

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
12 March 2000**

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At the International Women's Day Celebrations

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen ...

Allow me to share with you a recent e-mail I received:

By the time the Lord made mothers, He was already into his 6th day of working overtime. An Angel appeared and said: "Why are you spending so much time on this one?"

The Lord replied: "Have you seen the spec sheet on her? She has to be completely washable, but not plastic, have 200 movable parts, all replaceable, run on black coffee and leftovers, have a lap that can hold three children and disappears when she stands up, have a kiss that can cure anything from a scraped knee to a broken heart, and have six pairs of hands."

The Angel was astounded at the requirements for this one. "Six pairs of hands! No way!" said the Angel.

The Lord replied: "Oh, it's not the hands that are the problem. It's the three pairs of eyes that mothers must have!"

"And that's just on the standard model?" the Angel asked.

The Lord nodded in agreement, "Yep, one pair of eyes to see through the closed door as she asks her children what they are doing even though she already knows. Another pair in the back of her head are to see what she needs to know even though no one thinks she can. And the third pair are here in the front of her head. They are for looking at an errant child and saying that she understands and loves him or her without even saying a single word."

The Angel tried to stop the Lord. "This is too much work for one day. Wait until tomorrow to finish."

"But I can't!" the Lord protested, "I am so close to finishing this creation that is so close to my own heart. She already heals herself when she is sick and can feed a family of six on a pound of hamburger and can get a nine year old to stand in the shower."

The Angel moved closer and touched the woman. "But you have made her so soft, Lord."

"She is soft", the Lord agreed, "but I have also made her tough. You have no idea what she can endure or accomplish."

"Will she be able to think?" asked the Angel.

The Lord replied: "Not only will she be able to think, she will be able to reason, and negotiate."

The Angel then noticed something and reached out and touched the woman's cheek. "Oops, it looks like you have a leak with this model. I told you that you were trying to put too much into this one."

"That's not a leak", the Lord objected. "That's a tear!"

"What's the tear for?" the Angel asked.

The Lord said: "The tear is her way of expressing her joy, her sorrow, her disappointment, her pain, her loneliness, her grief, and her pride."

The Angel was impressed. "You are a genius, Lord. You thought of everything, for WOMEN are truly amazing!"

Robert P Downes wrote in the book ***Woman: Her Charm and Power***, published in October 1900: "*How wonderful and irresistible is the power of woman! Fluent and changeable as the wave, she is yet mighty as the sea. Gentle and yielding as the air, she is yet potent and prevailing as the hurricane.*"

Now with all these qualities endowed upon them, why have women always taken the back seat? Why are our societies not benefiting from the full contribution to economic growth and development that women can make?

President Mbeki, in his State of the Nation Address on 4 February this year, congratulated members of Parliament for the work and approval on time of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act and the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act – legislation that should strongly promote further economic empowerment of women in our country.

As the President indicated: "The Government will act to ensure the observance of these laws as part of our common national offensive against all forms of inequality and discrimination, including racial and gender inequality and discrimination as well as discrimination on the basis of disability.

"The recently completed gender audit will help us to carry out this task as will the objectives set out in the Integrated Strategy on Disability."

"The elimination of poverty remains one of the central objectives of the Government and the country. As we are all aware, this poverty is intimately related to the issues of racism and sexism which we have been discussing.

"Its elimination is fundamental to the realisation of the goal of the restoration of the dignity of all our people.

"Accordingly, this places high on our agenda the task of ensuring that all of us act together to achieve high and sustained rates of growth for our economy.

"... (We) would like to make the point that we have never been better positioned than we are today to achieve the progress we have to attain with regard to this important challenge."

These words from our President have a direct bearing on the economic empowerment of women in South Africa.

Other accomplishments by women to ensure their fuller participation in the upliftment of society include:

- Today, human rights are observed in our country, including the right to vote
- Our Constitution acknowledges both genders, thanks to the work of people like Balckla Mbete (Kgotsile), Yvette Mayakayaka and Frene Ginwala. We are indeed blessed with one of the most progressive Constitutions in the world. It upholds the values of equality, freedom and dignity – all of which are essential to ensuring gender equality in our country
- We also have a legislative framework that seeks to promote gender equality. The Domestic Violence Act, the Maintenance Act and the Customary Marriages Act bear testimony to this
- In addition, national machinery such as the Commission on Gender Equality has been established to ensure that gender equality is promoted and protected.
- Labour legislation has dramatically changed for the better
- All Government tenders (worth more than R50 billion annually) requires an equity plan
- Small businesses, many of which are owned by women, are getting strong support from Government
- Broadcasting, in terms of the IBA licencing, requires women in management and not just behind the microphone or camera
- Customary laws prohibiting women from property ownership is a thing of the past
- Violence against women is now recognised as a priority crime
- Sex education has been brought into our schools
- The first rape courts have been established
- Rape in marriage is acknowledged
- The right of choice in the termination of pregnancy has been legalised
- South Africa has signed and ratified both the convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the convention on the Rights of the Child

