

**DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SPEAKING NOTES**

**PREPARED FOR**

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**FOR THE**

**YOUNG WOMEN’S PROFFESSIONAL NETWORK**

**ON**

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**INTRODUCTION**

**Salutation**

**Programme Directors**

**Deputy Chairperson of NYDA Ms Karabo Mogale**

**Excellencies**

**Ambassador of Palestine**

**Ambassador of Turkey**

**Ambassador**

**Member of Parliament Ms Khusela Diko**

**Deputy Speaker**

**Most importantly friends and partners of the Young Women's Professional Network**

I am excited to be addressing you during the most important month in South Africa’s calendar, National Women’s Month under the theme: “***Celebrating 30 Years of Democracy Towards Women’s Development***’’.

We have chosen this theme to highlight the need for women to be empowered to participate meaningfully in all areas of human endeavor, with a particular emphasis on women’s access to the economy, which is the subject of our gathering this morning.

It is both necessary and critical that we engage on our continued role toward mainstreaming women’s representation in the economy as this will strengthen our resolve to building a developed nation that is representative of all its diversity.

In have made the argument, rightfully so, that the question on the empowerment of women should be understood in its rightful context. We should ever be ready to understand that empowering women is directly linked with the emancipation of society as a whole. There is “***no society that can boast of being free until its women, [in their diversity], are free***” as articulated by the longest serving President of the ANC, ***Oliver Reginald Tambo***.

President OR Tambo further said:

“***One of the fundamental tasks that this process of national liberation confronts is the liberation of the women of our country from their triple oppression on the grounds of sex, class and colour.”***

The South African economy encompasses a wide range of economic activities, such as:

1. Fisheries: South Africa has a vast history of fishing, and the sector currently contributes around R30 billion to the economy and supports over 127,000 jobs.
2. Tourism: South Africa’s diverse ecological resources are a major tourist destination, both locally and globally. The tourism ocean economy alone contributes around R40 billion to the tourism sector each year.
3. Mining and Minerals: South Africa has significant reserves of marine minerals, such as diamonds, manganese nodules, and rare earth elements. South Africa is one of the world's largest producers of precious metals such as gold, platinum, and diamonds. The country also has significant reserves of coal, iron ore, and other minerals.
4. Financial Services: South Africa has a well-developed financial services sector, including banking, insurance, and real estate. Johannesburg, the country's largest city, is a major financial hub.
5. Offshore oil and gas: South Africa has significant offshore oil and gas reserves, and the sector currently contributes around R10 billion to the economy. There is greater room for the development of the sector with new offshore reserves being discovered.
6. Agriculture: Agriculture plays a vital role in South Africa's economy, contributing to both domestic consumption and exports. Key products include maize, sugarcane, citrus fruits, wine, and livestock.
7. Energy: South Africa's energy sector is heavily reliant on coal, which accounts for the majority of its electricity production. The country is also investing in renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. This sector has much to contribute to South Africa, particularly in light of the country’s energy crisis.
8. Manufacturing: The manufacturing sector in South Africa includes industries such as automotive, chemicals, metals, textiles, and food processing. The country is a major producer of automobiles, with many international companies having plants there.
9. Transportation and Logistics: South Africa has a well-developed transportation network, including ports, railways, and roads, facilitating both domestic and international trade.

These are but some of the sectors South African women are entitled to be a part of, particularly as the country continues to prioritize the participation of women in the economy.

According to a 2021 report by the World Bank, women in South Africa make up only 44% of the workforce, and they hold only 27% of managerial positions.

As a result, it is important to continue to work towards greater gender diversity in the workforce. We encourage more women to enter the workforce and to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Key institutions of the state must continue to provide mentorship and support programs for women, advocate for policies that promote gender equality, and challenge gender stereotypes by promoting a culture of inclusion across the sectors.

