Member of the Executive Council for Education

Keynote Address by Honourable MEC Dr MJ Maboya at the Official Launch of the Free State Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTbBE) – Programme, Tharollo Primary School, Qwaqwa | 30 June 2025

Motsamaisi wa Lenaneo, ke kopa ka hlompho ho qala ka ho hlompha le ho amohela ba latelang:

Boemedi ba Lefapha la Thuto ya Motheo (DBE),

Ba boholong ba Thuto ba Profensi le ba Setereke,

Marena a rona a hlomphehang le Baholo ba Setjhaba tsa rona,

Bo Majoro le Makhanselara a teng kwano,

Baemedi ba Makgotla a tsamaiso ya Dikolo (SGBs),

Baemedi ba mekgatlo ya matitjhere,

Baqolotsi ba ditaba le di tsebi tsa puo tse teng hara rona kajeno,

Mesuwe le mesuwetsana, baithuti, batswadi le bahlokomedi,

Baeti ba tlotlehang,

Bomme le bontate, **Dumelang, Good morning**

Programme Director it is with deep pride and immense purpose that I stand before you today at Tharollo Primary School, in the heart of Qwaqwa, to mark a powerful new chapter in the story of education in the Free State. Today, we are not just launching a programme - we are restoring the dignity of language, culture, and identity in the classroom.

The **Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTbBE)** programme is a bold and necessary step forward in ensuring that every child learns to read, think, and thrive first in the language of their heart, while gaining full access to English **as a subject** and as a language of wider communication.

This is about equity and excellence. And most of all, it is about giving our children the best possible foundation to learn with meaning and to succeed with confidence.

Motsamaisi wa Mosebetsi, kajeno lena se re kopantseng mona ha se ho keteka feela, ebile hase feela ho tsebahatsa ka Lenaneo le itseng la thuto. Ke tsosolletso ya toro e ileng ya tjheswa kgale, ke ho kgutlisa lentswe le neng le nyediswa, le hatakelwa tlasa mmuso wa kgatello.

Language - the first inheritance we receive from our mothers - was among the very first things to be attacked in our painful history. The severing of language has damaged generations; it stripped us of our dignity, disconnected us from our identity, and displaced us from our natural position within the knowledge systems and progress of humanity.

Today, from the sacred soil of Qwaqwa - one of the towns with a unique historical legacy in the Free State - we rise to plant the seeds of freedom, nourished by the endurance of our ancestors, the wisdom of our elders, and the hopes of generations yet to come. And there could be no moment more fitting than the Youth Month of June 16 to proclaim this revival.

Programme Director, the advancement of the Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTbBE) programme is not separate from the spirit and significance of June 16 - it is a direct continuation of its legacy. It is a living response to the cry of the youth of 1976, who rose against an education system designed to oppress and destroy the African mind.

On that historic day, the youth were not merely rejecting Afrikaans as a medium of instruction - they were rejecting an entire system designed to oppress and control. Today, through the implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTbBE) programme, we honour their sacrifice not with slogans or symbolic gestures, but through real, transformative change.

We are rewriting the way knowledge is transmitted. We are restoring African languages to their rightful place - as instruments of thought, power, and liberation. MTbBE is not an isolated intervention; it is firmly anchored in South Africa's democratic Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP), which affirms the right of learners to be educated in their home language wherever possible. It is one of the post-apartheid government's earliest policy responses to the deep-rooted inequalities of the past - an intentional step towards dismantling the linguistic hegemony imposed under apartheid, and building a more inclusive and empowering education system.

It is a profound tribute to the youth of 1976 - a generation that, nearly 50 years ago, risked everything to defend the right to learn in a language they could understand. Today, we choose not to remember them in silence, but through action - by teaching in the very languages they fought to protect.

Bomme le bontate, kajeno ke tsatsi la phetoho e tebileng le e matlafatsang, leeto la rona la ho busetsa matla a dipuo tsa Afrika e le Dipuo tsa Thuto, ho ithuta le ho hlahloba (LoLTA).

