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Thuma mina and education: Volunteerism, possibilities and challenges

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South African education has become used to dealing with an array of new policy and strategy initiatives. Often these policies and strategies appear on the scene only to disappear into the sand later on. When President Ramaphosa announced the Thuma mina initiative in February 2018, educationists would have been tempted to ask questions about the viability and the practicality of this initiative to help turn education in the country around. Unfortunately, like many other countries, South Africans are used to policies and strategies that often do not produce any significant results. During the State of the Nation Address on 16 February 2018, President Ramaphosa used the song by Hugh Masekela, *Send me*, to call on people to volunteer their services to the country by helping address some pressing problems, including problems regarding education – one of the four pillars of the New Dawn announced by President Ramaphosa. In light of South Africa's history of failed initiatives, I assessed the potential of Thuma mina to address urgent problems in South African society and in education in particular, through volunteerism. To do this, I traced the roots of Thuma mina and analysed the information that became available since February 2018 to determine under what circumstances it might succeed, and what might militate against its success. My conclusion is that the campaign has the potential to make a significant contribution to the improvement of education. However, certain obstacles also need to be addressed for volunteerism, in the form of Thuma mina, to succeed in education.

Keywords: accountability; authority; culture; exclusionary; heterogeneity; recalling; religion; reluctance; thuma mina; *ubuntu*

Introduction

In South Africa, February 2018 started in dramatic fashion. Ex-president Zuma had been recalled by the African National Congress and resigned from the presidency. Mr Cyril Ramaphosa was elected, sworn in and delivered his first State of the Nation address (SONA) as President on 16 February 2018. Many South Africans felt that President Zuma had failed dismally, both as leader of the government and as leader of the state (Labuschagne, 2018), and were eagerly awaiting encouragement to restore their sense of nationhood and hope for the future.

Both Lediga (2018) and Preuss (2018) report on the address and make comments pertinent to this paper. Preuss (2018) refers to three national priorities mentioned by the President, namely job creation, re-focussing on the mining industry, and re-industrialisation. Lediga (2018) discusses the four pillars of the New Dawn to which the President referred in the SONA: clean governance, an intensified anti-corruption drive, rebuilding a broken economy, and education and training. In the 2019 SONA (*Daily Maverick*, 2019) education was named as the second highest government priority.

In the 2019 SONA the President again referred to Thuma mina and spoke about the positive response to it (*Daily Maverick*, 2019). However, a project of the scale and importance that the President had in mind usually takes much longer than a year to come to fruition.

Education is a matter of concern in most counties in the world. Two concerns, especially in developing countries, are that not all children can exercise their right to basic education, and the quality of education. School education does not always enable learners to learn what they are supposed to know and be able to do when they leave school, resulting in society not benefitting from education as it should. Both these concerns featured strongly in pre-1994 South Africa. The problem of access to education has been solved to an extent, but the challenge of providing quality education remains – mainly because of the quality of educators and the unacceptably high learner-teacher ratios.

The President introduced an unusual possible solution to solve the problems by invoking volunteerism to help address these issues. While I cannot assess the success of this initiative at this point, I will explore the Thuma mina concept and assess its possible impact. While many countries use volunteers to assist in the delivery of education, it is possible that no country has done it on the scale that the President envisaged.

Position Paper

This paper is a position paper. As such, I have no empirical work to report on. Neither have I chosen a particular theoretical framework through which to view the proposed campaign. I have, however, attempted to clarify the origins, meaning, and implications of the Thuma mina concept. I also touch on issues of cooperation, control mechanisms, and accountability to develop guidelines for the successful introduction of a project like Thuma mina, not only in South Africa, but also in countries facing similar educational challenges.