- A child care centre is now available to all women in Parliament, members and staff, as an example to the corporate world
- Leading the triumphant march of women towards our improved future, we have eight female Ministers and eight female Deputy Ministers, which brings the proportion of women in Cabinet to 27,58% while the women Deputy Ministers represent 61,53% of the total. Combined, women make up 38,09% of Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

The other strong point the President made, is that of a team working together.

Women in business seem to agree on one common denominator: Networking. It has also been suggested that the motto for women in business could be: "Network for work". There is the Executive Women's Club of Southern Africa (running the annual business woman of the year competition), Sheba, The National Association of Women Business Owners and many others. There are women investment companies such as Women Investment Portfolio Holdings (Whiphold) – now listed on the JSE, Nozala and Pontso to name but a few. These organisations represent more than 18 000 women. We have witnessed remarkable successes from women in the accounting and legal professions, in transport, construction, trade and commerce, the service sector and financial institutions – let us learn from them and ensure that best practices are shared through our own participation in the networking.

It is important that we recognise the full contribution of women, not only that done from public office, but the daily effort of all women to keep the house and family coherent, to excel in whatever occupation they have chosen – be it in an office, a market stall, a hospital, a school, a construction site or any other vocation.

The contribution of women in all walks of life is today being recognised. According to the October Household Survey of 1995, overall, nearly two-thirds (63%) of men aged 15 years and above were classified as economically active, compared to under half (46%) of women. This gender difference was largely accounted for by those women who defined themselves or were defined by household respondents as housewives. Many of these women, and particularly African women in non-urban areas, may have been engaged in subsistence agriculture in addition to their household tasks, but the extent of these activities is unknown.

Please allow me to discuss with you, in broad terms, some of the programmes and projects in which the Ministry and Department of Public Works are engaged to ensure that women are integrated into accelerated development and delivery initiatives, working from the construction and property industries.

The Department of Public Works is poised to play an even larger role in championing the cause of women in construction. As one of the members of the South African Women in Construction (SAWiC), the Department, through my Office, will strengthen efforts to empower and grow women in the built environment.

The Department of Public Works is committed to developing the emerging contractors, including women, in the South African construction industry. A broad departmental programme entitled "Creating an enabling environment in the reconstruction, growth and development of the construction industry" as articulated in the Department's published White Paper for the construction industry has been developed. The Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP), as an integral part of the overall Construction Industry Development Programme (CIDP), was designed to build capacity of the emerging contractors, including women, and to enhance their capabilities.

The CIDP aims to bring synergy among key role players in the construction industry. These include the Department of Public Works, technically competent emerging contractors, relevant industry associations, training providers and other organisations committed to the achievements of ECDP objectives.

By the end of 1999, the Emerging Contractor Development Programme had 1200 contractors registered on the database, of which only 7% were women. And most of these women were involved in the lesser support side of the industry by providing cleaning, horticulture and catering services. Less than ten women groups were actively engaged in construction work.

The same pattern is apparent in the Eastern Cape, where women are in the process of establishing themselves in construction, but at this stage there are very few that have registered on the database. Currently there is a massive roll-out by the groups in various areas of the province, including the Eastern Cape Local Government Association, to locate women in construction.

The Regional Office of my Department in Port Elizabeth is in a process of facilitating the establishment of an

organisation of Women in Construction Industry in the Province. It is envisaged that this organisation would be fully established by May 2000.

Women are also having representation on the Eastern Cape Construction Council Executive which is looking into and addressing the plight of emerging contractors in the Province.

In the Umtata region we have listed only 17 women in construction and in the Port Elizabeth Region a mere 27. Only 18 women have registered on this provincial database.

A major stumbling block seems to be the preparation of quotations by women contractors. While affecting all emerging contractors, our helpdesks have found that the problem is more pronounced among women contractors.

The Department of Public Works has set up helpdesks in our Regional Offices in Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Kimberley, Johannesburg and Durban. These helpdesks are there to assist – to explain processes, clear bottlenecks and to cut down on unnecessary red tape.

