

**Minister of Public Works  
Ms Stella Sigcau  
27 October 2000**

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## **Masakhisizwe Women Empowerment Trust Certificate Awards**

Master of Ceremonies  
Masakhisizwe Women Empowerment Trust Board of Trustees and Management Board  
Participants on the programme  
Distinguished guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed an honour and a privilege for me to be part of this historic occasion. Today we see first-hand the sweet fruits of honest labour and dedication. A day in which opportunity is being given to women who otherwise would have found it difficult to seek employment without the skills you have empowered them with.

It is indeed my pleasure and honour to share in today's certificate awarding ceremony with you.

Since the introduction of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in 1994, government in South Africa has made great strides in improving the livelihood of our citizens, in particular those previously disadvantaged. Many policies and programmes are currently being implemented in redress of the inequalities inherited from the apartheid regime, including the provision of basic infrastructure in an integrated development manner.

The construction industry, which we regard as a national asset, has a pivotal role to play in infrastructure delivery to meet the needs of ordinary South Africans.

The construction industry's development must be geared to rolling back the enormous legacy of an inadequate infrastructure, its inequitable distribution, and the underdevelopment of locally based physical and human resources.

At Public Works, we have specifically focused on the construction industry's contribution to job creation, women empowerment, skills development and elevation of contractor capacity. As a major procurer of goods and services in this industry, Public Works is ideally suited to influence policy and practice in construction.

Formal interaction with the industry has led to recent legislation being adopted by Parliament on instituting a Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB) as a catalyst for change. It constitutes a foundation for the rejuvenation and deeper democratisation of the construction industry.

The CIDB will provide impetus to the shaping of a comprehensive policy framework within which the industry can play an even more strategic role in the social development and economic growth of our country.

To promote broader representation in the professional cadres within the built environment, all key public and private sector stakeholders agreed on objectives, one of which was the representativeness in terms of race, gender, disability and regional distribution in our professions. Legislation on registration of professionals should shortly be finalised to realise potential and unlock the innovation and creativity of our skilled labour in construction for the improved quality of life of all South Africans.

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 founder 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. The Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP), as an integral part of the overall Construction Industry Development Programme (CIDP), was developed to build capacity of the emerging contractors and to enhance their capabilities.

At the end of 1999, the Emerging Contractor Development Programme had 1533 contractors registered on the database, just more than 200 of them registered from our Port Elizabeth Regional Office. However, less than 10% of these registered contractors were women.

Some of the major constraints faced by women in construction related activities are the lack of technical, contracting and management skills; gender equalisation; a generally harsh construction environment and the low profit margins in the construction industry that are a deterrent especially to black economic empowerment

enterprises for women.

The ECDP has prioritised the following areas of assistance to women contractors:

- Identification, registration and categorisation of women contractors on the data base
- Creation of work opportunities for women contractors, acceleration of women contractors on the data base when awarding work opportunities and identification of projects that can be linked to other initiatives, for example, projects within the Community Based Public Works Programme
- Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of women contractors on the data base.

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 you - 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 developed in conjunction with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), were well received by participants as being comprehensible, relevant and applicable.

We launched the Contracting Entrepreneurial Programme in October 1999. Ntsika, the Black Construction Council (BCC) and the ILO collaborated in the development of this programme. Services for Enterprise Improvement and Business Start-ups Africa (SEIBSA) has undertaken to assist with the development of further entrepreneurial training for 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, including women participation as an integral part of tender adjudication.

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 assets. The programme relies strongly on inter-governmental alliances as well as partnerships with local authorities, line function departments, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. This programme focuses on rural areas.

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 is provided to enable communities, especially women, to sustain their operations.

I am glad to have been told of the Masakhisizwe Women Empowerment Trust's achievements to date. You have indeed indicated that local mobilisation of women power leads to successful job creation, training and construction of infrastructure. The challenge now remains to enhance the acquired skills, to extend the skills base and to operate and manage the facilities created in a productive manner.

We are celebrating your advancement. I do want to believe that we are proud of all the women who have demonstrated their ability and in particular of those who received certificates today.

Women in construction are fast becoming a force to be reckoned with in integrated development in the new millennium.

Let us continue on this path of success to reach even greater heights, to ensure that technology and new information, networking and resource sharing are part of our operation modes. Let us acknowledge leading role models and strive for best practice.

Women in this industry need to join hands in the improvement of their working life. As the mobile nature of construction and long absence from home may render role players in this industry particularly vulnerable to

HIV/AIDS and related diseases, I appeal to you all to take an immediate initiative in promoting AIDS awareness programmes on building sites and at work stations.

Make sure that you inform yourselves of the various government programmes and support provided at different levels. Please allow me to ensure you of the full encouragement and support of the Ministry and Department of Public Works.

Please take good care on your return journey home - arrive alive!

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