1. Background

South Africa as a young democracy is going through interesting and innovative changes, especially at this stage of heightened transition. These changes and developments are very evident in various facets including government policy implementation and evolution of a range of Institutions. The General and Further Education and Training is one such sector of Education that is transforming with speed.

The first circle of Education management in South Africa focused on transforming, through widely accepted policies, the old system of education whose objective was the entrenchment of apartheid and political deprivation of the overwhelming masses of this country. The current management of education is acutely focused on the implementation of these policies and delivery at the school level. To implement all these changes national government had to devolve power to the provinces and consequently the provincial management further devolved decision-making to the District offices and to schools themselves. South African schools are at this point the most critical measurement instruments of developments in education and broadly in community life.

2. Key policies and strategies at national level

2.1. White Paper on Education and Training

This key policy document was published in March 1995 as a guide to the transformation of the South African education system. The White Paper is based on a set of key principles including redress, access and quality of education, many of which are directly related to the notion of open learning and lifelong learning, seen as basis for educational transformation. The National Education Policy Act ensued from this first White Paper and further emphasizes the need for a ‘completely fresh approach…to the provision of learning opportunities in South African schools.

2.2. Technology Enhanced Learning Initiatives

Emanating from the White Paper was a suggestion for the establishment of the National Open Learning Agency (NOLA) which subsequently became known as the National Centre for Educational Technology and Distance Education (NCETDE). The first critical

---


mandate of the NCETDE was to conduct a feasibility study into the use of technologies in South African schools. The objective was to find out what technologies exist in schools and recommend a plan of action to the Minister of Education.

The result of this study was a discussion document titled ‘Technology Enhanced Learning Investigation in South Africa’\(^3\). This feasibility study indicated that schools in South Africa have capacity, in terms of basic telecommunications infrastructure and school management and administration structures, to use technologies to enhance learning and teaching. The Ministerial Committee studied these recommendations and commissioned a special Committee to develop ‘Technology Enhanced Learning Initiative in South Africa: A Strategic Plan’\(^4\). This latter document maps out nineteen projects that need to be implemented, thirteen of these are enabling projects and six are ‘lead’ projects.

*These lead projects are as follows:*

A. Supporting curriculum development and delivery in three key areas at grade
B. Delivering technically oriented vocational education, in three areas of national priority, combining on and off the job training
C. Developing a generic information literacy course for use in schools, community centres, industry-based training sites, and other appropriate sites of teaching and learning
D. Professional development of educators in the use of technologies in education and training
E. Training and supporting managers of learning centres of different kinds
F. Running a pilot provincial project to test new strategies for introducing technology to support the management and administration of education and training

The Strategic Plan is premised on an understanding that the education department will not be in a financial position to fund schools introduce ICTs in education. The Department, through these documents, advises schools on a variety of issues including the Decision-Making Framework\(^5\) for the use of technologies in education, Fund-raising mechanisms, generation of revenue from existing use of technologies, etc.

Non-Governmental Organizations such as SchoolNet SA and others got endorsement and support from the Education Department on the basis of their implementation of these lead and/or enabling projects outlined in the Strategic Plan.

---


2.3. South African Schools Act

The South African Schools Act (SASA) sets out the national norms and minimum standards for school funding. It also deals with the procedures to be adopted by provincial education departments in determining resource allocation to their schools. The Act came into effect on 1 January 1997. The principal objective of the Act is “to provide for a uniform system for the organization, governance and funding of schools.”

SASA emphasizes the pivotal role of the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in liaisons with parents and community members on resource expansion and fees payment. Although the SASA focuses largely on public funding of schools, the exemption of parents who are unable to pay school fees and Public subsidies to Independent schools, it also sheds light on the role of schools, in particular through the SGBs, in generating their own funds and purchasing resources in line with the norms and standards as set out in the Act.

The SASA differentiates between two types of schools, Section 21 and not yet section 21 schools. According to this Act all schools will soon become section 21 schools which means all responsibilities of fund-raising and managing the allocations from provincial departments will be run by schools themselves, through the SGBs. The Act states clearly that, “The Minister of Education does not have responsibility for determining norms for the provision of non-educator personnel, including non-teaching personnel at school level. At present such responsibility lies with provincial governments.” The Act provides that a Governing Body must take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources provided by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school.

Schools on a section 21 list receive a lump sum, per learner transfer for the payments for which they have responsibility, in accordance with the Resource Targeting Table. SGBs on the section 21 list may deal directly with suppliers and contractors for the relevant budgeted items in accordance with standard procurement procedures. Schools not yet on the section 21 list, and have therefore not been granted approval to procure their own goods and services, must procure their goods and services according to existing departmental arrangements.

The SASA allows governing bodies to use the facilities of their schools in a reasonable manner in order to obtain further income for the school. The facilities of schools include their buildings, sports facilities, etc. Governing bodies may allow others to use facilities against payment to the school. The governing body must make sure that a proper contract is drawn up and that measures are taken to ensure that the facilities of the school are not misused.

