

**Minister of Public Works
Ms S Sigcau
14 October 2003**

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**Minister's Imbizo
Port Elizabeth**

The Deputy Chairperson of CIDB, Mr Pepi Silinga
The Chief Executive Officer of CIDB, Mr Spencer Hodgson
Distinguished researchers, academics and students represented here today
Ladies and gentlemen

INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to join you today at this exciting conference. The occasion is a special one since it draws together academics, researchers and practitioners to focus on an important sector of economic endeavor. Construction industry development and the delivery of infrastructure are two sides of the same coin. Both are pivotal to South Africa's economic and social development.

Throughout history, major civilizations of the world have been underpinned, among other things, by inspired and innovative constructors. The Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Stone structures of the Zimbabwe Kingdom and the cascading shrines of the Inca Empire are evidence of the power and presence of an organized construction capability.

Though today's construction challenges are different, they require even greater levels of creativity and organisation than those of ancient times.

I understand that academic papers from over 45 authors have featured research on a wide range of topics, including construction management, safety and health, procurement and delivery strategies, training, education and empowerment. These are all important issues that we all are grappling with and they affect the growth and performance of the industry.

Today, it is not my task to address these issues. In the tradition of the Imbizo, it is my task today to hear about your concerns, concerns about the industry, and particularly about issues that affect your ability to contribute to the industry's development. I will therefore merely touch on a few issues I believe are relevant.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Academic excellence shapes the human capital of our industry. The intrinsic value of research lies in its ability to stimulate industry innovation for the improved quality of life of millions of South Africans.

In this context the Construction Industry Development Board is charged by legislation, and therefore by our parliament, with establishing a national research agenda that guides the focus of researchers to ensure its relevance to industry development. Such an agenda must therefore be developed in consultation with industry, public and private sector clients and the research community.

An important aspect of an industry research agenda, is its ability to create sustain a national pool of specialist researchers. We are aware that such a research agenda requires funding and it is the responsibility of government and industry to focus the limited resources available so that we can achieve maximum impact.

In the rapidly evolving knowledge economy, it is increasingly evident that our built environment disciplines are operating in isolated silos. Academics and researchers must lead the way in breaking down the artificial barriers and indeed in promoting collaborative and cross-sectoral research.

The image of the industry will not change unless we focus on the industry's reality, the working conditions of people and the relations between contractors and subcontractors. We rely on research and academia to hold up a mirror to the industry and to stimulate positive change.

Industry capability is hampered by a deficiency of school leavers with mathematics and science. There are also severe learning problems facing non-English speaking students. Students need a concentrated focus on "learning how to learn". Perhaps bridging programmes funded jointly by government, and industry through the

Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) - would go a long way in resolving the immediate problem.

Very important also is the need for greater coordination between the industry and tertiary institutions to ensure that education is relevant to the needs of the industry. Similarly our built environment curricula should ensure that teaching engenders an ethos of leadership and management, and an ethos of commitment to the needs of our new society.

As part of the transformation and development of the industry, government anticipates greater accessibility to this industry by targeted groups such as the disabled, women and emerging contractors. We believe that research and development have a role to play in promoting the meaningful participation of the disabled in our industry, possibly in professional, clerical and other physically non-exerting capacities.

It goes without saying, that educators and researchers have also a key role to play in encouraging women to place themselves at the centre of the industry, to take leadership and not accept a marginalized role. Bodies such as South African Women in Construction (SAWIC) and South African Women Entrepreneurs Network (SAWEN) can be points of reference - to enable them to enrich any research initiatives.

We also call on tertiary institutions as repositories of knowledge and information including research, to lead a campaign in developing programmes that promote the competence and development of the emerging sector to ensure the sustainability of our empowerment drive.

CONCLUSION

As we celebrate the ten years of democracy and freedom in South Africa, let the outcomes of this conference help us lay concrete foundations towards the development and growth of this industry. It is imaginative minds of the women and men of the construction industry, such as those gathered here today, that must unlock the tremendous potential of the construction industry to shape a sustainable destiny for all our people.

I thank you.

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