The Origin, Relevance and Meaning of Thuma Mina, Hugh Masekela

Lediga (2018:para. 15) says that the President wanted to “galvanise his audience and the entire nation to action” on all the elements of his vision for a new dawn for the country. He did this by quoting from a song by Hugh Masekela (the theme song from his 2002 album, *Send me*):

I wanna be there
when the people start to turn it around
When they triumph over poverty
I wanna be there
when the people win the battle against AIDS
[Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome]
I wanna lend a hand

[...]
Send me.

An analysis of the text reveals that the emphasis is on the people that “turn it around.” This formulation presupposes that the people themselves are able, through volunteerism, to solve the problems, that the role of government can be backgrounded, and that the government’s service delivery and accountability are lacking. Maluleke (2018:para. 7) comments that, with “these words, Masekela paints a vision of a future in which ‘the people’ (not the government!) will ‘start to turn it around.’” An analysis of the SONA does not indicate that the President attached such a meaning to the words, but that he merely encouraged volunteers to report for duty. One might add here that, as pointed out in the discussion of the African National Congress’s ([ANC], n.d.) Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu volunteers Thuma mina campaign below, this duty could be restricted to persuading people to vote for the ANC in the 2019 election. As the President addressed the whole nation in the SONA, this interpretation is not likely to be true. The improbability of this interpretation is further borne by the emphasis placed on education as one of the four pillars on which the new dispensation in South Africa will rest.

In the abstract I pointed out that South Africans have grown used to the introduction of new policies, strategies, and buzzwords, and to the failures of the policies and strategies, and the evaporation of buzzwords. Even though the phrase “Send me” was introduced by the President, it does not mean that it is not susceptible to the weaknesses of its predecessors. It also does not mean that the campaign does not have the potential to help address crucial problems in South African society.

I first want to review the roots or etymology of the concept and then review aspects of its application to education to assess its possible contribution to improvement of the education system.

About Hugh Masekela and scepticism

Hugh Masekela released his album, *Send me*, in 2002, eight years after the dawn of democracy. Maluleke (2018:para. 7) makes a very important

statement about the SONA and about Masekela’s state of mind back in 2002:

Even then [2002], Masekela, a struggle stalwart in his own right, feared that the dream of Mandela was beginning to slip. Masekela could sense the mood of disappointment and growing despair in society. In some ways, the song *Send Me* is intended to confront the disillusionment and to call upon his countrymen and women to get directly involved in finding solutions to the challenges they faced.

If Maluleke’s (2018) assumption about Masekela’s intentions with the song is correct, one needs to explore the question whether this idea (analysed in context) could foreseeably lead to profound change in education though volunteerism, or whether it is likely to be subjected to the same pressures as so many of its failed predecessors such as indigenisation, social cohesion, democratisation, decentralisation, and multilingualism.

Such scepticism is supported to a degree by Van Onselen (2018:para. 9) who, in his discussion of President Ramaphosa’s SONA in 2018, observes that “President Zuma and President Mbeki before him launched no end of processes, commissions and strategies, all of which with time have fallen by the wayside. They include:

- GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution);
- RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme); and
- NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development).”

Maluleke’s views

To those who watched and listened to the 2018 SONA without prior knowledge of the history and background of Masekela’s song or of the ANC’s Thuma mina campaign for Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu volunteers (ANC, n.d.), the President’s call, Thuma mina, most probably sounded like an inclusive call to all South Africans.

Maluleke (2018:para. 14) comments on the religious origins of the term saying that, to this day, [...] the chorus Thuma Mina remains immensely popular in South Africa’s churches. There are as many versions of the song as there are church denominations and it is sung in different indigenous languages.

Thuma Mina resembles the story of the prophet Isaiah’s commission by God in Isaiah 6 in the Old Testament: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” – Isaiah 6:8 (BibleGateway, n.d.). Maluleke (2018) supports his comment that Thuma mina is based on a Biblical injunction by referring to Masekela’s own recollections of his youth and the influence of the church and the religious commitment of his family on his life. Although one cannot aver that the President definitely wanted to invoke the specific verse from the Old Testament when he made the call, it is very likely that he knew the origin of the phrase, Thuma

mina, given his own religious upbringing and leadership of Christian youth movements.