---

7 ibid. page 11 paragraph 36.
The governing body sets up and administers a School Fund. This refers to a special fund into which all payments made to the school must go – it does not matter where the money comes from, it can be from school fees, donations or any other monies). The School Fund is administered in terms of rules made by the Head of Department (HoD). Copy of these rules is always available on request.

Currently the State is responsible for payment of all taxes and rates charged in respect of public school property. Once a need for a service is identified, such a matter will be taken up with the office of the HoD who will be able to advise accordingly.

More and more schools are moving on to the section 21 list as it offers them sufficient leeway to directly run their school finances and expenditure, for as long as they can keep all documentation for reporting purposes.

2.4. Universal Service Agency

Universal Service Agency (USA) is a statutory body established by the telecommunications Act of 1996. The Act also established the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA) that will regulate this sector. The job of the USA is to promote universal access to telecommunications for all in South Africa.

The USA started its full operations in March 1997, officially launched on the 16 May 1997. While the long-term goal of the USA is to achieve universal service (telephone in every home), the more immediate task is to provide universal access, which is a public telephone within a reasonable accessible distance

A major role for the USA is to co-ordinate the many efforts to extend access to telecommunication working with community organizations, NGOs, service providers, government, businesses, universities, donor organizations and all who can contribute to this work.

In fulfillment of its vision, the USA has established Telecentres in each of the 9 provinces in South Africa. These Telecentres are currently been reviewed, as many of them are unable to sustain themselves, for a number of reasons ranging from poor management to lack of community buy-in. A big conference is scheduled for February 2001 to discuss how initiatives of this nature can be sustained in future. The future of the USA as it exists now is also a big issue for discussion with strong possibilities of this office closing down. A recurring suggestion from many decision-makers in this regard is that schools be considered for such community access since school-based telecentres will automatically fall within an existing school management structure. The International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) has recently completed a preliminary evaluation of school-based telecentres and will be making the findings public soon. This is very preliminary in that only IT managers at schools and provincial technology co-ordinators were interviewed, and not so many learners and members of the communities around the school.

---

8 [http://www.usa.org.za](http://www.usa.org.za), site does not have all information
The USA has also implemented School Web Internet Laboratory in about 20 schools in SA. This is a full-fledged networked laboratory with ISDN lines. Printers, alarm systems, air-conditioning and burglar proofing. In their contracts with schools the USA spells it very clearly that schools will have to raise funds for maintenance, repairs, insurance, amongst others. A clause in the contract states categorically, “The Institution is obliged to submit plans to indicate how it will supplement the operating costs in respect of the SWIL to the satisfaction of the USA.”

2.5. The South African Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategy

The Department of Communications published an ICT Strategy, discussion document, on 23 July 2000. This Strategy is an all encompassing comprehensive document that sets out and maps out how the country has to position itself as the leader in Africa and participate more meaningfully in the global marketplace. The discussion document addresses all areas of society ranging from government, schools, industry and socio-economic development.

Augmenting this discussion document the department of Communications is also implementing about 18 projects that will encourage members of the community, in all sectors, to harness the potential of ICTs in their day to day lives. This will also drive community members to approach access points like schools, to perform their daily transactions. These current projects include Community Information Centres, Public Internet Terminals, Internet 2000 for Internet connection to schools, Houwteq Institute for Satellite Applications, Digital broadcasting network, Domain naming authority, Public emergency communication, Tele-medicine, E-commerce, Cyber Malls, Dot.za telecentres in townships and rural areas, Smart Card to reach the non-banking citizens in SA, Web internet laboratories, etc.

The SA government is fully behind these initiatives, with government as the single biggest consumer of ICT products at more than R27 billion during 1999, with potential for increasing consumption. Besides being the policymaker, the SA government spends more than R60 billion of its annual budget on procurement of services and goods⁹, a process that should be done electronically (e-procurement). The SA government will be a ‘champion’ mobilizing national efforts and resources to enable SA to take advantage of electronic business opportunities.

As part of their initiative to promote universal access and connectivity in SA, the Department of Communications (DoC) and the South African Post Office (Sapo) are collaborating in two ventures aimed at providing public access to ICTs. These projects are Public Information Terminal (PiT) and Citizens’ Post Office (CPO). Because of the successful pilot a tender has been offered to develop further 100 Terminals by the end of March 2001. Some of these terminals might be based at schools that are accessible to

community members.

Fees for usage of these terminals or kiosks will be payable for time connected to the Internet or time used to utilize the PC and relevant software. Accessing government information will essentially be free, as will having an e-mail account. To recover costs however, fees will be charged for services such as printing out documents, or saving e-mail messages onto a server. Further income for sustaining the projects will be generated by providing targeted advertising opportunities within the localized business directory. When users register on either the PiT or CPO, demographic information is gathered, providing advertisers with a good idea of suitable areas in which to advertise.