We must ensure that we:

1. Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
2. Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade
3. Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women.
4. Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.
5. Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
6. Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

The face of poverty as that of an African woman of rural and peri-urban origin. While inequality remains considerably high in South Africa, it is women who continue to bare the worst brunt of these socio-economic disparities, particularly as articulated by the 2018 World Bank report on “***Overcoming Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities***”

This report makes the following observations which should guide our interventions toward any meaningful development of women in our country:

1. A profile of the poor shows a typical poor household as rural and headed by a single, economically inactive female black South African.
2. Poverty is higher in rural than in urban areas, and the gap between rural and urban poverty rates widened between 2006 and 2015;
3. Not only is the poverty headcount ratio higher in rural areas compared to urban areas, poverty is deeper and more unequal in rural areas as well.
4. Poverty is higher among individuals living in female-headed households compared to those living in male-headed households across all periods analyzed.
5. Participation in economic activities matters for poverty reduction; the non-working or economically inactive experience higher rates of poverty than those who are active.
6. Food insecurity is gendered and more prevalent among the black African population.
7. Rural areas have the highest poverty concentration.

Let us make the call to the country to join us in supporting and implementing meaningful programmes, plans, policies, strategies and interventions geared towards unlocking barriers of entry for women, young women, and the largely unemployed population. We iterate the call to all of society to grow the prospects of new entrants; develop tailored financial solutions that are inclusive; accelerate market access opportunities; and support sustainable enterprises to scale.

Despite all these challenges faced by South African women, the recently released 2022 Census data by Statistics South Africa demonstrates the impact that government programmes have had in alleviating poverty, reducing unemployment, and lessening inequality over the last 30 years.

We have noted, as the ANC in government:

1. **Education** – The following gains have been registered for persons 20 years and older between 1996 and 2022:
   1. The percentage of those who have completed secondary education has more than doubled,
   2. Numbers of those without any schooling have significantly dropped, and
   3. Those with post school education have nearly doubled.
2. **Households** – Households that resided in formal dwellings have increased sharply from 65,1% to 88,5%
3. **Electricity** – Despite our energy crisis, access to electricity for lighting has increased from 58,1% to 94,7%
4. **Water** – The percentage of households with no access to water halved from 19,7% to 8,7%
5. **Health** – The following has been registered in the improvements to South Africa’s healthcare system:
   1. South Africa has several transformative and progressive policies and legislations aimed at advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality. A review of some indicators suggests that there is an improvement in the quality of life of women over the years.
   2. We are experiencing a decrease in the deaths occurring during pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy.

**NEGATIVE IMPACT OF EXCLUDING WOMEN FROM THE ECONOMY**

Research has consistently proven that gender diversity in most organisations results in increased productivity, greater innovation, better decision-making, and higher employee retention and satisfaction. Having more females in executive roles is not only fair, it is also good for productivity and employees.

According to the Statistics South Africa, more than half (51,1%) of the South African population are female and, according to the General Household Survey (GHS) 2021, about 42,0% of households are headed by females. While women empowerment is central to the global development agenda and is a stepping stone to gender equality, a report released by Statistics South Africa titled ***Gender Series Volume 9: Women Empowerment, (2017–2022)***, women in South Africa are more likely to be unemployed than men and women are less likely to participate in the labour market than their male counterparts.

The elevation of women to positions of leadership should never be viewed in terms of “token empowerment” to meet equity targets. Women should be afforded expression and access to participate in all areas of human endeavour.

1. Studies have proven the following about societies that discriminate against its women in that development in stunted as follows:
2. ***Income Inequality***: When women are paid less for the same work or are concentrated in lower-paying jobs, it exacerbates income inequality. This reduces overall household income, affecting family welfare and children's opportunities.
3. ***Economic Dependence***: Women who face discrimination in accessing employment may become economically dependent on their spouses or family members, limiting their ability to make independent financial decisions. This is one of the reasons some women stay in abusive relationships as they are financially dependent on their spouses. In part, the GBVF challenge can be resolved when women are treated as equal members of society.
4. ***Lower Educational Attainment***: Discrimination can result in girls receiving less education than boys, which affects their future employment opportunities and earning potential.
5. ***Intergenerational Effects***: Educated women are more likely to invest in their children's education, leading to a cycle of improved educational outcomes. Discrimination that limits women's education can perpetuate poverty across generations.
6. ***Increased Violence***: Discrimination can manifest as domestic violence, which has severe physical and mental health consequences for women and children. This affects their ability to participate fully in society and the economy.
7. ***Slower Economic Growth***: Societies that fail to utilise the potential of all their members, including women, experience slower economic growth and development. It has been proven that organisations which employ women in their leadership echelons far outperform those that are only led by men.
8. ***Limited Access to Healthcare***: Discrimination may result in women having less access to healthcare services, impacting their health and well-being. Poor maternal health can also affect child health and development. We are also aware that an unhealthy nation is not productive.