Maluleke (2018:para. 17) interprets the quotation from Isaiah, saying that

A willingness to be sent to carry out a task or mission, and the capacity to muster the obedience and discipline necessary to accept being sent, are pervasive and creative ethical principles. They are based on a recognition of the power of personal change and agency, the courage to choose a noble cause, the adoption of a bigger vision than hitherto held as well as a willingness to market the chosen cause in recruitment of others,

and introduces the Zuma era into the discussion, saying that in “the South Africa of the Zuma era, people no longer wanted to say ‘Send Me’ unless there was something in it for them.” He comments that in “South Africa today, the themes of individual responsibility, the importance of personal change in mindset and self-sacrifice have become particularly pertinent.” This point of view must feature in any analysis of the relevance of Thuma mina and its contribution to meaningful change in South Africa.

Whether one regards Thuma mina commands as analogous to Biblical or other religious (ethical, moral) assignments introduced into the political arena (as has happened with the South African national anthem, which is in essence a religious plea), or merely as volunteerism, is, in the end, immaterial, as one can learn the following about such commands:

- they can be given to single people
- they can be given to groups of people
- what people have to do is normally clearly explained
- the commands may require people to go against current practices, customs and even religious beliefs and require some innovativeness
- the commands may seem impossible to the people who receive them
- the one who issues the instruction always seems to be involved in the trajectory of the carrying out of the command

The assignment (or instruction or command) does not necessarily have to come from Holy Scriptures, but could be inspired and underpinned by the morals, principles, and beliefs of people.

Potgieter's Views

The above exploration of Thuma mina lacks depth and profundity. To get to the deepest roots and the riches of the denotations and connotations of the concept of Thuma mina, and to guide reflection on the issue, I enlisted the assistance of Prof. Ferdinand Potgieter. Potgieter is an internationally acclaimed educational philosopher and an academically qualified expert on a number of indigenous African languages and a fluent speaker of a number of them. I am deeply grateful to him for his indispensable help through a series of e-mails from 21 August to 12 December 2018 (F Potgieter, pers. comm.).

Wearing his linguist cap, F Potgieter (pers. comm.), in an e-mail on 21 August 2018, indicated

that, in their imperative form, the words, Thuma mina, have a conviction that testifies to bravery, fearlessness, purposefulness and awareness of a calling and self-knowledge. In these words, pedagogical terms that have been in use since time immemorial are embedded, (a) knowledge, (b) mutual trust, and (c) authority. In this e-mail, F Potgieter (pers. comm.) points out that, what he has conveyed, represents an ideal interpretation and application of the phrase, Thuma mina. However, he has observed a kind of watered-down pragmatism in this regard, which resonates with Maluleke's (2018) comment that South Africans are no longer fond of volunteer work.

In a later e-mail dated 12 December, F Potgieter (pers. comm.) drew my attention to a very important work in this regard. Being fluent in German, he sent me a translation of an extract from a work by a German academic, Meinhof (1899), in which Meinhof writes about the semantic value of the Ancient Bantu imperative verb stem, *thuma*. This translation is quoted in full, as I believe that it sheds light on the phrase, thuma mina, and can help us understand and interpret its meaning and application in modern-day South Africa. One should bear in mind that F Potgieter (pers. comm.) is quoting from a German work of 1899, which may not resonate with all the socio-political ideas prevalent in modern-day South Africa.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that in Ancient Bantu (which is a scholarly-presumed ancestral language from which all indigenous African languages are believed to have descended) the imperative verb stem, *thuma/roma/*, originally, reflected the semantic value of “to call.” What is most interesting is the fact that the Ancient Bantu verb stem, */roma/*, seems to be linguistically and chromatically restricted to syntactic environments that endeavour to transmit the notion of “You are called upon because you are de facto linked to the collective of all those to whom you happen to belong; to those who need your particular knowledge, skills and social attributes.” This implies that being called (upon) is simultaneously always both the purpose and the outcome of a greater, collective, communal need.

