

Speech by Ambassador Dieter W. Haller
on the occasion
of the opening of the 7th Conference “Qualifications Africa”
on 22 November 2007 at Gallagher Estate, Midrand

It is a great honour for me to participate in this year’s Q-Africa conference. Sustainability is nowadays a key word for so many policies. What one can say without undue exaggeration: the cooperation between the SAQA and the Qualification-Federation Germany is very sustainable indeed!

What started some 8 years ago has become in the meantime a permanent and in its importance ever increasing asset of our bilateral relations.

There is no reason to be self-complacent – but with all due modesty I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to responsables of both sides. It is quite remarkable what you have achieved.

I would like to extend a special warm welcome to Madam Pieper. She is Member of Parliament and Vice-Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Technology. It is always good to have the blessing of Parliament!

I have studied the programme very carefully. I was very much impressed by the breadth and depth of the issues that you want to tackle. This is not an event of theological discussion. No, it is concrete, down-to-earth and very practice-orientated. I would like to congratulate the organizers on this approach.

Let me at the outset of this undertaking share a few brief comments with you.

First, what the SA Qualification Authority and the German Q-Federation are doing is part and parcel of a much wider picture of South African/German cooperation. Your cooperation is embedded into the strategic partnership both countries have agreed upon. South Africa is for Germany the most important partner on the African Continent both

politically, economically and culturally. We do acknowledge the enormous progress that South Africa has achieved since 1994. We know that the burden of Apartheid still weighs heavy. The structural injustices and inequalities that Apartheid caused and created can not be overcome in one decade. We Germans understand this perhaps better than others since we are experiencing ourselves how difficult it is to build a united nation that has been divided politically, economically and philosophically!

South Africa and Germany have developed since 1994 a very broad and multi-faceted cooperation covering a whole variety of areas. This goes from our joint endeavours to strengthening local Government, to supporting the African Renaissance Approach, namely the NEPAD Secretariat and the APRM and includes pioneering projects like BIOTA – an effort to preserve the wonderful biodiversity of this country.

The presence of more than 500 German companies helps to consolidate and expand the industrial basis of this country. I am mentioning this not to impress anybody, but only to reassure to our Qualification friends: You are part of a longer and broadly based German commitment to the development of this country. And let me add: we are doing this on an equal footing. We want to share our experience, our expertise and this is not a one-way exercise!

Second: South Africa is in our view a country with a very high potential. All those who want to see South Africa further develop, further grow, further bridge the divides of the past can only have one common interest: to tap this potential. And there is no better way to do this than by investing in education, education, education – and in training of course.

South Africa is compared to other countries in an obvious privileged position: it disposes of enormous resources: both human and natural ones.

Germany, on the contrary, is poor in resources. The only natural resource is a bit coal. The only real resource is our brain. This is the reason why education and vocational training is of permanent importance to us. Without a well educated and skilled labour force in all levels of the chain of production our economy would be shattered. Or in

other words: Bringing together the German expertise and the South African high potential in human resources is a winning formula!

Third remark: vocational training with a strong occupational focus is as important as tertiary education, that is academic qualifications. There is a general tendency in many countries to overestimate academic education and to underestimate vocational training. I disagree with such an attitude. Let's face it! In spite of the technological progress of the 21st century every economy still requires not only well trained engineers or computer experts but also good artisans, well trained technicians.

It is, however, a matter of fact that the South African economy develops along the same line as the economies of the industrialized countries: the percentage of the primary sector to Gross National Product is continuously diminishing (now at about 12 %). But sound growth in the secondary and tertiary sector still requires skills on all levels!

Fourth: Training with a strong occupational focus requires close cooperation between the qualification agencies and the private sector.

This insight is the basis of our German approach known under the label of “dual education” – a concept which we are sharing in many countries.

Private public partnership is instrumental in guaranteeing that the training efforts are directed to skills that are really demanded. And private public partnership also guarantees the necessary degree of flexibility and adjustments needed not only in large companies – which are under continuous pressure of international/globalized competition – but also in the small and medium sized companies.

I am therefore very pleased to see representatives of German companies operating in South Africa here. I have already visited quite a number of them and I was impressed by the high degree of corporate social responsibility they are sharing – towards their employees, their families and the local communities. In the long run every company can only prosper in an overall conducive environment.

Fifth: As for the methods of skill development we should make full use of all the options nowadays modern communication technology does offer. South Africa can be proud to

host the largest centre of excellence. UNISA opens up new possibilities for hundreds of thousands of students not only in this country, but in the whole continent to tap the potential.

I am therefore very pleased to see that you will also deliberate on issues like E-learning. This is in my view the right path to pursue in addition to the traditional methods of learning.

Let us fully explore the possibilities of old and new methods of transfer and dissemination of skills.

These, Ladies and Gentlemen, are my brief comments I wanted to share with you. Once again : many thanks to the organizers. I do wish this 7th Conference on occupational-directed qualifications every possible success!