

THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, Mr.
NTOPILE KGANYAGO, MP, ADDRESSES THE 2nd
ANNUAL WOMEN AND ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE

VENUE: NGWENYAMA LODGE, WHITE RIVER,
MPUMALANGA

DATE: 07 AUGUST 2006

SALUTATIONS!!!

Between the 27 July and 03 August 2006 the construction industry and the civil society observed the National Construction Week campaign. The initiative is the brainchild of the Department of Public Works and was conceived to create awareness about the role and the importance of the built environment in the reconstruction, development and transformation in South Africa. Government has realized the need to harness the strategic advantage of the built environment, including the construction industry, given the industry's pivotal role in providing infrastructure, promoting social cohesion and driving economic growth.

To appreciate how important this industry is, just close your eyes and imagine the world without any buildings, structures or roads. The house you live in, the school you attend, the road you travel on, the shopping mall you frequently visit, the hospitals, libraries, prisons, churches, clinics, sports fields, hotels, bridges, dams, bus & taxi terminals, airports, railways, military bases and offices we work from, are all the products of the construction industry and collectively constitute our built environment.

In recognition of the value of this sector, the Department of Public Works in 1999 published a White Paper on the *“Creation of an enabling environment for the reconstruction, growth and Development in the Construction Industry”*. Among others the White Paper calls for the transformation of the industry in terms of race and gender equality.

The industry is purported to be the third biggest in terms of job-creation behind mining and transport. It boasts an annual turnover of more than R60 billion, contributing no less than 13 % to the GDP of the country, yet the representation of blacks and women remain trivial. Government through its

procurement muscle is the single largest consumer of construction industry output, accounting for more than 40%. This relationship is historical but like most industrial relations in the history of this country, the apartheid system had left the industry completely closed to blacks, women and the emerging sector.

In 1999, in the study undertaken by the Commission on Gender Equality, both the mining and the construction industries were singled out for their lack of transformation agenda particularly when it came to offering prospects for the development of women. It was at the same time that women ministers had just been inaugurated to lead these sectors in the form of Ministers Stella Sigcau and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka who is today the Deputy President of the country. A long process ensued wherein the industry was engaged and persuaded to reposition itself for growth through adopting transformation.

Various strategic interventions were launched by the Department including the R142-million Strategic Empowerment Programme for Women in construction in 2001 which sought to ringfence certain infrastructure

projects for execution by women-owned enterprises. Lack of depth with regard to the availability of women contractors led the officials to allocate these projects willy-nilly, often leading to fronting.

This and other challenges around transformation prompted the Department to launch the Construction Transformation Charter process in 2004. A final document was adopted and signed-off by the Minister of Public Works and the representatives of the industry in March 2006. Currently the Department is in the process of gazetting both the Property and the Construction Transformation charters. In terms of the scorecard, we have given the industry seven years (up to 2013) to meet women targets in terms of ownership, control and employment equity.

The construction industry is worth highlighting because the infrastructure sector of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) relies on the capacity and the skills in the industry for effective delivery. The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was conceived as a government-wide initiative to alleviate poverty through job-creation, skills development and the improvement of public

service delivery. It is one of government's short-to-medium term programmes aimed at alleviating and reducing unemployment and unemployability and covers all spheres of government and state-owned enterprise.

Other sectors of the programme are economic, social and environmental. Since it was launched in May 2004, the EPWP has to date created more than 300 000 net job opportunities across all the four sectors of the programme and women had been among the beneficiaries. The programme has a target to create one million job opportunities by the end of 2009, and 30% and 40% of those jobs should go to youth and women, respectively. It is obvious that we need to up the pace of the programme.

Although the infrastructure sector of the EPWP is the most visible, other sectors have been equally frantic. In the last financial year (between April 2005 and March 2006), the programme expended four point seven billion rand (R4.7 billion) to execute four thousand three hundred and eighteen (4318) projects and created 208 898 net number of job opportunities. In the same period, more than six hundred and thirty five million rand was paid out in wages. About 49%

of jobs went to women and 38% to youth. The environment sector was responsible for eighty one thousand one hundred and eighty six net jobs from one thousand one hundred and seventy eight projects executed in that period.

In my travels to visit the EPWP projects, I have been very impressed to meet dedicated women working diligently to make success of this programme. Some of them include a young woman outside Mafikeng in North West Province, Ms Tshedi Lekhoue, who is growing a commercially successful vegetable garden. She was pleased to reveal that almost half of her product is donated to a local hospice to feed people suffering with terminal illnesses. Her effort did not go unnoticed. She was nominated the best young female farmer in 2004.

I have also interacted with women who are making success of projects in *working for fire* and *working for water* sub-programmes. The Department of Public Works is currently in talks with the National Treasury to request additional funds for the introduction and execution of labour-intensive domestic waste management services in some of the under-serviced areas in most municipalities across the country.

This is part of our effort in the upscaling and massification of the EPWP. We believe that the programme has the potential to be expanded further to create more labour-absorptive capacity and increase its scope as well as its social impact.

The country comes from an apartheid background which was characterized by backlogs due to lopsided social and financial planning. The challenges remain great but so is the resolve of government to battle and conquer poverty. Our environment and its management require injection of resources which the country has in limited supply at the moment. We rely on men and women of integrity who everyday battle it out often under difficult conditions to make South Africa work. The Expanded Public Works Programme is one such vehicle and women contribution has been outstanding as evidenced by the figures above.