F Potgieter (pers. comm.) (e-mail of 12 December 2018) emphasises “the communal and collective nature of the social contract that is at play here.” He says that “such a social contract is typical of Africa and also emphasises that the sent one remains accountable to those who sent him and is also obligated to provide them with feedback.” This resonates with section (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), which places a non-negotiable emphasis on accountability and transparency as well as on responsiveness as the ultimate aims of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996.

I will again refer to the issue of belonging to a collective as opposed to a narrow view of oneself as an individual when I discuss the issue of accountability for a mission.

The Thuma Mina Campaign

The ANC's *Thuma mina campaign Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu's volunteers handbook* (ANC, n.d.) is first and foremost meant for ANC members (specifically a particular group of volunteers). However, the President did not mention this in the 2018 SONA and did not suggest that the campaign would have a limited scope and exclusionary nature. Lediga (2018:para. 10–13) makes it clear that the President envisaged a much broader understanding of Thuma mina as it manifests itself in education.

Although the campaign focuses on community-based activities like dealing with service delivery problems (ANC, n.d.:4), it does refer to activities that could benefit education, such as working with communities, law enforcement on social problems like gangsterism, drugs and community safety, and painting and cleaning, crèches, schools, and other community assets (ANC, n.d.:4). However, these activities do not seem to have the potential to turn around the education system, which is largely dysfunctional and under-performing (Spaull, 2013:13).

Based on the South African experience regarding the introduction of new initiatives and programmes, I now explore the challenges, opportunities, and restrictions associated with the Thuma mina campaign.

Thuma Mina and volunteerism and education in general and education in South Africa today: Challenges, opportunities and restrictions Exclusionary nature

At first glance, Thuma mina simply means, Send me, and its use in the SONA suggested that all South Africans were invited to volunteer to help the government fulfil its duties. However, Thuma mina is deeply rooted in the ANC deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and it is most likely linked to efforts to keep the ANC in power (ANC, n.d.). However, Lediga (2018:para. 17) argues that “*Thuma Mina* is not a sectarian or party political mobilisation, it is a patriotic call to all those who love their country with their hearts to commit to serving the nation.” Developments after the 2018 SONA do indeed indicate that the campaign was meant to involve all South Africans and to cover the whole spectrum of education which could underpin the realisation of the New Dawn anticipated in the 2018 SONA (Makhafola, 2018).

Using volunteers

The use of volunteers has its own challenges. In South Africa's case, there seems to be no clear mechanism in terms of which people can be called on or offer to render voluntary service to help the government fulfil its duties towards the people. In the 2019 SONA (*Daily Maverick*, 2019), President Ramaphosa referred to many people who had sent e-mails to offer their services – unfortunately, ordinary South African citizens do not know to what address the e-mails were sent.

Recalling volunteers

The fact that somebody may be sent on a mission of his or her own volition and approved by somebody in an authoritative position does not mean that the situation may not arise where it may be necessary to withdraw the volunteer from his position, as that person may be doing more harm than good. This is not an unknown occurrence in ANC circles and is known as recalling people from positions. However, simply recalling or redeploying a person does not automatically solve the problem such a person may have caused, and provisions should exist for handling a problem where someone needs to be recalled, and for mechanisms to address problems. The problem could be compounded by cultural factors which may influence the application, acceptance, and refusal of being recalled.

South Africa's cultural heterogeneity: Western versus *ubuntu* world view

In South Africa, recalling or withdrawing volunteers who need to be removed from a project or mission is more challenging than in many other countries, among others, because South Africa is not culturally homogenous, and action against volunteers may give rise to cultural challenges that have to be managed very carefully. In this regard, South Africa can be seen to have at least two dominant cultures, collectives, or world views – a Western and an African culture (*ubuntu*) (Van Niekerk, 1996:2). Both views are over-generalised (different sub-cultures can be distinguished), but for the purposes of this argument two broad definitions are useful.

