its commitment to harness social capital as a means of tackling the national education crisis and ensuring stability and continuity within the education system. Through four compelling case studies — the Vuwani Schools Crisis, the SAFE Initiative, the Covid-19 Response Initiative, and the swift response to the July 2021 riots and floods in Kwazulu-Natal (KZN) show how the NECT's social capital-building model significantly contributes to the enhancement of the country's education system.

- The NECT's extensive social capital networks and in-depth understanding of driving impactful programmes in the education sector have positioned it as a leader in addressing crucial challenges within the country's education system. Its comprehensive insights have been instrumental in spearheading the national response to these challenges.
- One of the first major challenges that tested the NECT's agility and responsiveness to significant interruptions was the Vuwani crisis of 2016 which affected thousands of learners in Limpopo
- In 2018, the NECT leveraged its institutional insights and social capital networks to drive the implementation and rollout of the SAFE Initiative, which was described by President Cyril Ramaphosa as meeting "an urgent human need which was meant to spare generations of young South Africans the indignity, discomfort, and danger of using pit latrines and other unsafe facilities in our schools".
- In 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic threatened to reverse a decade of gains in the education sector, the NECT championed the sector's comprehensive response to the crisis and enabled South Africa to avoid an educational gridlock that would have left a catastrophic impact on a generation of learners.
- The NECT's established agility in harnessing public and private sector collaboration and its agility in implementing high-impact programmes enabled it to take the lead in the education sector's response to the July 2021 unrest and the April 2022 floods in KZN.



## Vuwani in crisis – How the NECT activated the District Steering Committee (DSC) model to lead the recovery in Vuwani

In May 2016, protests in the community of Vuwani in Limpopo regarding a proposed demarcation of municipal boundaries led to significant disruption in teaching and learning. The schools in the area were targeted as places where the sense of discontent against the state's decision on demarcation was expressed. Over a period of a few weeks, over 102 schools suffered various degrees of damage or disruption. This left 187 classrooms unusable and impacted the right of 42 834 learners to receive an education. Conscious of the long-term consequences that even short-term disruptions have on learners, the NECT realised that it needed to champion a programme of initiating and fast-tracking the recovery of the schools back to teaching mode in order to minimise the loss in teaching and learning hours.

In activating its response to the crisis, the NECT realised that the Vhembe DSC already present in the community and led by Judge Joseph Raulinga would be the best instrument to facilitate conversations amongst different stakeholders. These included labour, school governing body associations, government, learners, traditional leaders and pastors who worked together to find practical ways to get Vuwani schools back on track.

Given the significant and widespread damage across the schools, the question of resources soon loomed large, and the NECT activated its business and civil society networks, to mobilise for resources that would be used to get the schools back on track. A difficult talking point in the Vuwani crisis was the question of whether communities that had been somewhat complicit in the destruction of school infrastructure should actually be assisted with repairing the damage. In spite of the diverse views on that question, a sense of solidarity prevailed as individuals, corporates and civil society organisations responded to the call to action and offered a hand to the people of Vuwani.

Pledges amounting to R10.7 million were received from a wide spectrum of citizens and organisations, with individuals contributing to 75% of the pledges received, followed by the NGO sector (12%), the private sector (9%) and members of the political and judicial establishment at 2% each. As one would expect, the loss of teaching time was unavoidable due to the various processes that had to be undertaken



before schooling could resume at full capacity. By the time schools reopened in August 2016, 24% of the school year had effectively been lost. For matric learners – whose loss of learning time would have been irrecoverable, the NECT and its partners implemented a series of Grade 12 learning camps that benefited 1 985 learners and ensured that they would be able to complete the curriculum ahead of the matric exams.





## THE SAFE INITIATIVE – A COORDINATED COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE TO AN URGENT HUMAN NEED

In August 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa launched the SAFE initiative as a partnership between the public and private sector to tackle sanitation backlogs in schools. In his address, the President stressed that the safety and well-being of all learners was a national imperative which required comprehensive action and collaboration between government, communities and other relevant stakeholders to eliminate the “grave injustice of insufficient sanitation infrastructure”. Given its track record in the implementation of complex large-scale projects, the NECT was regarded as a natural partner for the SAFE Initiative. The NECT fearlessly embraced a monumental challenge: to address the persistent sanitation backlogs in rural and township schools within South Africa’s basic education system. Recognising the urgent need for action, the organisation took the lead in mobilising private sector involvement and pooling essential resources. Guided by the visionary leadership of CEO Godwin Khosa, the NECT forged impactful partnerships with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, laying the basis for the ground-breaking SAFE Initiative.

The primary objective of the SAFE Initiative was twofold: to raise widespread awareness regarding the critical sanitation challenges faced by schools, and to galvanise support from diverse stakeholders, facilitating the provision of resources needed to expedite the implementation of essential infrastructure across educational institutions. Building upon its established role as a bridge between the DBE, and provincial departments, as well as the private sector and civil society, the NECT naturally assumed a pivotal position in this process.

To breathe life into the SAFE initiative, the NECT harnessed its extensive social capital, activating its vast network of partners including business, NGOs, international agencies and individuals. By mobilising these invaluable resources, the NECT paved the way for tangible progress and transformative change.

Finally, on August 14 2018, the SAFE Initiative was proudly unveiled as a dynamic public-private partnership, responding to what President Cyril Ramaphosa described as “an urgent human need.” This collective endeavour aimed to spare future generations of young South Africans from the indignity, discomfort and dangers associated with inadequate sanitation facilities in their schools.

The NECT not only accepted this challenge but delivered on its promise to effect positive change within South Africa’s education system. Through its unwavering dedication and collaborative spirit, the NECT and its partners paved the way for generations of learners to experience safe, hygienic, and dignified educational environments.



In response to the President's call to action, the NECT took on the responsibility of developing the administrative infrastructure to drive the mobilisation of partners and resources and also joined the steering committee alongside BLSA, Business Unity South Africa (BUSA), and the DBE.

The results of this collaboration were immediately evident as the partners managed to raise R120.4 million in committed funding by the end of 2018. A key element of this success was that donors and funders who may not even have interacted with the NECT previously, found the NECT's mission statement – to mobilise national capacity to assist government to achieve distinctive substantial, and sustainable improvements in education – to be aligned with the pressing need to address the sanitation crisis.

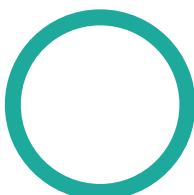


*Eastern Cape 2018*




*SAFE Launch in partnership with Assupol and Amalooloo, 2019*





The NECT's role in the SAFE Initiative went beyond mobilising financial resources. With its impressive track record of implementing initiatives in various schools and communities, the NECT was selected as one of the key implementation agents for this important undertaking. Among the 3 898 schools initially listed as having inadequate pit latrines and unacceptable sanitation, specific arrangements were made to address their needs.




Out of these schools, 1 005 were designated to be covered under different programmes facilitated through donations, partnerships, the Accelerated Schools Infrastructure Delivery Initiative (ASIDI), and the provincial infrastructure grant programmes.. An additional 1 026 schools would receive support from implementing agents such as the NECT, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Mvula Trust, and the Department of Environmental Affairs. The NECT was entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the improvement of sanitation facilities in 222 schools.

Th allocation of 222 schools to the NECT acknowledged the NECT's strong capabilities and commitment to implementing effective solutions on the ground. The NECT's proven expertise in rolling out initiatives played a pivotal role in addressing the sanitation challenges faced by these schools. With this significant responsibility, the NECT solidified its position as a trusted partner in the journey towards enhancing education infrastructure and creating safe and hygienic learning environments for learners.

With an unwavering commitment to its mission, the NECT stands as an organisation that constantly seeks innovative solutions to propel its work forward. Recognising the transformative potential of the SAFE Initiative, the NECT embraced it as an opportunity to commission comprehensive research into a range of sanitation technologies. The goal was to identify the most effective means to accelerate the implementation of vital sanitation infrastructure in schools nationwide.


