



MINISTRY
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

THEMBI SIMELANE

**DURING THE OCCASION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCE
WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING ENGAGEMENT SESSION HOSTED**

BY

TSHWANE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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BOLIVIA LODGE, POLOKWANE

Programme Director;

The leadership and academic staff of Tshwane University of Technology;

Dr Sindi Mokgopha and the team from the Department of Public Sector
Finance;

Distinguished alumni and public sector leaders;

Students and future public sector professionals;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good Morning,

It is my singular honour and privilege to join the university community and its stakeholders at this Public Sector Finance Work-Integrated Learning Engagement session, convened under the Public Sector Finance Alumni Leadership and Practice Series.

I commend the Tshwane University of Technology, and particularly the Department of Public Sector Finance, for creating a platform that connects academic learning with the lived realities of leadership, governance, and public administration.

This engagement is important because textbooks equip us with theoretical concepts, principles, frameworks, and technical knowledge, while professional practice teaches us how those principles must be applied under pressure, in conditions of competing priorities and limited resources, and always under the scrutiny of the public we serve.

This engagement session is timely albeit significant as it takes place in a year we are commemorating key milestones in our democratic journey as a country. Obviously, you are all aware that this year marks 30 years since the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was adopted.

Chapter 10, Section 195-197 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa instructs that:

Public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, including the following principles:

- (a) A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- (b) Efficient, economic, and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- (c) Public administration must be development-oriented.
- (d) Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- (e) People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making.
- (f) Public administration must be accountable.
- (g) Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information.
- (h) Good human-resource management and career-development practices, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated.
- (i) Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness, and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation.

Accordingly, the Constitution further states that the above principles apply to:

- (a) administration in every sphere of government;
- (b) organs of state; and
- (c) public enterprises.

I thought it was important that I reiterate the philosophical injunction of the Constitution as far as matters relative public administration are concerned since you have asked me to reflect on:

- the strategic importance of the public sector in nation-building,
- the value of ethical leadership and accountability, and
- why young people should regard public service as a meaningful and impactful career.

These three themes are intrinsically connected.

Notably, a developmental state requires capable institutions; capable institutions require ethical and accountable leadership; and sustainable renewal requires a new generation of skilled public servants. Human Settlements bring these connections into sharp focus because the quality of governance is ultimately experienced in the places where people live.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR AS AN INSTRUMENT OF NATION-BUILDING

When we speak about the public sector, we are speaking about more than departments, budgets, regulations, and policies. We are speaking about the means through which a democratic state gives practical effect to the rights, dignity, and aspirations of its people. In Human Settlements, this means translating constitutional commitments into serviced land, housing opportunities, secure tenure and neighbourhoods in which people can live with dignity, and create sustainable human settlements closer to social and economic amenities.

Every school built, every clinic opened, every road maintained, every household connected to basic services and every family provided with a housing opportunity reflects the work of public institutions and the public servants who make those outcomes possible.

In South Africa, this responsibility is especially significant.

The Constitution commits us to building a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, and socially just society. Section 26 recognises everyone's right of access to adequate housing and requires the state, within its available resources, to take reasonable legislative and other measures towards the progressive realisation of that right. The public sector is therefore not a passive administrator. It is an active instrument for overcoming the spatial, social, and economic inequalities inherited from our past.

The National Development Plan, Vision 2030, similarly places a capable and developmental state at the centre of our long-term progress. It recognises that overcoming poverty and inequality requires capable institutions, professional public servants, active citizens and coordinated action across the state and society. It also calls for the transformation of human settlements and the national spatial economy so that where people live no longer determines whether they can access opportunity.

This is consistent with the insights of developmental-state theorists. Peter Evans describes effective states as having "*embedded autonomy*": a professional and capable administration that retains the independence to act in the public interest while remaining connected to communities, business, and civil society. Max Weber likewise emphasised merit, professionalism, predictability, and legal-rational authority as foundations of an effective public administration.

For us, these are not abstract academic concepts. They speak directly to the institutional capability required to plan integrated settlements, coordinate different spheres of government, manage public resources, and deliver at scale.

Nation-building is also about trust and belonging. Citizens must be able to believe that public institutions are competent, fair, and responsive; that public resources are allocated for the public good; and that government decisions will translate into visible improvements in their daily lives. A well-located, integrated human settlement does more than provide a roof. It connects families to transport, schools, healthcare, employment, and economic opportunity, while helping to undo the spatial fragmentation of apartheid.

PUBLIC FINANCE: WHERE POLICY BECOMES DELIVERY

For students of Public Sector Finance, the central message is this: public finance is where policy intention meets the discipline of implementation.

A policy without an appropriately funded and credible implementation plan remains an aspiration. A budget that is poorly planned, inadequately controlled or inefficiently spent weakens the state's ability to deliver. Conversely, sound financial management converts limited public resources into infrastructure, services, and opportunities. This is particularly important in a sector such as Human Settlements, where delivery depends on coordinated investment in land, bulk infrastructure, basic services, housing, and social amenities.

The decisions made by accountants, economists, auditors, analysts, supply chain practitioners and financial managers determine whether resources reach the programmes for which they were intended; whether projects are delivered on time and within budget; and whether institutions can account honestly for both performance and expenditure.

In Human Settlements, those decisions influence whether provinces and municipalities can turn allocated funding into serviced sites, upgraded informal settlements, social housing and completed homes. In the Human Settlements sector, the relationship between finance and delivery is immediate and visible. Good planning and responsible financial stewardship support the provision of housing opportunities, the upgrading of informal settlements, social and affordable rental housing, access to serviced land and the development of integrated, sustainable communities. They also enable us to introduce innovative and alternative building technologies, improve the quality and speed of delivery, and direct investment towards areas of greatest need.

