

Collaborative transformation in education shows real results

By [Matshela Seshibe](#), issued by [Adopt-a-School](#)

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South Africa's journey of transformation is far from over. This is evident in the stories from the classrooms of our poorest schools, still heavily burdened by the effects of the apartheid education policy.



But what became equally evident to me, when attending the Adopt-a-School annual Back to School party hosted by its founder and chairperson Cyril Ramaphosa, is what can be achieved when South Africans come together and commit to being part of the solution.

It has been proven time and again that sustainable change can only be achieved through a unified effort.

Hope and possibility prevail when one becomes part of the effort to make a difference in the lives of our children and the Back to School Party shows what can transpire and be genuinely celebrated when business, individuals and organisations come together for the greater good.

Once a year, this extraordinary foundation brings close to 1,000 people together under one roof, in what has become one of the biggest events on South Africa's CSI calendar. Dressed in school uniform, guests are inspired to generously pledge resources to the development of schools. In 11 years, these parties alone have raised over R58 million for school projects.

Through their adoption programme, Adopt-a-School Foundation works with big business, small community enterprises, non-profit organisations and various sectors of government and society, to support over 440 schools, their learners, teachers, and broader communities.

In 15 years the organisation, through its collaborative social investment model, has ploughed over R600 million into rural and township schools, proving just how much we can achieve by working together.

It was inspirational to hear Cyril Ramaphosa talking about some of the successes of the Foundation and their Whole School Development model.

The Foundation works with school leadership to develop a strategic plan and a healthy, functional team with high morale. They then address basic infrastructure needs and basic health and welfare issues before providing academic support to

educators and learners and investing in educational resources. They are able to effectively address all of these areas by partnering with people with different skills, resources and capabilities.

Through the adoption of 446 schools to date, the Foundation has impacted nearly 900,000 learners, their families and their broader communities.

The Foundation has built 554 new school facilities and their building model benefits the community. During construction, parents and community members are temporarily employed and provided with a skills set that will assist them to be more employable in the future. To date 8,025 temporary job opportunities have been provided. Local small businesses are also supported, whether it is in making use of their services, or buying of building materials.

These initiatives provide ownership of the schools by the community, improve the dedication of educators and have seen a marked increase in the matric pass rates and number of bachelor and diploma passes.

Cyril Ramaphosa proudly explained to us how the average matric result of schools receiving Whole School Development was a 78% pass rate with over 60% of matriculants receiving a bachelor or diploma qualification. These results are particularly impressive as many of the schools that the Foundation works with are classified as dysfunctional when they begin working with them.

Mr Ramaphosa also explained how each year funds pledged at the annual fundraising event are channelled towards particular projects.

Last year, funds raised from pledges went towards a pilot initiative to run an audiology and speech therapy programme in two primary schools. This follows the success of the Foundation's visual support programmes which have impacted on over 60 000 learners. Over 90% of school children in adopted schools have never received eyesight or hearing tests. If hearing and sight issues are not identified and dealt with at an early age, it can result in poor communication, illiteracy and ineffective education, as well as negatively affect the social and psychological development of these children.

During this pilot, a total of 1, 140 learners were screened and 42 educators were trained on how to manage language and hearing challenges in the classroom. 17 learners have hearing challenges which can be rectified through bilateral or unilateral hearing aids which will cost over R400,000. Pledges made at this year's party will be used to provide these learners with the treatment and equipment that they need and will extend the programme to another primary school.

Funds raised will also go towards extending the eyesight testing programme to a further three schools. An additional R1.2 million was raised to build a Science Laboratory at a school in Hammanskraal. True to the Foundation's Whole School Development model, this investment will include all the necessary resources and an in-depth science educator development programme.

I was most impressed to hear that the Back to School Party fundraising initiative, while celebrating its 11th anniversary in Johannesburg, has also been held in Durban, Bloemfontein and London, where the combined donations have exceeded R60 million. This is in addition to the millions provided by those corporates that have adopted schools.

The Foundation is able to enumerate the school facilities built, the employment opportunities created and the teachers trained. The numbers speak for themselves. But even more inspiring, is the children that speak for the Foundation. Their voices enlighten us on the impact of our investment and it is their dreams and determination that bolsters our commitment to uplifting their schools.

One night. One thousand people. And R4.8 million raised. This is collaboration in action.

Education is the best tool at our disposal to empower communities afflicted by poverty and inequality and to ensure a future with opportunity and potential.

It is invigorating to support an organisation with vision and the expertise to achieve just that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matshela Seshibe is former MD of Coca-Cola Shanduka Beverages.

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