The NECT understood the diverse nature of the communities affected by inadequate sanitation and recognised the inconsistencies in the availability of resources such as water throughout the country. This insight led the NECT to acknowledge that a one-size-fits-all approach would not yield the optimal outcomes required for the project's success.



Driven by this understanding, the NECT embarked on a serious mission to explore and evaluate various sanitation technologies. The aim was to find adaptable solutions that could be tailored to specific contexts, taking into account the unique needs and resource limitations of each community. By conducting this vital research, the NECT demonstrated its determination to achieve the most effective and sustainable outcomes in the rollout of sanitation infrastructure.

This insightful approach exemplifies the NECT's commitment to excellence, ensuring that its initiatives are not only impactful but also tailored to the specific requirements of the diverse communities it serves. Through its dedication to innovation and research, the NECT continues to forge a path toward a future where every individual can access dignified sanitation facilities, irrespective of their circumstances.

The results of the research, which was conducted across 31 schools located in three provinces with a strong rural schools footprint, indicated that most schools preferred the use of waterborne facilities which use running water. This probably reflects the sense of familiarity that most citizens have with waterborne facilities.





By uncovering this valuable information, the research contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the needs and desires of the school communities. It offered valuable guidance for decision-makers and stakeholders involved in the planning and implementation of sanitation initiatives, emphasising the significance of taking into account the preferences and cultural context of the communities they serve.

Through their dedication to innovation and research, the NECT continues to forge a path toward a future where every individual can access dignified sanitation facilities, irrespective of their circumstances.




Aligned with the NECT's commitment to utilising the best insights available and making the most of the resources at hand, as eloquently expressed by Godwin Khosa, the research findings played a pivotal role in informing the initial implementation of sanitation infrastructure within the framework of the SAFE Initiative.

By incorporating these research findings into their planning and decision-making processes, the NECT ensured a tailored and contextually appropriate approach to the rollout of sanitation facilities. The consideration of alternative technologies such as low-flush and dry sanitation in areas with specific water scarcity challenges demonstrates a commitment to sustainable and efficient solutions that address the unique circumstances of each community.

The NECT's dedication to utilising the best available insights and resources showcases a commitment to evidence-based decision-making and an unwavering pursuit of excellence. Through this approach, the NECT continues to make significant strides in improving sanitation infrastructure, making a tangible difference in the lives of learners and communities across the country.

Twenty schools were provided with sanitation facilities based on Alternative Building Technology (ABT), which is more cost-effective and quicker than traditional building.



The implementation of ABT presented a remarkable opportunity to achieve significant cost savings of 30%-40% and remarkably short construction periods of two to four weeks. The valuable data obtained from the initial 20 schools played a crucial role in informing the decision to expand the ABT approach to an additional 121 schools by March 2020.

Despite the unforeseen challenges brought about by the disruptive Covid-19 pandemic and associated procurement delays, the NECT's unwavering commitment to addressing the sanitation challenge remained steadfast. The success achieved through the NECT's approach garnered recognition and appreciation from both partners and the DBE.

The ABT not only delivered substantial cost savings but also demonstrated the potential for swift construction, effectively improving sanitation infrastructure within a short timeframe. This achievement showcased the NECT's ability to find innovative solutions and adapt to evolving circumstances.

Although the initial rollout plan experienced setbacks due to external factors, the NECT's approach to tackling the sanitation challenge was lauded for its effectiveness. Its resilience and dedication in the face of adversity demonstrated their unwavering commitment to their mission and the betterment of the education sector.

Between 2018 and 2020, the NECT achieved a significant milestone by successfully completing the construction of 60 ablution facilities, with 20 of them being accomplished through a valuable partnership with Assupol. In recognition of the NECT's expertise and track record, the DBE entrusted the NECT with the management of a project involving the construction of 650 toilets over a span of three years.

Private partnerships are a vital component of the SAFE Initiative, with the involvement of Assupol deepening, based on the success of previous implementations. This led to an expansion of the project, targeting another 50 schools. In an exciting development, the South Korean Embassy joined as a partner. Their support enabled the rollout of sanitary facilities to six schools in the Eastern Cape, providing 33 ablution facilities and benefiting approximately 3 200 learners.

These achievements highlight the NECT's ability to forge meaningful partnerships and leverage resources to make a tangible difference in the lives of learners. The collaboration with Assupol and the South Korean Embassy exemplifies the shared commitment to improving sanitation infrastructure and creating better learning environments for South African students.

Through these collaborative efforts, the NECT's impact extended to a wider network of schools, positively influencing the lives of more learners and addressing critical sanitation needs. This collective commitment and dedication demonstrates the power of partnerships in achieving sustainable and transformative change within the education sector.

The continued rollout of the SAFE Initiative has made a notable dent in the sanitation infrastructure backlog in the country. At the end of 2021, the NECT anticipated that 300 more schools would receive sanitation upgrades by March 2022 with work in the remainder of the schools allocated



to the NECT to be completed by the second quarter of 2022. The success of the SAFE programme thus far means that the country's goal of eradicating pit toilets and unsafe sanitation facilities across the country remains on track.

The NECT's partnerships with MMI, Procter & Gamble, and the IDC enabled important construction work to be undertaken in KZN in order to ensure schools were restored to functional condition after the interruptions and teaching and learning could resume.

School	Enrollment	Scope of work	Progress
<b>Siphosethu Primary School</b>	1 379	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rebuilding of burnt administrative block</li><li>• Building a new administrative block</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In October 2022, P&amp;G, UNICEF and the NECT organised a handover of the school's new administration block</li><li>• The construction of the new additional administration block was completed in 2023</li></ul>
<b>Golden Steps Special School</b>	215	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Renovation of administration block</li><li>• Renovation of damaged computer block</li><li>• Refurbishment of walkways</li><li>• Removal of asbestos sheeting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All refurbishments to the school have been completed, including replacing the roof covers of a classroom block that was damaged by the floods. Given that this school caters to learners with special needs, the refurbishment of the computer block and walkways has had a significant impact on the accessibility of learning as non-verbal learners can now use the computer rooms to learn and communicate, and learners with physical disabilities can more easily access different parts of the school.</li></ul>



<b>Margot Fonteyn Secondary School</b>	1 651	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovation of the administration block</li> <li>• Renovation of damaged computer block and replacement of stolen computers</li> <li>• Renovations to the school kitchen and replacement of stolen microwaves, industrial fridges and stoves</li> <li>• Replacement of broken windows and burglar bars</li> <li>• Renovations to damaged ceiling in the classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All refurbishments to the school have been completed, including the installation of new appliances.</li> </ul>
<b>Elora Primary School</b>	301	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovations to the classroom block, including fixing damaged electrical cables, ceilings and old floor coverings</li> <li>• Renovating the burnt administration block</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The damaged and stolen electrical cables in the school have been fixed and the rebuilding of the administration block has been completed.</li> <li>• The completion of the ceiling and floor coverings, was completed during 2023.</li> </ul>
<b>Okumhlophe Primary School</b>	1 288	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repainting of damaged walls</li> <li>• Replacement of stolen microwaves and fridges*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All painting work has been completed.</li> <li>• Other partners responded to the need for replacing stolen appliances and, as such, the NECT's scope of work was adjusted to focus on other minor maintenance backlogs in the school which have also been completed.</li> </ul>
<b>Total learner beneficiaries</b>	4 834		

In addition to these schools, the NECT has completed projects at Slavu Primary School; Kwazamokuhle Primary School and Christianeburg Primary School which were all affected by the floods with the remaining schools also undergoing repair and refurbishment work.