However, success cannot be measured by expenditure alone. The important question is not simply whether money was spent, but whether it produced the intended outcome, at the required quality, for the people it was meant to serve. A housing project is not successful merely because the budget has been exhausted. It must result in safe, durable, and well-located homes, functioning services and communities connected to opportunity. Compliance, performance, and impact must therefore reinforce one another.

Those of you who enter public sector finance will become custodians of resources that belong to the people of South Africa. That is a profound responsibility. Each figure in a budget represents a public priority, and behind each public priority are real communities and real lives.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Competence is essential in public service, but competence without integrity is dangerous. The future of our country depends not only on capable public servants, but on ethical public servants.

Ethical leadership is demonstrated in the choices we make when those choices are difficult. It means placing the public interests above personal interests, applying rules fairly, declaring conflicts, protecting public resources, and refusing to normalise conduct that undermines the institution.

It means we must not use the authority attached to public office for personal enrichment.

Accountability is not an administrative inconvenience. It is one of the foundations of democratic governance. Parliament, the Auditor-General, the judiciary, oversight institutions and citizens all have legitimate roles in ensuring that those entrusted with public power answer for their decisions and actions.

When ethics and accountability are weakened and effectively undermined, the consequences are felt far beyond an audit report. Resources are diverted from communities, projects are delayed, incomplete or of poor quality, institutional morale declines and public trust is eroded.

In Human Settlements, failures of governance can leave families waiting longer for serviced land, an upgraded settlement, or a dignified home and contribute to the intricacies of the housing backlog.

When ethics and accountability are strengthened, institutions learn, improve, and become more credible and effective and re-gain public confidence.

I therefore encourage you to establish your professional values before you enter the workplace. Protect public resources. Ask the necessary questions. Keep accurate records. Respect controls. Speak up when something is wrong. Do not allow urgency, seniority, or convenience to persuade you to compromise your integrity.

PUBLIC SERVICE AS A CAREER OF PURPOSE

Like many people, I did not begin my career with every step of the journey mapped out. What has remained constant is the conviction that public service offers an extraordinary opportunity to improve people's lives.

Public service is demanding. It involves complexity, competing interests, pressure, and difficult decisions. Yet it also offers the privilege of contributing to outcomes that extend beyond an individual client or organisation and reach families, communities, and future generations. Few things demonstrate this more clearly than seeing a family receive a home, an informal settlement gain basic services, or a previously excluded community become connected to opportunity.

Whether you become an accountant, auditor, analyst, economist, financial manager, policy specialist or municipal official, your contribution will matter. The integrity of a reconciliation, the quality of an analysis, the courage to flag a risk and the discipline to follow a control can determine whether a public programme succeeds or fails.

Do not allow the difficulties or negative narratives associated with public institutions to convince you that meaningful change is impossible. Instead, see those challenges as an invitation to become part of the generation that changes the narrative through excellence, professionalism, and ethical leadership.

INNOVATION IN A CHANGING PUBLIC SECTOR

You are preparing to enter the workplace at a time of rapid technological change. Digital platforms, data analytics, artificial intelligence, geospatial information, and integrated financial systems are reshaping how governments plan, spend, monitor, and report.

In Human Settlements, these tools can help us understand demand, identify suitable land, monitor projects, track title deeds, and align investment across different spheres of government.

These tools can improve efficiency, strengthen transparency, identify risk earlier and support better decisions. But technology is not a substitute for judgement, ethics, or accountability. Poor data produces poor decisions, and sophisticated systems cannot compensate for weak values.

Your generation has the opportunity to combine technological confidence with a strong public-service ethic. South Africa needs professionals who can modernise systems while keeping citizens at the centre; who can innovate without weakening controls; and who understand that digital transformation must ultimately improve access, responsiveness, and service delivery.

The next innovation that strengthens public financial management may come from someone in this room. The next reform that improves accountability may be designed by one of you. The next leader who helps restore trust in a public institution may begin that journey here at TUT.

A CALL TO THE NEXT GENERATION

South Africa needs your talent, your energy, and your ideas. But it also needs your discipline, humility, and courage.

Choose excellence over mediocrity. Choose evidence over assumption. Choose integrity over convenience. Choose service over self-interest. Be the authors of your destiny.

Continue learning after you graduate. Understand the communities affected by your decisions. Work across professional and institutional boundaries. Human settlements cannot be delivered by one profession, department or sphere of government acting alone. They require finance specialists, planners, engineers, environmental practitioners, social facilitators, and communities to work towards a shared outcome. Remember that public finance is not only about numbers: it is about using resources responsibly to advance the public good.

Do not enter public service merely to occupy a position. Enter it with the intention to add value, solve problems, protect the public trust, and leave the institution stronger than you found it.

CONCLUSION

As I conclude, a career in public service is ultimately a commitment to people. It is a commitment to dignity, opportunity, and a better future for every community. In Human Settlements, it is the commitment to transform the places in which people live so that every settlement becomes a platform for social and economic progress.

The story of South Africa's development is still being written, and every generation has a responsibility to contribute. I believe your generation can help build a public sector that is ethical, innovative, professional, accountable, and capable of delivering meaningful change.

You are not preparing merely for employment. You are preparing to become custodians of the public trust and partners in building the South Africa envisaged in our Constitution.

Let's imagine and build a better South Africa together!

Serve with integrity. Lead with purpose. Let the quality of your work speak for your commitment to the people of South Africa.

I thank you.