

"Ploughing back into the community could uplift learners and make them stronger and healthier members of the Community; Those who can should do it," urges MEC Dhlomo (as school's impressive new R490 000 art centre named after him)

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KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo has called upon those who have the resources to rally behind the schools that made them and plough back into their communities. If charity begin at home in this way, it could restore hope among the poor, and help improve the future education and health prospects of children, so they can thrive and make the right decisions concerning their own health and wellness when they become adults.

The MEC was speaking at his alma mater Putellos Primary School, at Umbumbulu, south of Durban, during the official opening of an art centre that was built for R490 000.

He was pleasantly surprised to learn that the art centre had been named after him. When the school's old art centre was mysteriously burnt to the ground in July 2018, the MEC pledged R140 000 for the construction of a structure to replace it. But because the money was not enough, he then mobilised his own Bhelesi Foundation to team up with local businessmen Mr Nhlanhla and Tutu Mnganga, for the funding of the rest of the project. The result is an impressive, spacious art centre with a partition, which enables it to also be used as a hall, wedding venue or conference centre.

*"When the art centre was burnt down, I donated a sum of R140 000, but it was not enough to rebuild the art centre. I want to thank Tutu and Nhlanhla Mnganga, and the Bhelesi Foundation, who have partnered with me and have contributed far more to realise this building that we have now officially opened, and have now handed over to the Department of Education".*

*"I am delighted and humbled that the school has decided to name this building the Dr SM Dhlomo Art Centre. I want to continue supporting this school. I wish there could be many more like the Mnganga brothers who are willing and available to assist, because this school is no longer the same as when we were here in the 60s, and we can always improve and make it better".*

*"We're looking forward to more donations in improving this school because these learners will have to get a better foundation than the one we had. If that foundation created learners like ourselves, then what we are laying down for them now will be much more advanced. "Among other things that are highlighted there is the focus on educating the girl child, which is a very important programme because empowering the girl child also creates the foundation for a safe and economically thriving nation. All sorts of problems relating to the dying of women are really reduced or eliminated if women are educated."*



The MEC also used the opportunity to read from his newly-released book, *My Journey to Robben Island: A Memoir to the Armed Struggle*. This was preceded by the reading of extracts from the book by young learners, whose proficiency in reading the English language left a mark on the MEC. Earlier, he had visited his other former school, Sibusisiwe High School, nearby.

*“I was glad I was able to do a book reading at the schools where I started my education, and to see that the schools liked the book, and are interested in putting it in their library. At Putellos Primary, I was delighted to see a primary school such as this one having learners who are able to read English so well.”*

Ms Thenjiwe Mhlongo, Principal of Putellos Primary School, could hardly contain her happiness – which was in stark contrast to the sadness, panic and tears from when the school’s art centre was razed to the ground.

*“We very happy that this day has finally arrived, after we had a fire destroyed our beautiful art room. Through the MEC who visited the school and saw the fire that had destroyed everything that we had had, he laid the foundation of building this art centre. We are happy that it has been given to us as a school, and we will handle it with care and dignity. We promise that the learners and people of Umbumbulu will benefit from the same art centre that we have. We are going to be building the nation. We will also share it with the neighbouring schools. We thank him, the Bhelesi Foundation and the Mnganga brothers from the bottom of our hearts.”*

