

BOFESETE Message on Botswana Teachers Day

Theme; Teacher empowerment, a strategy for achieving the goals of vision 2016.

The theme for this years celebrations focuses on teacher empowerment as a strategy to achieve the ideals of VISION 2016. This is a very apt focus since empowerment of teachers is so critical as a success factor in education.

What is to be understood by teacher empowerment? Empowerment is essentially a staff development matter. To empower some one is to develop and grow the person. Make them be able to do what they previously did not have capacity to do. This capacity could be financial, intellectual or it could be any necessary resource that one could think of which is required to perform a task. The empowered person is able to function at a much higher level, they take decisions and are accountable for their actions. Empowerment entails recognising the professionalism of teachers in their work. Professionalism is understood to entail autonomy and self regulation. This is a two way process that first presupposes the maturity on the part of the person being empowered and also a lot of trust from the person who empowers the teacher. Teachers must demonstrate the maturity which is necessary for them to be empowered.

Self regulation in a professional context presupposes a teaching council that will have a major hand as to who can be allowed to practice the craft of teaching and who should be relieved of the onerous responsibility, if it is deemed fit that such individuals do not conduct themselves in a manner befitting of the status of a teacher.

Currently there are many teachers whose conduct and character does not bring credit to their schools and the profession at large. There are teachers who bring disgrace to the noble profession by engaging in love affairs with their clients (students). BOFESETE's position on such teachers is unequivocal, they should be fired from the teaching profession. Period. BOFESETE detests such teachers and calls upon the Ministry of Education to root them out without any mercy. Parents also should play their part by taking the schools and government to task for allowing this state of affairs to prevail. Often it is the parents who make matters difficult by refusing to give evidence against such teachers. Some parents accept bribes from such teachers who promise that they will marry their children. A teaching council would be much better placed to root out such characters from the profession and the education system.

TSM has shown itself incapable of doing this effectively and efficiently. A teaching council would have the power to take action against individuals who have been freed by the courts because of technicalities. Such problems are not necessarily a weakness of TSM, but rather a problem of government itself. Governments are not good at this sort of thing and in most industries self regulation is the way to go.

BOFESETE calls upon the Ministry of Education to start the legislative process that would allow the establishment of a teaching council for Botswana. This step is long overdue and the consultative process should be started without undue delay. BOFESETE is willing to participate in the process of the establishment of a teaching council and to participate in one.

There are so many unresolved problems which need to be addressed to boost the degrading morale of teachers. These among others include leave encashment policy, scarce skills policy, parallel progression, overtime allowance, etc. These are part of a plethora of problems which are yet to be resolved in the Ministry of Education. Justice delayed is justice denied. If other public officers have benefited from the above policies and continue to benefit teachers too should be accorded the same. It is taking TSM too long for it to implement the court order on parallel progression. The money that teachers will eventually receive would have lost value due to inflation. P1000 is not the same as P1000 last year or next year.

While the theme of this years Teachers Day celebrations talk of teacher empowerment BOFESETE notes with concern that the step by government to take over total running of CJSS is a step in the opposite direction. The Revised National Policy on Education of April 1994 had recommended that "Boards of Governors should be introduced in all secondary schools" and governments position then was that "It is government policy that, as much as possible the community should participate in the development and management of education. Such a policy will continue to be encouraged through consultations with Boards of Governors, PTAs and other relevant bodies in the community.

" Taking over the complete running of CJSS is the anti-thesis of empowerment be it of the community or of the teachers. As BOFESETE has pointed out in the past, this has been a retrogressive step since it centralises the management and administrative functions that were done at school level. This has already brought about a lot of delays and inconveniences.

Empowerment is a process that includes among other things formal academic training. BOFESETE has noted with serious concern that the government has terminated scholarships for teachers even for those teachers who had already received letters of offer. This is very demoralising for teachers who had received letters of further studies. Compared to other professions further training for teachers has always been a painfully slow process characterised by waiting for periods in excess of ten years before one can go for further studies. In addition to the poor training prospects teaching has historically been characterised by a very limited promotions prospects. When the government says they will no longer offer training at masters degree level, the message being sent is that teaching is a dead end job that offers very limited prospects for development and therefore empowerment.

BOFESETE holds the view that real academic development starts at the masters degree level, where one is able to undertake scientific research. The step by government to discontinue giving teachers training is a very regrettable one that contradicts the theme of

teacher empowerment. It is a very unfortunate step that we pray the government should reconsider as a matter of urgency. It is a step that will take us backward. This step contradicts the Revised National policy on Education which had recommended that "further training of teachers should be guided by a clear and long term training plans with objectives for each level, and with procedures for sponsorship and release made clear to teachers. Further, teachers who have gained higher qualifications related to the profession, either through full time or part time should receive appropriate incremental credit.

