



**NELSON MANDELA**  
Institute for  
**EDUCATION AND**  
**RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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The role of the Nelson Mandela Institute (NMI) is to help develop a sustainable future for South Africa by investing in the country's youth and creating viable and sustainable communities. To achieve this, the Institute aims to transform the education system by focusing on foundation-phase learning as well as on further education.

Sustained research by the NMI suggests that the South African schooling system is not teaching children to think, read, write and enumerate with any confidence. Through partnerships with the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Higher Education and Training and the University of Fort Hare the NMI is committed to continuing research and implementing initiatives that will begin to suggest ways to transform the education system.

The Institute's work is achieved through a host of programmes, including Magic Classrooms, Ilima Lokufunda and the Grounding Programme at the University of Fort Hare .

When the Nelson Mandela Institute was formed in 2007, it joined a small family of charities mandated to advance the vision and values of Mr Mandela's life and work.

Each organisation does work that is specific to Mr Mandela's vision for the future and the Institute is the embodiment of Mr Mandela's belief in the importance of education and rural development.

The NMI works closely with the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and the Mandela Rhodes Foundation in a spirit of mutual support.

Basetsana in her capacity as a member of the Sustainability Investment Committee: Nelson Mandela Institute plays a very active role in looking into the crisis facing rural education, and the vision of work of the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development.

This Committee is looking to build a long term relationship with other leaders in the private sector who are committed to building a system of quality education for our rural children, as long term patrons of the Nelson Mandela Institute.

Some of the facts being discussed are the following:

- The quality of basic education frames the long term questions of democracy and development facing our nation. More and more work of economists suggests that the long term national economic base develops alongside national freedoms – perhaps the most important of which are the freedom of children to learn to become thinkers and producers of the future. It is the quality of our people – and the quality of our collective and individual minds – that will navigate the complex economic environment of the future, as well as establish the substance of our democracy.

- There are two striking features of this crisis. First, the majority of our learners are not learning to read, write and engage with numbers with any confidence. In comparing primary school literacy and numeracy results with our African neighbours, South African learners rank amongst the poorest. Secondly, our system of education is deeply unequal. It appears that not only is our system of education not confronting historic inequity, it may be reproducing them. Across the globe, the socio economic status of a child's household has some impact on educational results. In South Africa, not only does this hold, but it appears that the socio economic status of a school overrides the socio economic status of the home. Another way of saying this is that even the children of more wealthy households have little chance of achieving educational results if they were forced to go to a poor school.
- The Nelson Mandela Institute was launched to dig into the 'problem behind the problem' facing rural education. Through the 1990's and early 2000's, President Mandela worked with leaders of the private sector to build new schools serving rural learners. During that period, an extraordinary 140 schools were built across the nation. After five years or so, an audit was taken of these schools. The conclusions were that while the school children still benefited from sounder infrastructure, the educational project of teaching and learning was still not alive. That is, sound infrastructure is a necessity for quality education, but, on its own, does not cause quality education.
- At that time, Mr. Mandela and others became committed to establishing a long term agenda that sought to understand and reconstruct rural education, placing rural learners and teachers at the centre of the circle. The idea was to engender a new kind of research, in solidarity with the social realities facing rural schools and communities. This vision gave birth to the Nelson Mandela Institute.
- There is a myth that teaching all children to read and write with confidence is relatively straight forward. The reality is that this task is relatively straight forward when specific social conditions are in place. The conditions that provide scaffolding for formal education are much more strongly in place in middle class homes and communities. And even many of you, as parents of middle class children, know that even in these conditions many children struggle, and need special kinds of support.
- When these conditions are not in place, the job is much more difficult, and teachers must be provided with educational tools that are especially built to work within the conditions that exist. One of the biggest 'problems behind the problem' for rural South Africa is that many of our educational tools (policy, curriculum, teacher support materials) are developed in the context of middle class English confident urban centres. The tools are test driven in middle class and urban schools. When they are then given to rural teachers, they fall flat. And instead of blaming the tools, we blame the teachers.

- Teachers across the globe stay in the classroom mainly for one reason. Beyond the pay cheque, teachers stay in the classroom because of the energy they get when they see a child 'break through.' It is extremely beautiful, and very rewarding -- when a child startles herself with a break through moment. However, if we have the wrong educational tools and conditions, children do not 'break through'. And when no one is 'winning', we get frustrated. We both blame ourselves, and turn inward / depressed. Or we turn outward – on children, on the system. There is a war of frustration in our classrooms that most dangerously is most often turned inwards on children and teachers themselves.
- One of the core pieces of work of the Nelson Mandela Institute has been to re-engineer the foundation phase classroom, placing the social, linguistic and emotional realities of rural children and teachers at the generative centre. We have focused on physical ergonomics, learning and teaching tools, curriculum and pedagogy. In 2008 we set up the first classroom. In 2009 we established 72 more. In 2009 we focused on Grade R. In 2010, we focused on Grade R and 1. This year we are focusing on Grade R, 1 and 2. Next year we will be focusing on the entire Foundation Phase – Grade R, 1, 2 and 3.
- The research goal was to establish sustainable bilingual interactive and differentiated foundation phase classrooms. The bilingual aspect is of importance: we seek to build careful tools to both strengthen children's home language for cognitive development, as well as systematically introduce English to give children a fighting chance for English based instruction further into their schooling.
- While we call the work bilingual, interactive, differentiated foundation phase classrooms, teachers, learners and parents have called them simply, 'Magic Classrooms.' They are magic because they are places where teachers and learners can see, for themselves, the magical process of learning break through. One elderly man said to me simply, 'this is a classroom for a human being.'
- Without going into further detail, we truly believe that this work is some of the most important work we can be doing in education. Many people assume this work has already been done – that is, we have the educational tools required for isiXhosa bilingual literacy. If this was true, then it would be fairer to be frustrated with teachers. But the work has not been done. Teachers do not have the right tools in their hands. And when they have the right tools in their hands, we slowly see the energy of teaching and learning emerge.
- This is not easy work. The team is highly skilled and yet has the energy to live in schools and communities working side by side teachers and learners to find solutions that work.
- the importance of sustaining this work. He explained that too much good work gets undermined by the lack of sustainability. Mr. Mandela himself has expressed his concern that good work is often undermined by lack of sustainability. We have built a careful sustainability model. We are currently able to pursue this work at the minimal investment of R 4 million per

year, supporting a core team of approximately 5 senior and 6 developmental posts. Our goal is to establish a sustainability fund of R 60 million by the end of 2012. We have currently almost raised one third of this target.

- Too much of this work is currently being supported by funders based outside of South Africa, who often make only short term commitments to small pieces of work. We as business leaders want to ensure that this kind of work is supported by ourselves, and has a stable sustainability strategy to build it into the future.

To read more about the Nelson Mandela Institute, visit the website: [www.mandelainstitute.org.za](http://www.mandelainstitute.org.za)