**ALL-OF-SOCIETY IS REQUIRED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

1. We all acknowledge that men and women are equal members of society, they live in diverse families and communities and should be afforded equal status and rights.
2. The subjugation and discrimination of women does not take place legally. These are acts, whether it be GBVF or pay disparity along gender lines, that take place in homes, within places of learning, worship, work, and even in the streets.
3. Statistics demonstrate that men are the primary perpetrators of GBVF and violence in general. Therefore, any efforts to empower women and rid our nation of the GBVF scourge should include all the men in society.
4. A necessary starting point is that we must teach boy children to espouse values that protect women’s position as equal members of society. Families are children’s first point of contact with any norms, values, cultural practices and ideology on what is considered appropriate behaviour through everyday interactions with their primary guardians.
5. The girl child must never be left behind. Effort should be made to ensure that girl children are brought up to embrace their identity in its diversity, and the enforcement of values that incline girl children to be confident in who they are and to embrace the rights due to them.
6. Adults bring back to society, what society taught them as children.
7. An African Proverb that we can borrow from:

***"A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth."***

1. The empowerment of women will only be addressed when all-of-society adopts a stance where each of us, particularly the men, declare that we cannot be complacent with the subjugation of women in our homes, workplaces, streets, churches, places of learning, and any other physical space within our Republic. We can never claim to be advancing as a society, in so far as women are not guaranteed safety and access to all freedoms whether in public and/or private spaces.
2. We need to intensify responses tailored to specific groups impacted by GBVF, including children, elderly and young women, and the LGBTQIA+ community. This necessitates a deliberate alignment and integration with other pressing challenges such as health, overall rates of crime particularly violent crime, the contribution of alcohol, drugs and access to guns on GBVF, and the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment.
3. These responses must also include promoting gender equality, strengthening law enforcement, improving support services, engaging communities, intensifying the economic empowerment of women, conducting research, developing effective policies, ensuring responsible media reporting, and fostering international collaboration. Men must be involved in all these efforts.

**THE 7TH ADMINISTRATION AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

1. Gatherings of this nature should always transcend beyond reflections on the devastating impact that the discrimination of women, gender-based violence, femicide, rape and all other ills directed at women have in our communities.
2. It is encouraging that this gathering focuses on how each of us should play a part toward uplifting women. This includes the men. Women empowerment is an all-of-society responsibility.
3. The 7th Administration is prioritising the following areas for the empowerment of women, among others:
   1. ***Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF)***

Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) remains a key focus priority for the 7th Administration, particularly as the President declared this social ill a second pandemic only to COVID-19.

Sacrosanct to all efforts to end GBVF is that all stakeholders need to play their part by saying #NotInMyName to all acts of GBVF, down to each individual. ***Religious leaders*** need to preach against GBVF in their congregations, ***traditional leaders*** should declare a no GBVF tolerance policy in their communities and even ***friends, family and individual community members*** should speak out when GBVF occurs in their circle.

GBVF and the oppression of women is rooted in patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, homophobia and masquerades as traditional values, religious practices and normative beliefs that assert male dominance and undermine women's inalienable right to exist. These can only be broken down by the very institutions and individuals that have established them.

His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa is the first signatory to the ***pledge against GBVF for all South African men*** as the first citizen at the National Women’s Day Celebrations in Poffadder, Northern Cape. We join the President’s call that all men, grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers and sons, young and old, from all walks of life, whether you’re a taxi driver or a pilot, black and white, traditional leader or faith leader, teacher or brick layer, we are talking about all men in your diversities in townships, villages and in suburbs to sign the pledge and play an active role in our fight against GBVF.

The National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Bill was signed into law by His Excellency President Ramaphosa at the end of the 6th Administration. We will build on this work to establish the ***National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide*** as the central coordinating body for all stakeholders and efforts to fight GBVF for greater impact throughout the country by spearheading the governance, monitoring coordination of the National Strategic Plan on GBVF.