# The Covid-19 response initiative – leading the quest for solutions

The year 2020 represented a watershed moment for the country and the world at large. The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic had far-reaching implications, impacting health systems, social structures and necessitating unorthodox and innovative policy responses. The pandemic led to an unprecedented convergence of public health and social challenges, testing the resilience of nations worldwide. In the words of Sizwe Nxasana, “2020 marked a post-apartheid development crescendo. The gains in our democracy, the education reform agenda and the steady but definite progress towards the 2030 NDP goals was abruptly disrupted by the Covid pandemic.”


The unique nature of the virus and the lack of pharmaceutical solutions meant that countries had to adopt a range of non-pharmaceutical interventions whilst the quest for scientific solutions was undertaken. The implementation of social distancing protocols as a measure for mitigating the spread of the virus brought new challenges for the education system. As a system designed with a particular classroom configuration, the education sector had to find new ways of operating under the new social order. Minister Motshekga and other prominent stakeholders consistently

emphasised the critical importance of avoiding prolonged disruptions within the education sector. They highlighted the profound long-term effects that such disruptions could have on the educational journey of learners. Recognising the challenges imposed by limited physical space within schools, Minister Motshekga acknowledged that despite not being ideal, some schools had to resort to rotational schooling, involving staggered attendance. This approach, while addressing space limitations, unfortunately resulted in some loss of learning time.

Anxiety about the fragility of learners stemmed from the understanding that extended periods of detachment from the classroom could significantly disrupt their progress, particularly in acquiring essential reading and numeracy skills. Recognising this, the education sector faced the imperative of finding ways to keep the learning process ongoing, particularly for students at critical stages of their academic journey.

To address this challenge, the sector explored various strategies, including rotational schooling and remote learning in its diverse forms. These instruments aimed to ensure that students at exit levels were given the opportunity to complete their academic programmes despite

Anxiety about the fragility of learners stemmed from the understanding that extended periods of detachment from the classroom could significantly disrupt their progress, particularly in acquiring essential reading and numeracy skills.



the disruptions caused by the pandemic. By implementing rotational schooling, where students attended school on staggered schedules, and embracing remote learning through different mediums, the sector sought to mitigate the impact of extended absences from the classroom.

Throughout these endeavours, the safety of teachers and learners remained the foremost consideration in the sector's response to the pandemic. The well-being and health of all involved were of utmost importance, guiding decision-making processes and shaping the implementation of alternative learning approaches.


Recognising the interconnectedness of physical and educational well-being, the sector strived to strike a delicate balance between providing continued learning opportunities and ensuring the safety of all participants. This commitment demonstrated a steadfast dedication to maintaining educational progress while upholding the health and welfare of students and educators alike.

In navigating the challenges presented by the pandemic, the education sector exhibited resilience and adaptability, exploring innovative solutions to sustain the learning process. By prioritising the completion of academic programmes and safeguarding the well-being of all stakeholders, the sector showcased its commitment to nurturing a conducive environment for learning amidst extraordinary circumstances.


As Nxasana highlighted in his reflections on the challenges of managing the pandemic in the sector, "...the education improvement needs changed drastically during 2020 and required different forms of engagement going forward."

Thankfully, the NECT was purposefully designed to possess the agility necessary to realign its efforts in accordance with the support requirements of the government and partners in the education sector. This inherent flexibility allowed the NECT to effectively respond to the evolving needs of the education landscape, preventing any potential setbacks.

In light of the tremendous crisis that befell the nation, the NECT drew strength from its own mission statement and rallied various stakeholders to collaborate in developing



comprehensive solutions for managing the pandemic response. The Covid-19 Response Initiative (CRI) emerged as the NECT's most pivotal and impromptu undertaking since its inception. With determination, the NECT tapped into its well-established social and stakeholder capital, harnessing the valuable institutional insights found within different realms of the education ecosystem. This collective effort enabled the formulation of a robust and comprehensive response to the crisis.



By leveraging its existing networks and capitalising on the expertise and resources available throughout the education sector, the NECT successfully set its plans into motion. This proactive approach showcased the organisation's commitment to addressing the immediate challenges presented by the pandemic. The NECT's ability to adapt swiftly and mobilise diverse stakeholders reflected its dedication to fulfilling its mission, even in the face of unprecedented circumstances.

The NECT's response to the crisis demonstrated its capacity to be nimble, responsive and resourceful, channelling its capabilities toward providing meaningful support to the country during a time of great need. This dynamic and collaborative effort underscored the NECT's commitment to safeguarding the education sector and ensuring the continuity of quality education for all learners.

Its long-established relationships with teacher unions enabled difficult conversations about the anxieties of educators to be managed with a sense of care that enabled everyone to understand the journey towards stabilising the system. When difficult questions were raised about the possible return to class for learners across the system, the strong collaborative relationship between the DBE and the unions that had been carefully cultivated within the ambit of the NECT's structures was activated to ensure that unions and the DBE worked together towards managing the response to the pandemic.

Of critical importance in this relationship was the fact the teachers themselves felt as vulnerable as any other citizen. The nature of their jobs required them to acknowledge the critical nature of their work as an essential public service. In addition, they had a new responsibility of ensuring that whatever prevailing protocols had to be implemented within schools were adhered to.

According to Sizwe Nxasana, the NECT's significance and effectiveness as a partner for the state and the DBE during the crisis can be attributed to the fact that "the NECT was conceived with the kind of agility that enables it to refocus its work in line with the support requirements of government and partners in the education sector. The agile capabilities of the NECT were effectively used to minimise possible regress in the education sector".

The work previously done by the NECT in working with teachers even before the pandemic became the national blueprint for interventions that could be ramped up during the pandemic.



Instruments like trackers and planners, which the NECT had rolled out over many years as part of its teacher support initiatives, suddenly became critical tools of the trade for teachers trying to keep track of learning progress and curriculum coverage in light of the continuous interruptions and rotational schedules.

Another intervention that the NECT had embarked upon prior to the pandemic – the SAFE Initiative – had provided the institution with abundant insights into the issues of sanitation and hygiene in schools. It was on the back of this work that the NECT initiated a project in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to provide hand washing stations. This crucial project, serving as a vital non-pharmaceutical intervention, encompassed 117 schools across four provinces.

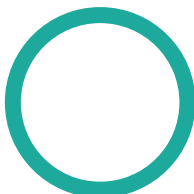
The NECT played a pivotal role in supporting a diverse range of initiatives aimed at preventing disruptions and gridlock within the education sector.

As the pandemic persisted and society adapted to the new way of living, working and learning, the NECT assumed new roles including undertaking an independent, strategic assessment of the readiness of the education system to reopen safely and coordinating critical partner support initiatives such as Woza Matrics. The Woza Matrics programme was instrumental in delivering 369 educational episodes specifically designed for national senior certificate students.

The NECT's ability to respond strategically and effectively during the 2020 health pandemic was made possible by the strong social capital it had built over its seven years of networking with stakeholders and experts. This social capital, which had already made an impact on 86% of schools nationwide by 2019, was quickly mobilised to address the new challenges presented by the pandemic.

The NECT truly contributed to the national imperative to preserve lives and livelihoods during the pandemic. The education sector's strategy to recover from the pandemic was built upon three fundamental pillars: rebooting the system, driving focused recovery, and building back better. These initiatives collectively aimed to revive operations in the short term, implement critical and straightforward system-wide initiatives in the short to medium term, and establish a foundation of social justice, environmental sustainability and innovation in the long term.

The NECT views its collaboration with stakeholders and partners in addressing the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic as a testament to the positive impact of its investment in building social capital over the past decade. This collaboration has yielded significant benefits for the education sector and has contributed to a substantial social dividend for the country as a whole.



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# Stepping up in times of disaster – the NECT as an agent of social change

The period of July 2021 to May 2022 was a period of great social and environmental disturbance in the country. In July 2021, the social unrest that sparked in KZN and spread across other provinces represented a major inflection point for the democratic state. The trigger points and the subsequent reaction at different levels of society represented an intersection of political, social and economic issues. The damage to public infrastructure, which extended to schools, was a great tragedy for the country. The education sector, already grappling with the challenges posed by the pandemic, faced a severe setback when more than 144 schools in KZN and 14 in Gauteng were subjected to acts of vandalism, looting and arson. This unfortunate turn of events compounded the existing strain on the sector, as approximately 1 700 schools had already been damaged and required repairs during the Covid lockdown.

