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THE first Plumbers Conference was held in Durban last week. | Nqobile Mbonambi African News Agency (ANA)

#### CRITICAL SKILLS

# Plumbing a job in demand in SA

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THE need for more qualified plumbers in South Africa and for more women to join the profession was highlighted at the first Plumbers Conference held in Durban last week.

The conference was held by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure in partnership with the Institute of Plumbing South Africa (Iopsa) and South African Women in Plumbing (Sawip).

Thandeka Msibi, director: capacity building in the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, said that plumbing was a critical skill for the economy of South Africa.

"I believe by empowering more plumbers they are able to sustain themselves without relying on the government to give them a job. You are able to do your business and go further and empower the community you are coming from. If we train and upskill more plumbers, we give them the opportunity to be self-sufficient to open their own businesses and create more jobs."

Msibi added that plumbing is one of the necessary skills listed in the economic strategy of South Africa.

"We are hoping that a conference like this will empower plumbers so they become experts in their field. They will tackle all the obstacles they come across in their day-to-day work."

"We also want to empower and encourage more women in plumbing as at the moment only 4% of plumbers are women and we hope initiatives like this will allow for more women to take up training as plumbers."

Sawip president Lorraine Mooi, a plumber and co-founder of the associa-



LORRAINE Mooi, a plumber and president of the South African Women in Plumbing association has urged women to get into the field.

tion, emphasised the important role that plumbers play in any country.

"If we look at buildings, whether they house doctors or lawyers, they all need a steady water supply for that building to function properly and that is why we are a critical profession."

"To be a plumber, it's about living to work with your hands and using your mind to solve problems. Really speaking, plumbing is a job that is in demand all over the world and with the right qualifications you can get a job as a plumber almost anywhere in the world," Mooi added.

She pointed out that women faced many obstacles in the plumbing industry.

"This issue that I found myself in when I started as a plumber, many were surprised

to see a female plumber and even wondered if I could do the job properly. They also wanted to see my qualifications and to know where I studied."

"That is why we need to encourage more women to take up the trade as plumbers and understand it is a viable career."

"The other issue is the safety aspect of women plumbers, which is of utmost importance."

Brendan Reynolds, executive director of Iopsa, said a survey conducted in 2018 in South Africa revealed that 120 000 people are called plumbers but only around 20 000 are qualified plumbers.

"The fact is that there is a demand for plumbers, well-skilled plumbers. Unfortunately our industry is not well regulated and we find a lot of people calling themselves plumbers but without the necessary qualifications," he noted.

He pointed out that the plumbing field was wide and it was important for it to be properly regulated in order to reduce bad practices by individuals claiming to be plumbers.

"Remember a plumber touches the water you drink and the water you bathe with, it is of utmost importance that a qualified plumber does all your water repairs."

Reynolds outlined two possible career paths to follow in plumbing.

"You can do a three-year apprenticeship, where around 30% of the time is spent at a vocational college and the balance is spent learning in the workplace. After the three years you write a trade test and then you are qualified, this is our preferred route."

"The second option is to work with a qualified plumber for a period of not less than four years, you then approach a trade test centre where your skills will be tested. If there are any gaps in your skills, you fill those gaps with training and then proceed to the trade centre."

Zikhona James, a recently qualified plumber, said that she had a passion for plumbing from the time she was in Grade 10.

"I saw a professional plumber working and started learning and doing repairs for my neighbours. That is when I decided to do a three-year apprenticeship."

"Plumbing is a job in demand in South Africa, however there are not enough women plumbers. The fact is, we are passionate about this job and want to be taken seriously in this field, with more women being employed as plumbers."