

## Are we taking care of our teachers? Are they taking care of themselves?

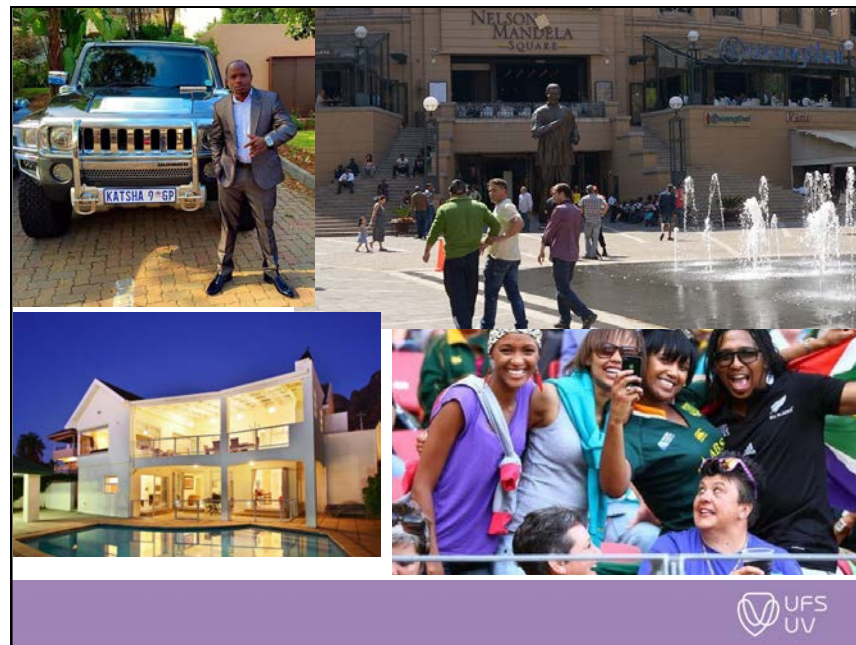
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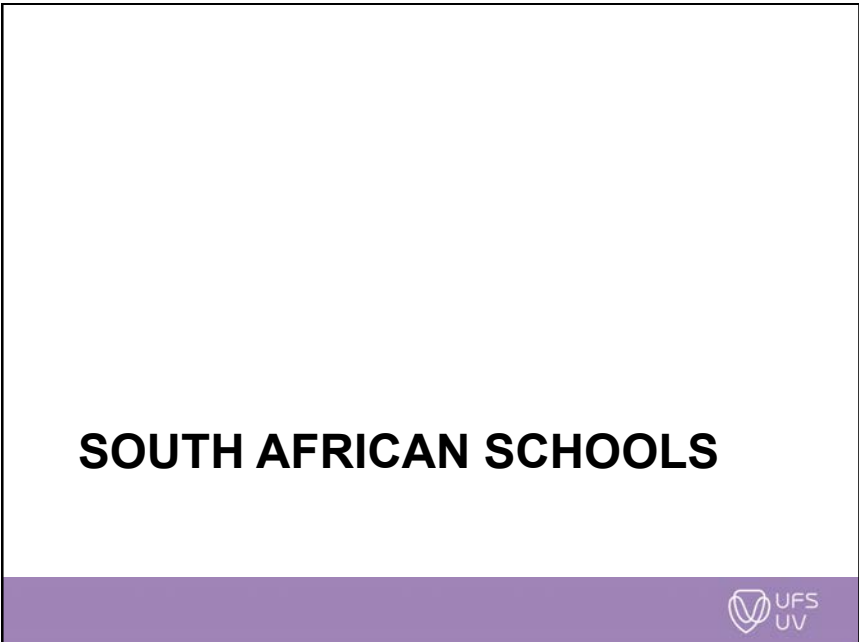


## South Africa

- Population 55 million
- 1 219 090 km<sup>2</sup>
- Country of contrasts









## Background

- As in many countries in the world, the majority of people in SA is very poor and often have low levels of education.
- Quality education however can create opportunities for the youth to escape from a life of destitute depending on the ability of teachers to create an enabling environment for the learners to thrive.



