Keynote Address by Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities: Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize

Event: Women in Business Luncheon
Venue: Wanderers Club, 21 North Street, Illovo, Johannesburg
Date: 15 August 2019
Time: 10H30 – 14:00
Programme Director

ANC Treasure General Cde Paul Mashatile

Minister for Social Development Honourable Lindiwe Zulu

Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Honourable Thembi Siweya

Convenor of the Progressive Business Forum Mr Daryl Swanepoel

CEO of the Jenny Wu Sports Academy, Jenny Wu

All esteemed Guests present here today.
Ladies and Gentlemen we must thank the Progressive Business Forum for making this one of the most success and popular annual women seminars in South Africa.

Today as we gather here as women, we are presented with an opportunity to engage and challenge the patriarchal standards that continue to cripple our society. Today, I stand here in front of business women and entrepreneurs who have contributed greatly to the growth of the country’s economy and changed the landscapes of many ordinary South Africans.

Every year in August, South Africa commemorates the 1956 Women’s March. This year’s commemoration theme is 25 Years of Democracy: Growing South Africa together for Women’s Emancipation. The activities for the month have presented us with an opportunity to evaluate the progress that South Africa has made since the dawn of democracy.

The country has really made great strides in certain areas, it is important to acknowledge that more work still needs to be done to tackle issues of gender inequality and to deal with the continued exclusion of certain segments of society, like women, youth and persons with disabilities. Which has resulted in the World Bank rating us as the most unequal country in the world.
Government will continue in its efforts to accelerate the Economic empowerment and job creation as one of the focus areas in this new administration.

To ensure that this becomes a reality and affirm our commitment as Government, our department was recently reconfigured to expand the scope and responsibilities from a sole focus on women, to further include youth and persons with disabilities. These are groups of South African citizens who are mostly affected by social injustices and economic exclusion. The mandate of the department is therefore to champion the advancement of their socio-economic empowerment and the promotion of gender equality.

Since 1994, South Africa has made advancements in gender equality and the emancipation of women. Cabinet also recently approved the Gender-Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework. Under this new framework, all government plans and budgets will have to include gender-specific delivery targets.

President Ramaphosa, in his address at the Women’s Day Commemoration, said: “there can be no true liberation of women unless they are economically empowered”.

As we celebrate women’s month, we must continue to ensure that women enjoy access to the same economic opportunities as men, more especially young women who are entering the labour markets.
INEQUALITY

Young women face many obstacles in securing employment, as they are more prone to be subjected to inferior positions, or lower salaries than male counterparts. Young women with disabilities face even more compounded levels of discrimination due to their inability to perform certain duties. The promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment is central to our efforts to combat poverty and stimulate sustainable development. More still needs to be done to ensure the full participation of women in the economy and in leadership positions. We must continue to work hard to remove the barriers preventing women from not only entering, but also thriving in the labour market.

How then do we position ourselves to be sole beneficiaries of opportunities created for us?

Ladies, we should take advantage of government initiatives meant to fast-track the transformation of the economy. Let’s position ourselves and look at broader opportunities than traditional ways of doing business, and play a bigger role in the economy. The President’s 5 year investment target is R3,2 trillion and In October 2018 he hosted an Investment summit which resulted to a combined amount of R290 billion in investments. Women should then question how they can relate to opportunities that comes with these investment. We are a developmental state, and this means that we need entrepreneurship to strengthen the economy of this country.
Women cannot continue to move to the middle level in corporates and get stuck there, what is it that is stopping them from moving further up?

**DIRECT SALES**

There are a number of industries that have an important role to play in growing our economy and creating jobs. One industry we should look at is the Direct Sale industry. Which has an estimated 1.3 million independent business owners who have generated R12.9 billion for the national economy in the form of sales directly to customers. This is according to the 2018 Direct Selling Association of South Africa report 2018.

This industry can become an avenue for the inclusion of youth, women and persons with disabilities especially in the era of advanced technology. South Africa’s direct selling industry provides entrepreneurial and income opportunities to over one million people of all ages, races irrespective of their backgrounds. It is encouraging to know that direct selling is an industry with an open-door approach, offering low barriers to entry as well as a sheltered and mentored learning environment to newcomers entering the business.

It is important to promote entrepreneurship and social enterprise development in particular. The low barrier of entry into the industry has enabled people without education to engage in the economy.

We can affirm that government is looking at models of placement and training of youth, especially women. We need to equip women with skills, to help them start their own businesses. This will promote entrepreneurship and
social enterprise development. There are programmes put in place by government to ensure that women are being trained and fully skilled.

**SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES**

Government has invested billions of rands towards special economic zones to revive local industrial parks, business centres, digital hubs and township and rural enterprises. We started with Industrial Parks then implemented Special Economic Zones where land is bought by government to erect infrastructure and ready the south African business landscape for foreign investments. These Special Economic Zones (SEZs), are geographically designated areas of a country set aside for specifically targeted economic activities, supported through special arrangements (that may include laws) and systems that are often different from those that apply in the rest of the country. This has allowed for local manufacturing equipments for specific industries.

These special economic zones should not become white elephants, women must position themselves to ensure they benefit from such big investments the country has made. As the President said in his national women’s day address, empowerment of women is everyone’s business and needs the support of government, business, labour and civil society. We are committed to investing in women entrepreneurship to grow our country’s economy.

We are expanding our work with specific programmes to support women’s participation across the value chain, and bring more women into the Black Industrialists Programme. In all these economic zones, women should
position themselves in areas such as manufacturing in order to form part of the value chain.

Moreover, procurement is the vehicle that government can use as a lever for fast-tracking inclusion of people who are left behind, our ability to monitor and track all beneficiaries will take the struggle of inequality forward, by reducing unemployment and eliminating poverty in society. An example is the procurement target set by the Department of Social Development under the leadership of my colleague present here today honourable Lindiwe Zulu, in partnership with the National Development Agency.

This target will in the coming financial year, ensure that R124 million is set aside from the Social Relief of Distress programme for procuring goods and services from women and youth-owned cooperatives and small businesses. We need to see an influx of 100% female owned businesses such as Nozala Investments and Whiphold coming in and dominating in industries i.e Energy, Mining, Aviation and Construction where government has a lot of big projects that women can benefit from.

**State Owned Enterprises (SOE)**

Over the last four years, state-owned Enterprises have spent over R100 billion on goods and services from women-owned businesses. These SOEs also have a crucial contribution to make in providing young women with the skills they need to succeed in a changing economy.
In the last year, state-owned companies enrolled over 2,700 female learners in training programmes to become artisans, technicians and engineers. This further affirms the government’s cause to empowering women and promoting the entrepreneurial spirit.

While Government is busy dealing with corruption, women must position themselves to benefit from big projects and investments.

THE FORTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

As South Africa is embracing the advancement of technology, women must see this as a great opportunity to grow their business through opportunities presented by technology. The abundance of technology is effective in providing alternative learning tools and contribute massively to digital entrepreneurship.

We need to look at programmes such as The Technology For Women in Business (TWIB) which is a brainchild of the Department of Trade and Industry which was introduced to accelerate women’s economic empowerment and the development of women-owned enterprises through the recognition of technology-based business applications and systems.

“The digital revolution is an opportunity to build an entrepreneurial state, where government’s own appetite for risk and innovation inspires large-scale entrepreneurship and unlocks economic potential” said the President during his address at the 4IR Summit a month ago.
Some opportunities that are presented by 4IR such as the e-commerce need to be embraced by women in business and starts creating their own South African e-commerce hubs. This may result in a big turnover and contribute massively to the economy.

Malibongwe!