

DM'S OPENING ADDRESS TO THE WOMEN & LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

HILTON HOTEL, SANDTON

28 FEBRUARY 2024

WOMEN & LEADERSHIP IN ENGINEERING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INNOVATION

Programme Director;

Leadership of the Council for the Built Environment (CBE);

Representatives of the Construction Industry Development Board
(CIDB);

Senior Government Officials;

Leadership of the event organisers;

Our Most Important Guest: Women in the Construction and Property
Sector;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Dumelang! Molweni! Sanibonani! Thobela! Lotshani! Avuxeni!
Ndimatsheloni! Greetings to you all!

I have been told that this is a conference that is convened for women to talk business, expand their visibility and share opportunities available to lead in STEM related careers. But I will break the protocol and greet men as well who are in our midst. This is an innovative and refreshing idea to have a bespoke and unique conference specifically and deliberately aimed at empowering women. It indeed is an honour for me to speak to you all today as key builders of women's progress in our country. This is

also an opportunity for us as women leaders to exchange ideas and views on how we, together, can accelerate and forge ahead with the task at hand.

For too long women have been left behind in the progress of humanity in general and our country specifically. It is sad that such a vast majority of humanity is kept on the sidelines of progress instead of bringing everyone on board for the progress of all of humanity.

As professionals in various industries, we have a duty and a responsibility to help the Nation to transcend the current stormy waters, to also live up to what our constitution so profoundly implores all of us in its preamble “to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person”. As a Department, we are using our meagre resources develop the cadre of professionals that are so badly needed in our environment, which is the built industry. We are also using our professional public entities to play their important role in concretising our tasks of providing policy leadership to the wider construction, property and infrastructure sectors.

We need more innovation from our built environment professionals on a whole range of issues confronting this industry and the country. Advancing transformation of the built environment system continues to be a national priority. But we are agreed that another pressing priority is to attract and retain women engineers in an array of fields. At our Department, we have a Branch called Professional Services. The mandate of this Branch is three fold: Building of internal capacity of the Department; Leading the developmental capacity of the State in creating

and maintaining infrastructure and Leading and directing the development of the capacity in Built Environment sector.

In our drive to meet these three imperatives, the Branch drives a number of capacity-building programmes on an on-going basis and we are showing a potential of great success as year after year the numbers are going up. Capacity Programmes are focused on scarce and critical skills list that support the technical units to be able to deliver to the mandates of Public Works Sector as well as the national imperatives.

The Built Environment Sector is facing shortages of registered professionals within the country. The root causes of the shortages are: ageing professionals; untransformed sector and bottlenecks during professional registration processes which further contribute to low throughput of professional registrations. This further exacerbates the attraction and retention of professionals within the technical functions of various infrastructure Departments, thus negatively impacting service delivery. As it is, the country is experiencing a huge backlog of Nated and University of Technology students who need to obtain qualifications and trade certificates. This is due to lack of structured work place placements and training.

It is therefore critical that as industry leaders gathered here, we push for more structured and targeted workplace placements and training for women. It will not help us to mourn and complain about the lack of women leadership if we do not drive these efforts ourselves. Ladies, leadership entails a lot of persistence and drive for the issues that we are passionate about. We shall always face hurdles as all women leaders who preceded us did. But we must develop the stamina and patience to persist.

In the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, the Skills Pipeline programme is largely driven by the Professional Services Branch. It is a comprehensive programme that takes learners from the school level right up to the professional registration stage. The programme has been in existence since 2014. It is structured as follows:

- 4.1 **The Schools Programme** - The Schools Programme is a whole school development intervention targeted at the learners, educators and school management in order to positively influence the outcomes of the programme. The Programme is a direct feeder into the Bursary Programme.
- 4.2 **The Non-Employees External Bursary Scheme** - DPWI Non Employees External Bursary Scheme serves as an exit strategy of the schools programme participants and create funding opportunities and structured support. The scheme aims to massify and sustain the skills pipeline to feed directly the DPWI Graduate Internship Programme. The Bursary Scheme caters for students who are enrolled at traditional universities within South Africa with an exception of qualifications in horticulture.
- 4.3 **DPWI Internship Programme** aims to develop talent and to create a skills base for the Department to align it to the Workplace Skills Plan and to address vacancies within DPWI. DPWI provides various forms of Internships namely:
 - i. Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Internship & Graduate Internship

- ii. Management Trainee Programme: – is customised to DPWI to develop Property Management graduates who are not pursuing professional registration.

- 1.1. **Artisan Development Programme** – DPWI Artisan Development programme aims to build capacity for Facilities Management to be able to comply with the National Immovable Assets Maintenance Management (NIAMM).

- 1.2. **Young Professionals / Candidacy Development Programme** - structured mentorship programme developing Built Environment candidates to accelerated and obtain professional registration with a statutory council and transform the sector.

We are pleased to note that all these programmes are continuing apace, delivering desired results. They are also infused with the guiding principles of encouraging females to take part in all the programmes.

Our Department is responsible for the governance oversight of the sector. We undertake vigorous governance oversight for built environment professionals. This is important to ensure public safety in that built environment professionals conduct work in the areas that they are most proficient in and qualified for. It also guarantees consequence management for professionals that do shoddy work.

Women in leadership positions should also be vigorous and ensure that workplaces are monitored and evaluated on their implementation of structured training and development programmes for women that their organisations have. If the organisations do not have such, they should

insist that they be set up. This should ensure that up and coming young women achieve optimal quality development in the shortest possible time.

We need acceleration at which work is done in order ameliorate the job losses and high unemployment a large swathe of professions, including stem professions.

We are all well aware of the devastating impact that COVID 19 had on all our work. It is our hope that with the learnings we have had over that time under the pandemic, we can all go back to work. We shall do all that we need to do on the legislative and policy front to remove the barriers to women progress. But government cannot carry the burden alone. The private sector will need to also do its bit in order to lighten the burden and open all the vistas of growth.

We hope that this conference has come at an opportune time for professionals to take stock of the situation. We would like to see this gathering delving much deeper into the content, substance, quality and relevance of your work as professionals in the context of an ever-changing world.

Thank you. Enkosi. Ke a le boga. Dankie.