

Business Must Channel Support for Innovation in Education



By Dr Mamphela Ramphele, Chair: Circle Capital

Last year I was involved in a scenarios exercise with 35 people who represented a wide variety of South Africans. We met together for three workshops in a place called Dinokeng. Dinokeng means "a place of rivers", and this became an important metaphor for us.

We also imagined ourselves as little rivers. By meeting together in a space where we would talk openly and frankly about our nation we formed a channel; a channel of ideas, a channel of celebration of the achievements of this nation, but also a channel that would be ready to think about the challenges of this nation that we tend to want to ignore.

One of the outcomes of the research we've done for the scenarios demonstrates that, beyond any doubt, education is going to make the difference between a prosperous South Africa and a South Africa that continues to struggle with poverty and unemployment. At the same time I was also involved in another multi-stakeholder process, facilitated by the Development Bank of South Africa, which resulted in the ANC's Roadmap to Education. The 10 points contained therein address innovations within schools, as well as those who provide support to schools and address broader societal matters

We all know, however, that the public sector cannot do the work of nation building alone. We need to channel efforts across sectors and walk together. Therefore, in the spirit of Dinokeng, we made a special presentation to the Department of Education at the time that the Roadmap was released, advocating the creation of an independent innovation task team that would bring together effective educational networks. This proposal has the department's full backing and the initiative, called Bridge, has been established thanks to seed capital provided by Convene Venture Philanthropy.

I've engaged in these forums because I feel strongly about the power of an active citizenry. I am also passionate about the role that innovation can play in our society. We need to find those pockets of excellence throughout our country, nurture them, connect them and showcase them. This is why I am championing the Bridge project and the chairing of the newly created Technology Innovation Agency.

I invite you to join me because as business people we have an important role to play. We can lend knowledge and expertise, as well as money. Although Corporate Social Investment spending was only 1% of the Department of Education's annual budget for 2007, this crucial funding can be leveraged by investing in the innovations that Bridge is identifying.

Contact bridge@leapschool.org.za and let us harness our time, energy and resources by investing where it matters most.