The sudden escalation in resource requirements placed an additional burden on the DBE, further stretching its capacity and resources. This unforeseen situation posed a significant challenge, requiring urgent attention and swift action to restore the affected schools and provide a safe and conducive learning environment for students.

The education sector, despite these setbacks, remained committed to overcoming the obstacles and ensuring that the impact on learners' education was minimised. Efforts were made to mobilise resources, collaborate with stakeholders, implement measures to address the damages and support the affected schools in their recovery process.


It is crucial to acknowledge the resilience and determination of the education sector in navigating through these difficult circumstances. By working together and finding innovative solutions, the sector demonstrated its commitment to overcoming challenges and providing quality education for all learners, even in the face of adversity.

In the aftermath of the disruption, the DBE, in association with the NECT, UNICEF, the KZN Department of Education and the Adopt-A-School Foundation undertook a detailed assessment of the impact of the unrest on the schooling system. The analysis revealed that over 135 schools had been directly affected by the unrest and suffered varying degrees of damage. The initial estimated cost of renovating affected schools was R138 million. According to Minister Motshekga, the eventual cost of the damage to schools in the two provinces was over R200 million.

Given the competing demands on public resources and the unforeseen nature of the unrest, the pressing task at hand was to swiftly mobilise resources to facilitate the recovery efforts. In this critical endeavour, the NECT played a crucial role by utilising its extensive experience and expertise in devising strategies to optimise resource mobilisation for maximum impact.

Drawing from the lessons learned during the response to the pandemic, particularly through the Covid Response Initiative (CRI), the NECT and its institutional partners were well-prepared to respond






to a disruption of this magnitude. The experience gained from the CRI and other initiatives positioned them to tackle the challenges posed by the unrest more effectively.

The NECT's ability to navigate and respond to such unforeseen disruptions was a testament to its readiness and adaptability. By leveraging its established networks, knowledge, and partnerships, the NECT was able to quickly mobilise resources and coordinate recovery efforts in the face of this unexpected crisis.

The focus was on optimising resource allocation to achieve the greatest impact in the recovery process. The NECT's expertise and strategic approach played a pivotal role in ensuring that available resources were effectively utilised and channelled toward the areas most in need.



In the face of challenging circumstances, the NECT demonstrated its resilience and commitment to mobilising resources and responding promptly to crises. Its readiness to address disruptions, supported by valuable insights gained from previous initiatives, underlined the NECT's capacity to adapt and overcome challenges for the benefit of the education sector and the communities it serves.


Getting the affected schools to reopen with adequate infrastructure required the type of resources that could not have been foreseen or budgeted for. Once again, the NECT responded to the call of duty by marshalling a partnership involving the DBE, UNICEF and Procter & Gamble. The partnership mobilised funds that were used to restore some of the most affected schools like Siphosethu Primary School in Pinetown. Siphosethu was one of five priority schools catering to 4 800 students that were identified as targets for intervention. The NECT's work involved more than just coordinating the partnership.

In the rollout of the refurbishment projects, the NECT tapped into its social partners on the ground in ensuring that communities were involved in the project and the unique status of schools as critical social assets was emphasised. The NECT's involvement once again alleviated the pressure on the state to mobilise the resources and also avoided the bureaucratic bottlenecks that usually delay critical public

projects due to procurement rules for state entities. The completion of the refurbishments across all the schools and the handover within a period of months rather than years as well as the completion of projects in the most cost-effective manner demonstrated to the nation at large that the NECT's mastery of how to achieve its mission of mobilising capacity to assist government to achieve distinctive, substantial and sustainable improvements in education was now complete.

When KZN and parts of the Eastern Cape were hit by floods in April 2022, schools were once again severely affected. The NECT responded to the call of duty by conducting infrastructure and education assessments across 630 affected schools. This assessment assisted the DBE to obtain granular insights into the scale of the damage and the resources required to refurbish the schools. True to its ethos, the NECT then mobilised its social capital to partner with the Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa (IDC) and Momentum

In the face of challenging circumstances, the NECT demonstrated its resilience and commitment to mobilising resources and responding promptly to crises.



and facilitate the refurbishment of 15 schools that were affected by the floods.

As demonstrated in this chapter, South Africa is prone to interruptions and disruptions of various dimensions that can have a massive impact on communities and the education sector. Some – like the sanitation crisis – represent longstanding fracture points that need to be addressed. Others – like the Covid-19 pandemic – represent once-in-a-generation events whose impact is so pervasive and widespread that it poses a serious risk to the country's pathway to prosperity. Others – like the July 2021 unrest and the floods in KZN – represent what has become increasingly acknowledged as the biggest risks for the country going forward, the potential for social unrest and the effects of climate change.

## The National Reading Coalition – the country's mission to address the literacy crisis

One of the more enduring challenges in the country's education system, remains the poor performance of South African learners in international benchmark assessments like TIMSS and PIRLS. In the PIRLS assessment, the country's performance is used by the DBE to identify the impact of contextual and structural factors that affect learner progress in literacy. The ranking of the country is regarded by Minister Motshekga as important as it illustrates a commitment to ensure that education stakeholders remain continuously aware of the developments and challenges within the system. The country's peers – developing countries like Mexico – have also embraced the international benchmark assessments as a national check-in reference point. In the results released in 2023, the assessment incorporated the period of great disruption by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic was predicted to reverse some critical gains that had been made over the past decade in literacy scores. Whilst some see the country's participation as a self-defeating exercise, the Minister regards it as an important tool of reflection and accountability. The commitment to addressing the literacy issues in the country: is shared by the Minister of Basic Education and the President. In the 2019 State of the Nation Address, President Ramaphosa articulated his Vision 2030 which includes all ten-year olds being able to read for meaning by 2024. Core to the drive for better reading and literacy outcomes is the provision of reading resources in indigenous home languages which have historically been under-served in terms of availability of materials. In addition to the low prevalence of reading materials in indigenous languages, the culture of reading within and outside the classroom remains a matter of concern in the country. The importance of a reading culture

beyond the classroom is illustrated by the contextual summary in the PIRLS report which indicates that learners who live in home environments where there is a strong culture of reading perform better in international benchmark assessments. Addressing the literacy challenge therefore requires investments in classroom resources and resources aimed at reading for leisure.

In response to the President's call for greater attention to be paid to the literacy challenge, the NECT once again responded to the call to action by partnering with the DBE to create the National Reading Coalition in 2019. In seeking to address the reading challenge, the NECT committed to using its expertise in leveraging networks and partnerships to create a programme that would network, mobilise and coordinate the reading initiatives in at least 25% of the districts in the country. The development of a national plan, which would then serve as the blueprint for the national rollout of interventions aimed at addressing the reading challenges, was the principal output envisaged in the collaboration. In the initial deliberations, six areas were recognised as critical aspects of the mission to improve reading. These were initial teacher preparation, access to relevant resources, community support, continuous professional development, policy, research and evaluation. These areas would naturally be refined over time in order to ensure that the eventual rollout would adequately cover the most important elements.

In 2022, one of the NECT's proudest moments was the release of the '1 Million Storybooks' campaign. Under this campaign, the NECT had commissioned various experts to produce reading materials in nine indigenous languages aimed at Foundation Phase learners. Twenty-one stories were translated to the nine languages, totalling 189 indigenous language storybooks. The campaign before provided provided 1 million books which were distributed to 8 882 primary schools, resulting in the coverage of over 50% of the districts in the system. This served as a first step towards the universal promotion of reading for leisure and a culture of reading beyond the classroom.