"It would appear that the Government is throwing away the Revised National Policy on Education without having fully implemented the policy. Does anyone remember what has happened to recommendations like "teachers should be considered for sabbatical leave and encouraged to embark on a project of professional development" Which teacher has benefited from this empowering recommendation? Did you know that the RNPE had recommended and Government had accepted that "at appropriate intervals during a teachers career, there should be opportunity for each teacher to participate in an educational study tour within or outside the country"? How many teachers have actually benefited from that? Maybe a handful. Another forgotten recommendation is REC.110 which said "The Commission recommends that as part of the overall development of teachers and as an incentive, attention should be paid to their job enrichment and rotation needs.

The goal is to create a pool of experienced professionals for leadership in the various areas such as examinations work, curriculum development, and as a resource persons for workshops and seminars." May be one could say to some extent this has been done somehow. The point about these quotes is that there were a lot of things that were promised by the RNPE but were never delivered.

The introduction of PMS and PBRs in the teaching profession was a false start. In principle the two theories are applaudable but the reality is that they were all rushed and as such are bound to fail before they take off. Schools were rushed into producing strategic plans without any clear guidelines and proper table of implementation. With the coming of PBRs teachers are made to commit themselves with deliverables and objectives yet there are no monitoring devices to see whether they are attainable or not. Indeed, despite their good intentions both PMS and PBRs are far from improving productivity or empowering teachers.

One can not talk teacher empowerment without considering the teacher organisations. Teacher organisations, no matter whether we like it or not, are the legitimate representatives of teachers. They are the bodies through which, the desires, wishes, aspirations and fears of teachers find expression. They are responsible and concerned with the social welfare of members, professional development and bread and butter matters. To what extent has the government come with empowerment schemes for teacher unions? What teacher unions experience is the exact opposite of empowerment. Teacher unions have experienced what can be termed as sabotage like for example the systematic transfer of the leadership away from where they have to do lobbying. In other

countries the leadership of teacher unions is given time in the form of sabbatical leave or attachment for the time when they are in office.

BOFESETE would like to applaud His Excellency the President Festus Mogae for sanctioning those laws which allows staff association to unionize. This has been long overdue. We want to urge our general membership to familiarize themselves with the provisions of these laws. BOFESETE undertakes to run workshops on these laws so that when we propose to unionise, as we intend to, we will all be knowing what we are getting ourselves into. The Government is working on proposals to amend the laws that govern the employment of public servants such that all public servants will be governed by one act, instead of the current situation where teachers are under TSM Act, council workers under a different act, other public servants in a different act. This development promises to bring about some improvements so that teachers are seen to be equal to other public officers.

“Teacher empowerment; a strategy for achieving the ideals of vision 2016”. This theme is so befitting especially after the upheavals which took place in 2002 and part of 2003, respectively. The strike action by teachers was a watershed in the history of teachers of this country. The events of 2002/3 empowered teachers to know what is possible and it had a liberating impact in the minds of teachers. School heads, Chief Education Officers, Directors, Permanent Secretaries and Ministers were no longer seen as omnipotent and omniscient beings. They were reduced to size. The punitive actions being taken by these same authorities are a small price to pay for the cost of freedom. Halala Matichara.

To BOFESETE, and probably the entire teaching fraternity that marked a turning point in the annals of the history of teachers struggle for their rights in our country. It was the moment of truth and ultimate realization that the people bestowed with running the Ministry of Education are failing us in so many respects. We salute you for your dedication, determination and commitment in your work and struggle. Even though rewards may not be immediate but you have written a new chapter in the teaching service that generations to come will always cite you as martyrs in this country. Halala Matichara Halala.

BOFESETE is concerned by the poor participation in Teachers Day by secondary school teachers. This poor participation is reflected in fewer nominations to the various award categories, attendance at teachers day activities. Teachers Day is a time to celebrate our achievements, recognize our shortcomings, debate these issues and map the way forward. We hope the review exercise that is in progress will come up with solutions to some of these concerns.

In conclusion BOFESETE wishes all teachers the best in their professional work and ask them to rededicate themselves to producing the best results for our children. Let me end by giving you a few quotes as food for thought;

All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth. (Aristotle)

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. (Nelson Mandela)

He who opens a school door, closes a prison. -- Victor Hugo (1802-1885)

In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility anyone could have. -- Lee Iacocca

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. -- Henry Brooks Adams

A child miseducated is a child lost. -- John F. Kennedy

The principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done -- men who are creative, inventive and discoverers. -- Jean Piaget

Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today. -- Malcolm X

I thank you

BOFESETE National Executive.