The Western view is linear and suggests that a person who does not deliver on the terms under which he was sent on a mission is personally responsible or accountable for failures and also subject to sanction (Van Niekerk, 1996:3). The African world view, on the other hand, is that of a circle. In this view, man does not attempt to control the cosmos but longs to be at home within its order and to reconcile all the opposites that can be found in the circle. A Western person says: “I think, therefore I am,” while an African person says: “I am connected to the cosmos, therefore I am” (Van Niekerk, 1996:3). This African view is known as “African *ubuntu*” and contains elements of group solidarity.

These cultures approach accountability differently. In the Western way of thinking, the belief in cause and effect means that a person who has not lived up to expectations must, in law, accept responsibility and correct what is wrong or be punished. In the African culture, a person stays within the cosmos (circle) in terms of the principle of group solidarity, and the consequences of failure or wrongful conduct are not the same as in the Western philosophy; in fact, they may even not apply at all.

Van Niekerk (1996:12) refers to an incident where the University of the Witwatersrand refused to admit students who were still owing money and

students then resorted to riots and vandalism. A Black African member of the Students' Representative Council said on television that she could not understand why a student could not be admitted to study "merely because he cannot pay."

Themba Sono (1994, in Van Niekerk, 1996:12) discusses the tendency to put group solidarity above the freedom of the individual and rejects this tendency because, like apartheid, it rejected another African tradition, that of the African intellectual, and because he sees it as an excuse for people to merely join the masses, to be lazy and not to think, to be cowards and not be able to swim against the tide. Lovemore Mbigi (1994, in Van Niekerk, 1996:12) believes that solidarity may be good, but that it may become so strong that dissenting individuals may be necklaced (set on fire by igniting a petrol-soaked tyre around their neck). He calls this possibility "the dark side of Ubuntu."

Matthee (2014:98) suggests that anarchy may result from a system (including a system of volunteerism) where legal rules are not applied uniformly to individuals. He also argues (Matthee, 2014:98–99) that if culture is used as a defence of wrongful conduct in terms of the South African common law, it could undermine the rights of vulnerable groups such as women and children. Masehela and Pillay (2014) wrote an article discussing sexual abuse of girls in a rural school which demonstrates very clearly that Matthee's concerns are not far-fetched.

Opportunities and conditions

Thro (2005:1), referring to Supreme Court rulings in the United States, has captured the importance of education in a manner which leaves no doubt as to its importance by summarising three relevant rulings.

- Education is the most important function of governments at various levels;
- Without education there can be no reasonable expectation that a child can succeed in life – South Africa's unemployment rate of 52% for the youth (February, 2019) does not signal a successful education system;
- A country's basic institutions such as its banks, post offices, farms, army, parliament and health services are maintained through education.

There is undoubtedly room for a movement such as Thuma mina in education in South Africa. The other three elements of the New Dawn cannot succeed unless supported by a functional, well-performing education system. Evidence of the apparent failure of South Africa's education system abounds and is common knowledge.

Authors such as Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019), Spaull (2013), Van der Berg (n.d.) and Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull and Armstrong (2011) are all authoritative sources on the state of South African education and provide evidence for the statements in the rest of this paragraph. A backlog exists in providing facilities, not enough learners pass Matric, the decentralisation of powers and functions seems to have failed, and the government

seems to be taking back control of activities and processes. Section 58 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) makes provision for the government to determine norms and standards for virtually all activities in education and thereby to control all activities in education. South Africa's learners perform extremely badly in regional, national, and international audits, unions often play a disruptive rather than a constructive role, educational institutions are far from safe, and education is often simply unaffordable.