Like all initiatives that are systemic, the impact of the National Reading Coalition's projects will be evaluated over a period of time with the practices aimed at promoting literacy becoming more embedded into the practices of the classroom and home environments. The NECT remains convinced that the execution of initiatives informed by a decade of insights and deepening expertise will ultimately shift the reading and literacy needle favourably to the benefit of the country's education system.

The issues discussed in this chapter will continue to affect communities and society in different forms. The case studies presented in this chapter are not an exhaustive list of programmes and initiatives run by the NECT but represent a cross-section of its initiatives and demonstrate the breadth of its programmes and the ability to implement both long-term macro initiatives and agile and effective responses to national crisis moments.



*Launch of the 1 Million Story Book campaign, Siphosethu Primaty School, Mpumalanga in 2022*

Organisations like the NECT, that can mobilise resources and skills to actively intervene at crisis points, will become more important for the state at large. Over the past ten years, as the NECT has evolved and matured as an organisation, it has come to realise that its role transcends its primary mission

and now the organisation provides a template for government role-players and other social partners to imagine new and innovative models of partnerships and collaborations that will ensure that when needed, well-meaning South Africans are able to put up their hands and assist in the national democratic

project. The existence of institutions like the NECT, with its social legitimacy, operational agility and strategic innovation, will remain a critical part of the country's continued path towards prosperity – even beyond the education sector.

### Increasing capacity to support emerging education improvement imperatives

Over the past ten years the NECT has demonstrated the agility to expand its programming to provide technical assistance to the Department of Basic Education.

South African - School Administration Management System	Innovation Programme	Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO)	Education Investment Portfolios	Special Projects
<p>The South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) is a stand-alone system that was originally donated to the Free State Provincial Department of Education (PED). In 2007, realising its potential, the system was adopted as a national school and administration system by the DBE.</p> <p>Through a 2014 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the Department of Basic Education (DBE) requested the NECT to manage the delivery of the South African School Administration And Management System (SA-SAMS) modernisation project under the thematic area of "Improving governments capacity to deliver". The new SA-SAMS is set to streamline school administration and simplify management processes and functions, allowing for more teaching and learning time and better access to and analysis of information</p>	<p>The innovation programme intends to initiate programmes and set up channels that will promote new thinking, approaches and programmes aimed at improving the quality of learning and teaching and the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. proven to be effective and have the potential to enhance the overall performance of the system</p>	<p>The Education Technical Assistance Office (ETAO) was established in 2020 to support the DBE to coordinate and accelerate policy reform by sourcing technical assistance to for the conceptualisation and implementation of four strategic imperatives</p>	<p>The Investment portfolios were introduced in 2020 in response to the need to prioritise critical areas for education improvement, and as vehicles for mobilising financial and non-financial resources to accelerate the development of these areas. This included the Remote and Digital Learning (RDL), and Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL)</p>	<p>This programme aims to advance the collaborative agenda of the NECT and focuses on introducing initiatives that respond to emerging needs within the sector</p>

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## CHAPTER 8

# Charting the path forward: Transcending the first decade

- The pervasive risks such as financial, political and social and the measures being taken to address them
- Transitioning from a school-level focus to adopting a more systemic approach that encompasses the entire education ecosystem
- Implementing a new operating model that shifts from individual programmes to organised divisions
- The significance of the funding model of the NECT and the involvement of non-government collaborators in supporting and financing the NECT's work
- The importance of stable leadership as a crucial competency that enables the NECT to achieve its objectives



## The crucial competency of stable leadership: Enabling the NECT to achieve its objectives

A key enabling competency for the NECT has been the stability and continuity of its leadership at the Trustee level and within the management structure. This stability has been crucial in ensuring uninterrupted long-term strategic planning, as significant personnel changes that would diminish its institutional wisdom have been avoided. Continuity has provided the organisation with the opportunity to enhance institutional capabilities and deepen expertise. The NECT has implemented a multi-level approach to ensure its own stability, focusing on the Board of Trustees, senior management team and the execution and delivery of programmes.

Given the size and complexity of the education system, with its numerous touch points, implementing deep and meaningful interventions cannot be achieved overnight. Minister Angie Motshekga commented on the structure of the education system, recognizing its dual nature and that it is simultaneously vast and delicate. Its vastness stems from the multitude of stakeholders, encompassing both professionals and patriots, whose institutional insights and contributions play a pivotal role in shaping departmental policy decisions. However, this very vastness renders the system fragile due to the intricate interplay of stakeholder interests and relationships. Wrong choices that can reverse the progress achieved within the system can result in devastating consequences that require substantial time to rectify.

Drawing from her extensive tenure as the political head of the DBE, Minister Motshekga has highlighted the inherent challenges in undertaking major policy updates and changes. The consultation process required for such endeavours, coupled with the diverse stakeholder landscape within the department, necessitates a time frame that extends beyond the short terms of political office bearers. Consequently, conceptualising and implementing ideas within the education system demands a level of dedication and consideration that exceeds the limited tenure of political leaders.

Educational interventions inherently require substantial time before their effectiveness and success can be evaluated and measured. Evaluating the impact of Foundational Phase interventions, for instance, can only be objectively done once students transition beyond the intervention phase. Consider the scenario where an intervention is implemented to improve the readiness of students to pursue pure Mathematics in secondary school. In such a case, investments in numeracy and literacy must commence years earlier to gradually develop learners' mathematical aptitude.

Another challenge that arises from having a department with a diverse array of stakeholders is the necessity to foster relationships in order to achieve consensus on inherently controversial issues. Establishing enduring strategic relationships among stakeholder groups requires a framework that creates a solid and trustworthy foundation to enable crucial discussions that impact the sector.

Minister Motshekga's tenure has fostered a sense of policy continuity, facilitating a comprehensive grasp of the state's long-term vision for the educational mission of the country. This continuity has played a crucial role in ensuring policy-aligned planning and implementation.

The link between the national department and the provincial departments relies on effective coordination as the basis for translating national policies into provincial programmes.

Minister Motshekga highlighted

the long tenure of the late Free State MEC Tate Makgoe and the steady improvement in educational outcomes in that province as an illustration of some of the benefits of leadership continuity.

Minister Motshekga has described the late Free State MEC Tate Makgoe as "simply the best".

The NECT has also uniquely benefited from the long-term commitment of its founding Trustees who have remained active and involved in the organisation since 2013. The leadership continuity has had benefits for the NECT externally and internally. The social capital associated with the founding Trustees, and the significant influence they continue to have across society, has made the job of profiling and highlighting the NECT's work much easier to achieve. Across multiple instances of crisis moments in the education system, the NECT has become the trusted partner for external role-players like business and civil society who wish to constructively engage government and co-create interventions. In addition to some of the initiatives already mentioned, the NECT has worked to address some of the country's key challenges in a manner that illustrates its capacity to respond to crises and foster collaboration, provide thought leadership in policy formulation, and deepen coordination of various role-players to maximise impact.



Establishing enduring strategic relationships among stakeholder groups requires a framework that creates a foundation solid and trustworthy to enable crucial discussions that impact the sector.





## EMPHASISING THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

The Vuwani protests of 2016 presented a significant crisis that severely impacted schools and posed the risk of jeopardising the education of an entire generation of learners. This event served as one of the initial instances where the NECT utilised its influence to aid in the recovery efforts.

As mentioned previously, the NECT's ability to promptly address various crises, such as the sanitation crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges caused by the KZN floods and unrest allowed for the collaboration of diverse stakeholders in supporting the government. By leveraging the NECT's programmes and operating model, bureaucratic structures inherent in the state architecture that often impede implementation could be bypassed or minimised, ensuring swift action and an effective response to urgent situations.