Ka leano lena le sebete la MTbBE, re phatlalatsa hore ha ho ngwana ya tshwanetseng ho khethollwa puong ya hae e le hore a fumane thuto; phetoho ya nnete e qala ha re ruta bana ba rona ka puo ya bona ya letswele, ka lentswe la bona, le ka matla a bona. **Motsamaisi wa Mosebetsi,** motsotso ona o re qobella ho sheba ka nqane ho melao le maano - ho ya ho boitsebiso ba rona (identity).

Ha re sheba leano lena la MTbBE hantle, re utlwisisa hore puo ha se thutohadi feela - ke mothapo o hokahaneng le boitsebo ba rona, mehopolo, le bokamoso. Ho ruta le ho hlahloba ka puo ya letswele ho feta Grade 3, ke ho tiisa botho ba rona, le ho kgutlela mohloding wa tsebo wa baholo-holo ba rona. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, one of Africa's leading scholars and writers, reminds us: ***"Every language has two aspects: it is a means of communication, and it is a carrier of culture."***

Ho lahlehelwa ke puo ha se ho lahlehelwa ke mantswe feela – empa hape ke ho kgaola setjhaba le mohopolo wa sona, le lebitso la sona, le moya wa sona.

It is no accident, therefore, that we continue to see poor performance among learners as they transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 - it is precisely because they are suddenly expected to learn in languages they do not understand, severed from the very languages in which they first made sense of the world. The shift alienates them cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. It is not a failure of the child - it is a failure of the system.

When colonial rule swept across the world, it did not come bearing only guns and laws - it also brought linguistic confusion. In courtrooms, classrooms, and churches, African languages were dismissed, degraded, and systematically dismantled. In South Africa, as across much of the African continent, generations were taught to abandon isiZulu in favour of English, to silence Sesotho in favour of Afrikaans, to trade isiNdebele and Tshivenda for European languages - all in the name of so-called *"progress."*

But progress that comes at the cost of identity is no progress at all. That is why the **Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTbBE)** programme is not only necessary - it is urgent. It restores dignity where there was once shame, clarity where there was once confusion, and confidence where there was once silence.

Several provinces have already begun to lead the way. The **Eastern Cape** has piloted MTbBE in isiXhosa, the **Limpopo Province** in Sepedi and Tshivenda, and **KwaZulu-Natal** in isiZulu - demonstrating that children learn best when taught in the language they speak, think, and dream in. These initiatives have begun to yield positive results: greater learner participation, improved comprehension, and stronger foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes. These provinces have recognised that **language is not a barrier to education - it is the bridge**.

It is now time for the **Free State** to follow suit. Our children deserve to thrive in classrooms where their home languages are not sidelined but celebrated.

They deserve to be taught in Sesotho and isiXhosa - the languages of their families, their ancestors, and their inner worlds - while being supported to become confident in English as a language of wider communication. This is not a political decision - it is a pedagogical, psychological, and moral imperative. As Frantz Fanon warned us, that kind of “progress” was built upon our degradation - upon the erasure of African knowledge. **Ka nnete, puo e ile ya fetoha lebaleng la ntwa – mmoho le moputso wa yona.**

Kajeno, re nka mohato o sebete kgahlanong le lefa lena la bokolone le ileng la kgaola bana ba rona le tokelo ya bona ya tlhaho ya ho ithuta ka puo ya bona.

We declare, with conviction, that learner-centred education is not merely an emotional preference - it is a critical necessity for cognitive development and intellectual growth. This is affirmed by research in cognitive science, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021), and by scholars such as Jim Cummins.

Ha bana ba nahana, ba bala ka puo eo ba e utlwisisang hantle - dithuto tsa bona di phahamela hodimo haholo.