The Emerging Contractor development Programme provides access to training for emerging contractors. The training modules have been developed in conjunction with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The ECDP also identifies and negotiates better deals with potential moneylenders to enable ease of access to finance by the emerging contractors.

The Ecdp complements the Department of Public Works' Affirmative Procurement Programme (APP) and empowers the emerging contractors to take advantage of the APP. The APP was developed to facilitate wider access to government contracts. It targets the previously disadvantaged individuals and gives more weight to women candidates.

The Department has also engaged in an intensified targeting programme to develop black contractors at prime contractor level through the Strategic Projects Initiative (SPI) programme. The SPI demands a higher level of expertise and capacity to develop and operate as prime contractor. The Kokstad Prison is one of the Department of Public Works' Strategic Project Initiatives. There is a large number of women who are actively involved in the building of the Kokstad Prison. They are mainly involved in plastering, painting and a few in plumbing.

Another programme that could be a very useful entry into construction, in particular for rural women, is the **Community Based Public Works Programme**.

The Community Based Public Works Programme (CBPWP) is a government initiative driven by the national Department of Public Works. The CBPWP is based on the principles of job creation, poverty alleviation and the creation of productive and sustainable community infrastructure. The programme relies strongly on intergovernmental alliances and interdepartmental integration as well as partnerships with local authorities, line departments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. The programme focuses on rural areas.

The CBPWP involves a lot of construction related work.

Since its inception in 1994 the programme has been constantly refined to achieve maximum local and regional socio-economic impact. Currently we are reviving existing infrastructure where previous development, such as irrigation schemes and other agriculture related projects, had been abandoned, taking into consideration the potential to supply not only sustainable jobs, but ongoing ripple effect development to foster the establishment of economic nodes in areas, benefiting between 50 000 and 200 000 residents of several villages grouped together per project. This approach fits in with the overall Integrated Rural Development Strategy driven from the Office of the Deputy President.

The CBPWP targets poverty pockets with an emphasis on youth, the disabled and women as specific target groups.

Women are continuously involved in the construction of clustered productive assets, apart from also building capacity in the planning and steering of the projects, as well as the operation and management of the completed infrastructure.

Training on the Ownership, Operation, Management and Maintenance of community assets will be provided to enable communities, especially women, to sustain their operations.

In the Eastern Cape, we have approved planning for more than 300 projects under the Community Based Public Works Programme during the financial year 2000/2001 – indeed creating opportunities for women to participate.

From our Affirmative Action and Gender Desk at Head Office, the Department of Public Works is initiating activities such as:

- A SWOT analysis of women's involvement in construction
- A review of the current selection criteria for women's participation
- Liaison with tender advice centres to facilitate and co-ordinate the training of women and other contractors
- Conducting training for women on:
 - Tendering procedures
 - Quoting
 - Targeted procurement procedures
 - Construction entrepreneurial skills
 - Construction management skills
- A review of the current roster system for faster rotation of women
- A bursary and recruitment system for youth interested in construction.

I believe that Government has created an environment conducive to the participation of women in all aspects of the economy. The initiative should be taken further by women – to analyse opportunities related to their particular interest and skill, to familiarise themselves with programmes and projects, to train and master available technology that would assist them in achieving excellence in business, management, or production. Women have proved that they can endure, but if I may refer again to what the President said – the time has never been better to show the world what women can accomplish!

Explore the options of joint ventures and partnerships, even though it may be a small beginning, even the smallest task needs to be done to complete the full picture. It is every contribution that counts, and even a consortium, which sounds like a big word, has to plan, incorporate and render the most detailed little aspect of the work that needs to be done. You may be the best woman for a particular job – why not make sure that you excel to such an extent that your specialised contribution is always in demand?

To all women interested in the built environment, the challenge remain to keep abreast of new developments, to obtain sufficient information, to become technologically literate and to continue, forming linkages and networking with those people who will prove to be a resource in enhancing your participation.

I am for sure looking, with great expectations, to the women in our country to become industrial and construction giants, to develop their inherent entrepreneurial skill and to make the power and spirit of women felt in the economy. Women participation, in different fields, is no longer a dream but a reality. Women have proved themselves in the various professional fields – the challenge is there: in the industrial, construction and mining fields – take it up!

This year's theme for the International Women's Day is "Women Uniting for Peace" – in our country I think that we stand united behind this drive. Not only in terms of war, but also in our effort to eradicate crime, to fight abuse against women and children and to bring peace and stability to our homes and communities.

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