Volunteers could play a constructive role in education, but education poses specific challenges for the use of volunteers. It would appear that volunteers could mostly only assist in a number of specific non-professional areas, as education is an established profession which may only be practised by professionals. Any initiative in education should be mindful of children's and the country's vulnerability should the education system fail. Work done by volunteers could be spectacularly successful or could cripple the system. The obvious lesson is that volunteers acting by themselves without some sort of government supervision or authority could easily be a recipe for disaster.

Shortages of human and physical resources

It seems as if there is no constituent element of the education system that is not experiencing a shortage of human resources. The learner-educator ratios in South African primary and secondary schools are considerably worse than those in well-performing systems. The Funza Lushaka bursary system for higher education students (Lewin, Musker, Mawoyo, Hazell, Shindler, Reddi, Marera, Mugo & Heimann, 2016:12–13), for example, is struggling to deliver students' money on time because of a shortage of human resources, and universities complain that they don't have enough staff to train and/or supervise all qualifying students.

Opportunities for volunteers

The shortage of human resources suggests that there is room for using volunteers in government services such as education. It seems very unlikely that the South African education system will have enough professionally qualified people in the foreseeable future to serve the system appropriately, and the use of volunteers is an alternative and augmentative possibility that needs to be investigated thoroughly. From the literature it appears that those in charge do not really know how many staff they need, and conflicting suggestions are made by different scholars, Van Broekhuizen (2015) being among them.

Regarding education one can distinguish two types of volunteers: professional educators who offer to do voluntary professional educational work in educational institutions, and people who are not professional educators but could render valuable assistance with activities at educational institutions. It is

a well-known fact that many professional educators leave the profession soon after entering it (Van Broekhuizen, 2015), and some of them could offer their services to educational institutions on a voluntary basis for teaching in the afternoons or during weekends and holidays. An example that comes to mind is Mathematics and Science educators who have been lured away from education to private institutions by better salaries. If these institutions release them to do voluntary work at educational institutions, it could be a way of fulfilling their employers' social obligations.

Examples of people who are not professional educators, but could render voluntary work at educational institutions, or in the education system, are parents who could help repair and maintain buildings, people in the world of finance who could help with budgeting and record-keeping in schools, lawyers who could help with compliance with legal requirements regarding discipline, construction companies that could help with the construction of new facilities or the repair of older ones, people who can help keep schools safe by ensuring that no drugs are sold in the vicinity of school, and parents who can serve as models of home language speakers of certain languages.

This paper is largely based on the 2018 SONA, but it should be mentioned that in the 2019 SONA (*Daily Maverick*, 2019) President Ramaphosa announced that more technical high schools would be established in the system and that Early Childhood Education (ECE) would be placed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Basic Education. Both developments create greater opportunities for volunteers to render services. The private manufacturing sector could be very influential in technical education, and various caregivers could be beneficial to the ECE sector.

Cooperative work

It goes without saying that all these activities should be done in cooperation with the people in charge of the institutions, or systems, or constituent elements of the education system, such as school principals, district directors, chairpersons of governing bodies, and heads of provincial departments of basic education. No national volunteering initiative can be undertaken and run successfully without the oversight, guidance, and control of some state mechanism staffed by people capable of managing and directing such initiatives.

Guiding principles

In selecting people for the various Thuma mina projects, the responsible state mechanism or mechanisms should take cognisance of factors such as the following.

- The complexity of Thuma mina must not be underestimated.
- Many Thuma mina missions will be extremely

challenging and require a great deal of courage and sacrifice and the willingness to oppose criticism from all sources. A sense of self-sacrifice is required.

