

**MESSAGE DELIVERED BY DR MOOKO, DEAN OF HUMANITIES AT UNIVERSITY OF
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The Teacher: A pillar in Behavioural Change, Academic Excellence and Economic Diversification

It is a great honour for me to join you this morning as you celebrate your day. This year's theme: *The Teacher: A pillar in Behavioural Change, Academic Excellence and Economic Diversification*, highlights the central or pivotal role that the teacher plays in nation building. A pillar has a very important function in a building as it offers the desired support. It is the pillar that also carries the weight, particularly that of the roof. When people look at a building, they do not usually bother about the pillars, but they may see the beauty in other features of the building which are in essence just cosmetic or mere decoration. Such decorations can be changed without affecting the strength and stability of the building. Such is not the case with a pillar. If you remove it, the building will be weakened and it may even collapse.

Director of ceremonies, such is the case with the teacher. In terms of the social and economic status, the teacher may not be viewed in high regard by some people, but the truth of the matter is that the teaching profession is the mother of all professions. There is no single professional who has not gone through the hands of a teacher.

A pillar by its nature is vertical or straight and points up-wards. When our elders chose those branches that they would use as pillars, they went for the ones that are both strong and straight. It is, therefore, fitting to see the teacher as the pillar of behavioural change. We expect the teacher to be an individual who is straight and morally up-right. A person whose behaviour can be emulated by others. He/she should be able to influence the behaviour of the children he/she teaches.

Director of ceremonies, the issue of behavioural change has gained currency over the years. It is a reflection of the changes that are continuously taking place which we have to deal with. This is proving to be a very difficult challenge for many. This is not made easy by the disintegration of our family system. Whereas in the past the family played a crucial role in socialising young people, that does not prevail today. The fact of the matter is that this task has now been passed on to the school system.

One of the things that we have lost over the years as a nation is the concept of *Botho*. As we all know, *Botho* embraces all aspects of human behaviour. It guides us in terms of how we relate to one another, how we interact and our attitudes to life. *Botho* has served us well as a moderator of our behaviour. Unfortunately, we have lost this valuable asset which defined us as a respectable and God fearing people. We need as a nation to go back to the basics and re-establish this value.

Director of ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen, some of the challenges that we face in this nation relate to alcoholism, drug abuse, HIV and AIDS, road accidents, and murders committed in the name of love, just to mention a few. All these problems are associated with our loss of Botho. As teachers, you have the task inculcating the attributes of Botho which we have sidelined for a long time.

Behavioural change is not a state of being, but a continuous process that we go through in order to cope with the emerging challenges that we encounter in life. Consequently, the school system should equip the learners with the skills that will enable them to continuously adopt the desirable attributes. We need to enable them to be able to have the confidence to make the right decisions in life, and hence being accountable for their own individual actions and behaviours.

Ba gaetsho, the task of behavioural change needs a collective effort between the teachers and parents. It is unfortunate that a lot of parents continue to be least interested in what happens at school. All that they are interested in is for their child to get a good grade. This lack of interest is reflected by the fact that most of the Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) are not functional. Director of ceremonies, if we were to undertake a quick survey right now, we would realise that most of the schools represented here do not have functional PTAs. This is highly regrettable because there is no way that the teachers can effectively influence the behaviour of the children unless the parents also take an active part in this process.

Academic Excellence

Director of ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen, whereas the task of moulding the behaviour of the learners can be seen as a social function, the teacher also plays a very important role in the academic life of the children that he/she teaches.

Academic excellence is not only a fashionable concept, but it is very difficult to define. Within the education sector, we have many stakeholders who may have different perceptions of what academic excellence entails. To some, especially the parents, it may simply refer the number of A grades that the school is able to produce. A good teacher is often seen to be the one who is able to produce as many grades as possible. We tend totally ignore that teacher who is good at moulding the behaviour of the children just because he/she may not have been able to produce a lot of A grades.

Ladies and gentlemen, education needs to be holistic, appealing to the whole person and not just to the academic dimension. It is unfortunate that the high stakes placed on attaining high grades can at times compromise this very important principle. .

We need to see academic excellence as the extent to which the learners will be able to function effectively in the global world. A score that a child gets may not necessarily enable him to get a job in the global world. What is important when we talk about academic excellence is the ability for the learners to apply what they have learnt in a variety of changing situations. This is the true mark of quality education. Education should increase the learners' understanding of the world around them.

Director of ceremonies, in order for the teachers to contribute towards the attainment of academic excellence, they need to be critical and reflective practitioners. A reflective teacher is able to continuously sharpen his/her skills as he/she analyses his/her teaching approaches. There is also a need to embrace life long learning in order to keep abreast with developments in the teaching profession. When all this takes place, the teacher will be best placed to serve his/her children.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed true that the quest for academic excellence will not be easily attainable unless we take into account the diverse contributory factors. First and foremost, we need to ensure that our teaching staff is highly motivated to the extent that they are willing to go an extra mile in assisting the students. There is, therefore, a need to identify and deal with any factors that de-motivate teachers. Some of these factors include heavy teaching loads, large classes, accommodation problems, and many more. There is also a need to provide the schools with the resources that are essential, both human and physical resources. If the government is indeed serious about academic excellence, it should then invest more in such resources.

Economic Diversification

Director of ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to conclude by briefly looking at the issue of economic diversification. Economic diversification is a challenge and reality that we need to live with as a nation. As we all know, we have committed ourselves to building a prosperous nation by the year 2016. We all need to make a contribution towards the attainment of this dream. The reality is that as individuals and as a nation at large, we need to explore other areas that can sustain our economy. We cannot continue to rely on the mineral industry. We cannot also continue to hope that all our students will be able to get employment when they finish their studies. We should instead prepare them to think about self employment.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a fact that some of the graduates of our higher institutions are unable to get employment both in government and in the private sector in Botswana. Gone are the days when all graduates were certain to get employment as soon as they graduated.

What then is the role of the teacher in this area? I believe that one of the answers lies with the issue of behaviour change already alluded to. We need to change the mind set of our children, and even their parents, so that they can realise that there is a need for them to explore diverse activities that can sustain them. We also need to seriously explore ways of developing our **vocational education** as well as developing the **entrepreneurial skills** of our children whilst they are still at school. Vocational education has been sidelined for a long time and very often seen as second class education. As we all know, the Revised National Policy on Education has identified this problem and identified the need to strengthen and develop this type of education. This is the way to go if we are to achieve economic diversity.

I am also convinced that the teachers need to start to play a crucial role of being talent scouts. Not all the children are academically talented, but that does not mean that those who are less gifted academically cannot make it in life. Most of the prominent world celebrities were not necessarily academically gifted. There is, however, a need for the government to provide a supporting and enabling environment which will provide a proper ground for the nurturing of some of this talent.

Director of ceremonies, ladies and gentlemen let me end by thanking you for inviting me to share with you some of these ideas this morning. Ke a leboga. Pula.