## Background

Teachers have to pull this off in a working environment that often does not support their own growth:

- Generally poorly resourced schools,
- Poor socio-economic circumstances with parents and the wider community mostly unable to provide any kind of financial support
- Poorly educated parents who are unable to support their children with school work
- The poor performance of learners in international benchmark tests and national examinations
- Heavy administrative loads,
- Large numbers of learners in classes,
- Negative learner behaviour and
- Work-place bullying



### Our argument is:

That in general, unless authorities and individuals take care of the wellness of teachers, their functioning will be compromised and under challenging circumstances, this will impact the quality of education that learners receive so much more.



### Aim of the paper

In this paper we consider to what extent teachers' rights to workplace and personal wellness are taken care of in the education system. Towards that, we will:

- Describe the Legislative & Policy framework that guides teacher wellness, and
- Share the narratives of a few teachers on their wellness, towards
- Providing critical comments on the way forward.



## LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK



## South African Legislation

- **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa** (Act 108 of 1996)
  - Fair labour practices (Section 23);
  - Environment that is not harmful to his/her health and well-being
- **Personnel Administrative Measures** (Government Notice 170 of 2016)
  - workload should be “equitable” to ensure that teachers “on a particular level or an individual educator is not overburdened”
  - The expectation is that every educator must be able to account for 1800 actual working hours per annum
    - Results in 9 hours per day for the duration of the term, excluding weekend, or 5 hours per day if teachers work all 365 days and take no leave.



## Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (2008)

The goal is to provide a common strategic direction and platform for operational policies by providing guidelines through principles and practices for the health and wellness of public servants, their families and citizens.



## Employee Health and Wellness Strategic Framework for the Public Service (2008)

### Strategic objective 4:

To promote individual wellness and organisational wellness and to improve work-life balance

- Promote an organisational culture that is conducive to individual & organisational wellness, towards effectiveness and efficiency of the Public Service
- Programmes to manage productivity & absenteeism
- Prevention programmes to deal with stress, discrimination, victimisation, harassment and workplace bullying
- Development, training and support programmes





## Other relevant laws and policies

- Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998)
- Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998)
- Occupation Health & Safety Act
- Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Act 75 of 1997)
- Employee Assistance Programme Policy of DoE 2001 and Strategy
  - a. Level 1 Reactive counselling service
  - b. Proactive projects
- South African Council for Educators, 2017 Code of Conduct.



## PARTICIPANTS



## Participants

- Participants

- Thabo

- Deputy Principal;  
Primary School; Male;  
40+

- Mary

- Head of Therapist  
Department;  
Special School;  
Female; 40+

- Hester

- Head of Mathematics  
Department; High  
School; Female; 50+

- Doreen

- Economic and  
Management Sciences  
teacher; High School;  
Female; 60+



## Immediate reactions

- Doreen

- Very negative about own wellness

- Hester

- Stressed; Although a well-managed school (by hard working SMT) the state of the staff can be described as stressed and tired. People are snapping when dealing with learners and also when dealing with colleagues
- I am stressed. I make lists of things that MUST be done and I get to do very little on the list

- Thabo

- Stressed, despondent, not confident about everything. I hate it here
- tired most times not feeling like coming to work



## Immediate reactions

- Mary
  - I am extremely busy and overloaded with responsibilities and duties, so I hardly take time in terms of self-care
  - I sit every evening and every weekend with a lot of work, and I feel that I never get on top of it
  - I feel as if I fail to get anything properly done
  - I seldom feel that what I do is good enough
  - I feel guilty the moment I don't tend to my work and spend time on something else



## Immediate reaction

- Mary
  - I realise that my own emotional wellbeing is cardinal in my work, and for my family life
  - I know that my colleagues and the parents with whom I work, are influenced when I am negative and discouraged.
  - I always try mindfully to be positive in conversations, and to influence people positively, even when I am not really positive.
  - I also try to focus on positive aspects when I encounter a negative situation
  - Some days it is definitely more challenging to be positive than others



## Working Environment: Management

- Doreen
  - I feel vulnerable, and let down by the school management
- Thabo
  - There is a lot of politics in schools, so you are responsible for your own wellbeing. Unless the principal feels that teachers need a party



## Working Environment: Colleagues

Hester

- Despite the school being well-managed and the Exco working hard, the staff can be described as stressed and tired. People are snapping when dealing with learners and also when dealing with colleagues
- Every morning at our Exco meeting the [senior management] tells us as HODs “You must do ...” – these come from the district office, but it leaves me despondent and I realise that more things are added to my list that I will not be able to do



