

Speech at the Launch of the Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme

PRETORIA, 23 JULY 2000

Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable MPs,
Directors-General,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

In our many interactions with Directors-General in the past year, we raised a number of issues that we believe are critical if we are to achieve our objectives of, amongst others, making government work in an integrated way, building the capacity necessary to meet the challenges of ensuring a better life for all, and the need for each one of us to develop a macro perspective and think strategically beyond the confines of our immediate line functions.

I believe that the launch of the Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme is an important step in this direction.

If we are to develop this macro perspective, work in an integrated way and build the capacity and expertise necessary to face the challenges of the modern world, we should, ourselves, understand correctly the world that we live in.

We all agree and in most instances recite the fact that we live in a globalised world. We have, however, often found even amongst those who profess to share a unified perspective on the transformation of our society, defining differently our common universe that is characterised by globalisation.

The consequence of this has, at times, been a disjuncture in the strategies and programmes of our own social transformation. In this regard, Professor Manuel Castells in a paper prepared for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, in 1998 observed that:

- There is a raging debate in the world on the mixed record of the information technology revolution, and of globalisation, when we input the equation the social dimension on a planetary scale. As it is always the case with a fundamental debate it is most often framed ideologically, and cast in simplistic terms. For the prophets of technology, for the true believers in the magic of the market, everything will be fine, if ingenuity and competition are set free, merely needing a few regulatory fixes, to prevent corruption, and to remove the remnants of bureaucratic impediments in the path of our flight to hyper-modernity. For those around the world who are not ecstatic about surfing the Internet, but are affected by layoffs, lack of basic social services, crime, poverty, and disruption of personal lives, globalisation is but a warmed up version of traditional capitalist ideology: in their view, information technology is a tool for renewed exploitation, destruction of jobs, environmental degradation, and invasion of privacy. Techno-elites versus neo-luddites.
- If we are serious about what we call 'Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme', a process that we hope will produce leaders who will be at the forefront of our work in the 21st century, then surely we need to prepare such leadership within the context of a clear understanding of our world today. Accordingly, the starting point should be a common understanding of the desirability, the inevitability as well as the form and content of our social transformation. This understanding is important as we travel along the long road of social transformation.

The strategic leadership programme should further equip us to be in a position to plan correctly, implement those plans correctly, utilise correct tools to audit the path traversed, and also, assist us to

anticipate the future, while at all times ensuring that our eyes are focussed on the transformation destination.

This transformation happens within the context of the process of the integration of our Region and the renewal of our Continent in a globalised World. It is therefore important correctly to understand the significance of the raging debate that Castells refers to.

Our approach to the divide between the 'prophets of technology and believers in the magic of the market' on the one hand, and on the other side, those who are 'not ecstatic about surfing the Internet' and yet are affected by the vagaries of the market, should be to establish the synergies between the advances of technology and the challenges of development, eradication of poverty and the empowerment of the marginalised.

This Leadership Programme should help us to master technology, not just for its sake, because technology, by itself, will not necessarily eradicate poverty, nor will it end; underdevelopment. Yet, the availability of technology and its dissemination amongst many sectors of society, is a critically necessary condition for economic and social development.

It is for this reason that we raised our concern in Parliament on the 13th June this year on the occasion of the discussion of the budget of the Presidency about the fact that according to the latest available figures up to the end of 1999, there were 829 engineers and related personnel in the public service, while information technology personnel totalled 1 416.

Those with skills in the natural sciences and economic professions were 4 575 and special scientists were 129. If government is to play a central and leading role in the process of ensuring that our country is not left out of the information society, to avoid the technological cumulative slow down which will lead to economic marginalisation, then we need to act urgently on this issue of bringing appropriate skills and training in the public sector.

The issue of appropriate skills is critical to the realisation of our goal of ensuring that our public service discharges its responsibility of helping to engender people-centred development. This also means that our public sector leadership is able to utilise the achievements of information and communication technology to advance the cause of our people, to propel our development forward and defeat poverty and disease.

Chairperson, the challenges of developing a strategic leadership must also occupy the collective mind of our entire nation, and we must find ways of extending this important task to other sectors of our society.

Accordingly, the Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme, must serve to nurture within the public service a leadership which can lead and perform its work in a professional and holistic way.

- This entails the training of a new leadership which is equipped with functional competence within a particular area of work and at the same time is also able to understand the bigger picture, a leadership which can combine service delivery with strategic vision.
- This leadership must be schooled in the kind of skills that are necessary to encourage the conditions for our developing country to expand and modernise our economy, ensuring that we raise the standards of living of all our people.
- We require a leadership which fully and truly understands its responsibility to society at large and which embraces a value system underpinning its actions that will contribute to the accelerated transformation of our country so that indeed we build the caring society which we have spoken so much about.
- For this caring society to emerge and be sustained, above all it falls upon our public service leadership in partnership with civil society to create a sense of community that must be cemented by the reality of people working together as a nation for a better life.

- Leaders in the public service will therefore have to be more imaginative in their thinking and more creative in their practice, remaining conscious at all times of the demands placed on them by the public, by business and civil society and as the implementers of decisions of their political principals in government.

Furthermore, we are all aware that as part of the process of dealing with the legacy of the past, we have and continue to deal with an important matter of making our public service representative. This task will continue until the public service reflects the true picture of all the people of South Africa because it is part of our efforts to bring about a truly non-racial and non-sexist country, while at the same time, this programme should help us to attract the best amongst our people to serve our country.

Finally, I am pleased that this programme is also linked to other continental and international programmes that try to improve governance.

Castells has remarked in the same paper prepared for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development that:

"The world is in the midst of a historical transformation at the turn of the millennium. As all major transformations in history it is multidimensional: technological, economic, social, cultural, geopolitical. Yet, in the end, what is the real meaning of this extraordinary mutation for social development, for people's life, and well being?"

The Presidential Strategic Leadership Development Programme, must help us to grasp the full meaning of this historical transformation. This programme must help us not only to understand the multidimensional nature of this transformation, but must equip us to take a leading role in this process.

We should be able to use this development to defeat poverty, to triumph over diseases and underdevelopment and to ensure the all-round liberation of all our people. I am confident that we have begun the process that will help us to meet all these challenges.

I thank you.

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