We will implement the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide strategy through a ***365 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women*** program. Through this program, we will work in partnership with various stakeholders to ensure the development and implementation of provincial, local, and ward-based anti-GBVF plans to combat the scourge.

The established ***Rapid Response Teams*** will serve as building blocks for this approach in line with the District Development Model (DDM). This approach seeks to institutionalise localized, context-specific interventions that respond to each community’s unique needs. By embedding GBVF prevention into municipal plans, we can achieve sustainable and impactful change.

The ***challenges experienced by persons with disabilities are gendered***, and young girls and women with disabilities remain vulnerable and victims of gender-based violence femicide and crime, to the point of having children whose fathers are not known. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities working with the JCPS Cluster departments will continue to raise awareness on ***access to justice and redress for persons with disabilities*** to ensure that they fully access the social and justice system, particularly the women.

* 1. ***Prioritising the Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women***

The economic empowerment of women is not just a priority on paper, it represents South Africa’s commitment to achieving gender justice and the overall socio-economic transformation of the Republic. The ***struggles of women are intrinsically linked to women’s access to the means of production*** and corelates directly their ability to act autonomously in situations where their rights are infringed.

The approach to the economic empowerment of women is comprehensive and multi-faceted, encompassing a range of strategic initiatives designed to ***dismantle barriers and unlock the full potential of our citizens***, particularly women, for sustainable livelihoods.

The ***Women's Economic Assembly (WECONA)*** and the Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (WEEP) are instrumental in unlocking economic opportunities and securing value-chain participation for women-owned enterprises. We will continue to collaborate with the WECONA which was launched by President Ramaphosa, toward providing women with access to economic opportunities.

In the realm of trade, our ***Women in Trade Initiative*** enhances women's participation in national and international markets. We promote market access for women-owned businesses, build export readiness, and leverage intra-African trade agreements such as the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to increase market share.

Our efforts also extend to the ***Solar Mama Project***, which provides women with technical skills in solar installation and maintenance, and the Women-owned Cooperative Financial Institution (CFI) to promote financial inclusion and business support through cooperative models.

Another key priority for our department is the coordination and monitoring of the ***Sanitary Dignity Framework***. This initiative monitors and coordinates the supply of sanitary dignity towels to schools that are in quintiles 1 – 3. Sanitary dignity and access to menstrual health is a challenge in the country, with direct influence on girls’ education. Some girls do not attend school when they are menstruating. Menstrual hygiene products are expensive and unaffordable to many. Schools with inadequate and inappropriate infrastructure in terms of access to water, private and sanitation facilities are drivers of this problem of indignity faced by girls and women in rural and urban informal settlements.

The budget of the Sanitary Dignity Framework presents an opportunity to ensure that the participation of women-owned businesses in the value chain of manufacturing sanitary dignity products is promoted. To achieve this, we are developing an ***Integrated Entrepreneur Development Strategy***. This strategy will support women, youth, and persons with disabilities to actively engage in and benefit from the economic opportunities presented within the sanitary dignity value chain.

Further, President Ramaphosa signed the ***Public Procurement Bill*** into law this week. This progressive legislation designates that certain groups of people, particularly women, will be afforded certain set asides from the public procurement spend. We will be engaging the National Treasury on the operationalisation of this Act, particularly on the set asides for the designated groups.

In the 6th Administration, Deputy President Paul Mashatile launched the ***South African National Service Institute*** ***(SANSI)*** to train and capacitate our youth to be resilient and self-sustaining, massify sector-specific skills development, power up our nation’s industrialisation aspirations, grow local economies and kick-start a deliberate skills revolution open to every South African son and daughter.

**CONCLUSION**

1. Initiatives of this nature by women and for women are encouraged. Women have the ability to change the narrative and transform society’s view on their ability participate in all areas of human endeavour equally.
2. The empowerment of women is an all-of-society matter that requires even the men to participate. This platform should invite men, who have as much an inherent responsibility to support the empowerment of women.
3. In closing, Thomas Sankara once said:

*“****Comrades, the future demands that women be liberated, and the future, everywhere, brings revolutions. If we lose the fight to liberate women we will have lost all right to hope for a positive and superior transformation of our society. Our revolution will then no longer have any meaning. It is to wage this noble struggle that all of us, men and women, are summoned.”***