## Working Environment: Learners

- Doreen
  - The poor discipline at the school, and the cumbersome administrative process to deal with learner lack of discipline
  - Learners are disrespectful towards me and other colleagues



## Physical wellbeing

- Doreen
  - I am tired, I can't concentrate
- Mary
  - I often have good intentions and plans, such as to get fit in order to reduce my stress levels, but I never execute them, mostly because I have too much work pressure



## Social Wellbeing

### Doreen

- I try to avoid social interaction; I avoid going to the staff room;
- Colleagues do not really talk to one another, they do not listen to each other; everyone is so busy with his/her own struggle to survive



## Support?

- Doreen

- I have a wonderful and supportive Learning Facilitator (Subject Advisor). She visits me at least once a year. She acknowledges my expertise and experience, treat me with the utmost respect.
- At one stage the Teacher Unions took trouble to organise motivational speakers etc. for the meetings; not any more

- Thabo

- In my history as a teacher, DBE has provided wellness officers *once* on request. But relatively speaking DBE is not taking care of its staff



## Selfcare Practices

- Doreen
  - I regularly go to a physiotherapist
  - Use prescribed medication to help me with the stress
  - When I was younger I used to go on hikes with friends
  - My sister and I travel the world during holidays
  - I eat irregularly, and mainly junk food or unhealthy food
- Hester
  - I give myself an hour every evening where I go to my neighbour and we have a cup of tea and we crochet
  - I changed my eating habits. I eat more regularly and healthy



## Selfcare Practices

- Thabo
  - I run in the morning before work and after work
  - I try to stay away from office politics for my own peace of mind
  - Keeping myself busy with my work
  - Ignoring things
  - Spiritually: Go to church with my family, share the Word during the week and we pray together.
  - Financially: we work together myself and my wife on finances and we help each other and we got rid of accounts and loans
  - Family life: making your family your friends, enjoying every moment you get with your family



## Formal Programmes

- Doreen
  - Once, the principal organised a expert to assist all the staff members to identify their personality types.
  - The school organise team building events one every three years - The rest of the time, we are constantly reprimanded and told to do this and that
- Hester
  - There are programmes in place. We have a councillor at our school available for staff members and learners. I have made use of our councillor but not of the provincial programmes

## Formal Programmes

- Thabo
  - Once, there was team building activities, it was not like sessions to assist with problems that we encounter daily at work. It was not very effective
  - The principal organised it, but you need to understand this, the programme was organised because teachers were complaining and very frustrated



## Formal Programmes

- Mary
  - The DBE offers no support
  - At the school, I am the one who regularly discusses the issue of emotional wellness and balance with the colleagues
  - I have organised activities in an attempt to address emotional wellness with the staff members. However there are always budget issues. It is very difficult to secure any funds for such activities
  - It is usually not possible to organise such activities during school hours. Teachers are often not motivated to spend weekends on such activities, as they often have to attend other school-related activities
  - Recently I made contact with consultants to launch a project to assist the school to review its character and identity. This would inter alia have addressed issues such as the emotional wellness of the staff, personality types, conflict management and so forth. Unfortunately the Governing Body rejected the proposal due to the costs



## Formal Programmes

- Mary
  - The DBE has never organised anything
  - One of the Special Schools in our district arranged a morning session for us therapists, with a speaker on emotional health. This included a number of activities and techniques to convey the message. It was a short session, but I really enjoyed it.
  - The Resource Centre that I am involved with has arranged 2 or 3 events where we invited the teachers from the Districts. We focused on specific topics to sensitise teachers regarding emotional wellness and stress, and how to address these.
  - We also organised a similar event for the teachers at our school. However, I know that this is by far not enough to simply talk about it, and we have to do more to support the teachers.



## Conclusion

- Teachers' right to workplace wellness is recognised in official documents
- However, based on the narratives of these four participants it seems that the policy has not been implemented yet
- Workplace wellness becomes the responsibility of teachers themselves
- However a lack of skills, resources and authority to implement formal workplace wellness programmes often thwart their attempts and affect personal wellness jeopardising occupational functioning.