## NURTURING THOUGHT LEADERSHIP: EXPLORING POLICY DISCUSSIONS FOR PROGRESSIVE CHANGE

Beyond the crisis moments, the NECT has occasionally stepped up to coordinate critical engagements across education stakeholders, particularly in the civil society space. Its dialogues programme has proved to be a critical thought leadership initiative and policy discussion platform for the sector. In 2015, the NECT took the lead in bringing together civil society stakeholders, fostering discussions on advancements within the sector, and reinforcing the partnership with the Department of Basic Education. At the height of the pandemic, consultations and dialogues became an integral part of managing the national response to the pandemic, and the NECT's role as coordinator enabled many milestones to be reached under extraordinary pressure.

## UNLEASHING COLLECTIVE IMPACT: THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Collaboration with diverse civil society organisations, for example, Room-To-Read, has been recognised as a significant manifestation of "collaboration beyond the primary stakeholder universe." As Godwin Khosa emphasised change, the education system has always consisted of numerous institutions and organisations engaged in various interventions. However, due to the fragmented nature of these efforts, objectively assessing their impact has been challenging. Since 2013, the NECT has taken a leading role in promoting coordination within and across the education sector, marking a fundamental shift in the relationship between the state and civil society. This shift is widely acknowledged as a crucial development in recent years.

Room-to-Read emphasises the critical role of the NECT in involving other stakeholders, noting its unique advantage of being closely connected to the DBE and having strong institutional relationships spanning the entire education system.

Smaller NGOs with specialist focus areas may not be able to individually spread their reach across the system in the manner that the NECT has managed. The NECT's willingness to use its reach to extend the footprint of interventions is regarded by Room-to-Read and Professor Gravett of the University of Johannesburg as an important application of its collaborative spirit.

## ADDRESSING PERVASIVE RISKS: EXPLORING TACTICAL MEASURES IN FINANCE, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Leading the NECT over its first decade has been a privilege and a challenge. Nonetheless, all key stakeholders agree the NECT has been instrumental in helping to shape the country's pathway toward the educational goals of 2030. The ability to successfully leverage strong social capital to advance its mission and serve as a model for collaboration among diverse stakeholders who share a common goal of supporting the country's education system is a template that is relevant for the country at large. Quite importantly, it is critical to reflect on the type of risks and challenges a model of this nature presents. A proper synthesis of the risks provides an opportunity for reflection and also for sharing insights with key stakeholders about what needs to be continuously monitored if the NECT is to survive and thrive for another decade.

If one had to summarise the risk profile of the NECT in its first decade, the following would emerge as the most critical risks the organisation has had to manage: social legitimacy, political and financial risks. The social legitimacy of the NECT hinges not only on its ability to tap into the wisdom and networks of its founding collaborators but also ability to engage meaningfully with role-players throughout the education value chain. Given the fact that the most strategic

partner – the DBE – operates within an environment of mixed levels of trust due to the prevailing perceptions about government in general and the state's capacity to deliver, the NECT needed to ensure that its approach to matters of common interest was inclusive and focused on bridging the gaps across social stakeholders. As previously articulated, the involvement of senior leaders across society with influence across various constituencies served as the most effective tool for addressing this risk.

Over time, the NECT's impressive track record in programme implementation, oversight and governance has instilled a level of trust among external stakeholders that typically requires more than a decade for organisations to establish.

While the NDP and its 2030 targets served as a primary reference for the necessary work, the NECT's initial objective was to make substantial progress within a ten-year timeframe. This required interventions that were patient enough to address the long-term nature of the education sector while being impactful enough to maximise results within the decade. Evaluating the NECT's extensive reach across various spheres of the sector, it becomes clear that the principles of creative work (innovation) and collaborative efforts have yielded significant benefits.

Due to the central role played by the DBE and Minister Angie Motshekga in the story of the NECT, the political risk dimensions associated with the model are worth discussing. Since the inception of the NECT, the responsibility of the department to be the ultimate custodian of the country's education system has been clear and undisputed. The role of the NECT as a complementary support structure which uses the inputs and insights from different stakeholders in order to help the department improve the education system is understood intimately by those actively involved with the NECT. However, it remains possible that others may see the NECT as an extension of the DBE, and also as a project championed by the Minister herself.



This reflection was particularly important for Minister Motshekga as the NECT's entire existence so far has coincided with her role as Minister (in government-speak, the NECT could be referred to as a Motshekga Project). As one knows the Minister will eventually vacate office, it is important for the NECT to establish itself as a partner that is so strategically important to the department and the country that the partnership will continue beyond the Minister's tenure.

When asked to reflect on the risk of new political principals taking a different view on the relationship between the NECT and the DBE, Minister Motshekga shared the view that the NECT's track record is of utmost importance as it has forged robust relationships with the department has become an integral part of the department's strategic framework as a strong partner. This means that even with new leadership in the department, the strategic significance of the NECT partnership will continue to be recognised. While new policy ideas may arise, the essential framework of collaboration and consultation facilitated through the NECT partnership will continue to be central to the department's operations.

For Professor Brian Figaji, the risk of any new political leadership cutting off the NECT's relationship with the department is very low since it is unlikely that "any responsible leader would abandon what has been a well-managed relationship that has delivered value for the country at large". The strong relationship with a state organisation

is not just limited to the DBE. The Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) continues to provide support for the NECT's programmes from the early childhood development (ECD) level to teacher professional development initiatives. The transfer of ECD from the Department of Social Development and its ongoing incorporation into the DBE, is one of the state's key policy shifts that has implications for long-term educational outcomes. The process of capacitating teachers through professional development initiatives enables personal growth and also improves the prospects of different career pathways within the profession for the teachers. The NECT collaboration enables the ETDP SETA to spread its reach deep into the foundational levers of the education system.



Despite the strength of these relationships, the NECT has undertaken proactive management of internal and external risks that could affect its future.

External risks primarily involve the potential loss of funding and stakeholder trust. To mitigate these risks, the NECT has pursued a dual strategy. Initially, as a new organisation, it faced challenges in mobilising resources due to its limited track record. However, the NECT effectively addressed this by leveraging the social capital of its founding Trustees. With a strong leadership team, the NECT secured support from entities like the FirstRand Foundation, which provided the necessary resources to initiate its operations.

Since then, the NECT has further managed risk through the successful implementation of programmes and interventions as well as maintaining an untarnished governance record. This has allowed the organisation to establish itself as a capable

entity with an impressive track record. A common approach to mobilising funds from the non-government sector and unlocking serious financial support is the practice of matching private sector contributions on a one-to-one basis. When this succeeds – as seen in the rollout of the SAFE Initiative in 2018 – we not only see more resources being poured into the system, but we also see improved transparency and accountability. Over the years, the NECT has sought to champion this model across various initiatives where possible. This was done with an eye to avoid an over-reliance on a limited pool of partners and donors.

*NECT Train the Trainer workshop in North West, 2018*

## EXAMINING THE NECT'S FUNDING MODEL: NON-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATORS' CRUCIAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING AND FINANCING THE NECT'S WORK

One common challenge faced by organisations in the non-profit sector is the prevalence of “earmarked funding” for project support. In this model, organisations are expected to allocate resources towards specific initiatives, rather than investing in back-office activities that ultimately support the delivery of frontline projects. Unfortunately, this approach often limits the ability of organisations like the NECT to invest in internal capacity building. Capacity building requires long-term funding that may not always be available in the project-based funding model.

The partnership between the NECT and the FirstRand Foundation has been particularly mindful of this dilemma. Since its inception, the partnership has ensured that the development of internal capacity and capabilities remains a continuous focus of the NECT's work. In the early stages, the FirstRand Foundation not only provided financial support for the NECT's capacity building efforts but also seconded human resources to assist with the establishment of the organisation. These innovative approaches were made possible through the deep understanding of the sector and funding models acquired by Godwin Khosa and Sizwe Nxasana from their extensive involvement with JET and the FirstRand Foundation respectively.

The NECT's remarkable achievements and the unwavering support it has received from external stakeholders are truly worth celebrating. The longstanding partnership with esteemed organisations such as the Zenex and FirstRand Foundations stands as a testament to the immense value they place on the NECT's work. These organisations have set high standards for delivery and governance, and the fact that they have continued to support the NECT since 2013 speaks volumes about the NECT's exceptional track record.