Ha re sheba dinaha tse etellang pele moruong - German, China, France, Japan - bana ba bona ba ithuta ka dipuo tsa lapeng. Ba utlwisisa hore puo ha se nalane feela - ke motlakase wa bohlale, saense le tlhabollo ya moruo. Ke hobaneng ha ngwana wa Qwaqwa, wa Petsana, wa Maokeng, wa Botshabelo, wa Thaba Nchu a tlameha ho ithuta ka puo eo eseng ya lapeng la hae?

Let us be clear: this is not about retreating into tradition - it is a forward-looking strategy. A Sesotho or Xhosa child who begins their education in Sesotho or isiXhosa does not start from behind. They start with a clear mind, a strong sense of identity, and the cognitive power that makes a profound difference. With this foundation, our children become thoughtful, creative, and confident individuals - fully prepared to engage with the world at large.

Motsamaisi wa Mosebetsi, thuto e hlakolang boitsebiso (identity) ha e nke lehlakore - e mabifi. Empa ka tsosoletso ena ya MTbBE, re re:" **ho lekane".** Ha re sa tla hlola re kopa ngwana wa Afrika ho iphapanya PUO YA HAE hore a tle a ithute. Ha re sa tla hlola re metha bohlale ka puo eo e seng ya letswele. Ha re sa tla hlola re ferekanya bana bitsong la ho ikamahanya le "tsoelopele" ya bokoloniale. Ka MTbBE, re qala tsosoloso e kgolo - ho sebedisa botjha dipuo, ho khutlisetsa bohlale ba baholo-holo, le ho tswala meloko mecha e tla ruta, e ithute le ho etella pele ka seriti sa dipuo tsa bona.

Ha re keteka Kgwedi ena ya Bacha, le ho hopola moya o sebete wa la 16 June, ha re se ba hopoleng ka dipuo feela - empa ka diphetoho tseo ba di tlesitseng. Lenaneo lena ke karabo ya moloko ona - e qalang ka phaposing ya thuto. **Ruri! Ke nako ya ho lokisa tshenyo e tlileng le bokoloniale le puso ya bohanyapetsi.** Ke nako ya hore dikolo tsa rona di rute ka puo e phelang ya bo mme ba rona - eseng feela ka dipina le dipapadi, empa ka mehato e hlakileng.

Truth is that the dominance of colonial languages in the teaching of science, mathematics, and technology has damaged the perception of African intellectual capacity. It was a falsehood that taught generations that our languages were not suitable for expressing intelligence or conveying scientific knowledge.

Leha ho le jwalo, diphuputso di ntse di bontsha se seng - seo borasaense/bo ramahlale ba rona ba setseng ba se bua ka dilemo: **Bana ba ithuta ka matla ha ba rutwa ka puo eo ba e utlwisisang ka ho fetisisa, eleng puo ya letswele.**

As I pointed out earlier, UNESCO (2021) clearly shows that education in the mother tongue improves comprehension, supports inclusive learning, and enhances educational outcomes. Scholar Jim Cummins also affirms that reading ability developed in the home language strengthens and supports the acquisition of a second language - a concept he refers to as ***"Common Underlying Proficiency."***

Ke hona moo re reng MTbBE ha se boithabiso - ke mohato o reretsweng ho phahamisa dipuo tsa Afrika hore e be dipalangwang tsa tsebo ya saense, thuto e tebileng, le tiisetso ya setso.

This is not about choosing between our language and the language of power - it is about using both. A child who can conduct a science experiment in Sesotho and present the findings in English is a child who possesses intelligence and dignity - a child who is prepared for this dynamic and ever-changing world.

As Professor Neville Alexander once said, "***Multilingualism is a resource, not a problem."*** In this model, we are not just changing the language - we are transforming the very structure of education, unlocking the classroom, and aligning learning with the real lives and lived experiences of our children.

