

Publication: Daily Dispatch - Main

Title: Still a long way to go in addressing women's issues, say activists



Publish date: 11 Aug 2025

Page: 4

Reach: 10889

AVE: R 17621.47

Author: ZIYANDA ZWENI and SIPHOSETHU NGCANGISA

**ZIYANDA ZWENI and
SIPHOSETHU NGCANGISA**

Still a long way to go in addressing women's issues, say activists

While SA is observing Women's Month this August, gender-based violence activists in the Eastern Cape say more needs to be done to address the challenges faced by women.

The country observed Women's Day on Saturday with a hive of activities to commemorate the day as a reminder of the resilience and courage of South African women.

Asonole Melaphi of the Nokwanda Patocka Foundation said the day was a powerful reminder of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, while also highlighting the pressing need for accelerated action towards achieving gender equality.

Despite the progress made, Melaphi believed the country still had a long way to go, with women facing numerous challenges such as gender-based violence, unequal pay, limited ac-

cess to education and resources, and underrepresentation in leadership positions.

"The strides made by the government and stakeholders, including legislative reforms, initiatives for women's empowerment, and support for women-owned businesses, are commendable, but they are not enough to address the depth and breadth of the challenges faced by women.

"We need sustained and collective efforts to accelerate progress, including prioritising women's safety, promoting education and awareness, amplifying women's voices, and supporting women's economic empowerment.

"It's essential to recognise the intersectionality of women's experiences and address the specific needs of marginalised groups, such as women with

disabilities, rural women and women from diverse cultural backgrounds," Melaphi said.

She lost her sister, Nokwanda, who was tragically killed in 2021 by her now-convicted boyfriend, Lunga Ngayi.

"Let's recommit to creating a world where women have equal opportunities, rights and freedoms, and where their contributions are valued and recognised.

"By working together, we can build a more equitable and just society for all," Melaphi said.

Dr Lesley Ann Foster of Masi-manyane Women's Rights International said women made a significant contribution to society — economically, socially and politically, among other aspects.

"We need to recognise that. We've had some political gains. We've seen women rise into

positions of power, but the majority of women in our country remain mired in poverty," she said.

"Inequality is growing, and that inequality leads to high levels of violence, high levels of brutality towards women.

"While on one hand we do need the day to commemorate the contributions women make, we also have to be mindful of the fact that we have a very long way to go before women enjoy their rights, before they actually enjoy protection and whether they have the human rights fulfilled in our society as guaranteed in our constitution."

Delivering a Women's Day celebration address in Dikeni, premier Oscar Mabuyane said that, among other interventions, the government had also invested in GBVF response

plans across municipalities and initiated Thuthuzela Care Centres and community-based safe houses.

It had also trained and sensitised law enforcement and healthcare staff, and empowered boys as well as men to become part of the solution, and not the problem, as was currently the case in our province and country, he said.

Mabuyane said women's struggles were not just women's issues, but were human rights issues, societal issues, as well as economic development issues.

"Equality calls upon us all to dismantle all forms of discrimination, be it in boardrooms, homesteads, academia, or in places of employment.

"Sustainability enjoins us to build long-term, inclusive systems that uplift women not only today, but also for future

generations," he said.

Despite three decades of progress, women, especially black rural women, continued to face systemic exclusion from meaningful economic participation.

Women remained over-represented in unpaid care work, in the informal sector, in subsistence agriculture, and in poverty-linked statistics.

"It is unacceptable that the same women who carry communities on their backs continue to carry the heaviest burdens of inequality," Mabuyane said.

Sanral continued to play a pivotal role in this regard and had committed to allocate a minimum of 5% of all subcontracting work to women-owned businesses on any project it undertook in the province, and recruiting wom-

en project managers.

He said 30% of the total workforce on projects undertaken in the province must be women.

The provincial government's support for women in agriculture, was a multilayered support programme, to strengthen women's participation in agriculture as well as in the mainstream economy.

Ten women farmers had been allocated a total of 3,991 hectares of land during the current term for various agricultural programmes.

The government also has projects such as the women's build programme which trains women in construction and related sectors.

The department of public works and infrastructure is actively working to increase women's participation in the built environment through var-

ious programmes and initiatives.

Mabuyane said Eskom awarded 89 contracts to black women-owned businesses, spending a total of R811m during the 2024/2025 financial year.

"These businesses participated in the provision of services that were historically known to be male dominated.

"No economic emancipation can be complete unless women are and feel safe.

"The plague that is GBVF continues to rob families, communities and the nation of mothers, daughters and sisters.

"Let us not reduce women to slogans but elevate them to leadership positions, to being engineers, legislators, entrepreneurs, scientists, educators and trailblazers.

"We must walk together, in solidarity, to uproot the structural inequalities of the past and cultivate a future that is equitable, inclusive and sustainable," he said