



LESSON FOR LIFE... Cas Cooradia, managing director of the Banking Association of SA, delivers a lesson on saving to the pupils of Musenga Vhadzimu Primary School
Picture: Kopano Tsape

Learners taught the art of saving

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FOR the first time in the history of South Africa, financial services firms joined hands to teach learners important lessons on saving.

On Friday, banks and insurance companies visited schools across South Africa to teach thousands of pupils how to save in a country renowned for its low savings rate. At 13.7% - which is a percentage of the gross domestic product - South Africa's savings ratio is woefully low, compared with China's 40% savings ratio.

The financial services sector's gesture formed part of the celebrations of Savings Month.

The SA Saving Institute (Sasi), the financial institutions and the education department have officially agreed to set aside one day in July every year to teach children about saving.

City Press Business visited one of the schools, Musenga Vhadzimu Primary School, which benefited from a lesson on saving. Musenga Vhadzimu is located in Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg.

Among the dignitaries who visited the school are Cas Cooradia, managing director of Banking Association of SA, and Mmadikozhi Phetla-Laketha, chief executive of Sasi.

Phetla-Laketha said instilling a culture of saving in the minds of young people was crucial as it would reduce the number of people who lived in debt. She said savings came in handy during rainy days.

She added that if more South Africans saved, the government would not need to ask for loans from foreign countries to build the country's infrastructure.

Dona Oosthuysen, chief operating officer of Citibank's African division, said the idea of teaching learners about saving was initiated in the US.

In the US, the project has grown to such an extent that about 50 000 bankers have taught more than 2.3 million learners this year.

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In South Africa, Sasi had planned to roll out the project to 90 schools, but overwhelming support from the financial services sector made it possible to take the project to 203 schools.

Oosthuysen said the project could become a success if all the institutions dispatched more of their employees to the schools.

"We hope the project will lay a strong foundation for the learners in the future," she said.

In one of the classrooms at Musenga Vhadzimu Primary School, Phetla-Laketha and Elizabeth Lwanga-Nanzini, coordinator of Sasi projects, gave 81 learners a one-hour lesson on how to save irrespective of the size of the income they received from their guardians.

This group formed part of the 814 learners between Grades 4 and 7 who were offered free lessons on saving money.

Lwanga-Nanzini told the learners that toys were not really necessary for survival. She urged them to channel their money into financial instruments, such as savings accounts.

At the end of the lesson, the learners were given money boxes and booklets - sponsored by City Press and MasterCard - to use as guidelines on how to save.