Mme ke sebaka se fe se loketseng ho qala tsosoloso ee ho feta Qwaqwa - naha eo batho ba yona ba kileng ba sebetsa e le batshwaredi ba puo, lefa, le kganyetso? Profesa Alexander goes on to say that: ***"Any society that aspires to democracy must, by definition, be multilingual. Monolingualism is the enemy of diversity, and therefore of democracy."***

Lenaneo lena ke phatlalatso ya boikemisetso ba rona ba demokrasi le ntshetsopele. This is not about excluding ourselves from the global stage - it is about redefining how we engage with it. Because the future of South Africa cannot be built on the erasure of the past. Economic progress, technological innovation, and social development cannot succeed if they are built on foundations of exclusion. Let me be absolutely clear:

You cannot build African excellence on an education system designed entirely in Europe. You cannot nurture a child who grows up believing that their language is inferior to others. You cannot decolonise education if the language of learning remains the language of colonial domination.

Post-colonial studies have long taught us that colonial systems - both of the body and of the mind - must be confronted boldly, not simply lamented.

Scholars like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Achille Mbembe challenge us to imagine new languages, new pedagogies, and new futures rooted in the lived realities of the African child. Achille Mbembe reminds us: ***"The challenge of our time is to begin where we are, in Africa, and to imagine new human beings through African knowledge."*** That challenge begins with language - with reclaiming our right to learn, think, and thrive in the tongues of our mothers, while navigating the world with confidence and clarity. Because true transformation is not imitation. It is the restoration of self, the reimagining of progress, and the refusal to build tomorrow on a foundation that denies who we truly are.

Bomme le bontate, karabo ya rona ke lenaneo lena la MTbBE.

Thuto ka puo ya lapeng/ya letswele ha se taba ya puo feela - ke taba ya ho hlompha motho le ho kgutlisa seriti sa hae. Ke taba ya moruo o kenyeletsang bohle. Ke tsosoloso ya setso. Ke ho tiisa hore ngwana ha a hole le thuto hobane a nahana ka puo e fapaneng.

Nahana ka sena: ngwana ya lorang ka Sesotho, ya bapalang ka isiZulu, o lebelletswe ho bala le ho ngola ka English ho tloha Grade 1. Hona hase tokoloho - ke pherekanyo ya kelello. **Afrika e tshwanetse ho bua dipuo tse ngata - empa e se lebale puo tsa yona.**

We must give birth to a new education system - one in which the African child is no longer forced to choose between learning and being themselves. This is not simply a programme - it is a transformation of the mind.

It is a bridge between generations - from the language of the ancestors to the digital learning of our children. Re tla kwetlisa matitjhere a rona. Re tla hlophisa di sebediswa tsa thuto. Re tla matlafatsa mekgwa ya ho ruta. Empa ka ho fetisisa, re tla bea ngwana wa Afrika bohareng - e seng feela jwalo ka moithuti, empa jwalo ka karolo ya bohlokwa thutong le tswelong pele ya lefatshe. Lefatshe le bontshang moya wa Ubuntu.

Steve Biko profoundly captured this in one of his powerful messages: ***"The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."*** Kajeno, re nka kelello eo - ka lentswe le le leng ka nako. Ha re aheng tsamaiso ya thuto moo ngwana a sa tlameheng ho tlohela puo ya hae monyako wa sekolo. Ha re be batswadi bao bana ba rona ba tla ba leboha ka motlotlo ka hosane.

Bo Mme le bo Ntate, Tharollo Primary School e tla hopolwa historing e le sebaka sa phetoho - sebaka sa toka ya thuto, kutlwisano ya moya, le tsosoloso ya setso. Ngwana e mong le e mong ya tshelang monyako wa sekolo sena o lokela ho tseba hore: **Puo ya hao ha se poelo morao. Setso sa hao ha se ditshila. Lentswe la bo-mme ke lentswe la bohlale.**

Qetellong, ke qotsa hape Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, ha a re: ***"To starve or kill a language is to starve and kill a people's memory bank."*** Re hana ho timetsa puo ya rona, re hana ho timetsa le sehopotso sa rona**.**

Ha re tsoheng. Ha re ruteng. Ha re busetseng. Ha re tsholeleng dipuo tsa rona bophelo bo botjha. **Ke a leboha**.