

Women determined to claim their rightful space in DPW

By Yondela Mzozo

The Department of Public Works (DPW) Construction Project Management Intern Ms Duduzile Maseko feels that the face of the built environment is still very much male and she has encouraged fellow women to change this picture, saying the industry has a lot of opportunities for women.

She shares her sentiments with other women in the field who have revealed how they would like to see more women sitting in the Built Environment Boards, taking impeccable decisions. Ms Maseko was addressing a Women's Month celebratory event that brought together the Department's Head Office based women employees, held on 31 August 2018 at the Voortrekker Monument in Thaba Tshwane – Pretoria.

South Africa commemorates Women's Month in August as a tribute to the more than 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women. The Government of South Africa declared August Women's Month and 9 August is celebrated annually as Women's Day.

Ms Maseko said women were still not well-represented in the construction industry's leadership positions and that their skills were still underutilized in the corporate environment and in many sectors throughout the world.

Focusing on her chosen field, Ms Maseko said, "At first it was intimidating for me to venture in the construction industry as it is still a male dominated industry. You sometimes get people who will criticize your work simply because you are young and female but you need to focus and stay strong to succeed." She encouraged women within the Department of Public Works to unite in the fight against unemployment which affects women, especially those from poor or disadvantage communities.

Delivering his speech during the celebratory event, DPW Director-General Advocate Sam Vukela emphasized the importance of the day and the need to reflect on the role of women who made it possible for the month of August to be celebrated. The DG voiced his concern over the fact that while there are laws that seek to protect everyone regardless of their gender; women were still dealing with harassment in the workplace. He urged women to report any form of harassment they encounter in the workplace as women should feel safe in the Department.

Advocate Sam Vukela said the Department was determined to improve the representation of women in the senior management positions as women are more than capable of taking on leadership positions. "We are also making this Department younger with the appointments we are making and we need to work very hard to improve the representation of women in the senior positions," said the DG.

The Department's Gender Unit is planning to visit every branch in the Department to discuss issues that are affecting women after the DG assured to support the unit in the professional development of women in the workplace.