3. Other Initiatives

3.1. SchoolNet SA

SchoolNet SA is an NGO endorsed by the national department of education to implement ICTs in enhancing learning and teaching in line with the Technology Enhanced Learning Initiatives Strategic Plan referred to above. Three other national depar ts sit on the board of governors of SNSA viz. Communications, Trade and Industry and Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. Through a variety of projects collectively amounting to over R50 million, SNSA has connected or facilitated connection of about 6000 schools, trained over 3500 teachers and coordinates content development initiatives.

Through the World Links for Development project of the World Bank SNSA has developed about 18 what can be referred to as school-based telecentres. A further 300 such centres are currently being developed through the Telkom Super Centres and Thintana i-Learn projects to the combined tune of about R40-million. These centres will be equitably distributed in all 9 provinces with about 20 computers in each selected school and about 20 teachers from each of the participating schools trained on a face to face and distance education modes.


The school selection processes for all the schools in all the 9 provinces is due the middle of February. Central to the school selection criteria is of course the school’s ability to sustain the use of the technologies so provided. Schools are requested to submit comprehensive business plans outlining how they will generate an amount of R1000 every month to pay for their insurance, maintenance and repairs and Internet access. SNSA also encourages schools to fund-raise and charge members of the community a minimal fee for services provided by the school. SNSA is in the process of developing a sustainability guide to schools mapping out exactly how much schools can charge for Internet access, printing, photocopies, etc. This kind of arrangement is well received by the provincial education department officials who sit on the Board of SNSA and the other stakeholders including the national education department who chair the Board.

3.2. Gautengonline.com

The Gauteng provincial government has approved R500-million for the provincial
education department to implement what they call gautengonline.com. This project seeks to develop computer rooms of 25 computers in all of the 2400 schools in the province, primary and secondary. The implementation Plan development phase of the project has started and the Premier of the province will officially make an announcement in February 2001. This project is not only about equipment rollout, but is also about teacher training and content provision. The spin-offs to the project include e-government, IT Industry and e-commerce. This is a five-year project with the first R300-million scheduled to be spent by 2003.

It has been made very clear that schools will have to charge members of the community for services rendered at the school level in line with universal access principles of redress and access. The private sector is invited to further invest in the initiative and the response thus far is very phenomenal.

4. Personal comments

The rate of development in the areas of Information and Communications Technology in South Africa is very fast. More and more people especially decision-makers at national government level are becoming more receptive to the idea of ICTs as instruments for socio-economic development. The IT Industry is growing very phenomenally including e-commerce, online banking, etc. There exists therefore in this country sufficient government support which is key to successful rollout of ICTs.

The Minister of Education, Prof. Kader Asmal, has recently employed a full-time IT advisor to focus specifically on the most strategic way of managing the use of ICTs in enhancing learning and teaching. SchoolNet SA is one of the highly acclaimed service providers in this regard and operates in very close proximity to the office of the Minister and the Department of Education as a whole.

The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the largest teacher union in SA representing 240 000 teachers, has made suggestions of getting all their members computer literate. The union is currently negotiating with other teacher unions internationally to at least secure a computer for every member teacher. Plans to get e-mail accounts for each teacher are far developed at this point in time. This is very interesting and encouraging in that the teacher union’s buy-in and support is very critical to the success of what we are planning to do.

Other donor agencies like the USAID, George Soros’ Open Society Foundation and the Finnish government to mention a few, have started investing immensely in the use of ICTs in education. The USAID is spending $40-million in four poor provinces on education departments IT systems and synchronization with schools and the Education Management Information System. The Open Society Foundation is interested in the Maths, Science and English development of learners and teachers.

Schools in South Africa are competing for resources and are very autonomous. School principals and their school governing bodies are capable of developing and building
capacity within their schools. Technologies are today a major incentive for learners to register at certain schools and not others. Principals as managers are fully aware of this trend and do not want to lose learners as this impacts on their annual budgets from the provincial departments.

The challenge at this stage includes security and safety of equipment. Computer rooms are being broken into and expensive equipment stolen. Insurance companies are also getting reluctant to insure computer equipment unless they are dead sure it is securely guarded. Hence it is important as a risk mitigation factor to get community buy-in so that members of the community can take care of the investment and are quick to apprehend perpetrators.

Most of the schools in SA can and will implement sustainability models and mechanisms suggested to them. It has been done before and the business plans from schools thus far indicate the willingness and commitment of schools to sustain ICTs developments. The private sector is also keen on meeting schools halfway in these endeavors.

Contact details

Ntutule Tshenye
Education Initiatives Director
SchoolNet SA

Tel. : +27 (0) 11 403 3952
Fax : +27 (0) 11 403 1417
Mobile : +27 (0) 82 900 8623
E-mail : ntutule@schoolnet.org.za
Web : http://www.school.za

http://www.gov.za will link you to whatever department you are interested in.