

## **Action Dialogue on the Church Consultative Workshop**

**27-28 November 2013**

*Hosted by the Towards Carnegie3 Inquiry (now Mandela Initiative)*

The first of the post-Carnegie3 dialogues was between academics and church and other grassroots organisations. The Action Dialogue had a particular emphasis on education. This focus driven by the awareness of the reach and capacity that the church could bring to educational opportunity. Many church leaders had also prioritised education in their community efforts.

A number of presentations were given from a wide variety of stakeholders including those in the education sector, non-profits and from the church.

During the presentations it was noted that the inequality in the schooling phase results in limited labour mobility post school and that there were a number of key issues that plagued the schooling system. These included the size of the education system, the historical imbalances and a lack of coordination. It was noted that the historical impact of “Bantu education” is only now being realised and researched in depth. Palesa Tyobeka drew on her 35-years’ experience in the field as a teacher and one of the first appointments in the post-apartheid era. She described her own experiences of Bantu education, growing up in the Eastern Cape, and reminded participants of the achievements that have been made. There is a need to affirm teachers and parents and empower them – and children should be central in this affirmation.

It was however noted that human capital is built from before the schooling period, with the first 1 000 days being integral to maternal and child health. During this period, nutrition, support and learning greatly affect the child. Similarly, it was illustrated that early language and literacy can lead to significant inequality and that parental support is an important factor. Like language and literacy, there are also tools to encourage numeracy, such as Miki Maths (a structured programme, generally offered through lessons at schools and centres, that helps young children aged 3 – 12 to develop a rich understanding of essential mathematical concepts).

Despite the problems related to childhood education, significant steps can be made in the schooling phase. Of the more impressive has been the work of IkamvaYouth, an NGO with a self-sustaining strategy to equip learners with a necessary skill-sets, networks and resources for further development. Many of these learners do however continue to work with IkamvaYouth and this strategy is particularly important as it was noted in other Action Dialogues that once people and their children move out of the township, the township loses human capacity.

This focus on education is particularly important when one studies the impact of drop-out rates and education and its relationship with earnings. A presentation by Nicola Branson, illustrated how South Africa’s success in expanding education and reducing educational inequality is vital in any discussion of poverty and inequality. Education should be community orientated and should put the learner first. This will also require collaborative efforts based on a value system.

Following these presentations, there was a unanimous agreement from the church representatives that education should be held in a high regard. The church could use its reach (there are 26 000 public schools and 56 000 church buildings) and influence to both educate children and improve the family.

Congregations can also stress the importance of education. It was noted that the church can play an important role in South African education and, in particular, the scaling up of effective programmes of empowerment. Parents also have the ability to fundamentally alter a child's educational opportunities and achievements and parents are the ones who should oversee the schooling system. The church again can provide a supportive role in this regard.

### ***Actions***

- Early childhood development (ECD) within the first 1 000 days is critical and the church can play an important role. The church can provide both education and nutrition to underprivileged children.
- The church and community can capacitate and hold the school system accountable.
- The church can have a role in education as well as generating awareness of the importance of education.
- Systemic intervention is needed, in particular with regard to corruption. This includes teachers who falsify statistics. There is also a need to look for alternative and innovative interventions.
- The church also needs to accommodate and account for teenagers who are not in education, training or employment.