

SPEECH DELIVERED BY MRS THAMO MZOBE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY AT THE NATIONAL SA ECD AWARDS 2017. 11 DECEMBER 2018

The Deputy Minister of Social Development, Ms Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu

The NDA Chairperson of the Board, Ms Judy Hermans and the board members present tonight.

Members of the National and Provincial ECD Steering Committees
Officials from the Department of Social Development, SASSA and the NDA

Members of Civil Society Organisations

Members of the media,

And our VIP guests, our finalists

The early years of life are crucial in influencing a range of health and social outcomes across the life course. Research now shows that many challenges in adult society – mental health problems, obesity, heart disease, criminality, competence in literacy and numeracy, have their roots in early childhood. Economists around the world now argue on the basis of the available evidence that investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment a country can make, with returns over the life course many times the amount of the original investment. Government, civil society and the private sector can make major and sustained improvements in society by implementing policies that take note of this powerful body of research.

Deputy Minister, the NDA has a vision of a “Society free of poverty.” This vision tasks us as the NDA with the responsibility of being involved in programmes that will make this vision a reality and promulgate interventions that will intensify the fight against poverty. The awards ceremony tonight is a demonstration that the NDA is still on course in attaining its vision. Without investment into early childhood development, impactful programmes into this sector and the necessary capacitation, our vision will remain just that, a vision. We cannot fail our children and

country when early childhood development is a public good in South Africa.

When we announced the opening of the entry forms late last year, we ran an intensified media campaign to ensure that many of our people particularly those in rural and remote communities know about the awards and also participate. We made sure that entry forms were distributed to various NDA and DSD provincial offices for them to be made available to the ECD programmes across the country. Over the last three years that the NDA has hosted these awards, we have collected over Eight Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety (8990) entry forms. We have used these entry forms as part of our consolidated database that informs our various intervention strategies in improving the ECD sector.

The Best Practitioner and Best Centre categories are shortlisted by the NDA SAECD Provincial Committees in the nine provinces that are comprised of representatives from the ECD sector, provincial DSD, provincial DBE, provincial Department of Health and the Environmental Health in the municipalities. These committees ensure that there are top 10 finalists in Best Practitioner and Best Centre categories. The finalists were presented with certificates and prizes during the provincial SAECD Awards ceremonies. These provincial awards were hosted by the respective MECs within the nine provinces and we are grateful for the effort of provinces in ensuring the success of the provincial leg of the awards. The finalists present here today are the 1st winners in both categories from the provincial leg of the competition.

The verification for the national five categories - Best Programme for children with disabilities, Best Nutrition, Best Non Centre Based Programme, Best Trainer and the Best Publication were shortlisted and verified by the NDA's national steering committee. That committee comprises of the national Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Sport and Recreation, Department of Health, and the South African Congress of Early Childhood Development (SACECD). The shortlisted finalists were then verified through site visits by the team.

Tonight we have a total of thirty four (34) finalists from all nine provinces. All these finalists present tonight were adjudicated on 10th of December 2018 by the National SA ECD awards steering committee members to select the national winners. Out of the 34 finalists, 22 will be presented with trophies and prizes tonight. We want to also utilize this opportunity and recognise some of our partners who have contributed to the provincial leg of the awards. In the Free State the Department of Social Development contributed Fifty three thousand rands (R53 000) in cash prizes and the Department of Education in the province also contributed laptops for all the provincial winners. The prizes we have presented in the provincial and the national stage being hosted tonight come to a sum total of Six hundred and sixty thousand rands (R660 000). This can never be enough given the mammoth task facing the ECD sector and its responsibility of developing our children

Ladies and gentlemen, we meet this year for the South African ECD Awards on a critical year when the government of South Africa has declared 2018 as the centenary year to honour the life and contributions of President Nelson Mandela and Mama Albertina Sisulu. These two giants displayed selfless service to the building of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa we enjoy today and our children can be proud of. They too believed that a society that does not centre its efforts on the well-being of children is a society that does not have a future. Today we honour men and women in the ECD sector who embody the characteristics of these outstanding compatriots.

Through these awards we have been able to recognise the selfless work being done by such women and men to give our children an early start to their education across the country. We cannot speak about developing the state of education in South Africa without investing in the foundation phase called ECD. These awards serve as a tool to enable us to put ECD on top of the development agenda in South Africa so that we can indeed realise a South Africa free of poverty.

Allow me to take this opportunity Deputy Minister to thank all those who submitted their forms for the awards. Some of them are represented tonight through the thirty four (34) finalists and others didn't make it to this stage of the awards but we want to thank them for entering. This says to us as the NDA that you value the work you do and you deem it

necessary for that work to be recognised. To all the finalists here today, thank you. Thank you for taking the most important job in the country which is to serve those who are the jewel of our country, our children. No one today leaves here a winner or loser. You leave here as people who have championed the cause of President Nelson Mandela which is to improve the lives of African children, and for that we can never thank you enough.

In the African context we believe that it takes a village to raise a child. You have gone beyond just being members of the village who help raise a child, but have made it your personal responsibility to make sure that these children grow up to be the best they can be. This lifelong commitment you have made, is recognised through these awards and challenges us to play an active role as a community in this village.

Our work as the NDA in the ECD sector will continue because we will never attain our vision until we develop and capacitate the future generations for a better South Africa. Deputy Minister, allow me to also thank you for the commitment that you continue to demonstrate for the advancement of the ECD sector in South Africa. May you continue to challenge us to do the best we possibly can to improve this sector for the sake of our children.

In 1995, the late President Mandela was quoted saying – “Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth who care for and protect our people.” This statement charges us not to rest as government, civil society and the private sector until the foundation for the development of children in South Africa can produce the desired results. Let our gathering here tonight not only be a celebration but also a statement that we all stand together to develop the ECD Sector.

I thank you.