- Projects must not exclude anyone on political, religious, cultural or other affiliations.
- The volunteers' motives must be altruistic. They must not try to further their own interests through their involvement in projects but strive to improve education and work for a better life for all in the country. Volunteers must be willing to give an undertaking to this effect.
- No remuneration will be attached to work done voluntarily, except for the repayment of expenses incurred by the volunteers in executing their tasks.
- Volunteers must agree to be recalled or withdrawn should they be guilty of any wrongful action in carrying out their assignments.
- When volunteers need supplementary skills, knowledge, and values to do their work as volunteers well, the onus rests on the state to provide such training (see for example section 19 of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) and section 125(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b)).
- Sending entities must be aware of the deep meaning and all the connotations and denotations of the concept of Thuma mina, and must take them into account when they make decisions on projects and people to serve in projects. There should be an awareness of the religious, cultural, and ethical underpinnings of the programme – when religious underpinnings are not appropriate, moral and ethical principles serve as well. F Potgieter's (pers. comm.) contributions in this regard bear repeating here:
 - Thuma mina suggests an awareness of being sent on a mission by a high authority, principles, or morals to where one is most needed;
 - The concept testifies to bravery, fearlessness, purposefulness, and an awareness of a calling, self-knowledge, and relevant ethical and moral principles;
 - Pedagogical terms in use since time immemorial, such as knowledge, mutual trust, and authority, are implied and must be respected by all initiatives;
 - Volunteers are called upon because they are *de facto* linked to the collective of all those to whom they happen to belong; to those who need their particular knowledge, skills, and social attributes.
- The fact that South Africa's culture is heterogeneous should be taken into account when volunteers are selected, in how they are deployed, in how they are expected to report, and in how they are recalled or sanctioned, if necessary.
- Although the project is voluntary, participants or volunteers can expect to be provided with instruments and tools that they might need and do not have or cannot get hold of.
- The safety of participants should be guaranteed.
- There should be a purposeful media campaign to support the programme, and communication should reach all levels of the education system.
- The fact that South Africans are not well known for voluntary work (Maluleke, 2018) – among others because they do not want to rob somebody of a work opportunity – will have to be confronted.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that this project should be managed well to have an optimal chance of success. Lediga's comments (Lediga, 2018:para. 13) that there "is no excuse for continued failure [in education], especially in the post-apartheid era" and that the "future of this country is ultimately dependent on how successful we are in education and training" capture the necessity of volunteerism and Thuma mina well. His words (Lediga, 2018:para. 13) that the "Ramaphosa administration must deploy the right people [whether they be volunteers or employees] to run our education and training system" seem very true.

Looking ahead to the 2019 SONA, Judith February (2019:para. 27) takes Lediga's idea further in more practical political terms, emphasising that Thuma mina is linked too closely to the ANC to ignore the energetic support of all South Africans:

The President's job on Thursday will be to forget about the ANC and speak to us all as citizens and spell out a vision which goes beyond "thuma mina!" and which provides a practical plan of action for the crucial year ahead

Although February (2019:para. 27) raises concern which is shared by many people, this article points out that it is fairly clear that the President did not intend the campaign to be an ANC initiative, which would exclude other South Africans and focus only on issues that did not have the promise of affecting the quality of education to any significant degree.

Indeed, Thuma mina, however valuable, must only be regarded as supplementary to what the government delivers. The government is and will remain chiefly responsible for the provision of education. Volunteerism can be a useful instrument to improve the provision of education, especially if it can mobilise a good number of South Africans with the skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes to enthusiastically lend their support to the education system. A voluntary initiative such as the Thuma mina campaign requires skilful management by all role players to succeed. Despite the not infrequent failure of campaigns and policies in South Africa, the campaign itself should not be regarded as being bound to fail, but as a project that needs to carefully avoid all the possible pitfalls.

At present, the question remains whether the call was and will be concretised into a nation-wide wave of volunteerism. At the moment the potential of the campaign remains beyond dispute, but one cannot conclude that the wave has really started to roll.

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Notes

- i. Launched in Tembisa on 18 May 2018. It has 10,000 volunteers who will mostly recruit voters for the ANC for the national elections in 2019 (Makhafola, 2018).
- ii. All the references to the Bible are taken from the New International Version.
- iii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- iv. DATES: Received: 18 February 2019; Revised: 6 May 2019; Accepted: 6 July 2019; Published: 30 September 2019.

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