WORKING TOGETHER TO PROMOTE UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Written by

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South Africa’s national pride is Unity in Diversity and this is clearly written or inscribed in the National Coat of Arms: the Motto \(\textit{ike e: /xarra //ke}\) in the green semicircle. “The motto is written in Khoisan language and it means \textit{diverse people unite}! There must be unity in thought and action. It calls for the nation to unite in a common sense of belonging and national pride – Unity in Diversity”.

\textbf{What does unity in diversity entail?}

It entails making a conscious decision to unite despite the diversity (our differences).

Why unite at all? We unite to achieve a common purpose; we unite to assist one another, to strengthen one another, to work together, to find identity, to complement, to offer/ to give support to one another, etc. Mahatma Gandhi said “I offer you peace. I offer you love. I offer you friendship. I see your beauty. I hear your need. I feel your feelings. My wisdom flows from the Highest Source. I salute that Source in you. Let us work together for unity and love.” The National Coat of Arms depicts unity in diversity and the message there is that we are expected to work together to promote unity in diversity.

We are a diverse people and that is what makes us a great people/ nation!! The diversity if channeled properly will bring out our strength: I cannot imagine how boring and how weak we

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would be if we were not a diverse people. Many nations envy us for this attribute and desire to be as diverse as we are. Think of a country that has no diversity and tell me if it is a progressing nation or not and if the people are not boring!!

Diversity is a blessing and that is why it is found everywhere and in everything in life: animals are diverse, plants are diverse, human beings are diverse, fish are diverse and even soil which is not a living thing is diverse. Individuals unite to form a family making this unit to be a diverse unit. Children from the same family/same womb are different. Members of the same family work together to achieve the goal of having a good home. Why? Because “a family or house that is divided cannot stand!” The man and woman knowing their differences consciously come together to make a family. It is a conscious decision to obtain/achieve a common goal. Different families make up a nation. This is unity in diversity!

- Unity in diversity is the ability to consciously choose to overlook the differences and work on building the similarities so cohabitation is to the benefit of all involved parties. It is far easier to condemn than to look for the good in someone/something else.
- The idea of unity in diversity speaks to the idea that within every unique individual lies the inherent belief to create some form of unity in all aspects of life. We aim for a unified country, government relations and even the often clichéd term of world peace. It can clearly be said that no two countries, governments or people are the same but by choosing to work together we sub-consciously aim for the unity in our diversity.
- Countries create meetings and conferences to have a platform where they listen to the different approaches adopted towards the same goals. We may have the same goal but my journey/thought process towards that goal will be different from someone else’s. By listening to someone else’s approach, it changes the dimension of how I think about something; forcing me to accept my shortcomings and work on them.
- This process of creating unity in diversity needs to start at a young age- teaching a child that just because another child is different doesn’t mean you can’t learn from him/her. It also teaches adults that instead of the reflex motion of condemning the mistakes others have made, they understand not to make the same mistakes and teach others not to do the same.
- It is much easier said than done and can easily fall in a utopian ideal. But what must be understood is that we must come to terms that we learn best from those close to us especially when it pertains to countries. An example would be choosing not to adopt a new productive system from another country, which would be applicable in your own country, because they are a younger independence or were war-torn but are slowly rebuilding themselves in a sustainable manner.
- While conflict is inevitable, the result that is usually witnessed in human behaviour is the choice to resolve the conflict and seek more similarities than differences. Many may
argue that human interests are selfish and for their own gain; humans seem to have come to the realisation that if one is happy and the rest are unhappy, that unhappiness spreads like a wildfire and defeats the happiness in the first place. People are willing to overlook differences to find a common ground which is the essential matter in unity in diversity.

• History has continually shown that people aim for unity in diversity: when former President Mandela chose not to drive out the perpetrators of apartheid from the country but opted for the rainbow nation to build the country again because regardless of the implementation and evils of apartheid, one cannot deny the fact that infrastructure that was developed helped to ensure that the new government didn’t start completely from scratch. America and Britain imperialised Africa and created slavery but now, one can see the process to build ties with African countries and constant talks to develop each other although for arguable reasons – second scramble for Africa’s natural resources as demonstrated in the NATO – Libya bombings.

• As much as people want to argue that it is not possible to reach complete unity however, people can always think back to one situation in their lives where they were forced to work with someone they had nothing in common with but later realised they could learn a lot from that person.

• It can never happen overnight but there is evidence that the right steps are being taken to ensure diversity; people just need to embrace that diversity is not a stigma (only similarities keep us together). It should pique our curiosity when we find something different to what we are used to because by doing so, we are choosing to build ourselves up and accept that we don’t know everything but we can choose to learn more and develop more fruitfully.

That is how drought-resistant crops were developed, how ARVs were developed, how the plague in old days became influenza that could be treated; how the idea of independence became the basis of all governments. One different idea that is given a chance to grow can change the world for good.

How can we work together to promote Unity in diversity?

We must first recognize that we are different: as different as all the 9 elements in the Coat of Arms. Eight of the elements are standing on the base/foundation and that foundation is “Diverse People unite”. Remove this foundation/base/motto and the whole thing scatters. Without unity there is no South Africa and therefore we must work together to promote unity in diversity or the thing we are standing on/our foundation. All the national departments depicted in the Coat of Arms cannot stand without Unity.
We must appreciate our differences and therefore recognize that we need each other: no individual can survive without the other. People succeed only when they work together. Families succeed when there is unity in diversity. The national departments can only succeed when they work together. The Department of education cannot survive on its own: they need the agric to feed the teachers and learners, health to keep these healthy, minerals and energy to provide light and other energy demanding equipment, they need you and me, as parents of these children, to work together with them. We must take our basic responsibilities of bringing up our children well seriously. If I teach my child to listen, think, obey, respect, and be honest and work hard(do his or her best in whatever they do) and you do the same, 60% of South Africa’s problems would be solved! We will surely have a better South Africa that is united in diversity. Teaching a child to listen, think, obey, respect, be honest and work hard is not a privilege for the rich or educated but God given responsibility to every parent. Family Values are important!!! What are your family values?

We must live our values: each organization has its values just like each home has its values. The problem we have is that they are on paper on the wall and not in our hearts. We read them but we do not believe in them and that is why we do not live them, neither take them as absolute truth that we need to be accountable to. Where is Batho Pele today? It is gone with the wind in most government departments/ institutions. We pride ourselves with organizational values whose meaning we do not even understand. Why? Maybe because even the family values have been thrown to the dogs! Or we believe we have outgrown them and therefore they are no longer important and we are independent and free to do as we please.

Values build character and character plays an important role in promoting unity in diversity. I read somewhere that “Focusing only on what you can do without first deciding on what kind of person you should be is a big mistake. Your talent may make your name known but your character will determine what people associate with it. Your talent may dictate your potential but your character will determine your legacy. What is character? It is the will to do what is right, even when it is not easy. It is deciding ahead of time what is truly non negotiable!”.

Appreciating diversity is non- negotiable! Unity in diversity is non- negotiable and working together to promote Unity in Diversity is non- negotiable in South Africa!!!

“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” Ryunosuke Satoro.

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