



Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi with learners at a winter school camp in Kameeldrift.

PICTURE: JACQUES NAUDE/AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

## 'It's your responsibility to build the country'

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GRAB every opportunity available to you now so you too can one day help build the country to what you wish it to be.

In relating the sacrifices made by the youth of June 16, 1976, during the Soweto Uprising, Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi encouraged learners from across the country to use programmes such as the department's Winter School camp to their benefit.

Hand-picked from 22 schools across the country, 113 learners were taken on by the department for a week-long extra tutoring session during the last week of the July school holidays this week. The purpose of the camp is to expose Grade 10 and 12 learners to consider alternative careers and educate them about the available industry

opportunities.

The young people were also encouraged to consider capacitating the country's scarce skills.

Like a father speaking to his own children, Nxesi implored the youngsters on the numerous opportunities taking mathematics opened.

"One can never say they are too old to learn something new. As old as I am, I am still learning because the truth of the matter is that we learn every day until the day we die."

He added: "Education is not about disrespecting teachers and parents, going out drinking and experimenting with drugs. It is a tool that others fought for so that the black child may be empowered and self-sufficient."

Nxesi said while the country's leaders were aware that there was still a need for economic liberation, he told the learners one sure way to achieve that was through closing the skills

gap so as to ensure there was no need to go outside of the country looking for them.

With the programme running since 2013, Nxesi boasted that 12 students were now doing their master's degrees, which would not only benefit the students and their families but also the entire country.

Other objectives of the programme was to promote training and skills development in the built environment, in line with the needs of the national infrastructure plan, to transform the built environment in order to reflect the demographics of the country and in particular to facilitate access for learners from disadvantaged communities.

Nxesi highlighted that despite 70% of the population being black, only 25% black and 10% females were in the professional world.

And it is for that reason he said his

department had a dedicated centre to open up the pipeline.

Following the relaxed and jovial address, learners at the camp said they were more inspired than ever to perform well in their studies.

One such learner, Nkanyezi Sibuyi, currently in Grade 11, said she was happy she was part of the programme as the tutors really helped them understand difficult subjects such as physics and how exciting mathematics is.

"When you understand something you start to enjoy it, and that is what they have done for us. We are going to make our country proud because 2019 will be our year," she said.

Thabang Ndlovu said: "I started last year and I'm back because they inspire and motivate me that I too can one day end up an actuarial scientist."

"If only these tutors were at every school many more could benefit."