

**ADDRESS BY MEC FOR PUBLIC WORKS KWAZULU-NATAL,
MRS LYDIA JOHNSON AT WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION SUMMIT
HELD IN DURBAN, ELANGENI HOTEL**

31 August 2007

Program Director,

Head of Department: Dr. F.B. Madlopha

General Managers

Invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

The Construction Summit is a first step towards engagement with government and building relationships between government, the construction industry, and women in particular, and as such our gathering here today steers us to that direction. Out of this Summit we hope to have provided a platform to share knowledge, experience, strategies and recommendations on how effectively the department can assist women with interest in the construction industry, whilst at the same time, looking after those that are facing challenges within the industry.

We are thrilled to be working hand-in-hand with key stakeholders to extend opportunities to women in the construction industry. We do acknowledge however, that the construction industry is not yet of benefit, or accessible to the majority of women in the manner that we would wish. Although the Employment Equity Act and the Procurement Procedures require that

women be employed and advanced in all sectors of the economy, women entrepreneurs in construction still find it problematic to optimise the benefits of such legislations.

Concerns around economic inequalities, gender representativity in this sector remain a challenge.

There is a need therefore, for interventions to remedy this situation. Summits such as these are platforms to share information and best practices amongst ourselves in order for all us to become “winners”.

Ironically, as early as in the days of Old Testament, we hear of women in construction. Nehemia 3:12. says that King Artaxerxes sent Nehemia granting him permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then Shallum king of half of Jerusalem repaired his “with the help of his daughters”.

It is also a known fact that black women in South Africa, when their men left for work in the mines, built their dwellings, clayed floors, thatched roofs, cultivated land and supported their families. The perception that construction is for men and that women are not entrepreneurial, has untraceable origins, I do not know where it comes from. I think that there is a need that the background of where women come from, the challenges they face, and why they are in construction industry need to be understood.

We are living in an era of the construction boom in the province. The local construction industry is expected to grow at an average rate of 6.41% between 2007 and 2010. The demand for facilities management is increasing as the FIFA 2010 World Cup draws nearer. With new stadiums being built and existing ones being upgraded, there are great opportunities for South

African companies. The question remains however, as to how many women owned businesses will benefit from these large projects? The other question similar to this is whether women owned businesses are adequately equipped to compete with the male counterparts for such business opportunities?

Ladies and Gentlemen our industry is the most important industry on the face of the earth, because everything is dependent upon the built environment. It is up to all of us as women to fight against that which deprives us in any way, of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of our population.

As a provincial department, led by the woman HOD, together with the woman MEC have always displayed our support for women empowerment programmes. Our programme of action has always been to engage women, and steer them towards fulfillment of the provincial theme of Emancipation, Empowerment, Equality & Poverty Eradication...(Now).

The Department is engaged in the process of developing emerging contractors and companies with the aim of improving the performance level and sustainability. The process will be conducted through the Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP) announced in April. Women are a priority in all our programmes.

In order to comply and demonstrate our commitment to the principles of Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Strategy, we have set the highest targets ever for the current and next financial year, of which 40% worth of work is to benefit women owned businesses.

The Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP which is one of South African Government's short-to-medium term programme aimed at the provision of additional work opportunities, and training is well implemented for the benefit of our target market.

Our strong links with the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb), had resulted to the establishment of a Contract Contact Center located next to our Mayville offices here in Durban. All enquiries related to grading, registration, business opportunities, joint ventures etc are now located in our door step.

Yesterday we held a Women in Property Summit in Ladysmith. We are excited about the enthusiasm that the women of this province are displaying in their search for opportunities that government presents to them.

In conclusion, I believe that it is through summits like these, based on constructive engagement that we can make the industry grow stronger. I believe that out of such gatherings, the department will be able to consider views, suggestions and recommendations to perform and introduce better systems in line with the needs of our people, you the women of today, building a solid foundation for the next generation of contractors to benefit the entire construction industry.

Building communities through construction

Sithuthukisa imiphakathi ngokwakha

I thank you.