The contributions made by the Zenex and FirstRand Foundations have been nothing short of transformative.

Their generous financial support, along with the secondment of experts to assist the NECT, and funding various evaluations, have fostered deep and meaningful relationships between the NECT and these foundations. Through their collaborative efforts, the NECT has evolved into a true strategic partner, perfectly aligned with the vision and objectives of the foundations.

The NECT's ability to nurture such robust partnerships must be applauded. It is equally important to recognise the Zenex and FirstRand Foundations' unwavering commitment to driving positive change in the education sector. Together, they have forged a powerful alliance that is paving the way for even greater achievements and advancements in the years to come. Let us celebrate their collective impact and the bright future they are shaping for education.

In certain instances, the state has made a commitment to match every rand contributed by the private sector, resulting in an augmented pool of resources available for national

priorities. This has proven instrumental in enabling projects that would have otherwise been constrained by funding limitations to extend their reach and impact. The NECT's involvement has played a significant role in unlocking these additional resources, allowing initiatives to go beyond their initial scope and make a more substantial difference in addressing critical challenges. Under the leadership of CEO Godwin Khosa, the NECT has experienced the benefits of continuity and deepened strategic relationships over the past ten years. Khosa's extensive involvement in the education sector allows him to instinctively understand what works well and what risks to consider, informing the NECT's ongoing operational programmes.

The NECT's track record of efficiently leveraging and deploying funding, demonstrated by initiatives like the SAFE Initiative, has earned it the trust of private sector stakeholders who view it as a reliable steward of financial resources. In the context of the state, burdened with a reputation for limited financial prudence and diminishing public resources amidst competing social needs, the NECT's partnership has played a crucial role in addressing this perception and unlocking additional resources for national initiatives. Through its effective financial management, the NECT has become an invaluable ally in optimising resource allocation and ensuring their efficient utilisation in support of broader societal goals. The fact that close to R2 billion has been mobilised over the past ten years is the best reflection of the value of the NECT model.



## SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES: TRANSITIONING TO A SYSTEMIC EDUCATION APPROACH WITH AN ORGANISED OPERATING MODEL"


Whilst the NECT has made significant contributions to the education sector over the past decade, the Trustees are mindful of persistent challenges in education and society at large. During 2022, the Board of Trustees took stock of the work that had been undertaken since 2013 and acknowledged that gaps remained towards the 2030 targets that could best be addressed by the continued involvement of the NECT in the country's education system. Setbacks like the Covid-19 pandemic and the incidences of social unrest that had impacted schools are issues that are likely to recur in some form in the future. With this in mind and the realisation that the NECT has built strong levels of social legitimacy and equity in the mission to build and maintain relevant social capital over the period, the Board resolved that the NECT would indeed exist beyond the ten-year timeframe.




The background of the slide features a blurred image of a young child with brown hair, wearing a bright red t-shirt. The child is positioned on the left side of the frame. Overlaid on the image are several geometric shapes: a teal circle on the left, an orange circle on the right, and a solid orange circle at the bottom right. A light gray rectangular box is centered on the right side, containing the text.

## **EPILOGUE**

Leveraging the lessons and resources of the first decade to create a relevant and sustainable platform for collaborations and support for continuous educational improvements




This archive of the NECT's work over its first decade has provided a valuable historical record, that offers critical insights for stakeholders seeking to implement the multi-stakeholder model in putting together new initiatives.




There is no doubt that the resource constraints and limitations inherent in the state are expected to persist for a while. This means that key national initiatives are at risk of inadequate resourcing and failing to materialise. The formation of partnerships between state and non-state entities has deep historical roots in South Africa. Leveraging the agility and innovation of non-state actors together with the scale and reach of the public sector represents a vital aspect of collaboration that should be harnessed, when possible, to address national imperatives.

This archive along with other work that the NECT has made available to the public at large, enables the country to build on its own literature on multi-stakeholder collaborations and programme design and execution. Throughout the course of this book, we have gained a more granular insight into the interconnected roles played by various stakeholders in the formation of the NECT and the development of a model that bridges historic divides between state and non-state entities. The NECT's capacity to establish a platform of continuous, constructive engagements between government, labour, civil society, and business has fundamentally transformed the nature of interactions that were once characterised by mutual distrust.

Perhaps the single most explicit example has been the end of protracted strike action in the sector due to the ability of the main unions – SADTU and NAPTOSA – to elevate the voice of teachers in critical conversations with the Department. Less visible but no less important, has been the gradual introduction of professionalisation in the sector. As a matter of concern that was elevated as far back as the initial Leadership Dialogue of 2012, the professionalisation of the sector has been a crucial factor in improving the education outcomes of the sector. Professionalisation programmes that have been implemented by the NECT, serve the dual role of fostering individual professional development and improving the capacity of the teaching profession at large. The case study of Mt Ayliff Secondary School – where the different elements of professionalisation and their impact on the macro-level and granular level are illustrated – represents an important reference point for policymakers, unions, and teachers themselves.





In his book titled *Collaboration in Development – A South African Heritage*, Dr. Godwin Khosa refers to eight motivations for the creation of collaborations. One of the motivations is the biographical motivation that each individual has that leads them to want to participate in a structure that addresses key national issues. Such biographical motivations played an instrumental role in getting the founding trustees to step forward and join the organisation. Leveraging the social capital inherent among these individuals, the NECT creatively harnessed its potential to build a collective sense of credibility that enabled the organisation to widen its reach and visibility within a short period. This social capital has been fundamental to the NECT's programme of action. It informed the adoption of the theme for the commemorative agenda of the NECT which was titled 'Ten Years of Social Capital Building for Education Improvement'. Uniquely, the NECT has extended the use of its significant social capital beyond its objectives. By playing a leading role in the formation of structures like NASCEE, the NECT has ensured that its social capital serves as a catalyst for other civil sector role players to amplify and deepen the role they can play in improving the education sector.


The motivation of the founding trustees has remained undiminished over the years and ten years later, they remain actively involved in the organisation. This leadership continuity and stability have created space for strategic long-term planning that is appropriate for the education system given its long-term duration. The alignment of the NECT's programmes with the Department's goals means that the continuity of programmes is likely to survive the leadership transitions within the Department and the NECT itself. Such a development is critical when one considers the historic limitations of intervention programmes formed and executed in parallel to the national education department which failed to reach the right levels of impact in relation to the resources deployed.

Dr. Khosa also identifies 'Crises as a motivation for collaboration'. For the NECT, the looming crises in 2012 and 2013 was the possibility of the country falling short of meeting its National Development Goals. That possibility

on its own was a strong enough motivation for the initial collaborators to initiate conversations about how it could be addressed. Later, as new crises emerged and threatened to reverse the gains made in the education sector, the NECT's agility and responsiveness significantly cut down the recovery time towards the restoration of the status quo. The response to the crisis in Vuwani, the July 2021 unrest and the subsequent flooding in KZN provide illustrations of how the crises served as catalysts for collaboration. The collaboration was facilitated by the presence of an organisation dedicated to promoting, facilitating, and fostering collaborative efforts to make it easier to respond effectively to the challenges that arose.

While the COVID-19 crisis represented the single most widespread threat to the progress of the education system, its negative impact on medium- and long-term outcomes was severely diminished by the NECT's work in leading the state-wide response initiatives to the crisis. The data collected by the NECT during the crisis through surveys and engagements with key stakeholders has bolstered the country's information archive regarding the public education system. Insights gathered during the pandemic were not only important for crafting appropriate responses to the pandemic, but also serve as reference points for future responses to issues affecting the sector.

By playing a leading role in the formation of structures like NASCEE, the NECT has ensured that its social capital serves as a catalyst for other civil sector role players to amplify and deepen the role they can play in improving the education sector.



