



**KZN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MEC FOR PUBLIC  
WORKS, MRS LYDIA JOHNSON AT THE  
DEPARTMENTAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION  
IN ULUNDI: 22 AUGUST 2008**

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MEC FOR PUBLIC WORKS  
MRS. LYDIA JOHNSON AT THE DEPARTMENTAL  
WOMENS'S DAY CELEBRATION IN ULUNDI ON 22  
AUGUST 2008.

Programme Director

HOD

Motivational Speakers, Mrs. D. Mthethwa and Dr T Mbatha

Senior Management

Management

Departmental officials

Today is a very crucial day for our Department as we are celebrating the power of women, recognizing their role in various spheres in the development of our country. Dating back to apartheid era, women played a very remarkable role in the fight against oppression.

Women organized themselves and formed the Women Anti-pass movement which led to a mass demonstration at the Union Buildings, Pretoria, on 09 August 1956 where women demanded the withdrawal of passes. Among the points raised to motivate for the withdrawal of passes was the fact that,

- Homes will be broken up if women are arrested under pass laws.
- That children will be uncared for and helpless and mothers will be torn from their babies for failure to produce a pass.

- That women and young girls will be exposed to humiliation and degradation at the hands of pass-searching policemen.

This mass action serves as evidence that women have always been instrumental in the fight against all forms of discrimination.

The points raised by women in 1956 indicate clearly the role of women in our society. By their nature women have power to be pillars of strength in their families and the society at large and are caregivers. “Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi malibongwe”

One should also mention that as we have achieved political emancipation, we have entered a new phase of our struggle which is economic empowerment and the fight against poverty. Women are still seen playing their role in this respect and they must be applauded for that. However, the sad reality is that there are many female headed families with no source of income and are therefore living below the poverty line. It is our responsibility as women to stand up and give the necessary support to those families.

As we are living in a dynamic society, women have been seen over the past years entering the labour market in order to support their husbands. Women are no longer playing the house keeping and child minding roles like before but are actively involved in various economic activities. This poses a serious challenge to women as they are still expected to play their roles as mothers and wives.

Balancing these roles is very critical especially for proper upbringing of our children. It is therefore very important for our society to change its attitude in terms of understanding the new role of women in modern society. A woman should no longer be seen on the lines of being a girl child, pregnant woman and a mother. Instead women must be seen as partners in economic development with capacities and abilities. They must be judged in terms of their competences rather than their gender orientation.

Our democratic government has re-iterated its commitment to women empowerment in various aspects. In the new dispensation the government is paying more attention to women empowerment issues. Women are becoming important role players in the affairs of the country. Various laws which seek to ensure that women are accorded equal opportunities with men have been passed. It is our responsibility to educate women about their rights because some are still subservient, vulnerable to intra-household abuse and various other forms of discrimination.

We also need to ensure that women dependence on low paid and insecure jobs is reduced. There is a wide spread and common belief that households wherein women have access to their own incomes and can exercise decision making power, tend to have expenditure patterns different to the one existing in male dominated households. Therefore chances are high that better income for women can bring a better life to many households “Imbokodo Inamandla”. Therefore the investment in women’s economic activities will improve employment opportunities for women and thus have a trickle down effect.

We need to unite in the fight against various socio-economic challenges we are faced with including wide spread child abuse, HIV/AIDS, crime, teenage pregnancy etc. This society needs strong and brave women like those of 1956. We must rise up and say enough is enough to these inhuman actions.

As the Department we are also on the right track in terms of ensuring employment equity within the Department. We are committed to ensure that women are also promoted to management positions. Furthermore the Department has initiated various programmes which are aimed at empowering women in construction and property. This includes Masakhe Emerging Contractor Development Programme.

Furthermore, most of the beneficiaries in our new poverty alleviation programme called Izandla Ziyagezana consist of women. Women are also given preference with regards to our procurement procedures. The Department is committed to ensure that women contractors, women property developers, managers and land lords are being empowered.

We have organized the Women in Construction and Property Summit which will be held on 26 August 2008 at Empangeni. The aim of this summit is to create a platform for women in these sectors to engage with the Department with regards to challenges they are faced with as well as interventions that must be made by the Department to strengthen its relationship with them as key stakeholders. We are optimistic that such engagement will make a significant improvement in our relationship and help our Department to deliver on its mandate.

With those words I would like to thank all Departmental officials who were responsible for organizing this event and thank all of you for your attendance. To all women within the Department today we say, your dedication, commitment, selflessness, perseverance and hard work is not unnoticed. Special thanks to our speakers who shared with us skills to deal with all life challenges. I hope that you will implement all what has been said by our speakers and be motivated when we go back to our respective responsibilities and play your roles diligently.

“All power to women”

I thank you

