



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Remarks by KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Public Works and Infrastructure Mr Lukas Meyer on the occasion of the Women In Construction Workshop held at Oliver Tambo Building, KZN Department of Public Works and Infrastructure – Pietermaritzburg: 26 August 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor to be here today, especially during the month of August, which is dedicated to our women.

Being part of an event like this gives me so much pleasure because there are a number of virtues that our women in society are best known for which inspire. For instance:

Women build

Women nurture

Women provide

Women are resilient

These are very much in line with what my department strives for... to build this province to the benefit of its citizens, to nurture our resources so they may last, to provide the best by means of equal and fair opportunity and to remain resilient in our determination to turn this beautiful province of ours into something greater, starting by making it one big construction site.

Previously it was unheard of that women would be involved in a sector such as construction but today here we are, gathered in paving the way forward so that our women make inroads. The truth of the matter is women are a foundation in any society – without them life and any opportunities cease to exist. It is therefore important that we play our part, both as a department and society in ensuring that opportunity continues to exist.

During his recent speech, the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, the Honourable Thami Ntuli, stated that women continue to be deprived of opportunity and therefore remain the face of poverty. This is dangerous as it has been shown time and time again that women who are caught in a cycle of poverty often become easier targets for abusers. This translates to increased cases of Gender-based violence and at times with no end in sight as these women are dependent on their abusers. In our mostly rural KZN province where opportunity, education and resources are not easily accessible this becomes compounded. As a society, department and individuals we need to change this.

The truth of the matter is times are changing. We now live in a world where women are becoming more than mothers, companions and daughters but have evolved to be leaders, breadwinners and

key industry players. There can no longer be efforts that seek to deny or prevent this inevitable evolution. Those who try to deny this fact are failing.

Sadly, the construction industry is one of the least gender inclusive sectors in the country with recent statistics putting the figure of women participating in the industry at a little over 10%. This is particularly worrying if one considers that according a report by Stats SA that says last year, in 2023, only 54,3% of women of working age were actively employed. So this means whether in construction or in the broader sense women are still not participating in the country's economy.

In realizing this the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has sought to make a contribution to this wave of change through its Economic Empowerment Program which helps women make inroads in a largely male dominated sector that is construction.

This is why the KZN Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has set aside 30% of its annual budget for designation groups and their assistance, under the Economic Empowerment Program. These include women. Of that 30%, 45% - which is the biggest allocation goes towards programs aimed at uplifting and upskilling women, 35% goes towards youth, with person with disabilities also included along with military veterans. This makes me particularly proud, especially during Womens Month.

During the 2023/24 financial year 524 projects have been awarded to 419 women contractors or service providers to the value of R455 million. In the current 2024/25 financial year 64 projects have gone to 51 women contractors or service providers at a total value of R26 million. This figure is still a growing figure.

Parliamentary resolutions:

As a department we continue to make strides when it comes to the upliftment of women. I shall take this opportunity to give feedback on the parliamentary resolutions taken at the 2023 Womens Parliament. The resolution was reached that unused Government buildings be made available for women and community-based organizations and businesses. The current progress of this is as follows:

1. State Owned Buildings are now periodically disposed, leased and repurposed for Economic Opportunities, Skills Development and Social Development purposes e.g. GBV Victims Support Centres to the benefit of Designated Groups (Youth, Women, Persons with disabilities and Military Veterans)
2. Among the eight property applications received by the department for utilization for various programs, three were from women-owned organizations. These three properties are located in eThekweni Metro.
3. A Women Empowerment Workshop was held under eThekweni District with SAWIC (SA Women In Construction) members in 25 April 2024.

4. Five sites have been identified for GBV purposes and the Public Works Department is currently in discussions with the Department of Social Development to finalise Service Level Agreements. These sites are in Zululand, Umkhanyakude, eThekweni and uMzinyathi.

EPWP parliamentary resolutions:

The resolution was that the EPWP program should be used to upskill participants – 60% of whom are women. An exit strategy for participants was to focus on sustainable livelihood and self-employment. Progress in this area currently sees the following skills development program to the benefit of EPWP participants: Upholstery skills program, garment-making learnership, furniture-making learnership and plumbing learnership.

It gives me great pleasure to say that the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is among the leading departments when it comes to representation of women. Just over 50% of our staff composition is female. This representation also extends to management and EXCO level. A further breakdown of the management composition reveals that we have more women than men in junior, middle and senior levels of management combined with a total of 397 women versus 366 men.

Our 2024/25 internship cohort also reflects the prioritization of women. Of the 52 interns within the built environment, 63% are women compared to 37% who are men. Of the 30 interns in the support discipline, 77% are women while 23% are men. This means our overall combined internship complement is made up of up 70% women.

When I delivered my budget speech earlier, I mentioned that the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure remains committed to reducing unemployment and helping disadvantaged communities. This includes interventions such as the EPWP program with a focus on labour intensive methods in construction and infrastructure related programmes.

Today, I want to reaffirm my commitment to creating a broader, safer and conducive environment in the construction and building sector.

To this end I am happy to make the following announcement:

Firstly, The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in KwaZulu-Natal will be acquiring a team of experts who will form part of a consultative and advisory body on issues affecting the built environment, including the construction sector.

Secondly, last week I met with the Bargaining Council for the Civil Engineering Industry in my office. During our engagement they raised a number of concerning developments within the sector that has prompted them to urgently band with law enforcement in order to counter the ongoing coordinated disruptions at construction sites. However, they still face a mammoth fight and have asked for my help. To this end I have committed that my office will be part of planned

ongoing monthly meetings which will see part of the blueprint drawn up on how to better coordinate successfully while utilizing integration of state-of-the art technology and law enforcement units.

And thirdly, tomorrow, the 27th August, I will be meeting with the Black Business Forum who have been vocal and at the centre of construction-related disruptions. This will be a closed-door engagement due to sensitivity of issues to be discussed. This roundtable meeting is, without a doubt, a significant step in the right direction in getting down to the crux of issues plaguing the construction sector. I am hopeful that soon after there will be some feedback from my office on areas where we have been able to find common ground.

In conclusion, as we celebrate 30 years of democracy towards women development, let us remember that such gains and progress such as the ones we see today could only be achieved through unity, a shared vision and above all shared resilience.

Phakama mbhokodo! Phambili Mbhokodo! (Translation: Rise women, forward women)

I thank you and happy Women's month.