The involvement of parents and communities in the education of South African children remains a matter of ongoing development. The NECT's District Schools Committee programme has galvanised the participation and support of community stakeholders which has significantly elevated the profile of schools as community and social assets. The inclusive governance model of the District Steering Committees has promoted a culture of collective accountability and shared responsibility amongst community members and parents. The NECT's work on preaching the gospel of education as a collective responsibility has been illustrated by the move to engage parents and guardians in the learning process through the provision of multilingual reading materials that can be used beyond the classroom. This strategy of 'socialising' education will have positive impacts on the country's literacy development and the drive to ensure that 'the performance of South African learners in international standardised tests is comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with similar levels of access' as required by the NDP.

The development of internal capacity within the NECT has resulted in an organisation that is ready to embrace a shift in its strategic orientation. Over the past couple of years, the NECT has reflected on its work since 2013 and also engaged in deliberations around its mission beyond the first decade.

This process of reflection was crystallised in 2021 when the NECT underwent an external evaluation process commissioned by the FirstRand Empowerment Foundation and supported by the Board of Trustees. Core to the evaluation process was the question of what impact the NECT's programmes have had on the education system since 2013. Such an evaluation represented a large-scale assessment that was largely in line with the continuous internal evaluations the NECT undertakes on its own programmes. The ability to tap into the external evaluation process allowed a greater sense of objective analysis that the NECT embraces as a proactive measure of assessing the state of the organisation and its impact.

In the external evaluation, the fundamental findings confirmed that the NECT programmes have reached and positively influenced the bulk of the education system through direct interventions affecting over 110 000 teachers and principals (over 25% of the system) and over 91% (22 812) of the schools across all provinces. The NECT's various programmes have been absorbed into the education system and institutionalized thanks to the systemic approach adopted by the NECT. The institutionalization of these programmes and initiatives, was an important criterion for the NECT as it directly linked to the mission of building and improving state capacity.

The development of internal capacity within the NECT has resulted in an organisation that is ready to embrace a shift in its strategic orientation.

In addition to these reflections, the external evaluation also identified critical areas for strengthening the NECT's work and impact on the education system. These included the following elements:

1. Ensuring the organisation maintains its ability to swiftly react to emerging developments within the education sector.
2. Guarding against overextension, which could potentially compromise the quality and effectiveness of interventions.
3. Implementing improved communication strategies to disseminate information and knowledge to stakeholders more effectively.
4. Making a more concerted effort to address gender imbalances at the management level.
5. Balancing the need to maintain trust with partners requiring strategic response projects like SAFE while not diverting attention from the core mission of education improvement.

Subsequent engagement with stakeholders through the 2022 Leadership Dialogue and the District Conference on Education Reform confirmed the need for the NECT to extend its role in supporting education improvement beyond its ten-year lifespan. When the Board of Trustees reflected on these observations, the issue of the existential crisis question – whether the organisation still has a role to play and a purpose to serve – organically resolved itself.

We know that over the past decade, the NECT has contributed to local and international knowledge on effective education improvement initiatives. The fact that the NECT has successfully run initiatives in a country of vast inequalities in resources and capabilities; and ran initiatives through a period of extraordinary challenges in 2020 and 2021; means that it has proven its distinct ability to adapt and innovate with a sense of agility often not available in public sector systems and large-scale interventions.

Some of the lessons learned over the past decade include the following:

- Achieving sustainable education improvements requires continuous school and teacher support from the district and provincial levels.
- Strengthened capacity building for district and provincial officials is required to enable them to adequately implement policy and support teachers and schools.
- Sustainable education improvement cannot be achieved without sufficient resourcing.
- Creating a platform for stakeholder engagement and consultation has encouraged and ensured buy-in which has contributed to stability within the sector, especially in times of crisis and major policy changes like the shift of the Early Childhood Development into the Department of Basic Education.
- There is a shortage in capacity within and outside government for education planning and management and ensuring the implementation of DBE strategic initiatives.
- There is a need to resuscitate collaboration with and between universities to advance research that will positively contribute to education reform.

These reflections have been instrumental in the Board of Trustees' deliberations about the future and the strategic direction of the NECT. While the board concurred with the views of the various stakeholders that the NECT's lifespan warranted an extension beyond the ten-year timeframe, it also had to deliberate on the question of how the organisation should execute its mission going forward.

With this in mind, the Trustees have concluded that the formulation of the NECT's strategy beyond ten years, should be guided by a range of programming and national strategic principles that are underpinned by three imperatives –

- Exploring new forms of support
- Consolidating the initiatives that remain relevant to the current education improvement agenda; and
- Improving the modus operandi of the support

From these imperatives, the key programming principles are as follows:

- Increased contribution to the education recovery strategy.
- Strengthened systemic approaches.
- Contributing to a balanced approach between the current and future education agenda.
- Consolidating previous successes and increasing the impact of future programmes.

These programming principles are complemented by national strategic principles that are defined as follows:

- Contribution to stable transitions between policy and administrative offices at national and provincial levels.
- Strengthened collaborations amongst key education actor groups.
- Supporting the sector to keep focus on 2030 NDP goals.


The principles have been applied in formulating a new strategy for the NECT which has resulted in the shift in programming to focus from the school level to the district level in order to ensure a more systemic approach to education improvement. In the view of the NECT, districts still represent the most important interface for the education system and getting districts to work and function better; results in an education system that works and functions better.

A key outcome of this process of introspection and deliberation is the decision to structure the NECT's programmes around three pillars which will be represented by divisions each with a defined strategic intent and fundamental design principles.


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Division	Strategic Intent	Design principles
<b>Schools and district systems</b>	To contribute to improving learning, teaching and the broader educational outcomes in schools by researching, testing and implementing initiatives relating to the curriculum delivery, management of schools and parent and community support	Establishment of initiatives that support the strengthening of curriculum delivery capabilities in the education system
<b>Systems capacity support</b>	To support the design and implementation of systemic initiatives that support the improvement of curriculum design, management of schools and learning and teaching	<p>Injection of strategic project management and technical capabilities into the education system aimed at providing delivery solutions and/or unlocking educational improvement opportunities</p> <p>The operational object of the division is to facilitate the process of matching skills and expertise demand in the education system and the supply of such from the non-state spheres</p>
<b>Social compact building and partnerships</b>	<p>To design and implement initiatives that promote a shared vision for education improvement and create partnerships around specific programmes and projects which partners initiate or are invited to join</p> <p>The division promotes greater involvement of the partners in education and enables them direct line of sight or even involvement in the projects' design, implementation and evaluation</p>	Providing platforms for greater collaboration of partnership among education actor groups that share education improvement goals, values and principles



The lessons accumulated over the first decade and documented here, indicate that South Africa's heritage of collaboration and partnerships remain a strong instrument for addressing the nation's development goals.

Drawing on the NECT's successful experiences and accumulated knowledge over the years; and building on the strong social capital networks that have been established, informs focus on the three divisions that will house the NECT's programme of work. It is the view of the NECT that the new model strikes the right balance between support for the broader education system; enhancing capacity building and coordination; and ensuring that the benefits of social capital building, are cultivated for another decade.

The process of shifting organisational processes and governance systems to accommodate the new strategy and the new operational divisions has already been initiated by the NECT. At this critical crossroad in the organisation's history, we reflect with a sense of pride on the achievements of the first decade and look forward to the next decade with a sense of hope that the NECT's work within the education system, will continue to generate significant benefits for the nation and its children.

As reflected in this book, the NECT's journey during its first decade serves as a significant case study for business leaders, policymakers, social partners, and stakeholders interested in addressing the substantial challenges within the constraints of limited resources and managing conflicts and divergent interests among stakeholders. The lessons accumulated over the first decade and documented here, indicate that South Africa's heritage of collaboration and partnerships remain a strong instrument for addressing the nation's development goals. This heritage needs to be promoted, protected, and replicated in other sectors in order to assist the country in charting a path towards a more prosperous and equitable future.




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